

the KING
REVEALED

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

How to be in a small group

Another year, another Bible study group. Time to sign up, turn up and get things rolling for another year. Time also perhaps to ask some questions about your small group. Do you feel as if you just go along because that's what you're expected to do? Does the group have a clear purpose, or does it just exist because it has always existed?

More to the point, what part are you going to play in this year's group? What can you be doing to make the group a success? There are many books and guides and training materials for small group leaders (like *Growth Groups* from Matthias Media), but what about the humble group member? What can each of us be doing to make the most of our small groups?

Why go in the first place?

People go to small groups for all sorts of reasons to fulfil expectations, to make friends, to pursue romantic possibilities, to receive encouragement and counsel, to learn, and so on.

While most of these might be perfectly acceptable reasons to join a small group, the first and indispensable reason must be clear in our minds. Our primary reason for belonging to a small group is to give us opportunity to love and encourage other people in Christ. It's not about Me; it's about Them. And it's about Them because of Christ.

This after all is what the Christian life is about. Our most basic principle is to love other people as Christ has loved us, to lay down our lives for them as Christ did for us. This applies as much to small groups as it does to marriages, families, workplaces, and larger Christian meetings. We go to small groups not primarily to have our needs met, but to meet the needs of others. Of course, we have needs too, and no doubt they will be met along the way—but we can let others worry about that. In fact, paradoxically, the more we focus on loving others, and doing whatever we can for them, the more encouragement and strength we find ourselves.

There are many ways we can love and encourage the other people in our groups. Here are five powerful ones (complete with alliterative titles).

1. The power of presence

This is the simplest and most obvious, but is no less powerful for being so. Just being there each week without fail is a powerful encouragement to the other members of the group. In making the group time a solid commitment, to be missed only in times of emergency, you send a very clear message to the other members: "Being with you matters very much to me. Unless something very important comes up, you can expect me. Encouraging you is a top priority."

Conversely, inconsistent attendance sends a somewhat less encouraging message: "I don't mind coming, but it's not that important. If I feel a bit tired or something else crops up, don't expect me. Being with you and encouraging you isn't really a very high priority for me."

Turning up regularly requires no extraordinary gifts or talent, but it is a powerful way of loving other people.

2. The power of preparation

Most small groups complete their evening's Bible study with a plaintive plea from the leader for people to read the passage and prepare for next week's study. The leader knows full well that most people won't, but there's no harm in trying!

However, preparing for the group time is another powerful way to love the members of the group. Of course, having read the

passage, or done the homework, greatly increases the benefit you yourself receive from the discussion. More importantly, however, it equips you to encourage others by what you say. Rather than throwing in whatever occurs to you at the time, you have actually thought about the Bible passage and the issues that it raises. You are much better prepared to say things that stimulate and encourage and teach others if you have bothered to give it some thought beforehand.

3. The power of prayer

Paul's friend and fellow worker, Epaphras, would have made an ideal small group member. According to Paul, he was always "wrestling in prayer" for the Colossians, that they might "stand firm in all the will of God". Paul was able to vouch that in doing so, Epaphras was "working hard for you" (Col 4:12-13).

Praying for others is hard work, but real work. It is one of the most loving things we can do for our fellow group members, not only because it is through our prayers that God does his work in people's lives, but because it is such a quiet, inconspicuous form of ministry. Making a casserole for someone, by comparison, is much more satisfying—you see something very tangible for your efforts, and you have the pleasure of delivering it to the person and receiving their warm expressions of thanks. Prayer has none of those rewards. You do it for one reason only: that you care for that person and want what is best for them in Christ. And so you pray for them.

4. The power of personality

The alliteration may be starting to stretch a little thin here, but the point is solid enough—that a powerful way of loving others in your small group is to be willing to share your own life and personality with them.

This is by no means an easy thing to do. Many of us would much rather keep quiet and not give too much away. However, by opening up and sharing our lives and thoughts and struggles and joys, we do others a great service. We not only show them that we have the very same struggles that they have (but thought they were alone in suffering); we also encourage them to open up as well.

Of course, it is anything but loving to indiscriminately dump everything we are thinking or feeling onto the group. We need to heed the advice of Proverbs and think carefully before we speak; as well as the words of Ephesians 4: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph 4:29).

5. The power of love

Whatever you do in the group—every word you say, every action—do it for the sake of others. Look for how you can support and help the leader. Look for ways to care for the members of the group—those who could really do with a phone call or visit; those who would benefit from having someone to pray or read the Bible with; those who need financial or other material help; those who just need a friend to have pizza and a video with.

