

If you meet Jesus...

Introduction

If you met Jesus in person, how would he respond to you and how would you respond to him?

Over these few weeks, we're looking at stories of a range of different people meeting Jesus and how he and they responded. Some are 'religious', some are not; some are expecting something, others aren't; some go looking for him and others don't; some regard themselves as 'religious', others as undeserving; some as capable and others as unable; for some its their first encounter, for others it's one of many.

We're told the stories of these encounters in chapters 2-6 of the gospel of John. As we hear them, we see how people respond to Jesus and in particular to his miracles, but we're left wondering how their stories will be different following their meetings.

We might also wonder how we have responded to Jesus and consider how we respond today when we meet him in our day-to-day lives – whether for the first time or on a regular basis. How do the stories of our lives change as a result?

Multi-Layers -Further Reading

As we will see, John's gospel is multi-layered. It was written to be read at different levels and there are things to learn in each. During this series we will look at these different layers. If you've read it before from one angle, why not read it through and deliberately explore a different approach?

For example, if you are familiar with the 'signs', 'deeper meanings' and repeated themes of some of the words and actions, why not engage more with the surface story itself. Likewise, if you naturally learn from



the story, you could decide to explore more of the 'connections' and double meanings it contains. Perhaps read it looking out for particular themes –such as Jesus' miracles (or signs) or how the themes introduced in Chapter 1 reappear through the rest of the book.

Other Resources

Lots has been written about John to help with this. If you have access to the internet, then you could try WordLive at scriptureunion.org.uk. This is one of many good resources for daily material (UCB is another), but it also allows you to search past editions. So, for example, you can search for 'John 2' and you'll find material from a series published in Jan 2009 on John.

For something considerably more detailed and technical, you could try using a Bible commentary such as 'John' by Mark Stibbe –it gives a different angle to many commentaries.

Whatever encounters you have and whichever layers you explore, I hope that you enjoy the discovery!

Toby

If you meet Jesus...

1: If you meet Jesus... at a party

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Share a memorable social gathering that you've been to & enjoyed.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Take it in turns to think of something you want to thank God for (e.g. creation, God's love, a relative...). Draw a picture of it for people to see and see how quickly people guess what you're drawing. At the end, say short prayers as a group thanking God for those things.

WORD

You may find the introduction to the series helpful to read at this point.

Read John 2:1-11

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*leaving time to pray!*)

Jesus' first miraculous sign recorded in John's gospel is at a wedding party, where he provides lots more wine.

- Which characters do you most relate to in this story? Why?
- If you were at a wedding party and Jesus was there, how would you expect Jesus to behave and react to what was going on?

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- How does your view of Jesus & the views of people you know match with the picture we get through this story?
- To what extent do you think people associate Jesus or Christians with social occasions and having fun? Why?
- On what occasions/areas of your life do you most/least expect to encounter Jesus?

We only meet Jesus' mother, Mary, twice in John's gospel –here at the start and at the cross in John 19:25-27.

- What do these instances show about Jesus' relationship with her?
- What do you think of their interaction in verses 4-5?
- How do you think the servants felt about 'doing whatever Jesus told them' (v5)? How do you feel about it in your life?

Beneath the surface:

As mentioned in the introduction, there are different 'layers' to John's gospel. Throughout these notes, we'll focus firstly on the 'surface story', but there is also the opportunity to dive beneath the surface and explore some of the deeper meanings, if you choose...

- In what ways could you read this story as a picture of Jesus' ministry as a whole? For example: the old wine running out and Jesus miraculously providing the best wine
- John 1 acts as a prologue to the whole book. Read John 1:1-18. What themes introduced there appear in John 2:1-11?

WHAT NEXT?

Jesus transformed this situation in an unexpected and amazing way. Share any situations that you would like him to transform & pray for those.

Jesus liked socials! Don't forget to organise socials for your group for the term. If you haven't done one recently, why not also plan to run a social for the whole church too?

If you meet Jesus...

2: If you meet Jesus... in secret

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Play a party game that involves discovering a secret –e.g. wink murder.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Darken the room. Light a candle in the middle. Play some quiet music. Read out John 1:1-9, 8:12 & 9:5. Use the stillness to ask God silently to shine his light into areas of your life that feel dark.

WORD

This story took place at night. Try closing your eyes and listen as someone reads **John 3:1-21**

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*leaving time to pray after*)

Nicodemus appears twice more in the Bible. Read John 7:45-52 & John 19:38-42, then...

- *Could do in 2s/3s:* What do you think Nicodemus was like? If you were to write his life story, how would you fill in the gaps? How do you think he grew Up, In & Out?

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- How did Jesus respond to Nicodemus? How do you think Jesus felt about him?
- Is there anything in Nicodemus's story that is similar to yours? Do you know anyone like Nicodemus?
- John 3:16 is a famous and well-loved verse, verse 17 less so. Why?
- Verses 16-18 mention believing, saving and condemning. How should they shape the way we talk about our faith?

Beneath the surface:

- Go through the passage looking out for each of the following themes. What do you learn from them? (NB: Some continue from the opening of John1)
 - Light/darkness/seeing
 - Birth
 - Wind/Spirit (same word used in Greek & Hebrew)
 - Truth & Belief
- What do we learn about the Trinity in this passage -God the Holy Spirit, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Father?

WHAT NEXT?

Bring in some newspapers/internet news articles. Pray about some of the stories in them.

If you haven't already as a group, why not adopt one of the church mission partners/organisations to pray for & support (Dave & Sarah Fidal have details). You could pray for them regularly as part of your meetings, write or support them in other ways. You could also let the church know about them.

If you meet Jesus...

3: If you meet Jesus ...and you're unprepared

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Describe a recent occasion when you've been particularly aware of God.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Share a picture, illustration or example that particularly helps you understand something about God. It may be from the Bible or somewhere else. Say prayers based on these examples.

WORD

NOTE: We looked at this passage from a different angle in a series on evangelism in Jun/July 2007. Downloadable from the church website –if you want more ideas

Read John 4:1-30 & 39-42

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Compare this story with the last one (John 3:1-21). Look at the characters, location, timing, the conversations, start/end etc.

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- *In 2s/3s, then share as a group:* List as many similarities and contrasts as you can between the stories. What can we learn?
- Which character do you like most? Which character do you relate to most? Why?
- Compare the changes in faith and action in the two characters. What are your own expectations of how people 'normally' come to faith? How can this affect the way you treat others as their faith grows?
- Imagine you encountered the woman at the well rather than Jesus, how would you have reacted to her –initially and if she'd told you her story?
- This woman quickly tells her whole town about Jesus, unlike the 'expert' disciples (v27-38)! Do you know anyone like her? Would you like to be like her in that respect?
- Knowing her history, if you were in the town when she returned (v29), do you think you would have gone with her? What would you have been thinking?

Beneath the surface:

- Jesus uses a play on words in v10-11: 'Living water' can also be translated 'running water', which could account for the woman's confusion. How does Jesus use everyday items (water, food, harvest etc) in this passage to explain deeper spiritual truths? How helpful do you find this approach?
- What do we learn about Jesus being both man and Son of God in this story? In what ways do you think this story a model for us & what aspects are unique to Jesus?

WHAT NEXT?

Are there people who you know or in your community who might often be forgotten about? Include praying for these people in your prayers.

If you meet Jesus...

Extra Stuff!

We now have a **Library of Growth Group Resources** to use & to try during Lent or you may have something yourself.

With the **New Wine Healing Training Day** in March, it would be good to give those who go time to share how they got on and discuss healing as a group. We will be looking at John 4:43-5:15 in sermons, so you could use these stories to help.