

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely Illawarra, Australia. The town is built on a hillside overlooking a harbor. The harbor is filled with numerous sailboats of various sizes. In the foreground, there's a marina with several boats docked. The water is a vibrant turquoise color. The sky is a soft, hazy blue. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

LOVE

FOR THE
ILLAWARRA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LIFEGROUP STUDIES
LEADER'S GUIDE

LOVE FOR THE ILLAWARRA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LIFEGROUP STUDY - PART A (WEEKS 1-5)

Term 1 for 2025 will see Figtree Anglican Church studying John's gospel together. We will do this in two parts. Part A will survey chapters 1-12 as we are introduced to Jesus, God's son who teaches about God's love. We will see how the love of God is central to the forming of God's family.

In Part B (chapters 13-21) we will take on a companion reader, David Mansfield's book *About Love*. This will provide insight to our reading and teaching of the gospel as well as providing some questions for discussion. *About Love* explores chapters 13-21 of John's gospel, observing what it is to be 'Loved by Jesus, the king of community', and 'Loving like Jesus, in the community of the King.'

Expect to see how God's love shapes his community! In 2025, we will partner with many other churches in our region for the 'Hope for the Illawarra' movement; simultaneously we hope to see in this series God's love for the Illawarra.

Useful resources:

The Gospel According to John by D.A. Carson

John by Andreas J. Köstenberger

About Love by David Mansfield
(Available to purchase at Figtree Anglican Church)

When	Sermon	Sermon Title	Study
2 Feb	John 1:1-18	From community for community	John 1:1-18
9 Feb	John 3:1-21	Love on display	John 2:13-23
16 Feb	John 4:43-54	Love you can trust	John 5:31-47
23 Feb	John 7:25-52	Love him or hate him	John 10:1-21
2 Mar	John 12:1-19	At the centre of the group	John 11:1-37
9 Mar	13:1-17	Ruling with a towel	The following weeks in conjunction with <i>About Love</i> by David Mansfield. Details to follow soon.
16 Mar	14:1-14	A place for you	
23 Mar	15:1-16	Stronger together	
30 Mar	15:17-16:33	Community crisis	
6 April	17:6-26	Connected and known	
13 April	18:1-40	Cancelled	
18 April	19:1-42	Good Friday	
20 April	20:1-31	Resurrection Sunday	
27 April	21:1-25	Victory and sacrifice	

A note on John 7:53-8:11:

Your Bible may offer you a note at this point in the text explaining that John 7:53-8:11 does not appear in the earliest copies of John's gospel. This may cause you to wonder what is going on, particularly as this is the famous account of Jesus's challenge "Let anyone who is without sin be the first to throw a stone", in the case of the woman caught in adultery.

What is before us is known as a *textual variant*. Our New Testament has many of them, and they are a reason for great confidence. We do not have the original manuscripts for any of the New Testament letters. And so, we do not have the original parchment that John penned his gospel on. We actually have something better from a historical and evidential perspective! We have numerous copies that are both early and widely spread across the ancient world, its churches and libraries.

Why is this a good thing? Well, the numerous copies mean many people were accepting and valuing the original manuscript and making copies. Like a road accident, rather than just having one account of what happened, we have many copies bearing witness to the same text with an extremely high level of consistency. All these copies are saying, 'this is what the original said', this is a safer bet than one alleged original claiming to be our one reliable manuscript.

But why are there variations? There are a few reasons for variation, copyists make mistakes. They are not machines. So sometimes a copyist might leave out a word, or simply have a typo which can add variation to meaning, or tense of a word, etc.

Sometimes a copyist might seek to perform the role of 'helpful editor' smoothing out a tricky sentence or adding something to bring a sense of closure or explanation. The copyist may add something to bring harmony with another gospel, or another part of scripture. Or a copyist may simply not like a bit and omit it. All of this points to a very authentic text that is in front of us. We don't have a New Testament conveniently arriving shrink-wrapped from heaven, but one that reflects the evolutionary New Testament world in which it was being created under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

How do we establish the original text? Textual critics will find different degrees of certainty at times. Some variants are very clear to see what is original, and we can have great certainty where the original wording is to be found. Some are clear enough, it's possible that another variant could fit. Some are trickier, the evidence could point one or two ways, but even in these cases context and our broader biblical theology helps keep us on track. Rarely does a variant present problems to the core message of the text.

