



IDENTITY

Who is God? Who are we?

LEADER'S GUIDE

IDENTITY Who is God? Who are we?

Leader's Guide

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HOW TO RUN THE COURSE



Identity is a seven-week course that uses John's Gospel to clear up the confusion about who we are and who God is. Each session gradually reveals more about the identity and mission of Jesus and shows why he is the key to life and the one who can answer our big questions.

It is an ideal course for anyone who wants to discover more about the Christian faith, either for the first time or in a deeper way.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO RUN THE COURSE?

- ☞ You need enough copies of John's Gospel for everyone attending. These should be given out free of charge in the first session.
- ☞ You need enough copies of the Guide Book for everyone attending. These should be given out free of charge in the first session. Guide Books can be purchased from **www.10ofthose.com**

It is possible to run Identity without using these booklets. You could simply show the videos and have a discussion about them afterwards. Decide whatever is appropriate for your situation.

- ☞ If you are showing the DVD then you will need the appropriate technology to display the videos. For example, you could show the DVD using a projector and speakers, or on a TV or on a laptop. The Identity DVD can be purchased from **www.10ofthose.com**

If you are planning to present the talks 'live' then download the full transcripts from **www.identitycourse.com**

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE ON YOUR COURSE?

Identity can be run with many or few people. Below are just some of the many possibilities.

- ☞ A large group could sit round multiple tables and listen to the talks spoken live by a local Christian. Designated leaders would lead discussion in table groups.
- ☞ A large group could sit round multiple tables and watch the DVD projected onto a big screen. Designated leaders would lead discussion in table groups.
- ☞ A small group could meet in someone's home at a convenient time and watch the DVD on a TV. Designated leaders would lead the discussion.
- ☞ A Christian could meet up with someone on a one-to-one basis. They could work through the Guide Book and watch the DVD together.

🌀 A Christian could meet up with someone on a one-to-one basis to discuss the DVD. The relevant video should be watched at a different time, either from the DVD or downloaded from **www.identitycourse.com**. Downloaded videos will play on computers and on many smart phones and the like.

HOW MANY SESSIONS WILL YOU RUN?

Identity has seven sessions but it can run in fewer. Simply watch the DVD or read through the talk transcripts and decide which sessions are the most appropriate for the people you are trying to reach in the time you have available.

HOW SHOULD YOU RUN A TYPICAL IDENTITY SESSION?

A typical Identity session is structured as follows.

🔍 **Take a Look** (*about 20 mins*)

👤 **Main Talk** from John's Gospel (*about 23 mins*)

💬 **Have Your Say** (*about 15 mins*)

🎓 **Big Question** (*about 10 mins*)

💬 **Have Your Say** (*about 15 mins*)

You may want to provide dinner before the session begins or simple refreshments as people arrive or nothing at all. There is not a right or wrong way. It all depends on the local culture that you are ministering in.

Always keep a few extra copies of John's Gospel. People do forget to bring them.

Below are a few tips about how to lead the various sections of an Identity session.



TAKE A LOOK

- 🌀 Encourage people to read the appropriate section of John's Gospel *before* they come and have an attempt at answering the questions. If everyone has read the text at home then there is no need to read it during the session.
- 🌀 The questions in the Guide Book are mainly observational questions. This is quite deliberate. We want people to come back with answers that they have seen for themselves in the text.
- 🌀 It is the responsibility of the leader to explore the implications of what has been observed. You can use the supplementary questions supplied in the individual session guides to help you do this.



MAIN TALK

- ☞ Encourage people to look at their John's Gospel as they listen to the talk. Do this whether the talk is live or being watched on DVD. Model this yourself.
- ☞ Suggest that people might want to take notes during the talks. They can scribble anything they want. You might want to ask them to note down what they found helpful, anything they want more explanation about or anything they disagreed with. You should have a few pens ready for people to use.



