

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 21

THE MINISTRY



JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness,
so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that
everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.
For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one
and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him
will not perish but have eternal life.”

—John 3:14-16



WATER TO WINE

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 2:1-11

CONTEXT

The prologue to John's Gospel declared Jesus to be God (1:1), the One through whom all things were created (1:3), and the revelation of the Father's glory (1:14). Then John recounted John the Baptist's witness (1:19-34) and Jesus's calling of His first disciples (1:35-51). Turning water into wine was Jesus's first miraculous sign recounted in John's Gospel. The site of this first miracle, Cana, was a town in the region of Galilee near Jesus's hometown of Nazareth. This episode marked the beginning of Jesus's public ministry.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

As you examine John 2:1-11:

- Contemplate that while the Father's will was Jesus's first priority, He also met the needs of others.
- Recognize that this miracle revealed Jesus's glory and further convinced His disciples to believe in Him.



TIMELINE

John Baptizes Jesus
in the Jordan River
(Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus Calls Disciples to Follow Him
(John 1:35-51)

Jesus Cleanses the Temple
(John 2:13-22)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness
(Luke 4:1-13)

SESSION STUDY:
Jesus Performs His First Miracle at
the Wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus
at Night (John 3:1-21)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** John 2:1-2
- Day 2:** John 2:3-5
- Day 3:** John 2:6-8
- Day 4:** John 2:9-10
- Day 5:** John 2:11-12
- Day 6:** Psalm 104



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

JESUS, BEING THE SAVIOR, CAME ULTIMATELY TO LAY HIS LIFE DOWN FOR OUR SINS (JOHN 2:1-5).

Circle the words that reveal Jesus's ultimate focus in His life and ministry.

1 On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus's mother was there, **2** and Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding as well. **3** When the wine ran out, Jesus's mother told him, "They don't have any wine." **4** "What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come." **5** "Do whatever he tells you," his mother told the servants.

While Jesus's ultimate focus was on doing the Father's will for our salvation, He also cared about the needs of His family and friends. That was evident when He attended a wedding in Cana along with His disciples. Jesus's mother, Mary, also was invited to the wedding. John did not specifically name Mary; perhaps readers already were familiar with her or perhaps John wanted to avoid confusing her with other Marys in his Gospel.

The opportunity for Jesus to help His friends and family arose when the wine ran out at the wedding. A first-century Jewish wedding celebration could last up to a week, and the groom was financially responsible for the event. Running out of wine was an embarrassment at best. At worst, it might have left the groom open to a lawsuit from the bride's family in a culture focused on honor and shame.¹ These realities provoked Mary to approach Jesus for help. They also seem to have played a role in eliciting Jesus's response of compassion.

LEADER NOTE: The presence of wine at Jesus's first miracle should not be viewed as a categorical license for the consumption of alcohol today. Scripture includes many warnings against drunkenness and encouragements for the wisdom of soberness (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Eph. 5:18). The wine in John 2 certainly was fermented, yet wine in the ancient world, unlike modern wine, typically was diluted to between one-third and one-tenth its original strength.²

Why might we struggle to believe Jesus cares about our everyday lives?

Jesus's response to His mother might sound harsh, but it was not. He addressed her as "woman" again on the cross when He assigned John to care for her after His departure (19:26). Still, "woman" was a less endearing term than generally expected between a mother and son. That address, along with Jesus's question, served as a gentle reminder that He came not to do favors for people in a pinch but to complete a mission in obedience to His Father.

Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

“My hour” in the Gospel of John refers to the time of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross (7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus’s statement to Mary about His “hour” underscored that His entire ministry aimed toward the cross and resurrection. Remedying the lack of wine would meet a temporal need, but more than that, Jesus was beginning to reveal the glory that would be seen most fully in His death and resurrection. Mary responded in faith by telling the servants to do whatever He instructed.

LEADER NOTE: Mary’s two courses of action yielded very different responses from Jesus. Her statement “They don’t have any wine” (2:3) was the plea of a mother to her obedient son. His rebuke, however, reminds us that no one has an inside track to receive or distribute His blessings. Mary’s subsequent instructions to the servants reflected faith in Jesus as the Lord. That response yielded His help and a display of His glory. Mary, like every other sinful human, had to approach Jesus by faith.

How does Jesus’s care for our temporal needs remind us of His ultimate provision for our spiritual needs on the cross?



GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus is the Creator God and can perform miracles to reveal His glory. His greatest miracle is seen in His resurrection, conquering death and sin for our salvation.

Notes

JESUS, BEING GOD, IS ALL-POWERFUL AND CAN PERFORM MIRACLES (JOHN 2:6-11).

Circle details in these verses that highlight Jesus's power.

