
Interpretation Bible Studies Leader's Helps—John

The IBS Leader's Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process. Each participant in the group should have a copy of the IBS study book and should make a commitment to do the assigned preparation for each session.

The sessions are planned for one hour. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those that are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

- *Read the book of John* in its entirety before beginning to teach. It is important to familiarize yourself with the overall content of the book, so you can see how the individual passages fit into the larger scope of the book.
- *Skim through the whole study book* to discern its flow. This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next lesson.
- *Prepare the room ahead of time.* For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semicircular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as “the authority.”
- *Secure necessary teaching aids.* You will need Bibles and hymnals for every session, as well as newsprint, felt-tipped markers, and masking tape. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.

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- *Keep the key idea firmly in mind.* Make sure all activities point participants toward this goal.
 - *Pray for God's guidance.* Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Testimony Concerning the Word (John 1)

Key Idea: As the Fourth Evangelist sheds light on who Jesus is, his relationship to the God of Israel, and his mission on earth, he prepares the argument for belief in Jesus.

Advance Preparation

- On newsprint, print the opening sentences from scripture below and post the sheet where it can be easily seen.
- Obtain a large white pillar candle that can be used as a Christ candle for the duration of the study. You'll also need matches.
- On newsprint, print the talking points about John's structure and theology from activity 4 below (set this aside after the session and save for use in Unit 8).
- Obtain some drawing paper and colored felt-tipped markers.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. **Read sentences of scripture.** Invite participants to join in the following sentences from scripture that you posted:

Group 1: The Word became flesh and lived among us,

Group 2: and we have seen his glory.

Group 1: To all who received him,

Group 2: he gave power to become children of God.

All: **We give thanks for God's Son our Savior Jesus, who is the light of the world. Amen.**

Light the Christ candle and leave it burning as you continue the session.

2. **Shine the light.** If participants do not already know one another, ask each person to introduce himself or herself to the group and mention one question or learning about the book

of John on which they would like this study to shine light. Record these questions and comments on newsprint (set the newsprint aside until Unit 10).

Presentation (20 minutes)

- 3. Synoptic? What's that?** On newsprint, print the word *synoptic*. Ask if anyone can define the term or provide an example. If participants do not include the following in their responses, share this information:

Synoptic means “seen together.” Because the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have so much material in common and follow the same general outline, they are called the Synoptic Gospels.

- 4. Introduce John's structure and theology.** Briefly share some of the information from the introduction, including the following points you printed on newsprint:

Structure

- It begins with theological prologue.
- It is punctuated with a series of miracles called signs.
- It includes long dialogues or discourses that include “I am” sayings.
- Opposition to Jesus grows as the Gospel progresses.
- After Lazarus's raising, emphasis shifts to Jesus' anticipated death.
- Jesus' life is not told as one year but includes recurring trips to Jerusalem centered on the Temple and the Jewish religious calendar and festivals.

Theology

- The mission of Jesus is cast in terms of sharply contrasted opposites, particularly light/dark.
- There is strong opposition to Jesus by “the Jews.”
- Jesus is understood to have come from heaven, to which he will return.
- Also point out that the author of the study refers to the Gospel writer as the Fourth Evangelist since the identity of

the writer is disputed. (Note: Save the newsprint sheet on which you listed these points for use in Unit 8, or display it for the duration of the study.)

Exploration (15 minutes)

- 5. Look at the Prologue.** Divide into three small groups. Assign one of the following passages to each:

John 1:1–5

John 1:9–13

John 1:14–18

Also ask participants to read “A. Structure of the Poem” (pp. 8–12). After allowing several minutes for the groups to work, ask them to comment on the section of the Prologue they read.

Ask participants to read the section on the metaphor of “the Word” and respond to the following:

The author of John, then, seems to be using traditions about wisdom already well known to those familiar with the scriptures and Jewish traditions and has used this concept to interpret Jesus from an eternal and cosmological perspective (p. 15).

- 6. “I am not”** Review what the author refers to as crucial information revealed in chapter 1:19–34. Discuss Question 3 (p. 18).

Response (10 minutes)

- 7. Discuss the titles of Jesus.** Ask participants to review the four sets of titles used to refer to Jesus (p. 18). Discuss Question 4 (p. 18). Then ask: Which of these titles resonate most fully for you? What aspects of Jesus Christ are most meaningful for you?

Give participants paper and colored felt-tipped markers. Ask them to choose a title from the list on p. 18, perhaps the one they identified as the most personally meaningful. Ask them to print the title in large letters in the center of the page and then use other words or phrases, symbols, or a line drawing to express what that title conveys for them. Invite volunteers to share their titles with the group.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. **Experience the Prologue as poem.** Invite participants to find a comfortable position in which to sit and to close their eyes. Then read John 1:1–5, 10–14 aloud slowly as a poem.
9. **Sing a hymn.** Sing the first stanza of “O Word of God Incarnate” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #327).

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 2, “Of Signs and Faith,” and John 2:1–3:21. Also ask for volunteers to research the Jewish festivals of Passover, Tabernacles, and Weeks (Pentecost) in Old Testament times. See the box on p. 27 for some recommended resources, or direct students to www.jewfaq.org.

Of Signs and Faith (John 2:1–3:21)

Key Idea: Signs, like testimony, are evidence for belief in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God.

