

BELOVED DISCIPLE

THE LIFE & MINISTRY OF JOHN

BETH MOORE



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To my new son, Curt—

If I could have looked the world over for a life partner for my firstborn,
I would have chosen you. No need. God already had. My dear Curt,
as I wrote this study, I often thought how very much you favor the apostle John.
You are a true man of vision, driven to the *Logos* by godly affection.
You are the essence of a deeply beloved disciple.

I love you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Beth Moore realized at the age of 18 that God was claiming her future for full-time ministry. While she was sponsoring a cabin of sixth-graders at a missions camp, God unmistakably acknowledged that she would work for Him. There Beth conceded all rights to the Lord she had loved since childhood. However, she encountered a problem: although she knew she was “wonderfully made,” she was “fearfully” without talent.

Beth hid behind closed doors to discover whether a beautiful singing voice had miraculously developed, but the results were tragic. She returned to the piano from which years of fruitless practice had streamed but found the noise to be joyless. Finally accepting that the only remaining alternative was missions work in a foreign country, she struck a martyr’s pose and waited. Yet nothing happened.

Still confident of God’s calling, Beth finished her degree at Southwest Texas State University, where she fell in love with Keith. After they married in December 1978, God added daughters Amanda and Melissa to their household.

As if putting together puzzle pieces one at a time, God filled Beth’s path with supportive persons who saw something in her she could not. God used individuals like Marge Caldwell, John Bisagno, and Jeannette Cliff George to help Beth discover gifts of speaking, teaching, and writing. Seventeen years after her first speaking engagement, those gifts have spread all over the nation. Her joy and excitement in Christ are contagious; her deep love for the Savior, obvious; her style of speaking, electric.

Beth’s ministry is grounded in and fueled by her service at her home fellowship, First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, where she serves on the pastor’s council and teaches a large Sunday School class. Beth believes that her calling is Bible literacy: guiding believers to love and live God’s Word.

Beth loves the Lord, loves to laugh, and loves to be with His people. Her life is full of activity, but one commitment remains constant: counting all things but loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, the Lord (see Phil. 3:8).

Beth’s previous Bible studies have explored the lives of Moses, David, Paul, Isaiah, and Jesus. In *Beloved Disciple: The Life and Ministry of John* she invites you along to learn from the long life and incomparable writings of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20). May you be blessed by your journey, as were those who traveled to Greece for the videotaping and those who worked with Beth to bring you *Beloved Disciple*.

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INTRODUCTION

I have the privilege of writing this introduction only days after my husband escorted our firstborn down the aisle and into the arms of her handsome groom. My heart is moved by the tenderness of God's personal affections, which He demonstrates to each of us in His divine timing. How like Him to choose this precious time in my life to plan a wedding while writing a study that culminates with joyous anticipation of the wedding supper of the Lamb!

John the apostle had no idea that the events, experiences, and transitions in his life experience were all etched on a divine map to move him toward an unparalleled destiny. He alone was positioned to receive the Revelation. I wonder whether after the final vision John realized that he had been getting ready for a wedding from the start. He had first learned of Christ through the faithful tutelage of a Baptizer who was also called "the friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29, KJV). Then Christ chose a wedding in Cana to first reveal His glory to His small band of followers by turning water to wine. Christ also chose wedding themes for several of His most powerful parables. No doubt, Christ meant to make a point, and I believe the point of His arrow pierced its way into the heart of the youngest disciple.

Every disciple and early follower of Christ left a legacy for future believers. John's legacy was love. After all, what is a wedding without love? Perhaps like no other disciple, John understood that relationship is the point. Every command of Christ and call to obedience is to enhance relationship and place the recipient in a posture the Giver can bless. All else is law. I may as well warn you. You won't find much law in this study. It just wasn't John's style. This study is about finding our way to the heart of Jesus and reclining so closely that our pulse begins to throb in tandem, loving what He loves and hating what He hates.

If John were here, I believe he would tell us, above all, to sell out to love. Legalists tend to get a little nervous when we talk about surrendering to love over service, but Scripture proves that those who loved most lavishly served most sacrificially. John was only one among good company. Mary of Bethany, Peter, and Paul were each compelled by holy passion. Affection will forever be the most efficient energy a believer can burn in her labors.

Allow me to give you the bottom line before we turn the first page in hopes that you might adopt John's attitude from the very beginning: John was free to love because he was so utterly convinced that he was loved. He called himself the beloved disciple. How differently would each follower live if we characterized ourselves above all else as the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ? This is the goal of our journey.

God is planning a wedding. Every moment of our believing lives is meant to prepare us for that day. John was like the wise virgins in Matthew 25, who did not know when the bridegroom would come but kept their lamps filled with oil. As you will discover in the last third of the study, even in exile when no one was looking, John kept his heart-lamp full with the oil of the Holy Spirit. No wonder Christ chose him to receive the final revelation. May John's legacy become oil in each of our lamps, preparing each of us for our Bridegroom.

I'll soon be turning in my mother-of-the-bridal dress for fine white linen. Glory! But while I've still got another wedding on my mind, allow me to say that I was in no hurry for Amanda to make her final flight out of our nest. In fact, I really could have gotten in a bad mood about it ... except for our groom. I awakened on the morning of the wedding with indescribable gladness—even laughter—in my heart. I sat down and wrote Curt a letter to tell him why, for God had used him to make our joy complete. The profound passage in our family's life was not only bearable but also celebratory because I was totally convinced of our groom's love for his bride.

Dear One, you and I can celebrate our profound passage through this life because we can "know and rely on the love God has for us" (1 John 4:16). Leave it to John to pen those words. Our water is turned to wine and our joy is complete because our Bridegroom is Jesus the Christ, the living, breathing Son of God. Oh, for the day we'll see Him face-to-face!

As surely as God loved me and timed this study for me, He will do the same for you. My reasons happened to surround a wedding. Yours will be entirely unique to you. In whatever way Christ applies the truths of these pages to your precious life, let Him romance you along the way. No matter what may be going on in your life, never forget that you are a bride.

RESPONSE SHEET

INTRODUCTORY GROUP SESSION

As we begin a journey that will take us throughout Galilee into Samaria, to Jerusalem, to Ephesus, and to Patmos, let's consider adopting the same invitations for embarkation that John encountered.

Read John 1:35-51.

1. Let's sense Christ asking us the same question: "_____, My child, what do you want?
[Your name]

What are you seeking here and now in this _____ of your life?"

2. Let's be willing to "_____."

3. Consider the unfathomable grace of God that we sometimes "find" Christ when we didn't even know
_____ was the _____ we were _____.

4. We will miss untold treasures if we confuse "_____"
with "_____."

5. Let's begin our journey as a true seeker "in whom there is _____."

6. Wherever we've recently _____, Jesus has _____.

7. As Christ reveals how He has "_____" _____, our eyes are somehow
_____ to "see" _____.

Go to LifeWay.com/BelovedDisciple for digital downloads for purchase or rent and a free PDF of the Leader Guide.