To establish the text, a critic will look at both *internal evidence* and *external*.

Internal evidence involves what is to be found in the text itself. General principles of reliable text are: **Shorter** harder variants, these tend to be more reliable. They don't bear the fingerprint of a later editor. **Language**: does the vocabulary and style fit with how this author writes. **Content**: does this variant fit with the theological message of the author, and does it fit well with the logic of and argument, or the flow of the narrative? These are some examples of principles for handling internal evidence.

Regarding external evidence, the critic looks at when and where the variant comes from. Logically, the most ancient manuscripts are weighted more heavily than more recent copies. Another important consideration is where the copy comes from, with some regions having proved a reputation for highly accurate copyists. Finally, we may look at texts against one another whilst it is not a case of majority rules, there is a factor of weight given to what most copies are saying. Number is less important than weight priority is given to the quality of the copy, rather number of copies that agree.

When it comes to John 7:53-8:11, this variant is best left out of our reading of John. The key reasons in this author's view are:

Eternal evidence: as mentioned this variant is not found in the earliest manuscripts, which may suggest a later editorial decision to include it.

Internal evidence: Shorter readings are to be favoured. However, most substantial to all of this is the disruption John 7:53-8:11 causes to the narrative. The dispute over Jesus' identity and the inability of the Jewish leaders to see and recognise him is wonderfully answered by Jesus in 8:12 "I am the light of the world." The conversation with the Pharisees then continues. The events of 7:53 - 8:11 are somewhat foreign to the story being told.

What to do with John 7:53-8:11? Before we have a *ye olde time* book burning, or worse an author burning depending how you respond to this argument, there is a place for this text. It is best omitted from the gospel as a work, yet it does not need to be omitted from the Christian thought world. My view is that this is surely not part of John, I am less forthright to suggest it is not holy scripture, though I'm inclined toward thinking it is not. This does not mean it's untrue or never happened. That is a different discussion, I lean toward believing it is an account of a true event. I think it is helpful and provides good counsel to the disciple of Jesus. I would probably class it as Christian historical writing that is beneficial to the disciple of Jesus but not inspired scripture.

STUDY 1

JOHN 1:1-18

A warm up: If God's love was on display in a local community, what would you expect to find?

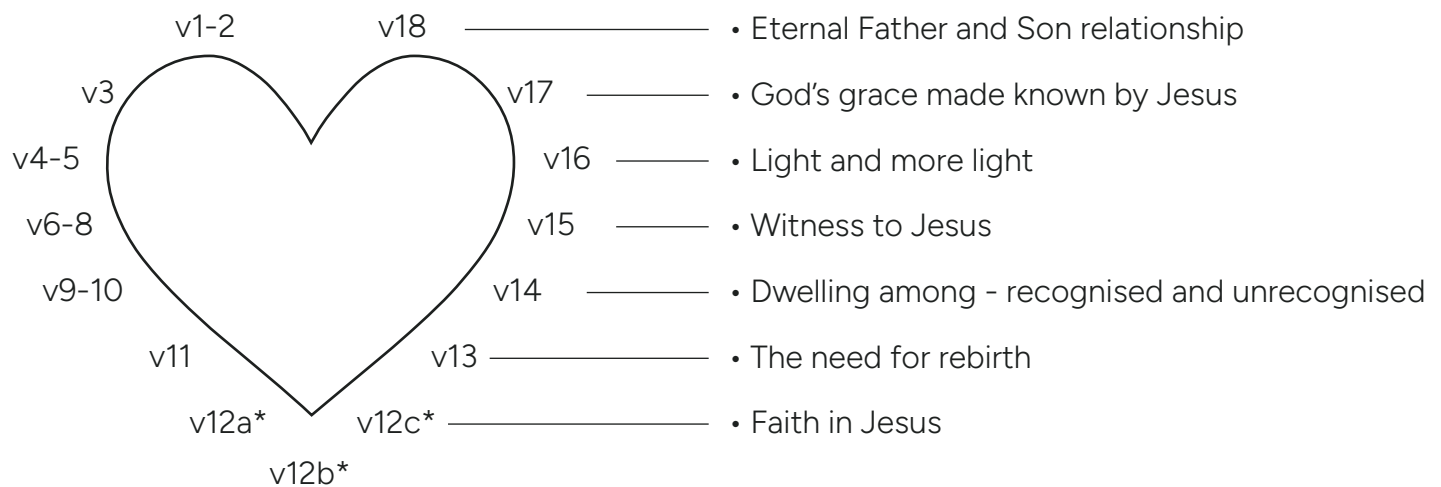
"God is love" declares John (1 John 4:8), the apostle that Jesus loved. In his Gospel, or testimony to the life of Jesus, John gives us a picture of God's love by introducing us to God's son Jesus. In his writing there are several themes all driven by the love of God.