Advance Preparation

- On newsprint, print the definitions in activity 2 below.
- From a craft store, purchase blank bumper stickers. An alternative is to obtain white self-adhesive shelf liner and cut it into rectangles the size of a bumper sticker. Also obtain some permanent-colored felt-tipped markers.
- Make copies of the script “Reader’s Theater: The Woman at the Well” for those who volunteer to be in the drama in the next session.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Pray together.** Light the Christ candle as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Open with this prayer or one of your own choosing:

God, we give thanks that you gave your only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Be with us as we explore your scripture, seeking an ever deeper experience of what it means to be born of water and Spirit. Amen.

Presentation (10 minutes)

2. **Define terms.** Call the attention of the group members to the definitions you printed on newsprint. Ask them to move around the room, reading each definition and adding questions or comments to each sheet of newsprint.

Sign: an act that points beyond what takes place to something else, something more significant

Glory: signification of the presence of the divine

“The Jews”: those in Judaism who actively oppose Jesus and his mission

After allowing about five minutes for recording observations, bring the group together to discuss each definition. Also ask the volunteers who researched Jewish festivals to share their information.

Exploration (30 minutes)

3. Explore in small groups. Divide the group into three working groups. Assign to each group one of the following sections of text:

Group 1: “Wedding at Cana” (p. 19 to top of p. 23) and Question 1 (p. 28)

Group 2: “The Temple Incident” (p. 23 to top of p. 25) and Question 2 (p. 28)

Group 3: “The Dialogue with Nicodemus” (pp. 26–27) and Question 4 (p. 28)

Ask the groups to read the assigned text and discuss the question.

4. Share as a total group. After allowing ten minutes for small-group work, bring the total group together. Ask each group to respond to the following:

- What particularly struck you or surprised you in the account you read?
- How does this account relate to the other Gospel accounts (is it unique to John, or is it told differently)?
- Make some observations about the question assigned to your group. What insights did you have?

5. Discuss the issue. Discuss Question 3 (p. 28) together. What specific groups of people can the class identify? Has the church

ever made broad generalizations about specific groups? Did such generalizations serve to build up the church or tear it down?

Response (10 minutes)

- 6. Create a bumper sticker.** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the second paragraph on p. 27, beginning “The basis for the miscommunication” Ask: If you could design a bumper sticker that would better communicate what Jesus means here, what would it say?

Give group members the blank bumper stickers and colored felt-tipped markers. Ask them to make the bumper sticker. When most participants have finished, ask for volunteers to share the slogans they created.

Closing (5 minutes)

- 7. Pray a litany.**

Leader: No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.

Women: How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?

Men: Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of heaven without being born of water and spirit.

All: **What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

Leader: The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

All: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

8. Say a closing prayer.

*God of grace and truth,
In Jesus Christ you came among us as light shining in darkness.
We confess that we have not welcomed the light,
or trusted the good news to be good.
We have closed our eyes to glory in our midst,
expecting little, and hoping for less.*

*Forgive our doubt, and renew our hope,
so that we may receive the fullness of your grace,
and live in the truth of Christ the Lord. Amen.*

—From Book of Common Worship (Louisville, KY:
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 175

Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 3, “The Varied Responses to Jesus,” and John 3:22–5:47. Also ask them to read the following passages of scripture about water: Genesis 1:6–10, 1 Kings 5, Isaiah 55:1–2, and Revelation 22:1–2, 17. Ask for volunteers to participate in the “Reader’s Theater: The Woman at the Well,” and give them copies of the script.

Reader’s Theater: The Woman at the Well

Narrator: Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near a plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water.

Jesus: Give me a drink.

Woman: How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?

Jesus: If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would

have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

Woman: Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?

Jesus: Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them springs of water gushing up to eternal life.

Woman: Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.

Jesus: Go, call your husband, and come back.

Woman: I have no husband.

Jesus: You are right in saying, “I have no husband,” for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!

Woman: Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.

Jesus: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

Woman: I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes he will proclaim all things to us.

Jesus: I am he, the one who is speaking to you.

Narrator: Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

Woman: Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?

The Varied Responses to Jesus (John 3:22–5:47)

Key Idea: The second witness of John the Baptist allows a transition to Jesus' wider ministry and the varied responses to it.

Advance Preparation

- On newsprint, print Jesus' three claims to the opposition found on p. 38 (also shown in the box on p. 39). Leave space between the three statements.
- Make copies of the script "Reader's Theater: The Woman at the Well" for the rest of the group.
- Bring in a large pitcher and bowl (preferably of glass). Fill the pitcher with water and place both on a table along with the Christ candle.
- Choose one of the suggested hymns.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Sing a hymn.** Choose one of the following:

"Lord, When You Came to Jordan" (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #71)

"When Jesus Came to Jordan" (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #72)

"Baptized in Water" (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #492)

2. **Open with prayer.** Light the Christ candle as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

*Eternal God,
you sent John the Baptist
to prepare the way for the coming of your Son.
Grant us the wisdom to see your purpose
and openness to hear your will,
that we too may prepare the way for Christ
who is coming in power and glory*

*to establish his kingdom of peace and justice;
through Jesus Christ our Judge and our Redeemer,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever. Amen.*

—From Book of Common Worship (Louisville, KY:
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 175

Presentation (15 minutes)

- 3. Explore the relationship of Jesus and John.** Summarize the information about Jesus' relationship to John the Baptist ("Jesus' Baptizing Ministry," pp. 29–30). Ask the participants who read the passages from the Synoptic Gospels about John to compare what they read with the account by the Fourth Evangelist. Ask: What are the significant differences between the Synoptics and the Fourth Evangelist?
- 4. Present the Reader's Theater.** Invite the three participants who prepared the Reader's Theater to present the passage. Discuss Question 1 (p. 40).