HAVE YOUR SAY

- ☞ The first question is deliberately vague. It is designed to allow people to talk about anything they found helpful. You may also want to open up the discussion to anything they didn't understand or disagreed with. It's important to allow freedom in the discussion. We genuinely want people to have their say. However, be careful that the discussion is not derailed in an unprofitable direction. It may be more appropriate to pick up on something later with an individual rather than talking it through as a group.
- ☞ It's also important to give direction to the discussion. You will be serving the group if you ask directed questions about a particular topic that has just been spoken about in the talk.



BIG QUESTION

- ☞ This is a shorter talk than the earlier one. However, the same tips are still valid. Encourage people to look at their John's Gospel when appropriate and to scribble any notes.



HAVE YOUR SAY

- ☞ Same tips as before.

As you wrap up the evening do encourage people to **take a look** at the section of John's Gospel that will be discussed at the beginning of the next session. Be enthusiastic about this and try not to call it 'Home Work' or 'Bible Study'. We've deliberately opted for 'Take a Look' as the title for the Bible questions from John's Gospel. We want people to take a look for themselves at the written evidence before their eyes and we want our group to know that **anyone** can do this. This way of engaging with the Bible is not just for the academic types.

MORE GENERAL TIPS TO BEAR IN MIND

As the sessions progress don't be afraid to ask more personal questions. Jesus wants a personal relationship with people. This course is not simply about imparting information. A great way to get more personal is to meet someone at another time for a one-to-one conversation.

The last session has a prayer of commitment. You may feel that someone is ready to become a Christian before that session. Praise God if that's the case! The prayer is not magical but it helpfully summarises how a person can become a committed follower of Jesus.

Don't assume that all who say they are Christians really are. They may be working with the wrong definition of what it means to be a Christian. A typical example of this would be someone who thought of himself as a Christian because he believed in God and Jesus and considered himself a reasonably 'good person.'

A number of short video tips can be viewed at www.identitycourse.com. These include tips on how to lead each individual session.

The God who created us



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You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com

RESOURCES

Make sure you have...

- ☞ Enough copies of John's Gospel for everyone
- ☞ Enough copies of the Guide Book for everyone
- ☞ Pens for anyone who wants to scribble notes

WELCOME TALK

Once everyone has arrived and is settled you begin this session by either showing the welcome video on the DVD or by presenting the material yourself.



HAVE YOUR SAY

The third question may reveal that people don't actually believe in a personal God. Don't be gobsmacked by this. Belief in an impersonal divine force is more common than you think.

Assure people that no question is too outrageous or too simple. We want to create an atmosphere of genuine openness. Don't force people to have a big question if they don't actually have one at that moment. Encourage them to think about it and say that they can ask any questions they want as the course progresses. Assure them that this is not their only moment to ask a question.

Do ask if you can scribble down what people say. This will help you remember people's questions and will show that you are serious about wanting to engage with what they say.

Don't feel that you have to answer everyone's question there and then. This is the time to listen rather than press the download button. Indeed, if someone asks a question that will be covered later in the course then open their Guide Book and show them when it will be answered. This will allow them to park their question for a time and allow them to hear other things that God wants to teach them.



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WHO CREATED US

In order to listen to *what* Jesus says we need to know *why* we should listen to him. This talk shows from John chapter 1 that Jesus is fully and utterly divine, on the same level of divinity as the Father and the Spirit. The divine Son is called the Word in John chapter 1 and we explain that this is because he is the divine spokesman for the divine family.

We introduce people to God as Trinity and use the illustration of divine family to communicate this wonderful truth. We say that our God is **much more like** a divine family than a lonely individual or an impersonal force. There are three eternal members who are distinct but not separate. They are so united in perfect love that together they form one God.

No illustration is perfect but I would encourage you to stick with talking about God as much more like a divine family. What do we ultimately want to communicate about our Creator? Not simply something about how the numbers 3 and 1 can exist together without contradiction. No, we want to talk about the three persons in relationship.

You will find the diagram in the Guide Book a great help when discussing God as Trinity. Notice that there is only one crown, not three. The Father, Son and Spirit are not three separate gods. No, the three divine persons rule together in a relationship of perfect love. The lines within the crown are an attempt to signify the perfect relationship that exists between the three members of the Heavenly Royal Family.