The prologue of John's gospel (John 1:1-18) introduces all the major themes of the book. As is so often customary in the bible, John

employs a chiasm, a mirror like technique of writing designed to reinforce themes, and point to a central climactic point of focus. The verse notes in the lines below tend to mirror and/or complement one another.

Let's introduce ourselves to the book, and John's idea of love by studying the reflected themes in the verses below, attempting summaries of the themes alongside the mirrored verses. E.g. v1-2 are mirrored by v18 and the theme is an eternal Father and Son relationship.

Theme:



*the word order of verse 12 is a little mixed up in the NIV English translation. It makes for smoother reading, but loses the pattern. Verse 12 reads in the original language:

a: Yet to all who did receive him, **b:** he gave the right to become the children of God
c: those who believed in his name.

STUDY 1

- 2. Verse 12 Introduces is the focal point of John's prologue. Why do you think this is the focal point of the structure? (Compare with John 20:30-31). What is the relationship between Jesus and the formation of community?**

The focal point is being given the right or authority to become the children of God. The chiasm in verse 12 parts a and c focuses on faith in Jesus, which is John's purpose in writing (20:30-31). It is faith in Jesus alone that brings about a position in the exclusive community of the children of God.

- 3. The themes you have noted above give some shape and character to God's love as seen in John. What further comments or questions do you have about the shape of God's love so far?**

Often when thinking about love and God's love we may be consumed by feelings of things that are 'nice.' Here we see so much more to the shape of God's love. We see the origins of love in the Trinity, we see Jesus and witness to him as a central theme of love, we see themes of revealing truth (light), and how love shows up what is intolerable - the need for rebirth for example.

- 4. Considering the themes you have encountered; how might you expect God's love to make a difference in your world?**

We might not expect everything to be pleasant in the here and now. We might expect to see the kindness of God and his people, we might expect to see people contending for the Lordship of Christ and his truth, we might expect to see love misunderstood, rejected even, and yet remain loving. God's love will have the effect of serving the world, rescuing the world, and dividing the world. God's love is pure and so will bring judgement and a need for repentance.

STUDY 2

JOHN 2:13-23

1. Write your own acrostic poem for Love, e.g.:

Labour L _____
 Overwhelming O _____
 Vigilant V _____
 Emotional E _____

Share and discuss some of the words you have used.

2. "John 2:13-25 is a love story". Read the passage and then discuss your feelings about this statement.

The story does not play out like you might expect a love story. It must have been tremendously tense and awkward. Whilst it is certainly not a romance story, with Jesus the one who is acting we can rest assured that this is a picture of God's love. This is a love story as Jesus is acting lovingly. This is an unusual display for us as we are not so used to equating loving action with forceful action in our culture.

3. a. At first glance, what do you think is the catalyst for Jesus' strong reaction in this event?

We have an impulse that Jesus has a big problem with the commerce taking place in the temple. We should remember financial activity has always been a part of temple life. Jesus himself has regard for the temple tax. We have to look a little deeper and pick up some clues rather than simply concluding Jesus is against commerce at the temple.

b. Are you surprised/unsurprised that Jesus might act forcefully? Why or why not?