Exploration (20 minutes)

- 5. Read about another sign.** Call participants' attention to the material about the healing of the official's son (p. 33 to top of p. 36). The writer takes the position that Jesus' statement about his country is not meant to be a statement of origins. Rather, it is meant to be about a spiritual or intentional relationship and at the same time is ironic. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss Question 2 (p. 40).
- 6. Hear Jesus' response to the opposition.** Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 5:15–18. Discuss Question 3 (p. 40).
Divide participants into three small groups. Call their attention to the three claims on newsprint. Assign one of the claims to each small group. Ask them to read the material in the text on pp. 38–40 and be prepared to discuss the basis for each

claim. After allowing five minutes for groups to prepare, ask each group to present its claim to the total group.

- 7. Consider the Jews' response.** In the same three groups, ask participants to speculate as to how the Jews might have responded to each of Jesus' three claims (Question 4 on p. 40).

Response (15 minutes)

- 8. Reflect on living water.** Ask for volunteers to read aloud the scripture passages assigned as homework.

Discuss: What is "living water" to you? What aspects of your faith are life giving?

Allow for a time of silent reflection. Then invite participants to come forward one at a time as they are so inclined and pour some water from the pitcher into the bowl. Encourage them to express out loud a life-giving aspect of their faith or to simply reflect in silence.

Closing (5 minutes)

- 9. Offer a reading on water.**

Reader 1: Water, the first element of creation, over which the Spirit hovered, from which came all life;

Reader 2: Water, which flooded a destructive world gone wrong;

Reader 3: Water, which parted, and slaves walked to freedom on dry land;

Reader 4: Water, which flowed from a rock to quench the thirst of a parched and grumbling band of wanderers;

Reader 5: Water, from a young woman's womb surrounding a baby boy;

Reader 6: Water, surrounding the man Jesus and sealing his identity as Beloved of God;

Reader 7: Water, turned to wine at a wedding celebration;

Reader 8: Water, which will flow through the city of God where all people gather in peace and nations are healed.

All: **Jesus said, “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal water.” We give thanks for the living water! Amen.**

- 10. Close with prayer.** Invite participants to offer sentence prayers. Close with a prayer of your own choosing. Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 4, “Jesus Himself as Sign,” and John 6:1–8:11. Also ask that they read the other accounts of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17).

Jesus Himself as Sign (John 6:1–8:11)

Key Idea: Jesus' revelation that he himself is a sign calls forth a response, one that is not always positive.

Advance Preparation

- In addition to the Christ candle, obtain votive candles or tea lights and other candles of various heights. Also have the pitcher of water and the bowl from the last session and various kinds of bread. If possible, obtain a portable electric fountain. Look for CDs of music related to water, light, or bread or a CD of water sounds.
- Post four sheets of newsprint. On each sheet, print one of the four scripture passages that relate the feeding of the five thousand. Have available three different colors of felt-tipped markers.
- On another sheet of paper or on a dry-erase board or chalkboard, print the following questions:
 - What is the controversy?
 - What sign or event prompted it?
 - What kind of response was elicited?
 - What special practices that are a part of the feast of the Tabernacles give you insight into any of the three controversies?
- Recruit four volunteers to read scripture in activity 4.
- Gather a variety of art and writing materials: paper, colored markers, clay, construction paper, glue, and the like.
- Choose one of the suggested hymns.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Sing a hymn.** Sing one of the following:

“Become to Us the Living Bread” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*
#500)

“Bread of Heaven, on Thee We Feed” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #501)

“Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #505)

- 2. Open with prayer.** Light the Christ candle. Tell participants that this opening prayer is a traditional Irish table grace that is applicable to the sharing in which participants will engage during the session:

*May the blessing of the five loaves and the two fishes
Which God shared among the five thousand be ours.
May the King who did the sharing bless our sharing and
co-sharing. Amen.*

Presentation (15 minutes)

- 3. Contrast feeding stories.** Summarize the information about the Fourth Evangelist’s placement of the feeding of the five thousand relative to Jewish festival seasons (pp. 41–42). Then divide participants into small groups, with four persons in each group. Each person in the small groups will read a different Gospel story of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–24) and make a list of the events in the account. Then the group members will compare what they found in their small group.

Allow five minutes for small-group discussion, and then bring the large group together. Chart the story lines of the four accounts on newsprint. Beginning with Mark’s account, list the events in the story. Then list the events in Matthew, using a different color of marker for any events that differ from Mark’s. Continue with Luke, then John, using different colors for events that depart from Mark. Ask: What events immediately precede this story in the Synoptic Gospels? In John?

Ask volunteers to read the following aloud:

- Deuteronomy 18:15–18
- 2 Kings 4:42
- Malachi 4:5

Point out that these are references to Elijah the prophet that must have shaped the crowd's expectations of who Jesus was. In the same small groups, ask participants to read the accounts of Jesus walking on water. Note the author's point that for the Fourth Evangelist, this miraculous happening does not seem to be a sign.

Exploration (25 minutes)

- 4. Digest the scripture.** Comment to the participants that hearing scripture read aloud provides a powerful way not only to enter the story but to let the story enter us. In much the same way, when we take food into our bodies, we need time for the food to digest in order for it to provide life-giving nutrients.

Set the stage by reading John 6:22–24 aloud yourself.

