

JOHN 5-12

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CHALLENGING JESUS



10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES

CHALLENGING JESUS



Confrontation: it's a part of life that many of us prefer to avoid, but which sometimes rears its ugly head and simply can't be ignored.

But what if we find ourselves confronting the wrong person? What if, unimaginably, God himself stood among us in human form—and instead of bowing down in worship, we dared to challenge and confront him?

This is the stunning reality at the heart of John's Gospel.

How will Jesus handle these confrontations? And what will he reveal about himself in the process?

Join pastor and Bible teacher Matthew Olliffe as he draws us deeply into John's breathtaking portrait of the most important person in history and 'the light of the world'.

An ideal guide for individual Bible study or for use in small groups.

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MATT OLLIFFE

Challenging Jesus

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Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

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Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

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» CONTENTS

How to make the most of these studies	5
STUDY 1: Jesus' third sign—raising the paralysed man [John 5]	9
STUDY 2: Jesus' fourth and fifth signs [John 6:1-21]	17
STUDY 3: Bread of heaven [John 6:22-71]	25
STUDY 4: Living water [John 7:1-52]	35
STUDY 5: Light of the world [John 8:12-30]	43
STUDY 6: The great 'I am' [John 8:31-59]	51
STUDY 7: Jesus' sixth sign—light for the blind [John 9]	59
STUDY 8: The good shepherd [John 10]	67
STUDY 9: Jesus' seventh sign—raising Lazarus [John 11]	77
STUDY 10: Preparing for death [John 12]	85

» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learned.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

We quote from and refer to the English Standard Version, which we recommend. There should not generally be any problems, however, if you are using a different translation. (Nevertheless, it might be useful to have an ESV on hand in case of any confusion.)

» STUDY 1

JESUS' THIRD SIGN —RAISING THE PARALYSED MAN [JOHN 5]

The honeymoon is over

IF JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY WAS TO have a 'honeymoon period', John 1-4 is it. Perhaps this is the reason why John 1-4 is so enjoyable and encouraging! We see there the refreshing and recurring theme of the 'newness' that Jesus brings: he makes new wine, is the new temple, requires the new birth, and introduces new worship.

While we will continue to see these themes emerge in chapters 5 to 12, we will now find them arising in a much more antagonistic environment.

Previously in John's Gospel, we see

Jesus face little or no hostile questioning. While unbelief and failure to receive Jesus (cf. John 1:11) were present, the organized opposition against him had not yet emerged. Jesus has had more or less clear air in which to conduct his itinerant speaking and signs ministry in Jerusalem and across Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. But now, in chapters 5-12, we will see the religious authorities explicitly challenge and confront Jesus. And, in response, Jesus presents challenges of his own, both to his contemporaries and to us.

The Pool of Bethesda

The events of chapter 5 occur in Jerusalem in the area surrounding a pool named Bethesda and in the temple complex. The site mentioned in verses 2-4 was rediscovered in 1888 during the repairs of St Anne's church, not far from the Sheep Gate and Tower of Antonia. In 1964, archaeologists unearthed structures that they take to be the pool at which Jesus raised the man. An upper reservoir would empty water into the lower pool, creating a bubbling effect. The "colonnades" were covered columned areas around the lower pool. The area of the upper reservoir, pool, and surrounds was huge—around the size of two football fields—and the pool was deep, around 13 metres. Nearby were found the symbols of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. The artefacts are likely to have been in the area at the time of these events.

The discoveries of the pool of Bethesda and the colonnades were important moments for biblical archaeology, verifying the accuracy of John's account at a point that had previously drawn scepticism from some historians.

Read John 5:1-16.

1. What question does Jesus ask the paralysed man (v. 6)? How would you characterize this question, and why might Jesus have asked it?
2. How is the manner by which Jesus healed the paralysed man different from what the man expected of the pool and had previously experienced from it (vv. 7-9)?¹
3. Jesus has some strong words for the now-healed man when he finds him again in the temple (v. 14). What might Jesus be referring to (cf. v. 29)?
4. What does the healed man do once he found out who had healed him (vv. 11-13, 15)? Why do you think he does this?

5. When does this incident occur, and why is this significant (vv. 9-10, 16)?

6. Does the once-paralysed man demonstrate faith in Jesus? On what do you base your answer? What (if anything) is the significance of this?

Jesus' sign: raising a man

THE RELATIVELY RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL discoveries mentioned above suggest that the man could have been seeking healing from a pagan god, Asclepius, rather than the God of Israel. Jesus' first question, therefore, which may seem harsh to our ears, might be an implicit rebuke for consulting gods that don't exist: "Do you want to be healed? If so, what are you doing here?" Of course a paralysed man wants to be healed. The implication is that the man should instead have gone to Israel's priests in the temple or sought out Jesus.