Often we can look at Jesus through selective lenses. It must be said the event stands out as quite unique in the accounts of Jesus

for its potential physicality. At the same time Jesus is not afraid of confrontation, or even an abrasive word in season. Personally, I have great empathy for the 12, and think Jesus is quite scary as a Rabbi at times. Hard questions, challenging missions, close to riots, and more rugged rebukes than I tend to encounter from my teachers! We must remember Jesus is also the 'word' of God in flesh. He is the God behind the command of judgment that we at times ascribe exclusively to the God of the Old Testament, which is to casually fall into Marcion heresy. Perhaps we should not see Jesus forcefully contend for the kingdom, this will be his ultimate display as he contends forcefully and physically though sacrificially at the cross.

c. How would you explain this as an account of Jesus being God's love in this community?

Something has gone wrong. In the famous 1 Corinthians 13 chapter, the apostle Paul asserts, "love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth"; it seems in Jesus' estimation something is terribly incorrect in this scene. His love, expressed as 'zeal for your house' compels his action to stop what he judges as evil.

It would seem that Jesus does not seek to harm anybody in John's account. The whip seems hazardous doesn't it! The whip however is not an instrument of harm or weaponry in this account so much as a tool for driving cattle. He does not turn over people, but the tables, scattering the coins. For those with birds in cages, he gives verbal commands to get them out of the temple. Perhaps we can say Jesus is forceful, but not violent in this scene. This is not to say love prohibits violence, but there is no violence on display here. Jesus is acting for the good of all, as will become more apparent.

STUDY 2

4. Take note of the verses that bookend this story (v13-23). What is the season that John wants us to take note of as we read? What themes come with this?

The bookends and the season John insists we observe is Passover. This is the most significant salvation event, and feast for these people. The Passover calls for people to teach and remember God's saving act when he struck down the first born in Egypt and rescued his people from slavery. The Passover requirement was that the blood of the Passover lamb would be painted over the door of the people of Israel. There were quite specific instructions for how the meal was to be eaten.

5. Read John 1:6-8,15, 29-30, and 35-36. Consider how Jesus has been introduced. Why might this be highly relevant to Jesus' place in the temple story?

The major signpost or witness to Jesus is John the Baptist. And John points to Jesus in most particular way. (Don Carson notes that the reason Jesus says in Luke 7:28 that nobody born of woman is greater than John..., is because John could point to Jesus with a precision that nobody else could before. This is why even the least in the kingdom are greater than John, because all kingdom members can point to the resurrection - John could not). John points to Jesus as 'the lamb of God.' This title makes no sense outside of the context of the Passover. A story about Passover anticipates the Passover lamb, Jesus is the lamb.

6. How might Jesus' reaction to the sacrificial animals for sale reinforce the main thrust of John's gospel? (Recall John 1:12)

In Matthew's gospel the clearing of temple is Jesus' reaction to Israel having forgotten

her mandate to bless the nations. This market is taking place in the court of the gentiles, a place where God fearing gentiles could draw near, and see God's people worship. In architecture, here is where Israel had the opportunity to be a kingdom of priests, to be mediators and show God. However, a convenience store is set up instead. Jesus, the ultimate Jewish missionary, is outraged! This is relevant in John too, but the emphasis of the story may be different in John's account, and for his purpose in writing.

The Lamb of God has come the temple, rather than be ready to receive him in order to be receive the right to be the called the children of God (1:12), folks are buying and selling animals for sacrifice. This temple itself is highly problematic. An awfully Hellenised and contaminated construction of Herod the great, the whole scene is one of misguided attempts to come to God. I am not sure, but the exchanging of money has echoes of the Tower of Babel for me too. The coins representing different kingdoms being exchanged for one currency... not sure, but Jesus does not like it. Jesus has come to set things straight, this challenge to the status quo is evident to the leaders, who ask what sign he has for this claim to authority.

7. What sign does Jesus offer that he is the authority and which people can come, meet, and indeed pray to God?

Fittingly the sign is his death and resurrection. His death and resurrection is the means by which people can come to God. Hence he will teach later, I am the way, the truth, and the life - to all who receive him, he gave the right to be called the children of God. Jesus' death and resurrection is not just a sign, but the means by which the great sacrifice is made, he is the lamb, his is also the temple, in him God takes on flesh and dwells (tabernacles - before temple) among us.

STUDY 2

8. Reflect on what we have seen so far, along with the closing comments of v23-25. What expectations could we have for true love to be among people? What is needed?