WEEK 1

FRESH WINDS OVER GALILEE

DAY 1 | SINCE THAT TIME

DAY 2 | THE IDENTITY OF FAMILY

DAY 3 | THEY WERE FISHERMEN

DAY 4 | OLD TIES AND NEW TIES

DAY 5 | A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW

I love new beginnings, don't you? I am honored to embark on this new beginning with you. Let's count on God to take us places with Him we've never been and to accomplish a work we didn't know He could. As James and John cast their nets on the sun-kissed waters of the Sea of Galilee, they had no idea that the Son of God was casting His net for them. Soon they would find themselves captured by His call and compelled by His love. Let's allow the same divine affection to catch us as we too are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

I hope you take part in weekly small-group gatherings and discussions. If not, you can work through this study by yourself. However, the accountability, encouragement, and shared experiences of a small group create an ideal learning process.

The Principal Questions will guide your discovery in the Word each week. Each day also provides a Personal Discussion Question (👉) that you will apply to your life and discuss with your group.

PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS

DAY 1: What was John the Baptist's purpose for preaching?

DAY 2: How was John identified in his family?

DAY 3: What name did Simon call Jesus in Luke 5:5?

DAY 4: How did Christ build His new followers?

DAY 5: According to Mark 1:25-26, what happened when Jesus commanded the demons to come out of the man?

DAY 1 SINCE THAT TIME

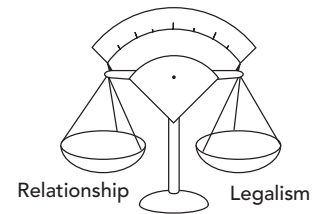
TODAY'S TREASURE

"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached." —Luke 16:16

The year was AD 28—give or take a few years. For a chosen people who hadn't heard a word from God in four centuries, life was pretty good west of the Jordan. They had covered their insecurities with a blanket of sameness. The absence of a fresh encounter with God had them clutching to what they had left: the law.

Interesting, isn't it? The Hebrew people climbed to the summit of legalism during the silent years that fell between Malachi and Matthew. That's what really religious people do who don't have much of a relationship.

Can you relate? On the scales in the margin draw an arrow where your balance lies between relationship and legalism.



The Hebrew people wanted to know what they could expect from life, so they formed an expectation and enforced it with a vengeance. They got life as they wanted it, threw it over their heads like a security blanket, and hid from change. If anyone questioned the status quo, the committed acted as if the blanket had always been there. No doubt, many ascribed to the prevailing attitude described in 2 Peter 3:4—"Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

But they were wrong. Since creation everything has never simply gone on. God has been carefully executing a plan of inconceivable perfection. Even in the silent years of Israel's history, God was never inactive. We have no idea how hard His hands may work even when His mouth seems closed. God's silence never equals slumber.

For those of us trying to grasp what the God of the universe is doing with planet Earth, few titles of Christ are more significant than those that issued from His own mouth in Revelation 22:13. What are they?

- Alpha and Omega
- First and Last
- Lion of the tribe of Judah
- Beginning and End

I cannot describe how impressed I am with the manifold perfections and consistencies of Scripture. A book that unfolds with the words "In the beginning" concludes with One who declares Himself both as that very Beginning and as the End. Life on this planet had a precisely executed beginning, and it will have a certain end. He who planned them both to perfection does not just leave everything in between to go on as it would—or as it always had.

God has a will for Earth. Before He uttered, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), every day of His kingdom calendar was filled from beginning to end. We can refuse to cooperate, but we cannot keep God from executing the critical events on His own schedule. Thankfully, no amount of tradition can stop God when He has a mind to change things.

Just as the establishment got things the way they wanted and swore they had always been, someone had the gall to stick his head out from under the security blanket. Sooner or later, he'd lose his head for it, but in the meantime, he'd shake up a few things.

God has a will for Earth.

Read Luke 3:1-9. In what ways did John the Baptizer seem to stick his head out from under the security blanket of sameness?

- Preached repentance to forgiveness
- Demanded faithfulness to the sacrificial system
- Demanded fruit in keeping with repentance
- Warned of impending judgment

I don't want you to miss the inference of a very deliberate God keeping a precise schedule on the kingdom calendar. Luke 3:1 says,

"In the _____ of the reign of Tiberius Caesar."

Luke 3:2 then says "during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" something very critical happened. What was it?

- John the Baptist came.
- The Word of God came.
- Jesus Christ came.

Today's Treasure quotes Christ Himself. Please reread it. How does this verse pinpoint John's life as a point of change on the kingdom calendar?

After four hundred years of silence, suddenly the Word of God came. After such a long wait to see God reveal Himself afresh to mortal creatures, I wonder if all of heaven hushed to hear it. Of course, those on Earth didn't have to hush. The Baptizer talked nice and loud. And when he was not nice, he was still loud. Loud enough, in fact, that Pharisees and Sadducees from Jerusalem went to the fringe of the security blanket on the banks of the Jordan to see what all the commotion was about (see Matt. 3:5,7). Theirs were among the few heads that stayed dry that day. They held their security blanket over their heads to keep from getting doused in change.

Always one to swim against the current, John the Baptist delivered a message that traveled the Jordan upstream into the waters of a handful of fishermen in a village called Bethsaida. Drawn like fish to bait, several of them trekked to hear him and hung on his every word. In fact, John 1:35 refers to them as disciples of John the Baptist. Don't let the term seem heretical to you. The label *disciple* seems almost sacred to many of us, but keep in mind the only thing that made the twelve disciples of Jesus sacred was the One they followed. *Disciple* simply indicates a pupil and follower of someone's teaching.

Thankfully, John the Baptist was a man worth following, precisely because he led straight to Jesus. Let's read a personal testimony about the teaching of the Baptizer from the quill of the man we have committed to study for the next 10 weeks.

Read John 1:19-31, focusing on the question in verse 22, "What do you say about yourself?" In what two ways did John the Baptist define himself?

Who he was not:

Who he was:

John the Baptist was a man worth following, because he led straight to Jesus.

I don't think that's a bad question for us to ask ourselves as we launch this boat together. So what about you? What do you say about yourself? What we don't say in words, we ultimately say in deeds. Daily we say all sorts of things about ourselves. Sometimes what we say about ourselves is not necessarily accurate, but it's what we believe. Trust me. I know about this one. I lived much of my life with a highly inaccurate estimation of who I wasn't and who I was. As a young person, I dizzily swung between feelings of *I am a victim, and I'm not as good as anybody else* and *I'm no one's victim, and I'm going to be better than everyone else*. As I stare at that brief testimony, I sigh at the recollection of it all. Believing and living a lie was so exhausting. What finally got me off the swing? Learning to see myself in relationship to Jesus Christ.

