### **BEING WITH JESUS**



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For additional support like the meaning of the icons and relationship building tips, please see the **Facilitator Best Practices** guide on **page 40**.

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# WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS FULLY GOD

1

# **BEING WITH JESUS**1: WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS FULLY GOD



BIG IDEA: To explore Jesus' identity as the Word of God

#### WELCOME/ICEBREAKER **©** 15 mins

Names of God: display or sort out on separate cards the <u>names of God</u>. Ask group members to choose one that answers the question, "How is God revealing himself to you this week?" and share why.

#### SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER **Q** 2 mins

Lord Jesus, we thank you for being our sovereign King who reigns in grace and love. As we come to know you more deeply, may we come to see you more fully as Lord and Savior, as the Word of God who can be trusted for all of life. May we grow to embrace your love and worship of the Father as you embrace us in your shared life with him. We thank you for coming to us to reveal the Father and give us eternal life. We ask your blessing on our study together that we may come to see and know you and your Father in the Spirit. Amen.

#### SCRIPTURE READING **3** mins

John 1:1-18

(scripture reading can be done in the round by multiple group members, by a volunteer or by the leader. According to your group's culture, you can take a variety of approaches)

#### **EXEGETICAL DISCUSSION ©** 30 mins

The Gospel account found in the Book of John has as its central theme: Jesus is God's beloved Son who was sent to reveal the Father, giving eternal life to all who believe in him. Key verses in the book that expound on this theme are John 1:14, 3:16 and 20:30-31. These may be good verses to commit to memory during this study.

For our purposes, we will remain in the Book of John throughout the entire study. Primarily, we will focus on the first 18 verses, which make up the prologue to John's Gospel. This prologue is the most profound articulation of Jesus' identity (Christology) found in the New Testament. Since the focus of this study is "Being with Jesus," we will begin each session on Jesus by reading John 1:1-18 to help guide us in knowing who Jesus is and who we are in him. Then we will take a closer look at certain verses to help us answer the question "Who is Jesus?"

John 1:1-3a and 16-18 give us two important answers to that question. The first answer concerns Jesus' identity and the second concerns his mission. For this session, we will look at the first claim of John concerning Jesus' identity.

John 1:1-3a (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

John 1:16-18 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION Q** 20 mins



What do you observe in these passages about Jesus' identity? From reading these passages, what answer does John give us to the question "Who is Jesus?"

John uses language that makes the claim that Jesus is God. He even starts his Gospel account by borrowing language from Genesis: "In the beginning..." By calling Jesus the "Word" from the beginning, he has identified Jesus as the Creator.

But he does this in a clever way by using the term Logos. In the Old Testament, Logos, God's word, was understood to be God's own dynamic force of his purpose and will (Ps. 33:6, Isa. 55:11). In Greek thought, the term Logos referred to divine reason responsible for the order and unity of the cosmos. John found a way to communicate to both Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the divine creator, but is distinct from the Father.

This is a startling claim given that Jesus is a flesh and blood man who walked on the earth only a few decades before John wrote this. How can this be, that Jesus is God? John is not concerned about answering that question, and we should not expect to find a complete answer to it this side of heaven.

He is not concerned about answering the "How" questions but rather the "Who" question. So, without explanation, John makes the claim of Jesus' divinity, and it is a claim we must wrestle with when asking the question, "Who is Jesus?" John is claiming that Jesus is not a god but the God who is equal to the Father. By saying the Word was both "with God" and "was God" from the beginning, he has confirmed Jesus as the Son of God who is distinct from the Father but still fully divine.

#### ? APPLICATION DISCUSSION **()** 10 mins

C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity draws our attention to the magnitude of the claim of Jesus' divinity and our response to it:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

As we read John's testimony that Jesus is fully God, we must decide how we will respond. According to Lewis, we cannot dismiss it under some safe category, but rather we either believe it to be true or we reject it as a lie. What do you think of Lewis' statement, along with John's testimony of Jesus?

#### ? DISCUSSION QUESTION **()** 15 mins

If we believe Jesus to be fully God, what significance does this have for us? What implications does this carry for worship? For obedience? How does this inform our view of the Bible?

For this week, challenge each participant to start each day by asking themselves this question: "Who is lord of my life today?" They can use this question as a reminder each day that Jesus is Lord and we are called to orient our entire life under his Lordship.

#### **DIVINE PARTICIPATION ©** 5 mins



John has made the claim that Jesus is the Word of God. He is telling us that Jesus is fully God, sent to us by the Father. With this in mind, go through the book of John and hear the Word speak to you himself with his own claims about his identity.

In the Book of John, there are seven "I am" statements from Jesus that help us see a little more of who Jesus is. When Jesus uses the "I am" title for himself, he is claiming to be God. These "I am" statements are listed below for reference. For this study, we will read and meditate on Jesus as "The Good Shepherd" and "The Gate" (or "Door") (which are referenced in John 10:1-18).

What does this passage help you see in regards to Jesus being the Word of God spoken to us?

- 1. The Bread of Life (6:35-40)
- 2. The Light of the World (8:12-30)
- 3. The Door (10:7)
- 4. The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
- 6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-7)
- 7. The True Vine (15:1-11)

#### **CLOSING PRAYER ©** 5 mins

Read together the Nicene Creed and note where the creed affirms John's claim of Jesus' identity discussed in this session.

#### NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Close with a prayer to Jesus, thanking him for who he is.

2

### WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS THE SELF-REVELATION OF GOD

#### **BEING WITH JESUS**

#### 2: WHO IS JESUS?

#### JESUS IS THE SELF-REVELATION OF GOD



BIG IDEA: To explore Jesus' mission to reveal the Father and bring eternal life.

#### WELCOME/ICEBREAKER **©** 15 mins

Go around and ask members to reflect and respond to one of the question pairs below:

- > What was the most life-giving part of my week? What was the most life-reducing part of my week?
- > What are you celebrating this week? What are you grieving this week?
- > When did you feel most connected with God, others, and self? When did you feel least connected with God, others, and self?

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Ask 2-3 people in the group to volunteer to pray prayers of thanksgiving for who God is and what he has done.

#### **SCRIPTURE READING 3** mins

You may wish to use a different translation than what you used for week 1.

John 1:1-18

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#### DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE **Q** 30 mins



Review the theme of the Gospel account found in the Book of John: Jesus is God's beloved Son who was sent to reveal the Father, giving eternal life to all who believe in him. Participants may be encouraged to set to memory key verses in the book that expound on this theme, like John 1:14, 3:16 and 20:30-31. Participants could be given the opportunity to recite these verses.



After reading the prologue in John 1:1-18, focus specifically on John 1:1-5 and John 1:16-18 for the second session. These two sections of the prologue give us two important answers to our question of "Who is Jesus." This is the question we will want to continually be asking in our time together. We discussed the first answer in our last study regarding the identity of Jesus as God's Word. This week we focus on the second answer found in this text regarding the mission of Jesus.

John 1:1-5 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:16-18 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Notes		

? What do you observe in these passages about Jesus' mission? From reading these passages, what answer does John give us to the question "Who is Jesus?"

Notice in John 1:1-5 that John moves from the Word's work of creation into the Word's work of rescuing humanity. This mission of Jesus is more explicit in John 1:16-18. John has told us that God spoke through his Word to bring the entire cosmos to life. That includes you and me. John has also connected "life" with the Word being the "light of all people." Light and Life come together in the Word of God.

John introduces here a theme of "light and darkness" that he will use throughout his Gospel account. You can be on the lookout for this theme as you read beyond the prologue. But take note here that the mission of Jesus is summed up as the Word who brings both life and revelation.

What connections do you see John making between "life" and "light?" Discuss the implication of Jesus as the Light who reveals the Father with how Jesus brings us life.

John states that "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." What is John telling us about Jesus's mission as the Light and revelation of the Father with such an exclusive statement regarding Jesus? How does this exclusive claim strike you? What response does it bring out? Why do we need Jesus for redemption, for salvation?

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#### **?** APPLICATION **0** 10 mins



It is no secret that most fruit will grow best when it receives plenty of sun. This can be said of Christians as well. We grow best in the "Son." Using this analogy, have participants discuss ways they can "grow in the Son" (scripture study, serving others, etc.). How might we shape our lives to see the Light who reveals the Father?

Building on last week's application, challenge each participant to start their day with the question, "Who is lord of my life today?" For this week, we will add to that question a challenge to respond in a specific way. If participants answer that question with, "Jesus is Lord of my life today," then have them participate in prayer to Jesus to start the day. It can be as simple as opening your eyes in the morning, saying "Lord Jesus, thank you for being Lord of my life. I give you this day to be my light and my life. Amen." Help participants see the importance of spending time "in the Son." Help them begin developing patterns and habits of communing with him. This week, encourage prayer. We will add other disciplines as we go along.

#### **★** DIVINE PARTICIPATION **●** 5 mins

John has made the claim that Jesus is the Word of God. He is telling us that Jesus is fully God sent to us by the Father. With this in mind, go through the book of John and hear the Word speak to you himself with his own claims about his identity. In the Book of John there are seven "I am" statements from Jesus that help us see a little more of who Jesus is. When Jesus uses the "I am" title for himself, he is claiming to be God. These "I am" statements are listed below for reference. For this study, we will read and meditate on Jesus as "The Bread of Life" in John 10:1-18. What does this passage help you see in regards to Jesus being the Word of God spoken to us?

Notes		

#### 1. The Bread of Life (6:35-40)

- 2. The Light of the World (8:12-30)
- 3. The Door (10:7)
- 4. The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
- 6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-7)
- 7. The True Vine (15:1-11)

#### **CLOSING PRAYER 1** 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from the group, and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send out the list to the group. Then close with a prayer or <u>one of the sample exercises</u>.

# 3

# WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS THE LIGHT

#### **BEING WITH JESUS** 3: WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS THE LIGHT



BIG IDEA: To explore Jesus as the Light and his witnesses to that Light.

#### WELCOME/ICEBREAKER **©** 15 mins

Off to the Movies – This is a visual exercise to help us to be present to God and to each other. Think of a favorite scene from a movie or book, or line from a song or poem, even a piece of art that expresses how you feel about God right now or how you feel about your relationship with him. Don't think too much about it, and don't try to give a "right" answer. Speak honestly as you are comfortable.