It seems love requires repentance - a new way to think. Jesus demonstrates in all of this that people are not as good as we would often like to believe. In order to have an understanding of love, we cannot find it in people, cultures, or received systems. We must look to Jesus. His clearing of the temple is a demonstration of God's anger of us replacing him as the 'love compass' with anything else.

STUDY 3

JOHN 5:31-47

Archaeology is the search for fact, not truth. If it's truth you're interested in, Dr. Tyree's Philosophy class is right down the hall.

- Indiana Jones

Discuss Dr Jones' statement.

Read John 5:31-47

1. There seems to be some key elements for truth communicating according to Jesus (v31-35). What key elements do you observe from these verses?

There seems to be some relational elements. Truth needs to be reliably communicated - there are tests for this, such as testimony or witness. Truth needs to be reliably received. Again there are some tests, investigation, checking of testimony. Is the communicator trustworthy. Does the content stack up? Is the communicator credible etc.

2. Jesus notes the strongest witnesses he has to his identity. What things does he point to? (v36-40)

Jesus seems to have two related witnesses that he points to. His witness is His heavenly Father, his voice. Whilst he acknowledges that these people may have never heard God's voice he speaks of 1. 'The works Jesus is doing - which demonstrate he is sent from the father, 2. The scripture they have (and not understood) containing the promises of God concerning the Messiah.

3. How do you think Jesus arrives at the conclusion that the Jewish leaders 'do not have the love of God in your heart' (v42)?

Jesus arrives at this conclusion because they reject him and refuse to receive him. The

love of God is made known in Jesus; he is the expression of God's love. To not have Jesus is to not have God's love, to not know Jesus, is to not know God's love. You can't have true love without Jesus.

4. a. What seems to be blocking these leaders from receiving Jesus and the testimony about Him? (v39-44)

Misplaced trust. They study the scriptures and trust their ability to discern them. Yet now God has come to them and said 'let me help you understand' they refuse. They trust themselves rather than God. A way to think about this is to consider God's law. When we receive instruction from God, rather than say, 'No problem God, I can do that', it would be better to say, 'Dear Lord, incline my heart to keep this law, help me to do it, I need you. Blessed is the one whose sins are not counted against them, and whose transgressions are hidden!' Trusting in God's enabling power, and his unlimited patience and mercy, is far more righteous than trusting in our ability.

We study scripture, but we do it trusting God's Holy Spirit to make Him known to us in the scripture. We don't trust our amazing brains to figure it out and know God because we are clever.

b. Who is the object of their love?

They may not realise but it is themselves. There is a spiritual narcissism going on. To love God, they are going to need to humble themselves and surrender to him. It's scary, they probably think they are surrendered to him; hence they study scripture. An older clergyman once told me about a lesson he learnt when he was younger. He had preached a very strong sermon, following his message his senior minister said to him, 'It's clear you were all over that passage!' The

STUDY 3

young man stood up tall. The senior went on, 'It was also evident you were not under it.' Lesson learnt, rebuke received and valued. Being an expert in all things Bible counts for little, if it does not continually humble us, and drive us to be ever more dependent on the God who is revealed in the Bible. To love Him more, and become less enamoured with ourselves.

5. a. How do you understand that their 'accuser is Moses' (v45)?

As above - the law of Moses exists to reveal God, to cause one to depend evermore on him. However, these people have taken to law of Moses as a standard to live up to. The law, or Moses will therefore continually demonstrate where they fall short. Moses' law will accuse them, the law was never an instrument for salvation, it was always to point people to God, not themselves.

b. What might this reveal?

As above.

6. What is the effect on love when truth is absent? Where have you seen this?

Love is not love without truth. It is desire, it is attraction, it is service that perhaps soothes a wounded conscience. Without truth, love actually becomes evil; it becomes disordered and misdirected, St Augustine of Hippo contended. We see this most evidently in the 'love is love' slogan of our day, that seeks to call what is evil 'love'.

7. What is the effect on truth when love is absent? Where have you seen this?

In a similar way truth decays without the presence of love. As we say early in this study, truth communication requires something relational. For truth to occur,

somehow it needs to be shared by more than one. Since the post-modern movement 'relative truth' and individual truth became accepted by some. The phrase, 'that may be true for you' and the encouragement to 'speak your truth' are common. In this individualistic, narcissistic, and loveless approach, truth suffers a heavy blow. What is actually true, real, factual, received, can be lost. Further without love, and related compassion, even factual truth may be received because it is just too harsh.