Ask the first reader to read verses 25–34 aloud. Discuss Question 2 (p. 51).

Ask the second person to read aloud verses 35–40. Then ask the third reader to continue with verses 41–51. Discuss Question 3 (p. 51).

Ask the fourth reader to read verses 52–59. Ask: How do you respond to this eucharistic metaphorical language? Which metaphor has more meaning for you, this image or the “bread of heaven”?

- 5. Examine three controversies.** Review with participants their research from session 1 about the feast of the Tabernacles. Ask participants to review silently the information in “The Tabernacle Controversies” (pp. 47–50) along with the relevant scripture passages. Then ask the following about each of the three controversies:

- What is the controversy?
- What sign or event prompted it?
- What kind of response was elicited?
- What special practices that are a part of the feast of the Tabernacles give you insight into this controversy?

- 6. Read the account of the adulterous woman.** Discuss the information in the text (pp. 50–51) about the textual problems with this account.

The author comments on the injustice of the whole arrangement and attributes it to the fact that the scribes and Pharisees were trying to entrap Jesus. How do you respond? What other factors (for example, cultural mores about women) might have come into play? Discuss Question 4 (p. 51).

Response (10 minutes)

7. **Respond to metaphors.** Light the candles on the worship table. Have the bowl and pitcher of water on the table. Turn on the fountain if you have been able to obtain one, and play any recorded music or sound effects.

Point out to participants that three powerful metaphors utilized by Jesus in the passages studied in this session are light, living water, and bread. Ask them to reflect on these metaphors and their tangible representations. Then invite them to choose one metaphor and use the art materials to make a visual representation of how that image speaks to them of the life of faith. They can use words, phrases, visual depictions, or any other form of response that best expresses their response.

Encourage participants to display their completed work. Invite volunteers to read their poems or writings or to give a short explanation of their visual representations.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. **Sing a communion hymn.** Sing “I Come with Joy” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #507) or “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #510) as a closing hymn.
9. **Pray together.** Pray the following or a prayer of your own choosing:

*Gracious God, you provide the true bread of heaven in your son Jesus Christ. Strengthen us in your service, that our lives may demonstrate that we have been truly fed.
Amen.*

Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 5, “Growing Opposition to Jesus,” and John 8:31–9:41. Also ask them to read some of the other Gospel accounts of healing the blind (listed on pp. 56–57).

5

Growing Opposition to Jesus (John 8:31–9:41)

Key Idea: With each new revelation of Jesus’ nature, “the Jews” react with increasing opposition. Yet the opposition allows Jesus to reveal himself more clearly to those who are open to the activity of God.

Advance Preparation

- On newsprint, a dry-erase board, or a chalkboard, print the outline of the growing conflict between “the Jews” and Jesus (p. 62).
- Familiarize yourself with the material for the minilecture.
- Bring paper and pencils for the response activity.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Sing a hymn.** Sing together “Amazing Grace” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #280).
2. **Read a psalm.** Light the Christ candle. Invite participants to read in unison Psalm 43, which some commentators believe John alludes to in chapter 8.

Presentation (5 minutes)

3. **Present a minilecture.** Present some of the following information from *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: John* by Gerard Sloyan.

The phrase “I am” occurs twenty-nine times in the gospel of John, with seven different identifiers: bread; light; door; shepherd; the resurrection and the life; way, truth, and life; and vine, always connected with the life Jesus gives to believers. The Hebrew phrase was a cue that some self-declaration of God will follow and expresses divine majesty and uniqueness.

Jesus' hearers obviously took Jesus' words as a claim to identification with God. But John is insistent that Jesus is rather God's revealer of the final age, one who comes from above. Jesus is claiming total intimacy with God, commissioned to deliver a message from God. The whole eighth chapter is about who Jesus is.

Jesus' claim that he knows Abraham is a link with the fidelity of that first patriarch. He is not claiming to be God when he says that before Abraham, "I am," but his hearers hear it as such.

Exploration (35 minutes)

- 4. Discuss Jesus and Abraham.** Using the information under "Jesus and Abraham" (pp. 52–55), discuss the following: "For Jesus, enslavement is a fundamental spiritual quality, a turning away from God and an obedience to the created order rather than to the heavenly order. It is, in a word, sin. And sin itself is slavery." How do you respond? Discuss Questions 1 and 2 (p. 63).

- 5. Read the healing stories.** As suggested in Question 3 (p. 63), ask for volunteers to summarize some of the healings stories listed on pp. 56–57, previously assigned as homework. Then ask:
 - What is the significance of blindness to Jesus' ministry?
 - How does this account of healing differ from the stories in other Gospels?
 - What connections are there to the feast of the Tabernacles?
 - What was the significance of healing on the Sabbath?
 - Discuss the crisis of faith revealed in the healed blind man as contrasted with the spiritually blind Pharisees. Is there still blindness among Jesus' followers today? How so (Question 3 on p. 63)?

- 6. Examine the pattern of opposition.** Call the attention of the participants to the outline you posted of the pattern of increasing opposition of "the Jews" to Jesus (also found on p. 62). In turn, ask volunteers to read aloud the verses noted under each item of the outline. Discuss Question 4 (p. 63).

Response (10 minutes)

7. **“I once was blind, but now I see.”** Distribute paper and pencils to participants. Ask them to respond in writing to the following phrase:

I once was blind . . .

Then ask them to turn their paper over and to respond to this phrase:

. . . but now I see.