HAVE YOUR SAY

Try to be joyfully Trinitarian as you talk about what we have discovered from the main talk. Focus your discussion on the identity of Jesus. His identity as the eternal Word/Son of God means we should listen to him. He is not simply offering interesting religious ideas into the human conversation. He is speaking the truth from a vantage point of knowledge.



BIG QUESTION: ARE SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY ENEMIES OR FRIENDS?

The aim of this short talk is to show that rightly understood Christianity and science are the best of friends. The cake illustration is easy to understand.



HAVE YOUR SAY

You can stress that the God revealed in the Bible gives a basis for science. However, if we want to know more about our Creator and why we were made then the Bible is the book to study.

Encourage your group to **take a look** for themselves at John 1:35-42 before the next session. There are a few questions to help them understand what they will read. You will discuss this section of John's Gospel at the start of session 2.

The God who wants to rescue us



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You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com



TAKE A LOOK

Please read John 1:35-42

1. What did John the Baptist tell his disciples about Jesus?

(See verses 35-36)

He referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God. At this point don't dwell on what this title means. Draw out the meaning and implications of calling Jesus the Lamb of God after question 2.

2. What happened as a result?

(See verses 37-39)

As a result of what they heard, these two disciples of John started to follow Jesus down the road. After telling Jesus what they wanted, they ended up spending the day with him.

The word *disciple* literally means a *learner*. So these learners of John decided they would go and learn from Jesus. The question is, why? They obviously understood what John meant when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. However, most people attending the Identity course will not understand the significance of referring to Jesus in this way. An explanation has been included to explain why Jesus was called the Lamb of God.

You will notice that the big idea in the explanation is **salvation through substitution**. You may like to ask a couple of supplementary questions at this point.

🌀 What do you think about when you hear the word substitute?

You could then explore how a substitute stands in the place of another. A swap takes place.

🌀 What kind of people do you think need to be rescued from the judgement of God?

This question will allow you to work out if the members of your group think of themselves as 'good people on the road to heaven' or 'rebels in need of rescue'. Lots of people think of themselves as 'respectable sinners'. Not perfect but respectable enough for heaven. The main talk will tackle these misconceptions so no need for you to engage with it fully now.

3. Why do you think Andrew hurried off to find his brother Simon?

(See verses 40-42)

They were so excited that they had found the promised Messiah they had been waiting for. This figure had been predicted in the Jewish Scriptures, what Christians call the Old Testament. Detailed predictions were made about where this Messiah would be born, what he would do, how he would die and even that he would rise physically from the dead. A selection of these predictions are included at the end of the Guide Book. Point people to these pages and suggest they have a browse through them at home.

More explanation is provided about the Messiah after question 3. The claim of the Bible is that Jesus is the Saviour/King. He is the Messiah who died so that all who trust in him will be rescued from the judgement they deserve. Jesus saves through substitution. This session's main talk will develop these ideas.



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WHO WANTS TO RESCUE US

Before we understand the relevance of the death of Jesus we must first understand our great need to be rescued from the judgement of God. This talk seeks to persuade people that we are not good people on the road to heaven but rebels who need rescuing from the judgement of God.

People often conclude that they are good because the standards we use are very low and because, normally, we don't consider how we treat God when we talk about what it means to be good.

The talk stresses that salvation is for *whoever believes*. It is not restricted to those who can perform well enough in God's world.



HAVE YOUR SAY

You may like to expand on the tenant illustration used in the talk. People like to think that they own themselves and so have the right to do whatever they think is wise. However, God owns us because he created us. Therefore, we have essentially changed the locks of our lives and declared ourselves to be in charge. By expanding on this illustration you may be able to help people feel the emotive weight of our rebellion against God and help them to see why God is righteously angry with us.

Without the death of Jesus as a substitute, we would all need to face the judgement of God. Our Creator cares about justice. Only the death of Jesus can save us. However, do stress that benefitting from Jesus' suffering is not automatic. We must become his personal followers.