I once heard it said, 'Love without truth is like anaesthetic with no surgery.' You'll feel no pain, but nobody gets any better. And truth without love is like surgery with no anaesthetic. It deals with the issue but who would ever subject themselves to it.'

8. When Jesus is brought into a community, how might his love and truth shape that community?

Discuss. Be cautious of utopian answers. The world is broken, the New Testament is one mess after another of Jesus communities – it's kind of the shape of things until the new creation.

At the same time, what wisdom could contributed? How could grace make a difference? What would the effect of champions for mercy have? What if we could have truth, without condemnation? What if changing your mind was encouraged? What if uncertainty was valued? Lots to think about.

STUDY 4

JOHN 10:1-21

Read **John 10:1-10** and then complete the following bios:

Name (v1): Thief / Robber

Distinguishing style (v1): Does not use the gate

Sheep reaction (v5): Run away - don't recognise

Mission (v10): Steal, kill, destroy.

Name (v2): The Shepherd

Distinguishing style (v2): Enters by the gate

Sheep reaction (v3-4): They know his voice and follow

Mission (v3,9): Lead sheep out to pasture

1. Consider the distinguishing style of the two figures above. What does Jesus mean when he says, 'I am the gate'? (v7)

The gate is marker of who is a genuine shepherd and who is a robber. Jesus telling the Pharisees, a sect of Jews who guarded the torah, and were dominant in the Sanhedrin that leading God's people - the sheep is an authentic shepherd only comes through him. This picks up the major theme of receiving and rejecting Jesus. Jesus' claim is not only terribly confronting to the rejecting Pharisees - who He is essentially calling destroyers of God's flock, but is also something of a divine claim. This should not surprise us in the 'I am' statements, however historically it was God who would call and appoint the shepherds of Israel. In this 'I am' statement Jesus says he is the appointer of shepherds - he is the Lord.

2. What does Jesus want the Pharisees to understand?

The Sadducees controlled the priesthood,

but their rivals the Pharisees were a dominant sect, having power in the Sanhedrin. Aside from these squabbles, Jesus (as above) wants the Pharisees to understand his authority. It surpasses theirs; it surpasses Moses, it is divine. To be part of God's family, indeed, to be a shepherd one must receive Jesus as Lord. He is the gate.

3. What are the implications of Jesus' discrimination here for us today?

"All religions are paths to God. I will use an analogy; they are like different languages that express the divine." - Pope Francis

We see here that Pope Francis could not be more mistaken. Jesus is the gate, there is no other way. But Jesus' statement means more. It means that the shepherding of God's sheep can only be done by a disciple of Jesus. Among God's people the first and most significant qualifier for leadership is conviction, the good confession that Jesus is Lord. All the talent in the world is irrelevant if this is not in place. What we see is that Jesus is indeed rightly discriminatory. Judgment, careful discrimination is a requirement of love. This will mean some will be excluded. Whilst this can be unpleasant and awkward, it is a requirement of love.

Read **John 10:11-18** and then complete the following bios:

Name (v11): The Good Shepherd

Distinguishing style (v11,15): Lays down his life for the sheep

Sheep/shepherd relationship (v14,16):
Known and followed

Mission (v15-16): Lays down life for sheep, and is gathering others.

STUDY 4

Name (v12): The hired hand

Distinguishing style (v12-13): Runs away from danger

Sheep/shepherd relationship (v12-13): Contractual and fragile

Mission (v13): Do a job

4. Consider what Jesus wants the Pharisees to learn about him from the following now:

a. "I am the good shepherd" v11,14

The deeply relational nature of his leadership. He knows the Father who sends him. He does not simply know the scriptures, he intimately knows God and loves and is loved by God. This mutual love relationship gives shape to his leadership. His leadership of the sheep is based on a devoted love. He does not dominate the sheep (The Pharisees are accused by Jesus of laying heavy burdens on people and not lifting a finger to help), he loves them so much that whilst being in full authority for them, he takes full responsibility for them. He will not abandon, even for his own safety, he lays down his life for them.

b. What drives Jesus to fulfill his role?