Don't get the idea that I've arrived or that whatever I've learned so far hasn't been a process. I struggled with my identity even as I grew healthier, and I still do at times. In my first years of ministry I tried so hard to *be* my mentor that I tried to do everything just as she did it. Has anyone besides me ever discovered that trying to be someone else is exhausting?

Because of Jesus, John knew who he was and who he wasn't. Who wasn't he? "He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ'" (John 1:20). Much of his public was plenty willing to hail him as the Christ, had John let them. He didn't.

According to John 1:27, how differently did John see himself from Christ?

What we don't say in words, we ultimately say in deeds.

So who was John the Baptist, according to his own definition? "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'" (v. 23). I find what he said about himself very refreshing. He understood Christ's greatness and how unworthy he was in comparison, but he didn't see himself as having the value of an inchworm under a rock. His life had value through its connection to Christ.

John the Baptist has just introduced a concept that another John will carry on for us throughout our ten-week travel together. Among many other things, we're going to learn how to define ourselves by our relationship to Jesus Christ. We'll arrive at an important place of maturity when we can say who we are—and who we are not.

As we try to compare ourselves to John the Baptist, we might be tempted to think: *Well, one thing is certain. No one's going to get me confused with Christ*. To the contrary, some people will try to make anyone with a semblance of spiritual maturity their personal savior. Have you ever had anyone try to make you their savior of sorts? Our most convenient response might be shifting all responsibility to the poor, confused person. After all, can we help it if someone mistakes us for more than we are?

John the Baptist's example might suggest that we can and must "help it" whenever possible. Like him, we need to confess freely things like: "I'm so sorry if I've led you to believe otherwise, but I am not your salvation. I have no power to deliver you." "I can't be our entire family's rock. If you're all standing on me for stability, we're all about to have a sinking spell." Or "I don't have all the answers. I'm still trying to figure out what the questions are."

So do we just let everyone down? No, we ask them to let us down, right off that man-made pedestal of toothpicks. Our role in the lives of those God sends our way for help is not unlike John the Baptist's. We become a voice in their desert helping them prepare a way for the Lord.

I can't wait to see why God has invited me along on this journey. I have no preconceived notions, no idea where this study is going. An unknown adventure lies ahead of me as surely as it does for you. I dearly love an adventure! I can't wait to see all the stops we'll make and all the keepsakes we'll pick up along the way, but when all is said and done, I have a feeling we will learn much about identity. Whose? Christ's and two of His very important disciples. One we'll meet tomorrow. The other you can meet in the nearest mirror.

As we conclude today, let's form a baseline for our present perceived identity so that we can draw comparisons after our journey. Don't give the answers you think you should. Instead, please be completely honest. You won't be asked to share your responses in your small group. They are just between God and you.

As clearly as you can presently see, please list the following.

Who you've discovered you aren't:

Who you've discovered you are:

I'm so glad you've joined me on this journey. Let's see where the Lord takes us as we explore His Word together.

DAY 2 THE IDENTITY OF FAMILY

TODAY'S TREASURE

"Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John." —Matthew 4:21

Family. Only the divine can be more essential. The devout Jew could not detach the familial from the spiritual. God Himself wove the two together from the beginning: "The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:21-22). A spiritual act if you'll ever find one.

Then in Genesis 4:1 "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.' Later she gave birth to his brother Abel."

Family life became synonymous with family problems almost from the start, but God never abandoned the concept. Indeed, family was a very good idea and became a powerful medium through which God has worked throughout history. In Genesis 28:13 God formally introduced Himself to Jacob like this: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying."

God never abandoned the concept of family.

God emphasized the meshing of the familial and spiritual so strongly in the Old Testament that space permits me only a few of many references: Exodus 12:25-27 says, “When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’”

Joshua 4:5-7 says, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.”

Hebrew parents and children talked. The Lord did not say, “if your children ask you” but “when your children ask you.” Fathers were even more involved in the education of their children than the mothers. In a typical ancient Jewish home, communication was virtually constant, and to remove the spiritual significance from their conversation would have almost silenced them.

No segment of Scripture expresses the interweaving of God and family like the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Carefully read these verses, trying to absorb the priorities of life God delivered in this directive.

How would you explain to a new Christian the relationship between the things of God and the things of family?



You are probably Gentile by heritage just as I am. Anytime we study the life of someone steeped in an entirely different culture, we have to be very intentional about seeing them in their world rather than ours. We can make countless applications to our world but only after we have viewed historical figures in their own. Not only was ancient Orthodox Judaism an entirely different culture from ours, but God also made sure it compared to none. He did not want His nation to be like any others. Let’s hear God talk for Himself in Deuteronomy 14:1-2: “You are the children of the Lord your God. ... For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the Earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.”

New Testament Jews were Jews at a time when Judaism had perhaps never been more Jewish. By this expression I mean that although they were under Roman rule, they enjoyed very significant freedom to live out their culture. They were firmly established in their land and had their temple. Every sect of religious life was functioning at full throttle—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the teachers of the law, to name only a few.

Life in the Galilean villages of Capernaum and Bethsaida must have seemed light-years away from the hub of religious life in Herod’s temple in Jerusalem, but one thing varied little from Hebrew to Hebrew. YHWH* was life—Provider, Sustainer, Sovereign Creator of all things. To the Jews, to have little thought of God was to have little thought at all.

If the more sophisticated Jews in the Holy City thought the simple settlers on the Sea of Galilee envied them, they were surely mistaken. Neither had modern conveniences, but who can miss what they never had? Neither was without the inevitable troubles that are part of life. Each had their preferences. Each had points of view. One awakened to

To the Jews, to have little thought of God was to have little thought at all.

*The Jews referred to God in writing with the Tetragrameton (four letters, YHWH), from which we get the name Jehovah or Yahweh. They used the word Adonai (meaning Lord) rather than speak the name of God.

the brilliance of the sun dancing off the gleaming walls of the temple. The other saw the sun strolling on the water. A fisherman would have been hard to convince that God's glory dwelled more powerfully in a building made of stone than in a bright pink and purple sunset over the lake. (I know this for a fact. I am married to a fisherman.)

Two pairs of sons grew up not far from each other on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Four pairs of feet earned their calluses on the pebbles of a familiar shore. From the time their sons were knee high to them, Zebedee and Jonah were responsible not only for making sure their rambunctious offspring didn't drown but also for harnessing their insatiable curiosity. Fathers were walking day-care centers for their sons, and their son's mothers would be expecting them home in one piece.

Peter and Andrew,
James and John were
raised to bring forth
their own fruit in season.

Peter and Andrew, James and John. They were trees planted by streams of water being raised to bring forth their own fruit in season (see Ps. 1:3). If those fathers had known what would become of their sons, I wonder whether they would have reared them any differently. I doubt it. They were simple men with one simple goal: to teach their sons all they knew.

Our task today is to piece together what our protagonist's life might have been like in childhood and in youth before a Lamb came and turned it upside down. In the following activity, please read only the verse without giving attention to the surrounding verses that will compose tomorrow's text. Here you'll find the first mention of the one destined to become the beloved disciple.