Invite volunteers to share their responses to both phrases.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. **Sing a hymn.** Sing “Amazing Grace” again as a closing hymn.
9. **Pray together.** Invite participants to add responses from activity 7 in the closing prayer:

Amazing God, we give thanks for Jesus, who came to open our eyes to your saving grace. We confess to times of blindness: (pause for responses from participants).

And we give thanks that in some things our eyes are opened, and now we see: (pause for responses from participants).

We know that there are times of darkness and lack of clarity to come, but we give thanks for your abiding presence. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 6, “I Am the Good Shepherd; I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” and John 10–11. Also ask those who have access to the Internet to research the feast of Dedication (the present-day Hanukkah) at www.jewfaq.org. Ask one or two volunteers to research the biblical understanding of the shepherd. If possible, provide a copy of the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., as a reference.

I Am the Good Shepherd; I Am the Resurrection and the Life (John 10–11)

Key Idea: The metaphor of the shepherd both interprets and further develops the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews.” It also suggests the nature of the close relationship Jesus seeks with us.

Advance Preparation

- If possible, locate some pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Check old curriculum pictures, art books, or the Internet.
- Choose a closing hymn.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Read a psalm.** Ask participants to read aloud the familiar Psalm 23.
2. **Pray together.** Light the Christ candle as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

Pray the following:

*Lord Jesus Christ, our good shepherd,
in the waters of baptism you give us birth,
and at your table you nourish us with heavenly food.
In your goodness and mercy,
lead us along safe paths,
beyond the terrors of evil and death,
to the house of the Lord
where we may rest securely in you forever. Amen.*

—“Daily Prayer,” Supplemental Liturgical Resources 5
(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987)

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. **Learn about shepherds and sheep.** Invite the person who volunteered to research shepherds to present the information

found. Emphasize the patience, skill, and caring a shepherd must demonstrate for the sheep.

Exploration (30 minutes)

- 4. Contrast images.** Divide the class into three small groups. With the exception of Ezekiel 34, assign to the first group the passages in which God is described as the shepherd and the people as the sheep; to the second, the passages depicting the false shepherd; and to the third, the passages that point to a future leader (see p. 66). When the groups have had a chance to read their passages, discuss the images.

Then ask a volunteer to read Ezekiel 34 aloud as the participants follow along in their Bibles. Ask participants to compare this Ezekiel passage to John 10:1–5. On newsprint, list the images found in each passage and compare the order in which they come.

With what does Jesus identify himself in the parable? What is the significance of this identification? Discuss Questions 2 and 3 (p. 76).

- 5. Know Jesus as the Good Shepherd.** Review the four elements of the theme of Jesus' dying on behalf of his people (p. 68).

The author states on p. 69 that one facet of Jesus' role as shepherd is his close identification with the people of Israel. What does it mean to "know" Jesus or to "abide in him"?

Ask participants to examine the pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that you obtained. Invite them to suggest what the pictures communicate to them about Jesus.

- 6. Share research on the conflict at the feast of Dedication.**

Ask those who researched the feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, to share what they found about the holiday in Jesus' time.

What charge did "the Jews" levy against Jesus, and why?

- 7. Explore wordplays and signs.** Point out that the author states that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is "the penultimate sign of [Jesus'] connection with God" (p. 73).

Discuss the two “ironic wordplays” used in the passage. What did Jesus say? How was he misinterpreted? What did he mean? Discuss Questions 1 and 4 (p. 76).

Response (10 minutes)

- 8. Respond to “I Am.”** Remind the group that the metaphors studied in this session are two of the most comforting and powerful of the “I Ams” in the Gospel of John. Ask participants to sit in silence for a few moments contemplating each image. Then ask participants to call out images, words, or phrases that come to mind when they hear the words “I am the Good Shepherd.” Print their responses on the sheet with those words. Then repeat this process with the words “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Closing (5 minutes)

- 9. Close with a hymn.** Sing one of the following hymns:

“The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #170)

“The King of Love My Shepherd Is” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #171)

“My Shepherd Will Supply My Need” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #172)

Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 7, “The Final Path to Jerusalem,” and John 12–13. Also ask them to read the accounts of the Last Supper in the other Gospels—Matthew 26:17–29, Mark 14:17–25, and Luke 22:14–23—and to note what differences they see between the Synoptics and the Fourth Evangelist. Ask for volunteers to research the meaning of the word *messiah*.

7

The Final Path to Jerusalem (John 12–13)

Key Idea: The announcement of the Passover sets the stage for a new major conflict between Jesus and “the Jews,” the final drama in Jesus’ life.

Advance Preparation

- Read over the response activity, washing of feet or hands, and decide if you will do the activity or the alternate. If you will be washing feet or hands, gather basins, towels, pitchers, soap, and scented lotion.
- On newsprint, a dry-erase board, or a chalkboard, print the points under “The Triumphal Entry” (p. 79).
- On two large sheets of paper, draw a simple outline of a figure. Label one “Peter” and the other “Judas.”

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Sing a hymn.** Sing “O Jesus, I Have Promised” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #389).
2. **Pray together.** Pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing:

*Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory, there we shall be.
Speak, and make us listen, Guardian of our souls.
Grant us the grace to follow you, Master and Friend. Amen.*

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. **Read about the anointing at Bethany.** Present the information in the section “The Anointing at Bethany” (pp. 77–79). Ask someone to read aloud John 11:2, the foreshadowing of

this account. Emphasize also the anointing of a body in preparation for burial as another feature of the foreshadowing of Jesus' death. Point out what the author calls "the dual response of faith by some and attempts to silence Jesus by others" represented in the attempt to kill Lazarus.