Self-sacrificing love. He loves and knows his sheep like he knows his father - which is quite phenomenal.

c. Who are the 'other sheep that are not of this pen' (v16). What does Jesus demonstrate to the Pharisees with this statement?

The other sheep are the gentiles - non-Jews. Israel have traditionally been the sheep of God. The Pharisees have no interest or ability to protect or guard the gentiles, only to separate and be free of their occupation. Jesus however is the king of kings, and the one who fulfills the promise to Abraham. He will be shepherd to Israel and non-Israel.

They will both come together under him and be one flock. He loves deeper and beyond anything the Pharisees can imagine.

5. a. What do the themes of surrender, sacrifice, courage, care, and seeking teach us about the kind of shepherd Jesus esteems?

Imagining the nature of the good shepherd and how he leads - discuss.

b. Where have you seen this, where have you seen it lacking? What could you do?

Discuss where you have seen these sorts of traits. Do not reduce this conversation to evaluation of other leaders but think about where and how in your life you can be a protecting good shepherd in the mode of Jesus. This could be a friend, a parent, a colleague. There are always opportunities.

STUDY 5

JOHN 11:1-37

Outside of the Bible, what is your favourite love song or story? What makes it so appealing?

Read John 11:1-37

1. Jesus' feelings for Lazarus are named three times (v3, 5, 36).

a. How does Jesus feel about Lazarus?

He loves him.

b. Who tells you? What is their perspective?

The sisters (Mary and Martha) v3, The narrator v5, The Jews v36.

The sisters' perspective most likely comes from having observed Jesus' friendship with Lazarus over time. The Narrator gives us the most informed and authoritative statement. It comes from outside of the world of the characters and tells us undisputable reality. The narrator uses slightly different language, we move from the friendly *philon* (friendship - love) of the sisters, to the self-sacrificing and deep *agape* love. The Jews observe Jesus' response to Lazarus, perhaps the risks he takes to be there, and similar to the sisters, by observation, now in real time conclude Jesus loves Lazarus.

c. What do you think this does to shape the story?

There are times when the activity seems strange. Perhaps not as urgent as you might expect, almost a bit distant at times. Yet we are told convincingly to read this story as a story of interaction between deeply devoted and loving parties.

Now stand in the shoes of others:

2. Standing in the shoes of Mary and Martha:

a. What surprises you about how Jesus shows his love?

In the sisters' shoes Jesus may seem slow to respond. Or perhaps an unfortunate disappointment - 'if only you were here'

b. What have you learnt about how Jesus loves?

Perhaps we might contemplate that Jesus' love for this family has not caused him to operate according to their timeline or desire. At times God's love is called into question when God does not act or answer as we would think is correct. The fact that Jesus loves does not cause him to surrender his sovereignty or Lordship. His love for people does not promote them or their desires to becoming his master. From the sisters' perspective this is a painful journey no doubt, they will need to learn to trust that Jesus' love for them has not faltered. In this story that resolution will come quite quickly with the raising of Lazarus, however for many they will have to trust that Jesus does love them even if He does not give them their heart's good desire. It is good in these instances to recall Romans 5:8.

3. Standing in the shoes of the Jews:

a. What surprises you about how Jesus shows his love?

John's gospel it begins with the announcement of the incarnation (1:9-10,14), the message of the God who takes on flesh and dwells among his creation. Here is a picture of Jesus incarnate ministry, as he chooses to thoroughly involve and immerse

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himself. Perhaps the Jews in the area are surprised that Jesus might come at all (v8), after a recent assassination attempt. It would be better for him to stay away. But he puts his safety second.

Next, the Jews will observe Jesus not only physically present, but emotionally present. Note carefully v23-37.

First comes certain hope from Jesus - 'your brother will rise again' v23. He goes on to assert his power over death, and the certain hope for those who believe in him. This is a continuing picture of Jesus who has a plan and complete mastery over what seems a hopeless situation.

And YET:

V32-35 - watch him insert himself into the situation as though he did not have power over it. Watch him draw alongside and feel what they are feeling. He is emotionally incarnate. He does not have to be, he chooses to be. He puts himself where the grieving people are. This is such a real moment, that the onlooking Jews are completely convinced that he is powerless at this moment v37.