Do stress that a follower of Jesus has nothing more to fear from God's judgement throne. Jesus has suffered **everything** they deserve.



BIG QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS?

This talk applies what we have already heard to answer the question of other religions. Jesus' answer is clear but controversial.



HAVE YOUR SAY

What would Jesus say to someone who believes there are many paths to God? Instinctively, we often reply that there is only one way to God. This is true if we mean that there is only one way to be saved from God's judgement. However, if you want to surprise your group and give your answer a bit of freshness you may want to answer as follows. All paths will lead us to God. There is nothing we can do to avoid a meeting with the God who created us. The more important question is, what will happen when we meet him? And Jesus says, only his committed followers will have nothing to fear when they meet their Creator. Only Jesus can save us from the judgement we deserve.

In many areas of life it doesn't matter what we choose. It's your preference what music you like or which ice cream is your favourite. 'Each to their own' when it comes to these choices. However, salvation is completely different. We **must** commit to Jesus if we want to be rescued from the coming judgement.

If we believe what we read in John 3:18, then we should believe in Jesus. Jesus' words are not simply for information. They are to effect change in our lives. We should act on them. The question to ask your group is: How convinced are you that what you are hearing is true?

Encourage your group to **take a look** for themselves at John 4:1-26 before the next session. There are a few questions to help them understand what they will read. You will discuss this section of John's Gospel at the start of session 3.

The God we were made for



3

You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com



TAKE A LOOK

Please read John 4:1-26

1. Why was the Samaritan woman surprised that Jesus spoke to her?

(See verses 1-9)

The big reason highlighted in verse 9 is that Jews do not associate with Samaritans. There was much hatred between these two people groups at the time of Jesus. The animosity started many hundreds of years previously when the mighty Assyrian Empire deported most of the Jews who lived in the northern part of Israel (this was called Samaria). The deported Jews were replaced by peoples from other parts of the Assyrian Empire. This led to the pollution of the Jewish religion, a merging together of different beliefs and religious practices. You can read more about this in 2 Kings 17. The Jews who lived in the south of the country called these 'northerners' Samaritans and despised them and their mongrelised religion. They would not associate with them if they could help it. Therefore, the Samaritan woman was shocked that this Jewish stranger was talking to her and, more than that, he was asking for a drink. Given that Jesus didn't have anything to draw water with, he would need to drink from **her** water jar. She couldn't understand why this Jew would ask to be 'contaminated' by drinking from her jar.

Also, she was a woman and he was a man. Later, in verse 27, we read that Jesus' disciples were shocked that he was talking with a woman. It seems that most 1st Century Jewish teachers did not greet women in public, let alone sit down and chat to them!

So what did Jesus want? At the very least he wanted a drink of water. Verse 6 tells us that he was tired from his journey. However, as we read on we discover that he wanted to offer this woman an end to her spiritual thirst.

2. What does Jesus tell the woman in verse 10?

Jesus tells the woman that if she knew what he had to offer then she would have asked him for his life changing gift. However, this woman had **two** problems. First of all, she wasn't aware of the gift that was available and, secondly, she wasn't aware that Jesus was the person who could offer this amazing gift. Jesus teaches her the truth about what he offers and who he is in the rest of the conversation. He focuses on the gift first and then moves on to speak about his true identity.

3. What do we discover about the gift of God in verses 11-14?

It might seem very strange to read how the woman responded to Jesus' statement. In verse 11, she talks about the depth of the well and points out that Jesus has no bucket to draw any water. Why speak about these things after Jesus has just spoken of living water? Living water has two meanings. It could either refer to fresh, running, spring water or it could be a way of referring to satisfying spiritual life. The Samaritan woman seems to think Jesus is talking about spring water, and so asks him how he will get his hands on this refreshing liquid since he doesn't have anything to reach the water at the bottom of this deep well.

Jesus responds by focusing again on the spiritual meaning of living water. He is not offering the woman a magical liquid to quench her physical thirst but a satisfying answer to her spiritual thirst.