Read Matthew 4:21. How is John identified in his family?

Scholars are almost unanimous in their assumption that John was the younger brother of James. In the earlier reference his name is listed after his brother's, which often indicated birth order. In their world, if any name existed that was more common than James (a Hellenized form of Iakob, or Jacob), it was John.

What is the Old Testament form of John (see 1 Chron. 26:3; Ezra 10:6)?

Because the family used the Hebrew language, this was the name John was actually called. It may sound a little fancier, but the name was as common as could be. I don't feel that James and John were the kinds of boys about whom the neighbors mused, "I can't wait to see what they'll turn out to be. Mark my word. They'll be special!" Those who watched them grow up assumed the sons of Zebedee would be fishermen like their father.

New identities were not common commodities in those days. Look at Matthew 4:21. Not only are James and John referred to as "two other brothers," but John is also simply identified as the brother of James, son of Zebedee. If we're right and James was the older brother, he held the coveted position in the family birth order. Special rights and privileges belonged to him as well as a birthright that assured him a double portion of his father's estate. The firstborn son was a leader in the family, commanding respect for a position he did nothing to earn. John? He was just the younger brother.

Most of us have experienced the ambiguity of being known by little more than our relationship to someone else. I love being Keith Moore's wife, Amanda and Melissa's mother, and Curt's mother-in-law, but that's probably because I've lived enough of life to figure out who I am. I can remember feeling lost in a whole line of siblings growing up. I have fond memories of my mother calling me every name in our big family but mine. I often grinned while she scrambled for the right one, and exasperated, she'd finally say,

“If I’m looking at you, I’m talking to you!” I’d giggle, “Yes, Ma’am!” and run off while she was still doing her best to remember my name.

What about you? How are you identified by your relationship to others?

Some things about parenting must be universal. Surely Zebedee looked straight at Jehohanan and accidentally called him Iakob at times. If so, would young John have been the type to let it go unnoticed, or might he have said, “Abba! I am Jehohanan!” These are concepts and thoughts I love to explore imaginatively when studying a character. Either way, John was no doubt accustomed to being Zebedee’s other son and James’ little brother. However common his name, its meaning was extraordinary: “God has been gracious.”¹ Growing up on the shore of Jesus’ favorite sea, John had no idea at this point just how gracious God had been. He would soon get a glimpse.

John may have been an ordinary name, and our protagonist may have been an ordinary boy, but based on maternal persuasions through the ages, we can be fairly certain he was extraordinary to his mother. We will discover later in our journey that she considered nothing too good for her sons. Who was this woman anyway, this wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John? Let’s look ahead for just a moment.

John would soon get a glimpse of just how gracious God had been.

Compare Matthew 27:55-56 and Mark 15:40. What might her name have been?

Most scholars I have researched believe that John’s mother is positively identified by name in the latter verse. Some scholars go as far as saying that Salome was Jesus’ aunt (the sister of His mother, Mary), based on a comparison with John 19:25.

Who is identified in John 19:25? How many relationships are referenced?

As you can see, we have no way of knowing whether John identified three different women or four. Mary the wife of Clopas could have been the one identified as Jesus’ maternal aunt, but two daughters in one family with the name Mary seems a little peculiar. On the other hand, to draw a fist-tight conclusion that Salome was Mary’s sister from comparing lists like these is probably risky. Although I don’t doubt that the families may have known each other and may even have been somehow related, I tend to agree with R. Alan Culpepper, who wrote, “Surely, if John had been Jesus’ first cousin, this relationship would have been recognized more prominently in the early Christian traditions about the apostle.”²

As you and I will learn in the coming weeks, the early church fathers recorded a fair amount of tradition about John, but we find little mention of his being Jesus’ maternal

At the cross all who wished to have a relationship with Jesus Christ became blood relatives.

cousin. I am certainly no expert, but from what I have gleaned from those who are, I will write from the basis that familiarity probably existed between the two families, but I'm not convinced of a blood relationship. Thankfully, at the cross all those who wished to have a relationship with Jesus Christ became blood relatives.

As we conclude today's study, what do we know about the apostle John so far, based on information we've gathered today? Go ahead and make a brief list of facts. You might also include any fairly solid suppositions.

I have made very few sacrifices to do what God has called me to do. Christ made the significant sacrifices. One occasional sacrifice brings me small waves of heartache from time to time: I don't get many opportunities to cultivate new relationships of great personal depth. I am a people person. I can sit in a shopping mall as happy as a clam to become a student of the people who walk past me! When I drive by a house in the country, I always want to know what the people inside are like. I love people! But my calling prevents my studying and exploring the uniqueness of individuals in depth.

I just realized that in-depth Bible study that focuses primarily on one figure is a creative way God has given me to do the two things I love most. In this hideaway office where I am alone with God to write, I'm about to get to know a "new" person very well. You are, too! What joyful anticipation floods my soul!

DAY 3 THEY WERE FISHERMEN

TODAY'S TREASURE

"Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him." —Mark 1:20

*This time frame is strictly a deduction I have made from comparing time references in John 1:43; 2:1, 12-13. I could certainly be mistaken if time lapses existed that weren't noted in these portions of Scripture.

Passover was just around the corner.* Soon the hillcrest of Eremos in northern Galilee would be covered in red anemones and blue iris. Spring had finally arrived but not a moment too soon for a band of fishermen who spent their days on the water. Winter temperatures ranging from 50 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit during the daytime may not have seemed so cold to landsmen, but fishermen would have told a different story. Sometimes their wet, sandaled feet felt like blocks of ice, and their fingers temporarily lost their dexterity from the cold. During the winter season their few hours at home were spent trying to thaw the chill in their bones. Just about the time they thawed, the boat had to be pushed from the shore back into the water. They were fortunate to get sunshine at all.

What does Luke 5:5 tell you about the hours fishermen sometimes worked?

Obviously, our little band of fishermen worked the graveyard shift at times. I can think of only one thing worse than fishing in the cold: not catching anything. It happens to the best of fishermen. When it happens to Keith, I always ask him the typical sanguine woman question: “But did you have fun with your friends anyway?” My personality is given to the philosophy that the question is not so much whether you succeeded or failed but whether you had fun. I wish I had a picture of Keith’s face when I ask him that question. I’d put it in the margin for your amusement. But I don’t care what anyone says; company greatly determines how difficult a bad situation can be. From the few facts we’re given, I believe the fishermen we’re joining today had pretty good company.

Focus for now on the implications Luke 5:8-10 had on the lives of these men before they encountered Christ. What relationship did Peter, James, and John share?

Competitors Business partners Companions

According to Luke 5:2-3, did these sets of partners share a boat?

Yes No

Read Matthew 4:18-22, focusing on the circumstances rather than Christ’s call. Although they were partners, how were the fishermen teamed?

Read John 1:44. Where were Andrew and Peter from?