Belonging to a small group can be a very demanding exercise. It can cost us our lives, because that is what it means to be a follower of Christ—to lay down our lives for the sake of others. If we grasp the possibilities, small groups represent an enormously fruitful opportunity for doing just that.



Introduction to John

John tells us very clearly what he's trying to achieve with his gospel. John 20:30-31 says, “*Jesus did many signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but **these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***”

John was one of Jesus' disciples. He was the son of Zebedee, and the brother of James, who was also a disciple. Along with this gospel, John also wrote three letters that are included in the new Testament—1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and the last book of the Bible, The Book of Revelation. In his gospel, John refers to himself as “the disciples whom Jesus loved”, which helps us not to confuse him with John the Baptist, who is a significant character in the first few chapters.

John probably wrote his gospel toward the end of the first century A.D., a long time after the gospel's of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written. John wrote to both Jews and Gentiles. He wrote to both Christians and non-Christians. As the verses above say, John wanted them, and he wants us, to have life in Jesus. In order to convince us, John records a series of *signs*. These signs are things Jesus did that reveal who he is, and what sort of king he is. John's account of these signs have earned the first half of the gospel (chapters 1 to 12) the nickname, 'The Book of Signs'. John often writes of a sign Jesus performed, something Jesus **did**, followed by what Jesus **said** about what he did, and then people's **reaction** to Jesus. For example, in chapter 6 John records the story of Jesus feeding a crowd of 5,000 people (verses 1-13), then Jesus explains that he is 'the bread of life' (22-59), a message which many of his followers couldn't stomach, so they stopped following him (60-71). As you read through John, keep an eye out for these signs.

John's gospel sets forth evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. John wants us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah (Messiah means God's anointed king), so we believe and have life. What John says is that without believing these things, you will not have life. Believing what John has to say about Jesus is the difference between life and death.

John's message is not just evangelistic. He wants followers of Jesus to grow in their belief, and to grow in the life they have in Christ. Belief for John is not just intellectual assent—John wants us to put our lives in Jesus' hands. He wants to reveal King Jesus to us, so we can know and love him.

Study 1; John 1:1-18

The Word Became Flesh

Jesus is God's Word in human form, Jesus is God living with us. Knowing Jesus is knowing God.

Discuss some of the different ways you can come to know someone.

Read John 1:1-5

Compare John 1: 1-5 with Genesis 1:1-3. List all the similarities.

How has God expressed and revealed himself?

What God reveals about himself is always true, because he is God. God can't be separated from his Word. That's why John says, "the Word was God". What do these first five verses tell us about God's Word?

Read John 1:6-13

What is the relationship between the Word and the light?

What is the great irony and great tragedy of verses 10 and 11?

What do you think it means that the world (that includes you!) has rejected light and life?

Read John 1:14-18

Verse 14 contains the most audacious claim of the whole Bible. What is this claim?

What is so unbelievable about this claim?

What has Jesus done (verses 17-17)?

If Jesus is God's Word in human form, what should our attitude toward Jesus be?

Pray

What would John want you to pray about?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Study 2; John 1:19-2:12

Jesus is Revealed

Jesus is revealed to be the Messiah, the one who washes away our sin, and brings new life.

What evidence do you need to believe something is true?

Read John 1:19-34

How does John the Baptist answer the questions of the priests and Levites (verses 19-28)? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Who does John the Baptist say Jesus is (verses 29-34)? How many titles are given to Jesus here, and what do these titles mean?

What was John the Baptist's purpose (verse 31)?

Read John 1:35-42

What are the first words of Jesus recorded in this gospel (verses 38-39)?

What did the two disciples find (verse 40)?

Why do you follow Jesus—what are you looking for? What will you find?

Read John 1:43-51

What does Jesus reveal about Nathaniel (verse 47)?

What does Nathaniel reveal about Jesus (verse 49)?

Does Nathaniel know all there is to know about Jesus, or is there more to come? What about you?

Read John 2:1-12

What kind of jars does Jesus ask to be filled with water? Given what we've already read, why is this significant?

What does Jesus turn this washing water into? What might this sign mean?

By showing his followers this sign, what did Jesus reveal about himself (verse 11)?

What is the response of the disciples? What is your response of the revelation of Jesus?

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Study 3; John 2:13-3:36

Understanding Jesus

God's glory is revealed in Jesus death.

Have you ever been lucky enough to be part of a friend's bridal party?

Read John 2:13-22

From your knowledge of the Old Testament, discuss what the temple was originally intended for (Check out Exodus 40:34-35 if you're unsure—the tabernacle was the portable temple before the temple was built). What was it being used for in Jesus' day?

When the Jews question him, what does Jesus say he will do? What is he talking about (chapter 2:18-22)?