#### Example:

- > To me, God seems like the man in the Wizard of Oz distant, fake, untrustworthy.
- > God feels like Rocky's coach, Micky Goldmill, who was tough, but loved Rocky dearly and wanted to see him succeed with all his heart.
- > God and I feel like Thelma and Louise or Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid – a strong friendship that helps me stand up to the difficulties of life and discover who I am.

#### SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER **Q** 2 mins

Lord Jesus, we thank you for being the healer of our blindness and the restoration of our vision. We ask you to open our eyes to see who you are and who we are in you. Open our eyes to see your Father whom you came to reveal. Open our eyes to see one another as the children we are created to be. With restored vision, we turn our eyes on you, that we may participate by the Spirit to point others to you as the only source of life and salvation. In the name of Jesus who is our vision, we pray. Amen.

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#### **SCRIPTURE READING 3** mins

John 1:1-18



#### **EXEGETICAL DISCUSSION ©** 30 mins

Review the theme of The Gospel of John: Jesus is God's beloved Son who was sent to reveal the Father, giving eternal life to all who believe in him. Participants may be encouraged to set to memory key verses in the book that expound on this theme, like John 1:14, 3:16 and 20:30-31. Participants could be given the opportunity to recite these verses to begin the study.

In this study, we are continuing to ask the question, "Who is Jesus?" and we are using John's prologue to help us answer that question. So far, John has told us that Jesus is identified as God's Word, who was with God and who was God. Jesus' identity is divine as God's beloved Son. John has also told us that Jesus' mission is to be the "light and life" in the world. Jesus reveals the Father and brings us into eternal life.

Now John moves to speak further about Jesus being the light by introducing John the Baptist.

John 1:6-8 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

John 1:15 (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'").

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? How does the writer compare John the Baptist to Jesus? What things are similar? What is different?

The apostle John, the writer of the Book of John, points out that Jesus does not leave us without witnesses. But we are not to confuse these witnesses with the one they witness to. John the Baptist is recorded with his own testimony telling us that Jesus is far superior to John, his appointed witness.

Phow does this shape how you view the role of the church as a witness? Can you think of ways the church can mistakenly, at times, pointed to itself rather than to Jesus? How important is humility in being a witness to Christ in your own life?

The inclusion of John the Baptist in John's prologue may seem surprising. The apostle John is talking about Jesus being God, the Creator of the cosmos and the Light and Life of the world. Then we are introduced to a humble servant who seems to be there to simply point to Jesus. But notice what John the Baptist is involved in. He is pointing to Christ "so that all might believe through him." Remember the Gospel of John's theme: Jesus is God's beloved Son who was sent to reveal the Father, giving eternal life to all who believe in him. John the Baptist has been called to participate in the mission Jesus was sent to accomplish. Don't let this escape your attention. The Apostle did not lose track of what he was trying to tell us and haphazardly get off topic talking about John the Baptist. He was very intentional to include this detail. This also tells us something about Jesus and the Father he reveals.

Phow does the inclusion of John the Baptist in the mission of Jesus inform your understanding of God? Jesus doesn't really need our help to reveal the Father so why does he have John the Baptist serve as a witness to the Light? What does this tell us about God's heart?

The prologue begins with the intimate relationship between the Word and God. Then it moves to include us in what God is doing through the Word. Without using the term "Trinity," the apostle John has made a staggering statement about the Triune God who is a relationship of love going out to us to bring us to be in relationship with him. (If there is time, you could say more about God being Father, Son, and Spirit.) The God revealed in Jesus Christ is not a God of isolation. He is not alone. He does not intend to leave us alone either.

#### ? APPLICATION • 10 mins

#### Questions:

- > Have you ever "witnessed" to someone with the gospel in a verbal way? What was the interaction like polite/adversarial/forgettable/transformative? Or, conversely, has someone witnessed to you? Share stories (the funnier the better).
- > How can we, like John the Baptist, get out of Jesus' way when he arrives on the scene? "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3:30). What's the problem when we don't get out of the way or have humility?
- > John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin (or something close), and he recognized Jesus even when he was in the womb (Luke 1:41). This has been the plan all along, telling us that God leaves no detail out of place. What does that tell us about who God is? What does that tell us about God's plan for us?

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#### **★** DIVINE PARTICIPATION **●** 5 mins

John claims that Jesus is the Light of the World. John is letting us know that there is only life in following Jesus, who is the Light. In the Book of John, there are seven "I am" statements from Jesus that help us see a little more of who Jesus is. They are listed below for reference. For this study, we will read and meditate on Jesus as "The Light of the World" in John 8:12-30. What does this passage help you see in regards to being followers of the Light?

- 1. The Bread of Life (6:35-40)
- 2. The Light of the World (8:12-30)
- 3. The Door (10:7)
- 4. The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
- 6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-7)
- 7. The True Vine (15:1-11)

#### CLOSING PRAYER • 10 mins

Collect prayer requests from group, and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send out the list to the group. Then close with a prayer or one of the sample exercises.

Notes		

# 4

# WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS FULLY MAN

#### **BEING WITH JESUS**

#### 4: WHO IS JESUS? JESUS IS FULLY MAN

**Q** 

BIG IDEA: To explore Jesus' identity as the Incarnate Word.

#### WELCOME/ICEBREAKER **1** 15 mins

Go around and ask members to reflect and respond to one of the question pairs below:

- > What was the most life-giving part of my week? What was the most life-stealing part of my week?
- > What are you celebrating this week? What have you lost this week?
- > When did you feel most connected with God, others, and self? When did you feel least connected with God, others, and self?