Judea The Jordan Nazareth Bethsaida

Let’s discover another fun fact, and then we’ll draw a few conclusions from what we’ve learned. Read Mark 1:20. What detail suggests something about Zebedee’s financial status?

Let’s tie these bits and pieces together. Take a look at a map and pinpoint the Sea of Galilee. This freshwater lake is called by three additional names in Scripture: the Sea of Chinnereth, which is the Hebrew word for *harp-shaped*, the general outline of the lake; the Lake of Gennesaret, named for a fertile plain nearby; and the Sea of Tiberias because it was associated with the capital of Herod Antipas.³ At the time Andrew, Peter, James, and John cast nets on those waters, a vigorous fishing industry was booming all over the lake. As you can see, many villages settled on its shores. Not only was it the food basket of the region, but the sight was also breathtaking. It still is. The way the lake is cupped in the center of surrounding hills looks to me like water in the palm of a large hand. With my own eyes I’ve seen how the early spring sunrise hangs lazily in the clinging mist. Since the first time I saw the Sea of Galilee, I have never wondered why Christ seemed to favor the villages near its shore over the metropolis of Jerusalem.

At the northern tip just where the Jordan River feeds the lake, you’ll find Bethsaida. The word *Bethsaida* means “house of fishing,”⁴ and it lived up to its name. The Sea of Galilee boasts 18 species of fish,⁵ so fishing could be profitable almost anywhere. Bethsaida was located where the warm springs at the foot of Eremos Hill bubbled into the

When Andrew, Peter, James, and John cast nets on those waters, a vigorous fishing industry was booming.

lake, attracting fish looking for a winter blanket. The fish that have since been labeled Peter's fish are tropical and often swarm the warmer temperatures where the springs flow into the lake, giving our fishermen a decided advantage over many of their competitors.

We know for a fact that Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida, and we can safely assume Zebedee also raised his sons in the village because they were all partners. As we will soon discover, at some point Andrew and Peter moved to nearby Capernaum, where Peter lived with his wife and mother-in-law (see Mark 1:21,29-30). We don't know for certain which of the two villages was the home of James and John at this point in their lives, but we do know they all continued to work together.

Obviously, Zebedee was the one who owned the fishing enterprise. Although I don't want to intimate that he was wealthy (because few villagers were), we'd probably be mistaken to think him poor. The reference to the hired servants tells us that he owned his own business, which was profitable enough to allow him to have servants in addition to two healthy and able sons. He might have easily owned both boats. Peter and Andrew could have fished from one (which was considered "theirs"), while a little farther away (see Mark 1:19) James and John fished from another.

Now that we have an idea what the fishermen's lives were like before they followed Christ, let's read all three Synoptic Gospel versions of their call. God wisely equipped us with four Gospels because we learn far more from hearing several accounts of anything especially noteworthy. The facts one writer included may not have been noted by another because each point of view is tinted by the individual's perspective and priorities. While writing *Jesus, the One and Only*, I learned I could almost always expect Luke to get a little more specific, which made perfect sense to me. He was a doctor, and a good doctor pays attention to details. You'll find this principle to hold true in our reading today.

We learn far more from hearing several accounts of anything especially noteworthy.

Read each segment of Scripture below and carefully record any facts unique to each Gospel in the appropriate column. Be sure to look for details!

Matthew 4:18-22

Mark 1:14-20

Luke 5:1-11

I can go no further without musing over Christ's divinely uncanny ability to waltz right into a life and turn it upside down, inside out, and every way but loose. Just think how many times those fishermen had prepared and cast their nets together. We would not be at all off base to imagine that they had caught fish together under Zebedee's instruction since they were young boys, perhaps no older than seven or eight. Picture how many years they had practiced a routine. They weren't fishing for the pure enjoyment of it as my husband does. Fishing was their job. I don't doubt they loved it as most men would, but don't think for a moment it wasn't work. I know you didn't miss Luke's inclusion, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything" (Luke 5:5). They worked hard. Day in. Day out. Then one day Jesus walked up, and everything changed.

Oh, isn't that exactly like Him? Jesus walks up, catches us in the act of being—again today—exactly who we were yesterday, and offers to turn our routine into adventure. Hallelujah! Have you allowed Christ to do that for you? If you're bored with life and stuck in a rut of routine, you may have believed in Christ, but you may not yet have agreed to follow Him. Christ is a lot of things—but boring? Not on your life! Life with Him is a great adventure. You don't necessarily have to leave behind what you do if He proves your present course to be in His will, but I assure you, He will have you leave its boredom and routine behind. When Jesus Christ takes over our lives, life gets exciting!

When Jesus Christ takes over our lives, life gets exciting!

As we begin our journey, plot where you feel you are in this season of your life. Keep in mind that even spiritual or religious practices can become routine. Also keep in mind that living in the great adventure doesn't mean you won't have challenges or suffering. It means you can see and take part in Christ's breathtaking work in your life, no matter what your circumstances are.

Where do you see your life right now?

In a routine and a rut

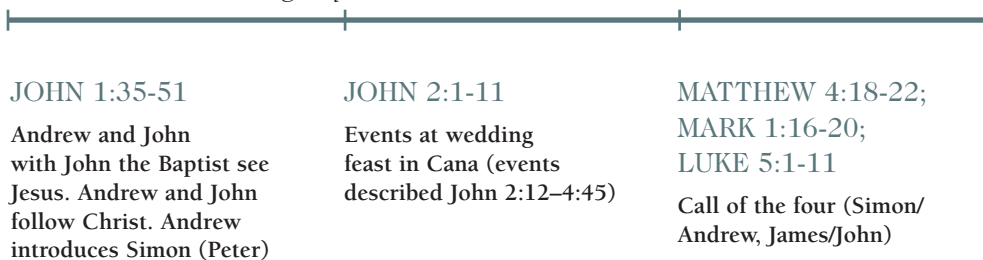
Living the great adventure

No matter where we plotted ourselves, I pray that we will need an extension to the right margin at the end of our 10 weeks. May our lives be off the scale with excitement as we live the great adventure!

Let's notice another important fact inspired by God for Luke's account. What name did Simon call Jesus in Luke 5:5?

Lord Master The Christ Friend Lamb of God

That's not the kind of title most people use for a stranger unless they know that the person is worthy of honor. I believe we can assume that these fishermen had familiarity with this man called Jesus. Remember, in day 1 we established that several of those who would become disciples of Jesus had been disciples of John the Baptist. The events occurred in the following sequence.



Based on John 1:35-42, who were certainly disciples of John the Baptist?

Andrew Peter James Matthew

Many scholars believe that John the apostle was the other of the two disciples mentioned in John 1:35. John as a rule did not identify himself in his writings. We know for certain that Peter met Christ in advance of his encounter on the boat because John 1:42 tells us that Andrew brought him to meet Jesus.

The words "Jesus looked at him and said" sends chills up my spine. According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Greek word for *looked* means "to look on, i.e. ... to observe fixedly, or

The same God who prepares also repairs and restores.