How is God's glory revealed on earth?

Read John 2:23-3:21

Discuss Nicodemus' first question (the question is implied) and Jesus' first answer (chapter 3:1-3).

Discuss Nicodemus' second question, and Jesus' second answer (verses 4-8).

Discuss Nicodemus' third question, and Jesus' third answer (verses 9-21).

Read John 3:22-36

How does John the Baptist describe his relationship to Jesus?

Nicodemus found it hard to believe that Jesus could offer eternal life and forgiveness—he found it hard to believe that Jesus could be a better version of the temple. What things did John the Baptist believe about Jesus that Nicodemus didn't (verses 31-36)?

What is a Christian? Are you a Christian?

How will God's glory be revealed in your life?

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Study 4; John 4

Our Greatest Need

Jesus can give us living water that will well up into eternal life.

What's your greatest need this week?

Read John 4:1-26

What did Jesus need (verses 6-7)? Why was the woman at the well?

What did Jesus say the woman at the well needed instead (verse 14)?

What did the woman think she needed most in life (verses 16-18)? What does Jesus say she needs most (verses 23-26)?

Read John 4:27-42

What did the disciples think was the most pressing need at the moment they returned to see Jesus talking to the woman (verses 27-33)?

What does Jesus say is the most pressing need for the disciples (verses 34-38)?

How did the woman's action stack up against the actions of the disciples (verse 39-42)?

Read John 4:43-54

What did the official think his greatest need was?

Did the official believe only because he saw signs and wonders?

What's your greatest need right now?

The woman from Samaria is a great picture of church. She was looking for love in all the wrong places, going against God in the way she lived, but saved by the gift only Jesus could give. Not only that, she was a missionary, sharing the live-giving water with her parched community. Are you drinking water that will make you thirst again, or are you drinking Living Water from Jesus?

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Study 5; John 5

Jesus' Authority

Jesus' authority is from God, and we can't honour God without honouring Jesus.

List some people whose authority it would be foolish not to honour.

Read John 5:1-17

What was the sick man trying to do? Was it working? What did Jesus do? Did it work?

What did the Jews think of the man working (carrying his bed) on the Sabbath?

Why were the Jews unhappy about Jesus' work? Whose authority did the Jews honour?

Read John 5:18-29

What was it about Jesus' work that *really* upset the Jews (verse 18)?

Discuss what Jesus says to the Jews. Is it possible to honour God without honouring Jesus?

Do you ever presume to right with God, but fail to honour Jesus?

Read John 5:30-46

List the three witnesses who testify that Jesus' authority is authority from God.

What do you think verses 45-47 mean? (Hint: Moses was the one who gave Israel their law.)

Are the Jews really honouring the law they hold so dear?

Whose authority do you honour first and foremost? What might it look like to honour Jesus' authority in your Small Group and at church?

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Study 6; John 6

The Bread of Life

Jesus is the bread of life. No other diet gives life like the words of Jesus.

What's your diet like?

Read John 6:1-21

What did the Jews celebrate at the Passover feast (verse 4)? Why might John mention this?

Read Exodus 16:1-4 and Exodus 14:15-18. How is Jesus like Moses?

Compare Moses words in Deuteronomy 18:15 with John 6:14. What did the crowds rightly understand about Jesus? What should this fact make us do?

Read John 6:22-59

The crowd understood that Jesus was a prophet like Moses. What did they ask Jesus for (verses 31-34)? Discuss Jesus answer (verses 35-40).

What is the diet that leads to eternal life (verses 52-58)?

Is this cannibalism?! What does this mean?

Read John 6:60-71

Many of the crowd listened to Jesus, but did they truly hear and understand him (verse 66)?

What about Simon Peter—did he truly understand Jesus (verses 67-68)?

Are Jesus' words the words that sustain you and give you life?

What are the consequences of not eating for a short time? What about for a long time? What are the consequences of not regularly hearing and reading Jesus' words? What can you do to help your Small Group keep a healthy diet?

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Study 7; John 7

Jesus Divides

Jesus divides opinions, and Jesus is deeply unpopular.

Discuss the idea that Jesus polarises opinions.

Read John 7:1-24

Why does Jesus say the world hates him (verse 7)?

What are people saying about Jesus (verses 11-12)? What sort of buzz is he creating?

Who claimed to know the truth about God in Jesus' day (verses 14-24)? Who claims to know the truth about God today?

Read John 7:25-36

Where has Jesus come from? Where is he going?

In these verses, what responses are there to the rumour that Jesus may be the Christ?

Do you find it easy to believe Jesus is the Christ when people around you are (sometimes

aggressively) opposed to the idea?