#### **SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER ©** 5 mins

The following prayer is from Angela of Foligno, an Italian Franciscan known for her spiritual writings. You can say this prayer together to begin the session or have someone read it for the group.

O Lord Jesus Christ, make me worthy to understand the profound mystery of your holy incarnation, which you have worked for our sake and for our salvation. Truly there is nothing so great and wonderful as this, that you, my God, who are the creator of all things, should become a creature, so that we should become like God. You have humbled yourself and made yourself small that we might be made mighty. You have taken the form of a servant, so that you might confer upon us a royal and divine beauty. You, who are beyond our understanding, have made yourself understandable to us in Jesus Christ. You, who are the uncreated God, have made yourself a creature for us. You, who are the untouchable One, have made yourself touchable to us. You, who are most high, make us capable of understanding your amazing love and the wonderful things you have done for us. Make us able to understand the mystery of your incarnation, the mystery of your life, example, and doctrine, the mystery of your cross and passion, the mystery of your resurrection and ascension. Blessed are you, O Lord, for coming to earth as a man. Amen.

Angela of Foligno, from her Complete Works

SCRIPTURE READING **3** mins

John 1:1-18

#### DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE **Q** 30 mins



Review the theme of The Gospel of John: Jesus is God's beloved Son who was sent to reveal the Father, giving eternal life to all who believe in him. Participants may again be encouraged to set to memory key verses in the book that expound on this theme, like John 1:14, 3:16, and 20:30-31. Participants could be given the opportunity to recite these verses to begin the study.



We will continue to ask the question, "Who is Jesus?" as we move further into John's prologue. So far, John has told us that Jesus is identified as God's Word, who was with God and who was God. Jesus' identity is divine, as God's beloved Son. John has also told us that Jesus' mission is to be the "light and life" in the world. Jesus reveals the Father and brings us into eternal life. We also saw that Jesus calls others to serve as his witnesses. Now, we move into the greatest mystery of history: Incarnation. We will not be able to unpack all the richness of this truth. Our aim will be to see how John points us to the Incarnate Son and the implications it has for us.

John 1:9-10 (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

John 1:14 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

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# How do these passages strike you? Do John's words here challenge the way you see God? What do you think about a God who comes to us instead of waiting for us to come to him?

The Incarnation speaks of God's great love for his creation beyond our imaginations. He comes to us by taking on our human nature with all its darkness, brokenness and suffering, and transforms it in his own life, death, and resurrection.

The verb used for "lived among" (or in some translations, "made his dwelling") shares the same root for the Old Testament word for tabernacle. The tabernacle was the portable temple that Israel traveled with through the desert and was the dwelling place of the presence of God. This is John's way of saying that God's presence has come again to "tabernacle" with us.

What does this passage say to you about a God who comes to us, even though "the world did not know him"?

John connects Jesus as the "true light, which enlightens everyone" with Jesus coming in the flesh. This means that when we see Jesus, we are seeing who God is. There is no other God to be seen or known than the God we see and come to know in Jesus Christ. This gives great weight to reading the Gospel stories to hear Jesus' words and see his deeds. It is in Jesus' words and deeds that we have the revelation of the Father.

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#### ? APPLICATION **0** 10 mins

- 1. Have you ever thought in terms of what Jesus said and did in the Bible as hearing and seeing what God is really like? Discuss some ways you have thought about God that is not consistent with the way Jesus is presented in the Gospels.
- 2. How do we "recalibrate" our understanding of who God is? How do we re-center on who Jesus is in our lives, especially when it seems like he's not there?
- 3. How does it strike you that Jesus—a person who lived a short, in some ways tragic, and very complex life, shows us who God is? Does this make God more approachable or more alien and foreign to us?

#### **★** DIVINE PARTICIPATION **●** 5 mins

John enfolds Jesus' "I am" statement of being the Resurrection and the Life in a story that expresses the depths of Jesus' solidarity with humanity. In the Book of John, there are seven "I am" statements from Jesus that help us see a little more of who Jesus is. When Jesus uses the "I am" title for himself, he is claiming to be God. These "I am" statements are listed below for reference. We will continue to survey these "I am" statements to add further insight to our study. For this session, we will read and meditate on Jesus as "The Resurrection and the Life" in John 11:17-27. What does this passage help you see in regards to Jesus being the "Resurrection and the Life"?

Notes		

- 1. The Bread of Life (6:35-40)
- 2. The Light of the World (8:12-30)
- 3. The Door (10:7)
- 4. The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
- 6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-7)
- 7. The True Vine (15:1-11)

#### **CLOSING PRAYER 1** 10 mins

Collect requests and praise reports from the group.

Have the host or leader for the group close with this benediction:

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever He may send you.

May He guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm.

May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you.

May He bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.

from the prayers of The Northumbria Community, Scotland

# 5

# WHO ARE WE IN JESUS? CHILDREN OF GOD

#### **BEING WITH JESUS**

# 5: WHO ARE WE IN JESUS? CHILDREN OF GOD



BIG IDEA: To explore our response to the Word by reception or rejection.

#### 

Give a quick warm welcome. Use one of the icebreakers from the Appendix, or go around the room and have each member share a "three-word happy story" (ex. "I am loved," "Project is complete," or "Here's some chocolate.")

#### SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER **Q** 2 min

Lord Jesus, we thank you for opening our eyes to see your Father. We thank you for your righteous response to the Father in blood, sweat, and tears as you lived among us. We pray for eyes that see and ears that hear and a receptive heart that turns toward you. We pray that we can receive your vision of the Father, your perfect obedience to his voice, and your love toward him. Forgive us, Lord, of our rejection of you and our rebellion against your Father. You have provided for us all that is needed to enter your life of faith, hope, and love. We thank you for taking upon yourself our sin and death in order to give us your righteousness and life. May we turn to you again today and receive more of your life with the Father held out to us through the Spirit.

SCRIPTURE READING **0** 3 mins

John 1:1-18

		28

#### DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE **Q** 30 mins



Review the theme of the Gospel of John: **Jesus is God's** beloved Son who was sent to reveal the Father, giving **eternal life to all who believe in him.** Participants may again be encouraged to memorize key verses in the book that expound on this theme, like John 1:14, 3:16, and 20:30-31. Participants could be given the opportunity to say these verses to begin the study.



John has arranged the prologue of his Gospel account by structuring verses 10-13 as the central focus. This structure is consistent with his reason for writing his Gospel account that he states towards the end of the book:

John 20: 31 – But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John is not writing for his own sake. He wants others to see the God he has seen in Jesus and for them to place their trust in this Jesus who gives eternal life. Eternal life is not just life that goes on forever, but it is a quality of life defined by being in right relationship of love with him and his Father.

John 17:3 – And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Relationship is not a static thing, like a statue. It is dynamic, with real interchange between persons. Could you imagine a relationship where there is never any response from the other? It would be like talking to a fence post. It is the same when it comes to our relationship with God. There is response. John does not leave out this important aspect of Jesus and his what the Father has done through him. We are created to respond to him. Let's look at the central text in John's prologue:

John 1:10-13 (NRSV)

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

#### What responses do you see in the passage?

Jesus coming to the world is not a mechanical or magical fix. It's relational, and it requires that we respond. Just like someone giving you a gift, it can be received or rejected.

Both responses, of receiving and rejecting, are seen in the passage. Can you think of why someone might refuse to receive a gift from someone? Do we sometimes reject Jesus for some of these same reasons?

In the passage, receiving Jesus is linked to believing in Jesus. To believe in Jesus' name means to trust all that he is and all that he does. It's a relationship of trust. When we do not trust someone, it is difficult to receive anything from them. It might be a trick, or there may be strings attached.

But Jesus came to show us that he is not trying to trick us, and, therefore, his Father is not either. The Father is a generous giver who has given to us his own Son in the Incarnation. God does not hold anything back from us, but gives us everything in Jesus.

For us to receive all the Father has given us in Jesus, we must grow in our trust of him – and Jesus is God's grace to help increase our trust. Another way of saying this is to speak of faith. To live by faith is to live trusting the one you put your faith in. In Jesus, we find that God is trustworthy.

As we come to see he is trustworthy, we grow in our response of receiving from him. In this way, Jesus becomes our faith. Jesus draws out the response of reception (faith, belief, trust) from us like a breathtaking scenic view draws out our response of awe and wide-eyed wonder.

### What does the passage say is the gift we receive as we put our trust in Jesus?

To know what it means to be a child of God is seen in Jesus being the Son of the Father. We cannot look to our relationship with our earthly fathers to know what it means to be a child of God. Only as we look to Jesus do we truly come to know how to live in response to the Father, who loves us in the same way he loves his own Son.

What is John telling us about becoming children of the Father when he says, "he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God"?

John is showing that becoming a child of God is only by grace. It is to be received, not achieved. The Father has made us his children in Jesus and we are called to respond to that reality. We are not told to make it a reality by earning our way into his love and acceptance.

#### ? APPLICATION **()** 10 mins

- > Have you ever found it difficult to receive a gift? To receive undeserved grace from someone? Do we ever feel that way about God?
- > What's the difference between believing in Jesus and trusting in Jesus? Is there a difference? How do we travel from belief to trust?

Notes		

#### **★** DIVINE PARTICIPATION **⑤** 5 mins

John has made responding to Jesus the central part of the structure in his prologue. For John, the coming of Jesus demands a response. There is no neutral ground. In the Book of John there are seven "I am" statements from Jesus that help us see a little more of who Jesus is. When Jesus uses the "I am" title for himself, he is claiming to be God. These "I am" statements are listed below. For this session, we will read and meditate on Jesus as "The Way, the Truth, and the Life" in John 14:1-7. Consider this passage in light of our response to Jesus. Does Jesus leave room for any other "way" or "truth" or "life" that demands our response?

- 1. The Bread of Life (6:35-40)
- 2. The Light of the World (8:12-30)
- 3. The Door (10:7)
- 4. The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
- 6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-7)
- 7. The True Vine (15:1-11)

#### **CLOSING PRAYER © 10 mins**

Collect prayer requests from group and assign prayer partners for the week or have one person send out the list to the group.



### HOW DO WE GROW IN JESUS? PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

#### **BEING WITH CHRIST**

## 6: HOW DO WE GROW IN JESUS? PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST



BIG IDEA: To explore our call to remain in Christ.