Moreover, there were many needy people lying around the pool (v. 3); why

does Jesus focus on this man? Unlike the royal official in John 4, and the paralytic in Mark 2, he hasn't come looking for Jesus. But Jesus takes the initiative and approaches him, as he does the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26). After Jesus heals him, the man doesn't even know who raised him from his mat, and when he finds out, he reports Jesus to the religious leaders, who then persecute Jesus (vv. 13, 15). The man seems ungrateful.

Perhaps the answer lies in the 'sign' itself—Jesus raised up a lying down, paralysed man. The ancients regarded paralysis as a loosening of

9. What are **the Son of Man's** "greater works than these" at which the Jewish leaders will "marvel" (vv. 20-30; cf. v. 14)?

10. How does the sign that Jesus did (vv. 7-9) point to these marvellous and greater works?

The Son of Man

The phrase 'the Son of Man' (v. 27; cf. 1:51; 3:13-14; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:34; 13:31) is an exalted title, the background for which is Daniel 7:13-14, where "one like a son of man" will be exalted and lifted up from the earth with the clouds. From there, he will receive all authority and power to judge, the worship of all people and nations, and an everlasting kingdom. The Son of Man is both God and man, because while Daniel sees a human figure, it is God who rides on the clouds of heaven (Deut 33:26; Isa 19:1), and only God has the right to receive the worship of humanity.

Jesus' authority to raise all people

IN VERSES 19-30, JESUS GIVES a defence for his act of healing on the Sabbath. The Jewish religious leaders, whose headquarters are in Jerusalem, are now prosecuting him. His statement in verse 17 has escalated the controversy. The argument with the religious leaders is no longer about what you can and can't do on the Sabbath; it is now an argument about whether Jesus is equal with God (v. 18; cf. 1:1, 14, 18). The Jewish leaders rightly understood it as such. As Sustainer of the universe, the eternal Son of God watches and copies God his heavenly Father. That is why Jesus can heal the man on the Sabbath: he is God the Son, whose ongoing work is to sustain the world, Sabbath or not. Moreover, Jesus' healing of the man on the Sabbath was perfectly fitting

to the day, because it brought God's rest to the man. The rest of the new heaven and earth involves perfect healing and restoration, and it is to this reality that the Sabbath day points (Rev 21:1-5, 22:2).

The Son only does what he sees the Father doing (John 5:17-19), and the Father shows the Son everything he does (v. 20; cf. v. 30). Father and Son share a complete unity of purpose and action, even though each has a different role: the Father shows and directs, and the Son is shown and does (vv. 19-23).

The 'sign' of raising the paralysed man is also a visual aid to the "greater works" that the Son will do, which also spring from his relationship to the Father. At the end of time, Jesus will raise the dead, judge all people, and appoint them to either salvation or condemnation (cf. 3:36). He is the Son of Man to whom the Ancient of Days gives authority to judge the world (v. 27; cf. Dan 7:13-14).

While the promise of eternal life is wonderful, the resurrection to judgement is much worse than being crippled for 38 years (cf. John 5:14). The healed man's continued sinning is almost certainly his failure to believe in Jesus in spite of the sign he has personally

experienced (cf. John 9).

While we are not explicitly told what is the 'good' that characterizes those who receive "the resurrection of life", nor the evil of those who will be subject to "the resurrection of judgement" (5:29), doing good is probably 'believing' (v. 24; cf. 3:16) and doing evil is not believing (cf. 3:17, 36). Jesus will later re-characterize the works that God requires as "the work" (singular) of believing in him (6:28-29). This turns the notion of 'works' upside down, for the work of God is the non-work of believing. Similarly, Jesus has a very Jesus-centred view of what sin is: the most terrible sin for which he sends the Holy Spirit to convict the world is the appalling abomination of not believing in him (16:9)—an unbelief many people still think is normal and sensible!

Nevertheless, there is also a clear relationship between believing in Jesus and doing good works. People do not come to the light—that is, they avoid and reject Jesus—because their works are evil (cf. 3:19-21, 7:7). Apart from remaining in Jesus, we cannot bear fruit (John 15). So 'doing good' or 'doing evil' is also the fruit of believing or not believing in Jesus.

-
- Jesus gives a wonderful promise in verse 24. Have you personally taken hold of it and “passed from death to life”? What are the consequences of taking Jesus at his word here?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God, the Father and the Son, for their work of sustaining and bringing saving rest to the world, exercised through the Holy Spirit.
- Acknowledge Jesus as the judge of the world about whom the Old Testament bears witness.
- Thank the Son for the wonderful promise he makes for believers and for the enjoyment of those promises that we can now have.
- Pray for family and friends who likewise need to respond appropriately to Jesus and enjoy the confidence of having passed from death to life.

Endnote

1. Verse 4 is not part of the original text. It is not in our earliest manuscripts and appears in only one fifth-century witness.