Read John 7:37-52

What is Jesus' invitation (verses 37-39)?

List the reactions to Jesus' invitation in verses 40-52. What similar reactions do you see today?

What is the inevitable outcome of being a follower of Jesus?

Jesus divides. Are you for Jesus, or against Jesus?

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Study 8; John 8:12-59

Jesus' Big Claims

Jesus is truth and light, outside Jesus there is no true enlightenment.

How popular is the idea of 'absolute truth'?

Read John 8:12-30

Compare these verses with John 1:6-8. Why did John the Baptist bear witness about the Light?

What is Jesus claiming in verses 12-14? What is so controversial about this claim?

How do the people react to what Jesus was revealed about himself (verse 25)? Why do we see the same today?

Read John 8:31-47

What is so controversial about Jesus' claim in verses 31-32?

The Jews say to Jesus, "Abraham is our father" (verse 39). What are they really saying here (Hint: verse 33)?

What does Jesus say about people who don't believe his truth (verse 37, 40, 44, 47)?

Read John 8:48-59

Read Exodus 3: 13-14. Verse 58 is the most controversial claim of them all! Why?

Go back and read John 1:14. Why is the claim that Jesus is God made flesh such an unpopular claim for Christians to make?

Do you believe Jesus is who he claims to be? What sort of opposition do you think you will face if you tell others about this truth?

God's Word, God's truth, has been made flesh. Do you believe him?

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Study 9; John 9:1-10:21

Seeing & Not Seeing

Spiritual sight is seeing that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who lay down his life for us.

How good is your vision?

Read John 9

What can the man born blind see (17, 30-33)?

What can the Pharisees not see (15, 16, 19, 29)?

What does it mean for Jesus to do for us what he did for the blind man?

Read John 10:1-21

There are three important components to Jesus' story. Who is the gate (verses 1, 7)? And what does the gate in the story tell us about who is and who isn't a legitimate part of God's family?

Who is the shepherd (verses 2, 11-16)? What does the shepherd in the story tell us about what kind of king Jesus is? How do you know if you're one of Jesus' sheep?

How many ways are there to be saved? Are you following the Good Shepherd?

Read John 10:22-42

What are the Jews still not seeing (verses 22-24)?

What is the message the people must *hear* before they can *see* who Jesus is (verses 27, 30)?

What is the inevitable reaction of people who cannot see clearly who Jesus truly is (verse 31, 39)?

We all reject Jesus in some areas of our lives. What steps can you take to come to see Jesus more clearly in those areas? Are you able to help others see him more clearly?

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Study 10; John 11

Jesus Has Power Over Death

Jesus is the good and powerful life-giving son of God, who died for the good of all God's children.

Do you think science will ever let us overcome death?

Read John 11:1-27

Why did Jesus delay when he had heard that Lazarus was dying (verse 6, also check out verse 4 & 15)?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “Are there not twelve hours in a day?”

In verses 25-26 Jesus seems to say two contradictory things. What are they, and what does he mean?

Read John 11:28-44

Describe the scene. What's going on here?

How long had Lazarus been dead?

What did Jesus do in verses 43-44? What does this reveal about Jesus?

Read John 11:45-57

What were the Jewish leaders worried about (verse 47-48)? What should they have been worried about? (The temple was destroyed a few years after Jesus ascension, and has never been rebuilt – their nation was also taken, and only returned to them in 1947.)

Was Caiaphas showing insight into God's plan for salvation, or just thinking politically?

How were the people getting ready for the Passover feast (verses 55-57)? How were they about to stain themselves with the biggest crime of all?

In what areas of your life do you see the good and powerful life-giving son of God, and respond by trying to promote your own interests? What can you do to change?

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Study 11; John 12

A King on his Way to Glory

Jesus ultimate glory is in and through his death on the cross, where he triumphantly offers salvation to the world.

Whose praise do you love?

Read John 12:1-8

Verse 7 seems strange! What is Jesus anticipating?

How do Mary's actions compare to Judas' actions?

Do you sometimes use passion for a good cause to hide unfaithfulness to Jesus?

Read John 12:9-26

Why did the chief priests want to kill Lazarus?

What do we learn about King Jesus from his entrance to Jerusalem?

Was Jesus' death an accident? Did he not realise he was about to be arrested?

Read John 12:27-50

What kind of death did Jesus say he would die?

John quotes Isaiah to show that the King has indeed been revealed (verse 38). What stopped many people from believing in him (verses 42-43)?

How do verses 49-50 mirror John 1:1-14?

On the last day (verse 47-48), will you be saved by Jesus, or judged by your rejection of his words?

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