6 Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained twenty or thirty gallons. **7** “Fill the jars with water,” Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. **8** Then he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the headwaiter.” And they did. **9** When the headwaiter tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom **10** and told him, “Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people are drunk, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now.” **11** Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

The six stone water jars were used for ceremonial washings, likely of hands or utensils. Each was approximately the size of a 20-gallon trashcan, and cumulatively they held between 120 and 150 gallons of liquid. Filling them “to the brim” (v. 7) would provide more than enough water to fulfill the required Jewish rituals. Yet performance of the Jewish rituals would not remedy the problem at hand. They needed Jesus to do something new, and that is precisely what He did.

LEADER NOTE: The six stone jars were there for purification, but they also represented the old system of Jewish washings, sacrifices, and ceremonies. Jesus's miracle not only helped the need at hand but it also pointed to His ability to change things and make things new and better. This includes fulfilling the old law and establishing a new covenant. It also includes making us white as snow from our sin-stained lives. Jesus has the power to transform anything for His purposes and mission.

At some point between drawing the water from the jars and giving it to the headwaiter, the water became wine. The headwaiter was unaware anything supernatural had occurred, but the servants knew. The Son of God did what first-century Jewish religion and rituals could never do. He manifested the power of God on earth, utilizing it to care for the Lord's people and to show His glory.

Why is it sometimes hard to believe Jesus can do the supernatural?

Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

Through His miracle, Jesus revealed His glory. In verses 9-10, John's emphasis shifted to the quality of the wine. As an expert on banquets and feasts, the headwaiter was the most qualified person to evaluate the quality of the wine Jesus produced, and he deemed it superior. That fact highlighted Jesus's creative power, manifesting His glory.

Remarkably, not everyone who witnessed the miracle believed in Jesus as the Son of God. When He revealed His glory, "his disciples believed in Jesus" (v. 11). This introduces an idea that John developed as his Gospel progressed: those who believed God's Word and followed Jesus had their faith bolstered by supernatural signs. Those who demanded signs as a condition of belief, however, remained unconvinced by miracles (see John 5; 6). The deeper realities of life and salvation are perceived by those with eyes of faith.

LEADER NOTE: The Old Testament prophesied that when abundant wine flowed among God's people, the kingdom of God was at hand. Isaiah prophesied that "the LORD of Armies will prepare . . . a feast with aged wine, . . . fine vintage wine" (Isa. 25:6). Amos prophesied a messianic era when "the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it" (Amos 9:13). The abundant fine wine at Cana signaled the Messiah had arrived in Jesus.

When have you witnessed God's supernatural work, and how did you respond?

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

MIRACLES: A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order or supersedes natural laws for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; signs and wonders were often evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.



ARRIVAL

SURVEY: Poll the group for their response to this question: “Which of these incidents would you characterize as a miracle, and why: (1) when trying to make it in time for a family funeral, you secure a seat after being on standby for the last flight available; (2) you win a highly significant award for a proposal despite stiff competition from other, more expert entrants; and (3) a friend with a terminal diagnosis shows signs of being healed?”

CONTEXT

TRANSITION: The Bible is filled with examples of what we consider to be miracles, largely because there is simply no other explanation for them. These incidents are exceptions to the natural order or they supersede natural laws as a demonstration of the power of God. From Adam’s first breath to a bush burning in the wilderness or the parting of the Red Sea, these events in Scripture testify to the glory of God, manifested in acts accomplished only through divine power. Some of the prophets in the Old Testament were able to perform miracles to affirm their message; this was true of Jesus as well. *(Display Pack Item 12: Christ as Prophet and compare how Jesus wasn’t just a prophet but the Prophet.)*

SAY: It is logical to assume Jesus would glorify God by performing miracles of His own, but an honest observation and analysis of those miracles defies reasoning. Miracles evoke awe and wonder. They may lead us to question, but they require an element of reverence to be accepted and respected. Jesus’s first miracle helps us understand the earmarks of a miracle. In breaking them down, we will be astonished anew.

RECAP

RECORD: Invite the group to share aloud some of the key points from the study passage that they found particularly intriguing or perplexing. Write them on a board to help keep them in mind during the group activity.

TRANSITION: While miracles may defy science, it is true that there are certain common elements that appear to be present if God gets the glory. Let’s get to the essence of the making of a miracle.