#### WELCOME/ICEBREAKER **©** 15 mins

If you were to imagine you were a biblical character, which one would you be right now? Looking over your week, your day, and how you feel right now, which biblical figure would you say you are and why? For example:

- > Abraham—A little lost but feeling God is leading me
- > Mary Magdalene—Once oppressed but now with an intimate friendship with Jesus
- > There are many other possibilities!

#### **SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYER Q** 2 mins

Lord Jesus, we thank you for bringing us into the life and love of the Triune God. We put our trust in you for our sanctification, growing us as the children of the Father we were created to be. We seek to remain in you, to embrace and enjoy the life-giving relationship you have given us with yourself and your Father by the Spirit. Lord, remove everything that stands in the way of our staying in you, all that competes with the love the Father has for us. We thank you that as we draw close to you we find that you have drawn close to us with the life and love of the Triune God. Teach us now to be with you. Draw our hearts closer to the Father and make us to be like you more and more. Amen.

1

**SCRIPTURE READING Q** 2 mins

John 15:1-17

#### DISCUSSION OF SCRIPTURE **Q** 30 mins



For our final session on Jesus, we will remain in the Gospel of John but move to a different chapter, John 15. Now that we have discovered a little more of the identity and mission of Jesus and have grown in our faith in him as children of the Father, we may ask ourselves, "How do we grow in Jesus?" Or, "How do I participate as a child of God in this new life found in Jesus?"

The key to answering that question is to return to a relational understanding of God's identity as Triune. If you were asked how to grow in your relationship with your wife, husband, child, or friend, you would probably say, "You spend time with them. You talk with them, hang out, and get to know them." In other words, you participate in the relationship. That's how relationships grow. This is pretty much how Jesus would answer the question of how we grow in him. In his words, we "abide" with him, remain with him, live with him.

#### John 15:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Notes		

<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

<sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

? What stands out to you in this text? How many times does the word "remain" appear? What is Jesus telling us about our relationship with him?

It would be a shame to get to the end of this study only to be left with some abstract understanding of the Father and his Son Jesus. That was not John's intention and it certainly is not how Jesus describes life with him. Jesus calls us into an intimate relationship that is concrete. Jesus is real and he meets us as we remain in him. For Jesus, bearing fruit has everything to do with living in and enjoying the love of the Father. Notice how Jesus concludes his teaching:

"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

Remaining Christ is not a kill-joy. Either we believe Jesus is the Life or we don't. But he and the apostle John have told us that he is indeed the Life we are created for. Belief in Jesus and his Father will grow as we spend time with and come to know further who God is as revealed in Jesus. We will not be disappointed. God is that good and more.

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But we must also take note that abiding in Jesus is not always a walk in the park. Jesus is committed to our relationship, and therefore there is a lot of "cutting" and "burning" of things that need to be cast aside, things that are hurting our relationships with Jesus.

What did Jesus' strong images of pruning say to you? Why does Jesus speak in such strong terms? What does this say about his love for us and about grace?

Grace is sometimes confused with God ignoring the fact |we have really failed. But this is not how grace is conveyed by Jesus in this passage. God's grace is his determination to be with us in Jesus. He does not ever change his mind about us or his love for us. This means he will resist everything that stands in the way of our relationship with him, including our bad habits. So, abiding at times may hurt and it may feel like God doesn't love us, but in reality, he loves us far better than we love ourselves.

## **?** APPLICATION **()** 10 mins

We have been adding different ways of abiding throughout our entire study. Whether in prayer, Bible study, fellowship, worship, giving, meditation, solitude, and more, we are obeying Jesus' command to live in him. Spiritual practices, or "spiritual disciplines," as they are often called, are best seen under this call to remain in Jesus. We are not engaging in these practices to create a reality, but to participate in a reality. We are not trying to get God's attention through worship —we are worshipping because he got our attention through Jesus. Worship is the umbrella over all these practices that we engage in. To worship is to respond to the reality, grace, and truth we see in Jesus.

As we remain connected to Jesus, we are like the fruit that grows best sitting in the sun. For our final application, encourage each participant to find ways to worship the Lord in these spiritual practices. You may want to spend some time talking about different ways Christians can live with Jesus that have not been mentioned in this study.

### **★** DIVINE PARTICIPATION **●** 5 mins

For this final session, we have already looked at the last "I am" statement of Jesus as "The True Vine." In the Book of John there are seven "I am" statements from Jesus that help us see a little more of who Jesus is. When Jesus uses the "I am" title for himself, he is claiming to be God. These "I am" statements are listed below. For our final "I am" statement, consider at least one way this week you plan to "abide" in Christ. Share with one another opportunities you see where we can live in Jesus through worship, prayer, fellowship, Bible study, service or witness.

- 1. The Bread of Life (6:35-40)
- 2. The Light of the World (8:12-30)
- 3. The Door (10:7)
- 4. The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 5. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)
- 6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1-7)
- 7. The True Vine (15:1-11)

Notes		

#### **CLOSING PRAYER © 10 mins**

Close this series with these words from C.S. Lewis, Poem on Prayer:

They tell me, Lord, that when I seem To be in speech with you, Since but one voice is heard, it's all a dream, One talker aping two.