Ask someone to read aloud verse 3 in John's account. Ask participants to respond to what this sharp detail of sensory imaging (the smell of the perfume filling the room) conveys to them. Discuss Question 2 (p. 89).

Exploration (25 minutes)

- 4. What do we mean by *messiah*?** Call the attention of the participants to the points you printed on newsprint. Ask those who researched the word *messiah* to share their findings. Read the verses from the Old Testament aloud (Ps. 118:26 and Zech. 9:9).

Comment that the author states that there were two distinct groups present in the Fourth Evangelist's account. Divide participants into two groups: one group will represent the crowd that accompanies Jesus from Bethany, and the other will portray those who greet him in Jerusalem.

Tell participants that you will read the account in chapter 12:9–19 aloud. Ask them to listen from the perspective of the group to which they were assigned.

Have each group respond to the passage from their own perspective: The group from Bethany will testify to what they saw, and the group who had heard of the raising of Lazarus will respond to them. Discuss Question 3 (p. 89).

- 5. Explore glorification.** Print the words *glory* and *glorification* on newsprint. Ask participants to call out, popcorn style, thoughts that come to mind when they see these two words. Print their responses around the words.

Point out that the author indicates that these words are theologically significant in the Gospel. They indicate how Jesus understands his death. Now ask the participants to scan the material in the last two paragraphs on p. 81 and the first paragraph at the top of p. 82. Ask them to call out observations

gleaned from this information. Record their responses using a different color of marker. Ask: What do you make of the fact that God’s response to Jesus’ cry is the only time God speaks in this Gospel?

The author notes, “The choice between believing and not believing in Jesus and his words is ultimately a choice about God, not just about Jesus” (p. 83). How do you respond?

6. **Compare accounts of the Last Supper.** Using the information in “The Final Supper” (pp. 83–86), discuss the differences participants found in the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper. Discuss Question 4 (p. 89).
7. **Portray Peter and Judas.** Divide participants into the same two groups as used in activity 4. Give each group one of the large outline figures you prepared. Assign “Peter” to one group and “Judas” to the other. Ask participants to use the information about Peter and Judas in this unit to depict their character on the outline figure. They can draw, use words or phrases, or use any other method of depiction that they choose. Invite each group to present the completed figure and explain what it reveals about the character of their assigned person.

Response (15 minutes)

8. **Wash feet/hands.** Invite participants to join you in a circle around the worship table. Play some quiet music and ask participants to center themselves. Say that they will have the opportunity to wash the feet or hands of another participant and to have their own feet or hands washed in turn. Emphasize that anyone who is uncomfortable should feel free to opt out of the experience.
Begin with yourself, using the basin, cloths, soap, and towels. Continue until everyone who wants to participate has both washed and been washed.
9. **(Alternative) Think of metaphors for *servanthood*.** Point out that in the ancient Middle East, foot washing was something servants performed for people when they entered a household. People routinely walked long distances on dusty roads wearing

sandals, and it was considered hospitable to soothe the tired and sore feet of one's guests.

Ask: What task or role would you choose as an appropriate metaphor for servanthood in today's world?

- 10. Sing a hymn.** Sing “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #367).

Closing (5 minutes)

- 11. Sing a praise song.** Close by using a praise song, “Lord, Be Glorified” (*Sing the Faith*, #2150), as a closing prayer. Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 8, “The Farewell Sayings,” and John 14–17. Also ask a volunteer to be prepared to read John 17 aloud as a closing prayer in the next session.

8

The Farewell Sayings (John 14–17)

Key Idea: The final discourse brings us back to the beginning point of the Gospel, reminding us that Jesus is the Word of God incarnate.

Advance Preparation

- If possible, obtain a grapevine wreath to use on the worship table. Craft shops often carry them.
- If you saved the newsprint from Unit 1 with the talking points about the structure of the book of John, post it again.
- Prepare a chart of the scripture phrases on pp. 95–96.
- Obtain some paper and fine-tipped colored markers for the response activity.
- On separate index cards, print each of the “I am . . .” statements in the box on p. 101. You will also need blank index cards and pens or pencils.
- Recruit a volunteer to read John 17 aloud as the closing prayer.
- Choose a hymn for the opening.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Sing a hymn.** Sing “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #376) or “There’s a Sweet Spirit” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #398).
2. **Pray together.** Pray the following or a prayer of your own choosing:

*Holy Spirit,
Stay right here with us, filling us with your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise,
Without a doubt we’ll know that we have been revived
When we shall leave this place. Amen.*

Light the Christ candle as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

Presentation (10 minutes)

- 3. Summarize John's structure.** Using the information in the first paragraph on p. 90 as well as the information in the introduction on pp. 1–3 and the newsprint sheet from session 1, review the structure of John.

Point out to participants the author's point that the departure theme ties this long discourse together. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the Prologue (John 1:1–18). Ask someone else to read aloud John 14:1–4. Ask someone to read the first full paragraph of p. 92 (beginning "The spatial metaphor . . .") aloud.

Exploration (25 minutes)

- 4. Examine roles of the Paraclete.** Assign each of the passages in Question 1 on p. 103 to pairs of participants. Ask them to read the verses and identify the role of the Paraclete. Ask: How do you discern the Holy Spirit's presence in your life? In which role do you sense the Paraclete's presence?