(absolutely) to discern clearly:—behold, gaze up, look upon.”⁶ I think Christ looked Peter straight in the eyes with a look that could have drilled a hole through him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter)” (v. 42).

Based on John the Baptist’s faithful ministry, Peter, Andrew, James, and John knew Christ at least by reputation. Several of them also knew Him because of the prior encounter described in John 1. When Jesus approached them at their boats, God had them primed and ready to leave everything behind and follow Christ. I’d like to suggest that just as James and John were preparing their nets, they too had been prepared. The word *preparing* (see Mark 1:19) can also mean *repairing*. The exact word is used in Galatians 6:1 for restoring a fallen brother. Oh, how thankful I am that the same God who prepares also repairs and restores.

At this season of your life, what do you sense that you need most?

- Preparation for a fresh work of God
- Repairing from a tear
- Restoration from a kind of fall

Preparation reminds me of a wonderful verse in Joshua, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you” (3:5). God can perform a miracle in any one of us at any time, but amazing things happen when He prepares us for His mighty work. Included in that mighty work will most assuredly be what we need most—whether a fresh work, a repair from a tear, or a full-scale restoration.

Let’s allow God to consecrate us over the next few weeks and lay the groundwork for something spectacular so that by the time we reach the last half of this study, God is amazing and astonishing us. Right this moment let Jesus look you straight in the eyes and tell you that He knows who you are and who He wants to make you. Are you willing to follow Him? That’s the only way you and I will ever discover the One who calls us and the one we were born to be. Child, a great adventure awaits you.

DAY 4 OLD TIES AND NEW TIES

TODAY’S TREASURE

“After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.” —John 2:12

One of our primary goals this week is to piece together coinciding facts that help us picture how the ministries of the disciples—and one in particular—began.

Please reread Mark 1:16-20, but this time allow the scene to capture your full imagination. Remember that what we’re reading happened to flesh-and-blood people who were busy leading fairly established lives when Christ intervened. Allow me to help you explore the possibilities in the scene by asking you the following questions. Keep in mind that no right or wrong answers exist.

How do you picture Christ's expression and demeanor as He called these four fishermen to follow Him? Briefly explain. This picture will establish our present impressions of Christ and will allow us to measure whether our impressions change over the course of deeper study.



We'll give considerable attention to the group dynamics involved in the circle of disciples, so let's start now. How do you think Peter and Andrew felt about Jesus' stopping by the second boat and calling James and John also? Keep in mind the partnership they shared in business for some time.

Do you think the sight of Peter and Andrew accompanying Christ had any kind of impact on the response of James and John? Whether yes or no, briefly explain your answer.

James and John left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men (see Mark 1:20). How do you think Zebedee reacted? Keep in mind that Zebedee probably had some familiarity with Jesus. Don't forget that he was a Jewish father with his own plans for his sons. What do you think?

I'm glad God chose to include the name of James and John's father. He wasn't just any man or just any father. He was Zebedee. He had a name, feelings, and plans. He was probably close enough to his sons' births to hear Salome cry out in pain. He probably wept when told he had a son. And then another. No doubt, he praised God for such grace. Daughters were loved, but every man needed a son to carry on the family line, after all. He had two fine sons. He named them himself. They played in his shadow until they were old enough to work, and if I know anything about teenage boys, they still played plenty behind his back even when they were supposed to be working. Just about the time he grew exasperated with them, he'd look in their faces and see himself.

At the time Christ called James and John, I have a feeling they had never had more pleasure or more support. Life is curious. Just about the time you get to reap some of the fruit of your parenting labors, the young, flourishing tree gets transplanted elsewhere. Keith and I are in the season of life I'm describing. Our daughters have never

Just about the time you get to reap some of the fruit of your parenting labors, the young, flourishing tree gets transplanted elsewhere.

been more delightful, have never been easier to care for, and have never had more to offer in company and stimulating conversation. The summers of their college years have been great fun, and we never secretly wanted to push them back to school or down an aisle. They are simply very little trouble right now. I wonder whether Zebedee felt the same way about his young-adult sons. Just when he was reaping a harvest of parental rewards, they jumped ship. All he had to show for it was a slimy fishing net.

What would happen to the business? What about Zebedee and Sons? No matter how Zebedee felt, God had great compassion for him. After all, He knew how Zebedee felt when John had to be called away from his father's side to fulfill his destiny.

Chances are pretty good that Zebedee thought their sudden departure was a phase they'd get over. Glory to God, they never did. Once we let Jesus Christ really get to us, we never get over Him. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). I love the fact that Jesus talks in words and images His listeners can understand. When He said, "I will make you fishers of men," He obviously used terminology Andrew, Peter, James, and John could understand. I am convinced that one part of the sentence applies to every person Jesus Christ calls: "Come, follow me, and I will make you ..."

Christ made these fishermen the men and the influences they were.

Decades later when God used these fishermen to change the face of religion forever, they still could not boast in themselves. Christ made them the men and the influences they were. I can't express what these thoughts mean to me. I am not falsely modest when I tell you that when Christ called me, He had pitifully little to work with. I was such a broken and scattered mess. So emotionally unhealthy. So insecure and full of fear. I was a wreck and stayed a wreck for longer than I'd like to admit. I have such a long way to go, but this I can say: anything that I am or have of value is completely from Christ. I followed Him, and whatever I am of worth, He made me.

Do you have a similar testimony? If so, share it on the lines below. Perhaps you are still in the broken, scattered state I described. If so, can you accept by faith what Christ can do if you follow Him? Please comment.

So how does Christ make a man or a woman? We will explore many ways over the weeks to come, but the most immediate way Jesus began building His new followers into the men He wanted them to be was by spending intense time with them and showing them how He worked.

Piecing the Gospels together in a precise chronological order is a task far too challenging for me, and I'm relieved to know that it is also a little too challenging for most Bible commentators. What we know is that Christ and His small and yet incomplete band of followers attended a wedding in Cana together. We are going to wait to explore the wedding until week 5, when we study the uniqueness of John's Gospel, but I'd like for you to view the verse immediately following the celebration.

What does John 2:12 tell you about the relationships involved at this point?

Have you considered that Christ's family and disciples obviously enjoyed at least a brief season of peace and harmony? I didn't give it any thought until researching for this study. The schism in Christ's family didn't develop until a little later (see John 7:3-5). In week 3 we will see the reconciliation brought by the power of the resurrection. For now, however, picture Christ surrounded by both His family and His new disciples.

I am fairly convinced that we don't really know people until we stay with them for a few days. Can I hear an amen? Although I'm grinning, I have almost always been more blessed than less. Not long ago due to a severe flood in Houston, Amanda and I got stranded in Tennessee after a conference. When I learned that the airport was closed, I frantically called Travis, my dear friend and worship leader, and asked whether he had room for two more in his van back to Nashville. Without making a single preparation for us, his young family of four graciously received us into their home for two nights. Although we were already very close friends, we bonded for life. The treasure of having part of my ministry family and part of my natural family in fellowship together was priceless. I am very aware that the experience might not have gone quite so positively!