He has put his safety aside, he has laid his power aside for a time, that he might be with those who suffer. He is not simply a fixing Saviour, he is a journeying, loving, incarnate Saviour. Hence Hebrews 4:14-16.

b. What have you learnt about how Jesus loves?

His love is incarnate! He has skin in the game. He condescends and involves himself. At times we might think God is far off, does not feel what we feel - but here Jesus shows how God chooses to involve himself in our grief, and in our trials. Jesus shows up physically

and emotionally. We would do well to remind ourselves he will show up physically again, and he is always spiritually with us to the end of the age. He shows up emotionally and feels with us too. His love does not leave his people alone.

4. Led by the narrator:

a. Are there some actions of Jesus that are surprising?

The narrator gives us the indisputable lens to read the story through (v5). It's almost like a literary safety belt, 'no matter what you see about to happen, know that Jesus loves (agape) these people. Because the next actions are surprising. We might think, why is it not lights and sirens on the donkey and off he goes at speed to save the day. He does not. He stays where he is two more days. Why does he not do the trick where simply speaks and heals by remote control? He does not. Why is he cryptic with his disciples with the falling asleep language? It does not seem like the time for riddles. On arrival why does he not go straight into divine first aid? Instead there are conversations, and a demonstration of powerlessness.

b. What do you suppose the narrator is trying to help us see about Jesus' love?

Wonderfully, the narrator helps us to grasp both Jesus' transcendence (beyond and apart) and immanence (intimate and close) in this scene. He is the Lord of life and death, treating death like a nap, and at the same time his love is such that he gets so intimately and immanently involved. The narrator allows us to see with a bird's eye view the greater picture of Jesus' love. He broadens our perspective, beyond that of the crisis, or grief-stricken characters. He helps us to see that love is about understanding who Jesus is, not simply his ability to take away our problems. The narrator gives us

STUDY 5

an appreciation of God's timeline, and God's priorities, which can be so easily lost when we have our own strong needs, wants, or desires. Desires are powerful, they can be good, they can be evil, desire is not love. It's amazing the patience that Jesus has to teach a love lesson in this episode, his love that wrestles with the tension, and is governed by him, not us.

5. What might we remind ourselves when God's love and perhaps his actions are hard to understand?

First and foremost, we remember God is not on trial and we are not his judge. (Job 40:1-5)

We remind ourselves that He is love (1 John 4:8), and we are by nature evil. (Jer 17:9, Rom 3:23, Matt 7:11).

We remind ourselves of Rom 5:8, here is where God demonstrates or puts his love on display.

We remind ourselves of our limited perspective. Similar to the story, the sisters and the Jews see in part, but the narrator allows us to see more.

We remind ourselves of God's empathy, and his desire to hear from us, and to teach us, to fashion us and by His Spirit conform us to the likeness of His son. So we remember to pray, to call out to God. We don't demand he change his ways, but perhaps give us understanding in them.

We remind ourselves that God loving us does not make us His master.

We remind ourselves of the broken time we live in. That when love or true light came into the world the darkness did not recognise it, and preferred darkness. Even as followers of Jesus we recognise that we have not shed all our dark ways, at times we do not recognise the love of God, we do not recognise his kindness, we do not recognise his fatherly discipline, we do not recognise his provision.

LOVE FOR THE ILLAWARRA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LIFEGROUP STUDY - PART B (WEEKS 6-14)

STUDY 6

JOHN 13

1. What has been a highlight for you in John's gospel so far?

2. We have come to a shift in the Gospel of John. The last 12 chapters covered around 3 years; you will note the three Passover occasions. (Chapter 2, 6, 12-13). As a group create a story board of what you recall happening so far.

3. Once you have done this, go back to your work on chapter 1:1-18. Which of the themes you identified do you see in your story board?

5. What might be some of the 21st Century equivalents of Jesus washing his disciples' feet?

6. What range of emotions might you have felt if you had inclined at that Last Supper table with Jesus?

7. Which of the people who Jesus loved as his own (John 13:1), that we read about in John chapters 1-12, do you identify with the most and why?

*The following is adapted with permission from *About Love* by David Mansfield.

Now Read John 13:1-17

4. In just a sentence, what do you think this passage has to say about:*

Love

Forgiveness

Service

Trust



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