The author states that it is more probable that the Holy Spirit is to dwell in the community of believers than in individual Christians. Do you discern the Holy Spirit's presence in this community of faith? How?

- 5. "Abide in me: love one another."** Point out that the author presents a progression in Jesus' argument about abiding in him, and call participants' attention to the chart of scripture phrases.

Ask someone to read aloud the sidebar on p. 96 about the vine. Discuss Question 2 (p. 103). Then ask: In what ways do we see this kind of community demonstrated in our church?

Response (15 minutes)

- 6. Think of a contemporary metaphor for the vine.** Give each participant a sheet of drawing paper and some colored fine-tipped markers. Ask the group to think about the image of

intertwined relatedness and steadfast love expressed by the metaphor of the vine. Ask them to read over the scripture phrase progression and consider the complexity of what the image of abiding is trying to convey. Then suggest that they create a new metaphor that reflects our cultural context and draw or write about it. After allowing a few minutes for persons to work individually, ask them to share with one other person.

7. **“I am”** Hand out to volunteers the cards on which you printed the “I am” pronouncements. In turn, ask each person to read aloud the saying on his or her card. Encourage them to take a few moments for reflection after each reading. Then read “I am the way . . . the truth . . . and the life,” pausing after each of the nouns.

Hand out blank cards to everyone. Invite participants to jot down any reflections or insights about Jesus that occurred to them as they heard all of the “I am” sayings read.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. **Experience a prayer.** Remind participants that the final chapter of the final discourse has been called Jesus’ “high priestly” prayer. Jesus is allowing his disciples to overhear his prayer to God, a prayer for unity among believers. The author states that this unity “is to demonstrate how God and Jesus continue to abide in the community of believers” (p. 98).

Ask participants to close their eyes, to find a comfortable position for sitting, and to center themselves. Suggest that they listen to the prayer as it is read, imagining that they are hearing Jesus pray in their presence. Have the volunteer read John 17 aloud. Extinguish the Christ candle.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 9, “The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus,” and John 18–19. Also have them number off from one to three. Ask

the ones to read Matthew 27:32–56, the twos to read Mark 15:21–41, and the threes to read Luke 23:32–49. Instruct all participants to read John 18–19 and their assigned Gospel reading and make notes of how the accounts differ.

9

The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus (John 18–19)

Key Idea: Despite the language of glorification, the trial and crucifixion end on a note of sadness, fear, and darkness.

Advance Preparation

- On index cards, print the following names: *Peter, Judas, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate, Annas, Caiaphas, the woman in the courtyard, Barabbas, and Mary, Jesus' mother*. If you have more than ten persons in the group, either make duplicate cards or add other characters, such as the Roman soldiers, people in the crowd, the high priest's slave Malchus (whose ear was cut off), or the relative of the man whose ear was cut off who confronted Peter in the courtyard.
- Prepare sheets of newsprint headed *Matthew, Mark, and Luke*.
- Choose one of the suggested closing hymns.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. **Sing a hymn.** Sing “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #100 and #101).
2. **Pray sentence prayers.** Invite participants to pray sentence prayers. Close with a prayer of your own.

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. **Compare Gospel accounts.** Using the information on p.104 in the text, summarize the author's points about the different framework in John's Gospel. Then ask someone from each of the groups from the homework assignment to share how their Gospel account varies from John. Invite others to add anything not mentioned by the first person. Print the succession of events of each Gospel on separate sheets of newsprint. Now

ask a volunteer to read aloud John 18:1–14. Review the following from “The Arrest of Jesus” (pp. 105–107):

1. Judas was familiar with the Mount of Olives.
2. There is no agonizing prayer, such as that found in the Synoptics.
3. Throughout, John portrays Jesus as intentional, knowledgeable, and fairly self-confident in the face of growing opposition and death.
4. Roman soldiers are a part of the story.
5. Jesus takes the initiative in the arrest (there is no kiss of identification).
6. There is a detailed portrayal of the cutting off of the official's ear.
7. Jesus is taken first to the house of Annas, then to Caiaphas.
8. The scene uses the language of forensic rhetoric (testimony, signs, truths, judgment, proof).

Exploration (20 minutes)

- 4. Speculate on denial.** Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 18:15–27. Then have someone read Mark 14:66–72.

Discuss the following: Today in some parts of the world, it is dangerous to be identified as a Christian. If you were in a situation today similar to Peter's, how do you think you would respond? Would you deny being a disciple of Jesus? Or would you respond more like the Peter in Mark's account and claim never to have known Jesus at all?

How do you think we “deny” Jesus today?

- 5. Review Pilate's trial.** Ask someone from each of the groups from the homework assignment to briefly summarize the account of the trial of Jesus according to his or her assigned Gospel writer. Ask another volunteer to read John 18:28–19:16 aloud.

The author states: “John's version of the trial before Pilate is striking in its construction, the portrayal of Pilate, and the impression one gets of the Jewish opposition to Jesus.” Ask participants to consider each of these three elements in turn.

- 6. Compare the crucifixion accounts.** Ask participants who read the other Gospel accounts of the crucifixion to briefly summarize the details of their account. Then discuss Question 4 (p. 115).

Response (10 minutes)

- 7. Compare eye-witness accounts.** Hand out the index cards with the names of various characters in John's account. Ask participants to review the events in John's account (from Peter's denial through the burial of Jesus) from the perspective of the character on their card. Allow several minutes for reflection, and then ask for volunteers to tell what happened from the perspective of their character.