Because the disciples were new on the scene, they probably weren't quite as comfortable interacting with Christ's family as I was with my worship leader's family. Still, they got to see Christ interact with His own family—a critical opportunity, I think. Soon they would see Him perform all manner of miracles. They had already witnessed His changing water to wine, but the sights they would soon see would nearly take their breath away. You see, people are much harder to change than water. Don't you think?

As they watched Jesus, fellowshiped with Him, and then witnessed His work, what do you think they saw? Consistency? Versatility? Unwavering passion? Did they see a lamb as often as a lion? The center of all attention? Or a teacher who became a student of all those around Him? We know they saw absolute authenticity, but how might you imagine they saw it portrayed?

Record your thoughts below.

Don't think for a minute that exercises like these are a waste of time. The more we grasp the flesh-and-blood reality of these encounters and try to imagine the intimate details the disciples witnessed in Christ, the better! What we're studying isn't religious fiction or simple Christian tradition. Christ walked into and transformed people's lives. You and I want to experience nothing less. We read in Isaiah 53:2 that Jesus

Christ walked into and transformed people's lives.

*had no beauty or majesty to attract [them] to him,
nothing in his appearance that [they] should desire him.*

Yet Jesus had things about Him that caused grown men to walk away from established lives and to keep following Him to the death.

What do you think some of those things were?

Now that you've had a chance to share your own impressions, let's take a look at several Scriptures that applied to Christ at this time of His ministry.

Read the following Scriptures in your Bible. In what ways would people have been attracted to Him?

Mark 1:40-42

Luke 2:52

Luke 4:14-15

Luke 4:31-32

Christ was everything of value. People knew He was unique even before they knew He was God.

Do you see, Beloved? Christ was everything of value. People knew He was unique even before they knew He was God. He was the rarity. An honest-to-goodness whole person who embodied the fullness of the Godhead (see Col. 2:9). Can you fathom it? I can't, but how I want to!

Jesus had favor. Power. Authority. Compassion. He was the perfect Man. He had hands strong enough to turn over merchants' tables and tender enough to touch the leper's rotting flesh and make him whole. Those who appreciated His uniqueness were drawn to it. Those who were threatened by it either ran or wanted Him destroyed.

As we conclude today's lesson, I sense the Holy Spirit leading me to ask you a question. Are you by any chance threatened by Jesus and His desire for you to follow Him with complete abandon? Don't answer quickly. Meditate on the question for a few minutes and see if the Holy Spirit raises anything to the surface. Are you afraid of anything? Are you jealous over the things He might require? Intimidated? Think about it.

Beloved, if you are willing to cast away all your fears, hindrances, and unanswered questions and follow Him, you're going to see His glory.

DAY 5 A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW

TODAY'S TREASURE

"Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.'" —Mark 1:38

The disciples saw Christ perform eye-opening miracles almost from the start. Although we are saving further comments on the wedding at Cana for week 5, we know that it was the location of Christ's first miracle and that John's reference to the time frame of the wedding was "the third day" (John 2:1). The next occurrence in sequence was Christ's

trip to Capernaum with His mother, brothers, and disciples (see John 2:12). The three events we will study today probably happened during the same stay in Capernaum, so imagine them falling next in sequence.

Please read Mark 1:21-28. Check your context. How can we know that at least Andrew, Peter, James, and John were with Jesus?

Picture these four fishermen mingling in the crowd gathered that Sabbath in the synagogue. I have an idea that Christ's new disciples didn't just watch Jesus as He preached. I have a feeling that they watched the reactions of others who were listening to Him as well. Mind you, at least Peter and Andrew lived in Capernaum at that time (see Mark 1:29). A town this size had only one Jewish synagogue, so they worshiped with virtually the same people week after week. They knew them personally. Some were relatives, others were neighbors, and others were business associates. What kinds of reactions do you think they saw on these familiar faces as Jesus preached in Capernaum?

Talk about an interesting service! If an amazing message were not enough excitement, just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" (Mark 1:24). Suddenly their heads turned toward the opponent, almost like spectators in a tennis match. I wonder whether the crowd previously knew that this man had an evil spirit or whether they had been oblivious for years to the nature of his problems. Had they known, I'm not sure they would have allowed him in the synagogue, so my feeling is that the man may have kept it covered to some extent. Goodness knows Satan loves a good disguise. Somehow, however, when the authority of Christ was released in that place, the demons lost their cover. Jesus has a way of bringing the devil right out of some people, doesn't He?

When the authority of Christ was released, the demons lost their cover.

What happened when Jesus commanded the demons to come out of him (see Mark 1:25-26)?

They immediately left the man. They talked back.

Picture John witnessing these events. Many scholars believe he was the youngest of the disciples. One strong basis for this deduction is his positioning and apparent role at the Passover meal just before Jesus' crucifixion. We'll glance at those events in several weeks, but for now keep in mind that the youngest at the Passover meal usually sat nearest the father or father figure so that he could ask the traditional questions. I will refrain from building any doctrines on this deduction since I could be off base, but I am personally convinced enough that John was the youngest that I'll adopt this position. If he was, can you imagine his face while Jesus encountered—then cast out—these demons?

Write down what you think may have been some of the statements or questions going through John's mind as this event unfolded.

I think John probably experienced a combination of emotions. Young men dearly love competitions, so he had to savor seeing his new team win, even if only one Player was

Christ desires that we seek His presence and glory even more than the display of His might.

involved in the match. I have to think the encounter also scared him half to death. One thing that might have offset his fear was that he had to be indescribably impressed with his new mentor. John wasn't the only one. Mark 1:22 tells us the crowds were amazed by Christ's teachings, but Mark 1:27 intensifies the adjectives by saying they were "so amazed" by His demonstration of authority over the demons. We do love a show, don't we? When I think how patient Christ has been with our human preference for divine fireworks, I am more amazed than ever. Christ knows us intimately. He knows how to get our attention, but He also desires that we grow up and seek His presence and glory even more than the display of His might. John and the other disciples would see many miracles before they were irresistibly challenged to mature.

I have a feeling that by the time the fishermen reached Capernaum with Jesus, so did the news of their leaving Zebedee holding the net. I don't doubt for a minute that these young men reveled in the grand reaction people had to their new leader. What could be more exciting than being the *khavura*, or "circle of friends"⁷ of the most powerful and popular new man on the scene? But the day was far from over.

Read what happened next in Mark 1:29-34. What were the obvious living arrangements at the house in this scene?

Think of events such as Jesus' birth, baptism, crucifixion, and resurrection as primary events that can indeed be placed in time sequence. Think of the events like the ones we're studying today as secondary events. We won't often be able to put the secondary events of the four Gospels into an unquestionable chronological order. Based on identical time sequencing in Mark and Luke and on the fact that nothing in Matthew or John refutes it, however, I believe we can rightly assume that the first healing of the sick ever witnessed by the disciples was in Simon Peter's home.