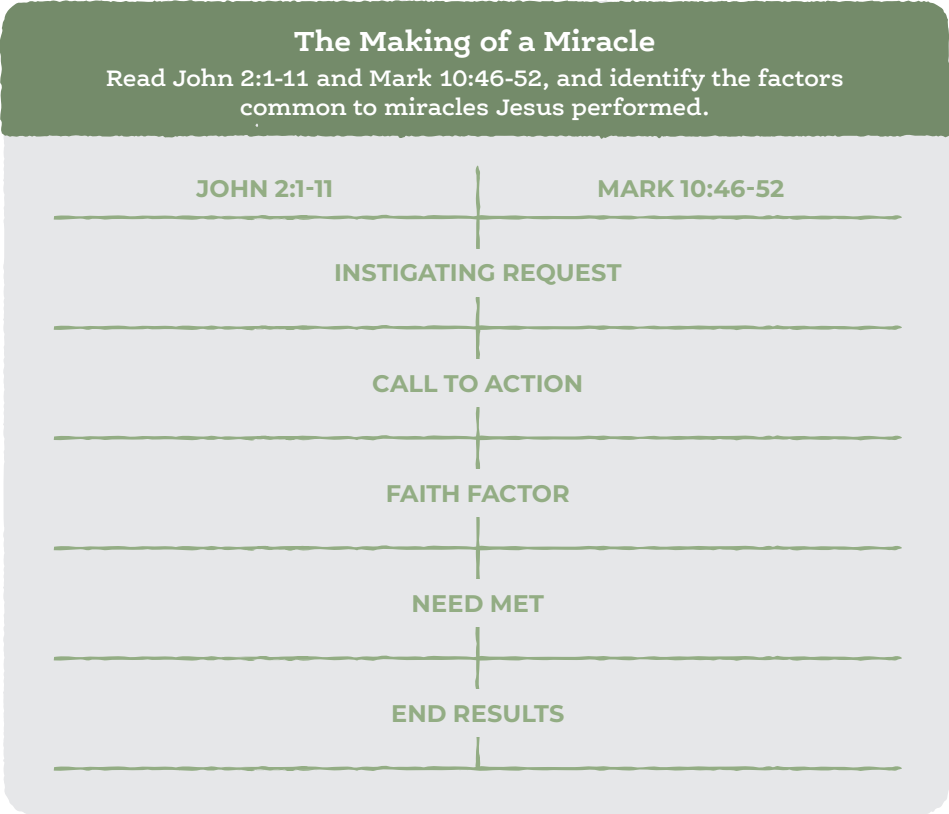
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Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

COMPARE: Draw attention to “The Making of a Miracle” chart in the Personal Study Guide (PSG) on page 92, and explain that this exercise will compare the water-to-wine miracle to the healing of a blind man recorded in Mark 10:46-52. The goal will be to discover the common components of both miracles.



ASSIGN: Form two groups and assign one group the miracle of the water turning to wine in John 2. Assign to the second group the healing of a blind man in Mark 10. Invite the groups to read their Bible passages and work together to determine the instigation (John 2:3; Mark 10:47-48,51); the call to action (John 2:7-8; Mark 10:49-51); the faith factor (John 2:5,8; Mark 10:48,51); the needs met (John 2:9-10; Mark 10:52); and the end results (John 2:11; Mark 10:52). After a few minutes for discussion, bring the groups back together.

READ: Call for a volunteer from the first group to read aloud John 2:1-11.

REPORT: Instruct this group to report their findings and record them in their PSG while you write them on the board.

READ: Call for a volunteer from the other group to read aloud Mark 10:46-52.

REPORT: Instruct this group to report their findings and record them in their PSG while you write them on the board.

DISCUSS: In the water-to-wine miracle, if Jesus pointed out that His hour had not yet come but He then yielded to His mother to accomplish what she asked, what may have been His purpose? (*Suggest: The miracle itself was not the end result because the purpose of miracles is to glorify God and to draw human beings to Christ, our only hope of salvation.*)

PROBE: Thinking about this and some of the other miracles of the Bible, is faith a requirement for a miracle to be accomplished or its byproduct? Why? What is the place of obedience in a miracle?

DEBRIEF

What do these miracles tell us of Jesus's response to our earthly needs?

How do these miracles point to Jesus as the solution for our greatest need?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus used miracles to manifest the glory of God and to identify Himself as the Christ. His first miracle of turning water into wine resulted in converts then, and the ultimate miracle of His resurrection has resulted in salvations throughout the ages. Jesus has not retired from miracle making because He remains personally involved in this world and continues to engage humanity with His divine power, transforming and saving sinners through faith in Him.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 93). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Sometimes we witness the power of Jesus on display but fail to recognize it as Jesus's work. We see Jesus bring a friend through a health challenge. We hear of a financial need in our church being met. We learn of a broken relationship that has been restored. As the disciples did at Cana, it is important to acknowledge such events as the work of Jesus.

What might it look like to believe and acknowledge Jesus's work in our lives?



HEART: When Mary had a need, she brought it to Jesus. Then she trusted Him to address it in His timing and in a way that would support the salvation He came to accomplish. Needs in our lives are occasions to trust Jesus as well. Bring them to Him in prayer, trusting Him to address those needs in a way that best advances His mission to redeem humanity.

What are some reasons you might resist taking your concerns to Jesus in prayer?