Closing (5 minutes)

- 8. Sing a hymn.** Sing "Were You There?" (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #102) in the following manner:

- Read chapter 19:13–16a; then sing verse 1.
- Read chapter 19:16b–18; then sing verse 2.
- Read chapter 19:31–37; then sing verse 3.
- Read chapter 19:38–42; then sing verse 4.

Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 10, "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," and John 20–21. Also ask participants to clip from the newspaper or news magazines or to download from Internet sites news items or headlines in the coming week. Ask them to reflect on this question: "What is the relationship between the news and the good news?"

Also recruit persons to prepare to read John 20:1–18 aloud. If your group is small, you might choose just one reader. With a large group you might choose people to play the roles of a narrator, Mary Magdalene, angels, and Jesus. Choose good readers who can read

slowly and with expression, and ask them to practice reading the passage aloud.

Decide whether you want to share a complete meal at the conclusion of the study or simply a light snack. Ask participants to bring a dish or a snack to share.

10

The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus (John 20–21)

Key Idea: The crucifixion and resurrection are the story of Jesus' glorification of God, but that is not the end. There is a future to the story for his followers—for us.

Advance Preparation

- Prepare a poster with the heading “What Is the Relationship between the News and the Good News?” Provide scissors and glue.
- Post the newsprint page from session 1 with the questions and comments participants hoped to consider in this study.
- Choose an Easter hymn for the opening.
- If you have planned a concluding meal, set up tables for food and for eating. If you are planning a light snack, set up a table where participants can place snack foods. Plan to bring paper plates, napkins, and tableware.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. **Make a news/good news collage.** As participants arrive, ask them to add to the poster any news clippings or headlines they collected through the week.
2. **Recite an Easter response.** Light the Christ candle. Use the following response, beginning softly and increasing the volume each time the phrase is read:

Leader: Alleluia: Christ is risen!

All: **Christ is risen indeed!**

Leader: Alleluia: Christ is risen!

All: **Christ is risen indeed!**

Leader: Alleluia: Christ is risen!

All: **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

- 3. Sing an Easter hymn.** Sing any Easter hymn familiar to your group. “O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal* #116 and #117) includes stanzas from John 20.

Presentation (10 minutes)

- 4. Discuss news/good news.** Call the attention of participants to the title of the poster, “What Is the Relationship between the News and the Good News?” Share the following:

In *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed., Shirley Guthrie discusses the doctrine of the resurrection. He states that by his resurrection, Jesus triumphed over death. But the news, says Guthrie, tells another story. Death, sin, and the devil are not overcome. Yet the foundation of our faith is not the suffering and death of the cross but new life in Christ.

Further, the Christian faith is based not on the crucifixion but on encounters with the risen Christ. The good news of the resurrection is that God is stronger than death. Guthrie contends that the coming of Jesus and his resurrection mean that the long-hoped-for kingdom of God is a reality in the here and now. But it is also true that ultimate victory over evil is not yet a reality. The rule of God is not yet a reality and at the same time is here now.

Ask: How would you then answer the question, “What is the relationship of the news to the good news?”

- 5. Enter scripture.** Tell participants that they will hear the resurrection narrative read aloud. Ask them to close their eyes as it is read and to try to form a visual image of the setting, characters, and situation. Invite them to place themselves in this picture as the narrative is read. Then ask the person (or persons) you recruited to read John 20:1–18 aloud.

When the reading is over, ask the following:

- How did you picture the scene? What did you see? Hear? Smell?
- Where did you place yourself in the passage? Were you a bystander? Mary Magdalene? One of the disciples?
- What were your emotions? Fear? Wonder? Skepticism? Confusion?

Invite those who are willing to respond with their impressions.

Exploration (25 minutes)

6. Recall the closed room. Divide the group into two small groups. Assign one of the closed room appearances to each group. Ask them to discuss the following:

- What is the significance of the emphasis on Jesus' hands and feet?
- How do you interpret Jesus' greeting, "Peace be with you"?
- How do we experience both Jesus' presence and the peace he gives?

Invite participants to share any insights with the total group.

7. Relate another fish miracle. Point out to the group that the author states that the final miracle (the catching of the fish) shifts the focus away from the resurrection and toward the lives of believers and the community of faith. Ask participants to silently read the final-appearance passages (21:1–14, 15–19). Then discuss the following:

- Why do you suppose the disciples fail to recognize Jesus after two previous appearances? Can you think of an occasion when you failed to recognize the presence of Jesus in your life?
- Jesus emphasizes the importance of love and of "feeding the sheep" by repeating each command three times. What is the importance of love and unity to the church today?
- Who do you think the beloved disciple is?

Response (10 minutes)

8. Review previous questions. Call the attention of participants to the questions and comments they listed in session 1. Ask: On which questions and comments have we been able to shine the light in this study? What questions remain? Invite the group to continue to read and reflect on the Gospel in the coming days.

9. Share a meal or snack. Offer the following table grace:

*Be known to us in the breaking of the bread, O Christ.
Open our eyes to your presence, so that we may say, "It is the Lord!"
Amen.*

Enjoy a meal or snack together. After participants have enjoyed food and table fellowship, ask them to respond to Question 4 (p. 128) about how their understanding of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus has been changed. Encourage them to call out responses popcorn style. Record the responses on newsprint.

Closing (5 minutes)

10. Recite the closing litany.

Leader: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book:

(Invite participants to read in unison from the newsprint their responses.)

Leader: 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.

All: Halleluiah! Christ is risen indeed!