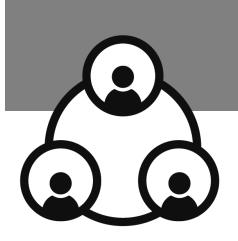
Sometimes it is, yet not as they Conceive it. Rather, I Seek in myself the things I hoped to say But lo!, my springs are dry.

Then, seeing me empty, you forsake
The listener's role and through
My dumb lips breathe and into utterance wake
The thoughts I never knew.

And thus you neither need reply Nor can; thus, while we seem Two talkers, thou art One forever, and I No dreamer, but thy dream.

Spend time in prayer for each other and close.

Notes		



# THANK YOU FOR STARTING AND LEADING A NEW GCI CONNECT GROUP!

We believe Connect Groups are the perfect place for a community of believers to grow in their love for Christ and one another. In this kind of context people are transformed by God's love. Basically, we see the Faith Avenue as a place for deeper discipleship & relationships.

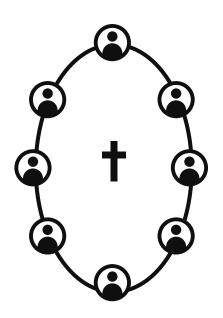
We have developed a basic curriculum to support our Faith Avenue leaders. The curriculum is meant to facilitate discussion that will help disciple new believers and veteran members. Along with the curriculum, we wanted to provide some facilitator best practices to help create a space where people feel a sense of belonging and where enriching, practical spiritual conversations can occur. Here are some best practices to help provide some additional support as you start your group.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A CONNECT GROUP?

• To create a safe space for seekers and members to connect with God and one another. To share, to grow spiritually and to build relationships with one another.



#### WHY START A CONNECT GROUP?



- We are sanctified through relationships.
  As we unpack spiritual truths and practical ways to live out our faith, the Spirit is working in and among us, purifying us and transforming us more into the image of Christ. Through these intentional and honest conversations, we experience the love of Christ through one another.
- In his ministry to and with the twelve disciples,
  Jesus modeled connect group ministry.
  He did not just preach truth to this group. He lived
  daily life with them, and they ministered together.
  He was available and provided opportunities for
  them to grow in leadership.
- · We see connect group type ministry at the heart of who our Triune God is, and at the center of the early church.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)



#### WHAT ARE SOME QUALITIES OF A CONNECT GROUP LEADER?

- **Passion for Christ** be a disciple before discipling others.
- Passion for people a desire to care for and draw out participation from others.
- Commitment to invest the time reliably be available both during the set group time and for other relational opportunities.

#### WHAT ARE SOME CONNECT GROUP BEST PRACTICES?

When inviting others to participate in your group, have a clear purpose/shared goal and expectations set, create a format (when do you meet, how long each gathering will be, how are children included, etc.).

- Because **Connect Groups** have both spiritual and relational purposes. Our Team Based-Pastor led model recommends having one person serve as a host and another as the facilitator of the discussions. The host creates a warm welcoming environment (often in their home), and provides refreshments. Sharing food together develops relational intimacy. The facilitator prepares for the discussion and leads the group through the curriculum, drawing out participants to share and discuss making sure all voices are able to contribute.
- For group dynamics, we find that 5-15 people meeting weekly or bi-weekly are the size and frequency that work best.
- · As you will notice in our curriculum, we find it best to set a six to eight-week timeframe for groups. This allows people to commit for a set time and explore if the group is a good fit for them.



- In the initial meeting discuss group norms and expectations. What will we commit to as a member of this group? How will we create a safe space for everyone? How can new members be integrated into the group? We have provided a "Shared Covenant of Care" worksheet that will allow your group to discuss and commit to your group standards or norms. Here are few suggested standards:
- 1. Give priority to attending each week unless unavoidably hindered.
- 2. Faithfully complete the weekly home study assignments.
- 3. Participate in the group discussion as I am able.
- 4. Pray by name for each member of my group during the weeks the group is meeting.
- 5. Refrain from discussing needs expressed in the group with anyone outside the group.

#### WHAT ARE SOME BEST PRACTICES FOR GROUP FACILITATION?

#### Please...

- ✓ Encourage participation.
- ✓ Guide the conversation around the set topic.
- ✓ Model group standards in your interactions and remind members of the standard when decisions are made that conflict with them.
- ✓ Reflect and summarize to the group the overall feelings, reactions, ideas, or solutions shared during the discussion.
- Resolve conflict by mediating differences in point of view.
- Be organized and flexible. This helps create the structure, while allowing you to respond to group needs.

#### Do not...

- **x** Present yourself as the expert.
- **x** Dominate the conversation by bringing the conversation back to your experiences, rejecting ideas without thoughtful consideration, using the group to share your personal opinions and values.
- **X** Compete to have the deepest idea, last word, or be the favored person in the group.
- **x** Disrupt the process of the group with excessive joking, mimicking, etc.
- **X** Withdraw by becoming passive or overly formal.

#### HOW TO PREPARE FOR A GROUP MEETING

- Pray join with the Trinity in praying specifically for the individuals in your group and for an openness toward the movement of the Spirit in and among you.
- Content to best facilitate the group, become familiar with the flow, big idea, and application of the scriptures. Consider how to contextualize the material for your group.
- **Coordinate** connect with the host to discuss relational building opportunities and needs for creating the atmosphere.