Key Concept: Jesus's power over creation reveals His divine glory and our only hope for salvation.



HANDS: There are people in your life who may be experiencing deep needs. They could use reminders that while Jesus's ultimate focus was doing the Father's will for our salvation, He also cared for the difficulties of His people. Consider how a call, text, or card might encourage them and drive them to deeper trust in the Lord.

Who in need will you contact with encouragement this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Conduct a self-assessment about the status of your faith in God's power to work miracles and your obedience to His ongoing work in your life.
- Identify a miracle you would like to see in your own life and pray for it to be accomplished according to the Lord's will.
- Make a list of people who need a saving miracle in their lives and pray for their salvation.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 93 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 104:31-35 with your group, praising God for His works. Invite your group to take turns thanking God for the mighty works He has done.

References

1. John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), Jn 2:1.
2. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press 1991), 169.

Notes



THE REAL MARY

By David Roach



Misconceptions about Mary abound. She was not a feminist icon, a sinless miracle worker, a critic of traditional authority structures, or a reflection of the human need for feminine symbols of the divine. Amid our efforts to correct these misconceptions, we may focus so heavily on stating what Mary was not that we fail to state positively what she was. Scripture says more about Mary, the mother of Jesus, than we often realize. Her life teaches us lessons about family, faith, and godliness.

MARY'S LIFE

Mary was a young woman living in the Galilean village of Nazareth in the first century. A relative of John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, Mary was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. Though she was a virgin, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Despite his own trepidations about the virgin conception, Joseph married her and refrained from normal marital relations until after Jesus was born (Matt. 1:25). Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, some ninety miles south of Nazareth, when Mary and Joseph traveled there to be counted in a census. After presenting Jesus at the temple some forty days following His birth (Luke 2:22-24), Mary and Joseph apparently resided in Bethlehem for a time and later fled to Egypt under threat from the murderous King Herod (Matt. 2:13-15). They returned to Nazareth after hearing from an angel that Herod had died (vv. 19-23).

Mary appears in the Gospels with less frequency following the narratives of Jesus's birth and infancy. Mary and Joseph had other children following Jesus's birth (Matt. 13:54-56; Mark 6:3).

She worried when twelve-year-old Jesus remained in Jerusalem, unbeknownst to His parents, on a trip there for Passover (Luke 2:41-50). She attended the wedding in Cana, where Jesus performed His first miracle (John 2:1-11). She was present at the crucifixion, where Jesus assigned the apostle John to take care of her (19:25-27). She even gathered with the early believers in Acts 1:14.

Though Mary's biographical information is confined to the Gospels and Acts, other Scriptures reference her. Genesis 3:15 predicted the offspring of a woman one day would defeat the devil and sin's curse. Isaiah referenced Mary in his prophecy that "the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Paul acknowledged Mary in stating that Jesus was "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Clearly Mary's life is more than a historical footnote in Scripture. But does she have enduring significance for our lives today? In a word, yes.

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MARY'S LESSONS

Mary dignified motherhood. In our modern culture that often views children as obstacles to success rather than blessings to be nurtured, Mary reminds us that God values motherhood. After all, He chose a human mother to birth, nurture, and teach His own Son.

Mary modeled faith. When Gabriel announced God's miraculous plan to Mary, she first believed then sought to understand. Though she could not comprehend how a virgin conception would occur, she told the angel: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Her attitude of faith seeking understanding persisted. When shepherds visited baby Jesus and shared an angelic message, "Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them" (2:19). Likewise, she "kept all these things in her heart" following the episode in Jerusalem when her young Son reminded her God was His Father (v. 51). Mary's attitude contrasted with Zechariah's, who demanded answers from Gabriel before he would believe God's word (1:18).

Mary exemplified growth in godliness. Mary walked a difficult road. When she presented baby Jesus at the temple, the prophet Simeon told her, "A sword will pierce your own soul" (2:35)—likely foreshadowing Jesus's crucifixion and the pain Mary would experience as a witness. Along life's difficult road, Mary grew in personal holiness. She was not sinless. At times she exhibited spiritual immaturity. Presumably, she was among the family members who responded to Jesus's early public ministry by claiming, "He's out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). At the wedding in Cana, Mary prodded Jesus to do His mother a favor and remedy the lack

of wine. Jesus responded with a gentle rebuke, reminding her that no one, not even her, had an inside track to win His favor (John 2:3-4). That reality alone corrects the misconception that humans can go to Mary in prayer for an inside track to God. When she responded to the correction in humble faith, she experienced Jesus's power (vv. 5-11).

Of course, the goal of any study of Mary is not merely to know Jesus's mother but to know Jesus Himself. Yet Mary pointed us toward Jesus by the life she lived and the lessons she exemplified. She spoke with Spirit-inspired foresight when she said two thousand years ago, "All generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

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