Surely an early turning point came in the hearts and minds of the disciples when healing hit home. I know it did for me. Seeing Him work in a church service is one thing. Witnessing His healing in the life of your own family is another. That's when a person begins to get it through her head that Jesus doesn't just love church. He loves people.

Compare Mark 1:21,29. When did this healing occur?

On the Sabbath On Passover On the Lord's Day

Christ raised the Pharisees' ire on several occasions by picking this particular day for healings—as if He were making a point. In a future session we're going to see that in many ways this was the perfect day of the week for healing. I didn't realize until researching for today's lesson that even Jesus' first healing was on the Sabbath. Obviously, Christ saw the purpose of the day far differently than many of His contemporaries. Apparently, Simon Peter's mother was healed just in time to rise from the bed and get ready for company.

What happened literally at her front door after sunset (see Mark 1:32-34)?

Have you ever seen an instantaneous physical healing like those described in this text? I've known people God healed physically, but I haven't had many chances to watch an instant healing take place before my very eyes. Can you imagine what these sights were like for the disciples? Matthew's Gospel records a graphic scene that occurred very close to the same time. Meditate on Matthew 4:24, pausing to picture every description.

What kinds of feelings did you have the last time you encountered someone who was suffering terribly?



Few of us choose to confront suffering because we feel so helpless. Imagine the contrast between the agony of seeing human suffering and the ecstasy of seeing someone healed. What would such an experience have been like for Mother Teresa, for instance, as she daily died to her own desire for personal comfort and confronted the unimaginable suffering in Calcutta? Somehow my mind can hardly even fathom the range of emotions. Picture being one of Christ's disciples. After all, John was a human being just like you.

How do you suppose these kinds of sights affected John?

Rewind to the scene in Mark 1:33-34. John had observed hundreds of Sabbaths. Imagine that he awakened that morning with a fresh wave of, *I can hardly believe what I've done! I wonder what my mom and dad are thinking right now.* John is excited and unsure, and his soul is filled with the realization that something new is looming on the horizon. Perhaps Scriptures swirl through his mind as he recites morning prayers of thanksgiving for God's provisions: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23, KJV).

John prepares to go to the synagogue for services just as he has done all his life, only this time he gets a bit more than he bargained for. The scroll is unrolled, and the Scripture for the day's service is read. Then Jesus takes the role of rabbi, sits down, and nearly preaches the locks off their heads.

Just then a man possessed by demons starts shouting, and John sees Jesus get stern—perhaps for the first time. In an astounding show of power Jesus casts out the demons, causing the man to shake violently. John feels that he will never forget the sound of those demons shrieking as long as he lives. He and the other disciples walk together to Simon Peter's house, whispering all the way about what they've seen. Simon Peter's mother-in-law is sick with a fever, so Jesus takes her by the hand and helps her up. The fever leaves her so instantaneously that she begins to serve them.

Then they begin to hear sounds at the door. Murmurings. Shrieking. Crying. Sounds of moaning. Sounds of hope. And hope says, *What He did for her, He might do for me.* That He did. When John awakened that morning, his mind could not have conceived just how many mercies were new that particular sunrise. Imagine being John. Imagine all he had seen during the course of the day.

THE HEART OF THE BELOVED

John is excited and unsure, and his soul is filled with the realization that something new is looming on the horizon.

If you were John, when you pulled a blanket over yourself that night, what part of the day or piece of a scene would you have thought about the most?

I can only imagine the things that went through the mind of the young disciple. He probably tossed and turned most of the night. Perhaps he and James whispered to each other from their pallets until they were overtaken by exhaustion.

As I imagine all that had happened that Saturday and all they had seen, I know one of the thoughts that would have crowded my head: *Is there anything the man can't do?* John watched Jesus practically bring the house down with His teaching. He watched Him confront and cast out a hoard of demons from a man who came to synagogue. He watched Him not only heal Simon's mother-in-law but also instantly restore her strength. Then every manner of distress landed on their doorstep.

I love Matthew Henry's words of commentary on the scene at the door: "How powerful the Physician was; he healed all that were brought to him, though ever so many. Nor was it some one particular disease, that Christ set up for the cure of, but he healed those that were sick of divers [various, diverse] diseases, for his word was a panpharmacon—a salve for every sore."⁸ Jesus' Word was a panpharmacon—a salve for every sore. Ah, yes. I have yet to have an ailment that God had no salve to soothe. But what may be even more peculiar is that I have yet to have an ailment of soul that God's Word was not the first to point out, diagnose, then heal. His Word is far more glorious, powerful, and fully applicable than we have any idea of.

You very likely did not pick up this particular Bible study because you sought healing. You would surely have picked other titles. But based on my own experience and many references in Scripture, you will undoubtedly receive some fresh diagnoses and, if you cooperate, a new measure of healing. As will I. I'm counting on it.

That's the nature of His Word. As Psalm 107:20 says, "He sent forth his word and healed them." How often God had to send forth His Word and begin the healing to get me healthy enough even to face the diagnosis! I want you to revel in something wonderful. Every time God has prepared us with His Word and gotten us to a point that we can receive a hard pill to swallow from Him, healing has already begun. Once He confronts us, we never need to be overwhelmed by how far we have to go. If we've heard Him through His Word, healing has already begun. Take heart. He is the Panpharmacon.

If we've heard God through His Word, healing has already begun.

1. R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Minneapolis: First Fortress Press, 2000), 7.
2. *Ibid.*, 9.
3. Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), s.v. "Galilee, Sea of."
4. *Ibid.*, s.v. "Bethsaida."
5. Culpepper, *John*, 11.
6. James Strong, *New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1689.
7. Christo Botha and Dom David Foster, trans., *With Jesus Through Galilee According to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin Publishing, 1992), 32.
8. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5, *Matthew to John* (n.p.: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 456.

GROUP SESSION 1

Sometimes we also may have the desire to take our _____ and _____ in our worlds: in our _____, in our _____, in our _____, etc. We've got to be so careful what we rationalize by Scripture. Before we proceed, we are wise to remember a few important things. We'll make six points today based on the calling of John.

Read Mark 3:13-19 and John 2:12-17.

1. Christ could not _____ in His _____ or _____. **See Ephesians 4:26-27.**

Anger and rage are highly motivational, but they are extremely destructive.

2. Godly _____ is measured by the _____ of "_____."

3. God looks upon the _____ beneath the action. We can even have a _____ about a _____ and find ourselves disciplined by God.

4. Paradoxically, we receive our calling as _____ but can only fulfill it _____. **See Matthew 18:2-3:** "Unless you change and become _____, you will never _____."

5. Though _____ is important, Christ seems to have an affinity for _____.

6. The kind of change God desires comes one primary way. **See Mark 3:14:** "that they might be with him and that he might send them out."

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