#### HOW TO WRAP UP A GROUP AFTER THE LAST SESSION

- **Evaluation** create a method to get feedback for the group's experience. This promotes quality and provides accountability, and allows for next steps to be determined.
- · Continuity provide next steps.
  - o Has the group grown and created a need to multiply?
  - o Will the group continue to meet after the six to eight weeks?
  - o Will the group desire to take a break? If so, provide some relational opportunities to check in with each other during the break.
  - o Are there other groups starting that members can choose to join?



#### WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ON BEING CURRICULUM?

On Being is a four-part interactive connect group curriculum, designed for biblically-based, dynamic discussions around being a disciple.

We will be rolling out a different curriculum quarterly throughout 2021.

The four curricula are: Being a Christian Neighbor, Being the Church, Being with Jesus, and Being with the Bible. Each curriculum has a Facilitator Guide and a Participant Workbook. Included in this document is an appendix with additional resources for facilitators.

Below is the key for each icon included in the Facilitator Guide:



BIG IDEA - main theme of the lesson



**SCRIPTURE** - Bible passage for this week's lesson



BIBLICAL CONTEXT - additional analysis on this week's passage



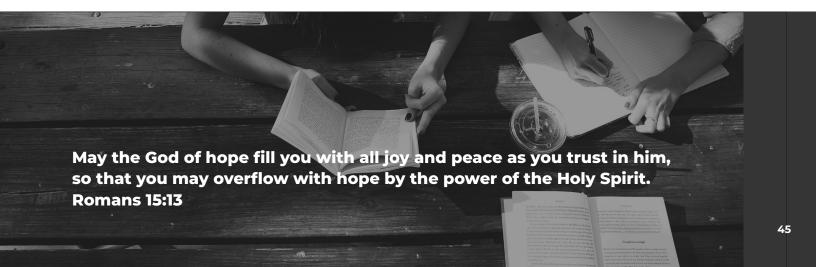
CALL OUT - reminder to read this section out loud or explain the concept



**APPLICATION QUESTION** - questions that bring out of the participants the personal relevance of this week's passage



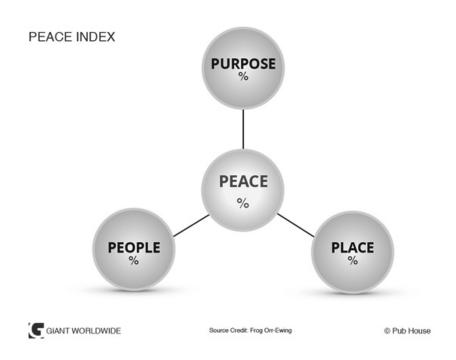
**CALL TO ACTION** - How the BIG IDEA impacts how we live our lives



#### **APPENDIX**

## Sample Icebreakers (for consistency and variety, please rotate between 2 or 3 icebreakers throughout the course of the curriculum):

- Names of God: display or sort out on separate cards the <u>names of God</u>.
   Ask group members to choose one that answers the question,
   "How is God revealing himself to you this week?", and share why.
- Examen: Go around and ask members to reflect and respond to one of the question pairs below:
  - o What was the most life-giving part of my week? What was the most life-thwarting part of my week?
  - o What are you celebrating this week? What are you grieving this week?
  - o When did you feel most connected with God, others, and self? When did you feel least connected with God, others, and self?
- Peace Index: Reflect on each of the following categories: your people (relationships), your purpose, and your place (environment). Combine these factors to develop your peace index. Share your percentage and a few reasons why you chose that number.



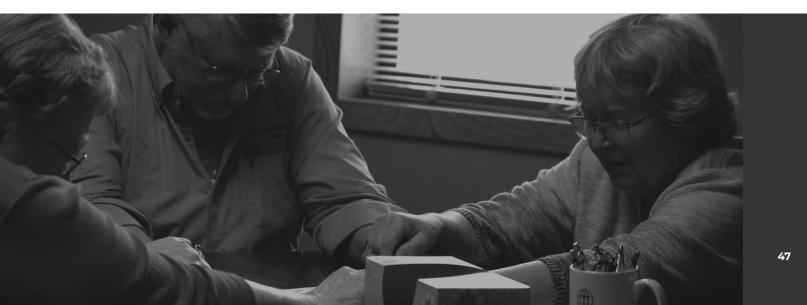
- Looking over your week, your day, and how you feel right now, which biblical figure would you say you are and why?
  - o Abraham—A little lost but feeling God is leading me
  - o Mary Magdalene—Sickly and dependent but had an intimate friendship with Jesus
  - o Many examples!

#### **Sample Opening Prayers:**

- Begin five minutes of silence allow the group to become centered in the present moment, and then have the leader or assigned group member say a short prayer or simply say amen.
- Responsive reading or reading of a written prayer

#### Sample Closing Prayers:

- Ask a group member to read a scripture or quote that embodies the theme of this lesson and then pray.
- Give a few group members a descriptor of who God is (God is present, God is powerful, etc.) Ask them to read the descriptor and pause for a moment of reflective silence and then have the leader or another member of the group close in prayer.
- · Read the Apostle's Creed together.



# MY CONNECT GROUP SHARED COVENANT OF CARE

Name	Contact Info	🕏 Prayer Need	
_			
As a member of	the <b>Connect Group</b> , I will:		
	• /		
Signed by:		Date:	