What is so good about this living water, the gift of God mentioned in verse 10? Jesus tells us in verses 13 and 14. There is similarity between normal water and Jesus' living water. They both quench thirst. Normal water quenches our physical thirst and Jesus' living water quenches our God-implanted spiritual thirst. However, notice that Jesus also contrasts the effects of physical water and the effects of his living water. Normal water only satisfies us for a little while. The satisfying effects will soon wear off. In a few hours we will be thirsty again. However, Jesus' living water is very different. It will get even more satisfying as time goes by – Jesus promises it will **well up** to eternal life! It will also satisfy us forever – it will well up to **eternal life**!

What exactly is this living water? It's a vivid way of speaking about a personal relationship with the living God. We were created to need him and he has placed within us a thirst for himself that only he can meet.

If it's appropriate for your group then you can dig deeper into this theme by considering the Trinity. In John 7:37-39, we read again of this living water and we are told clearly that it refers to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the person who mediates the relationship every Christian has with the Father and the Son. Jesus' gift to his followers is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us to know Jesus better through the Bible and, as a result, we get to know the Father more and more.

4. What do we learn about the woman in verses 15-18?

The first thing we notice is that even after Jesus' explanation in verses 13-14 she was still thinking that his living water referred to some sort of physical liquid that would quench her physical thirst once and for all. This would prevent her from needing to come to the well to draw any more water. We don't know why she was still thinking like this and what kind of tone she used. Perhaps she was rather wistful for such a thing to exist, although not at all convinced that this stranger had such a substance. 'Oh that would be nice if you had some of that. Then I wouldn't need to keep on coming back to this well day after day.'

What Jesus says next is rather abrupt and would have certainly got her attention. This stranger knew about her messy relationships. She has had five husbands and the bloke she is currently shackled up with hasn't walked her down the aisle! We don't know exactly what happened to her previous husbands, whether death or divorce had severed the relationships. However, given that she was

currently involved in an unmarried sexual relationship, it seems that we are to conclude that here was a woman with a sinful past that God would not have been pleased with.

Perhaps this also explains why she was alone at the well drawing water at this hour of the day.

Normally, the women of the village would have arrived in groups at the well, either in the morning or late afternoon. However, this Samaritan woman was there all alone at the 6th hour (see verse 6). The Jewish day started at 6am so the 6th hour would have been 12 noon. Why was this woman drawing water alone at one of the hottest times of the day? Well, perhaps her sexual past had resulted in social isolation in her village.

And yet here is the great news! This woman's past and current lifestyle was no surprise to Jesus. Jesus knew all this and yet still offered her living water. What a joy! We don't have to pretend with Jesus. He knows everything anyway. And yet he still holds out eternal life to everyone, regardless of who they are or what they have done. In John 3:16, we heard Jesus declare, "...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." In John chapter 4, we see this truth in practice. We see Jesus reaching out to a Samaritan woman with a shady lifestyle. He looks at her in the eye and offers her thirst quenching living water. What a delight! Eternal life is for everyone. All we have to do is receive the gift.

We may wonder why Jesus brings up this woman's relationships at this point in the conversation. **Two** reasons are worth pursuing.

First of all, it shows us that this woman has been looking in human relationships for what only God himself can provide. It is such a common practice. Human relationships are a good gift from God but we are not to expect them to fulfil ultimate desires hardwired into us that only God can meet. This session's main talk will explore this theme in more detail using the language of **God-substitutes**. You may want to explore whether those in your group can relate to this woman's experience. Our impression is that the Samaritan woman has become a **settler** in life. Her expectations haven't been realised. Her deep desires have not been met in countless sexual relationships and she is now settling for whatever she can get. How many are like this today! The problem is that she was looking in the wrong place to meet those deep cravings for significance, security, pleasure and lavish love. Only God can meet those ultimate needs.

Secondly, this enables Jesus to get this woman's attention and so allows him to speak about his true identity. He is no random Jewish stranger at a well. He knows all about her. This leads us nicely onto question 5.

5. What do we discover about the identity of Jesus in verses 19-26?

The big idea is that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. He is the one who can provide this living water as the Jewish Scriptures predicted.

The woman was keen to find out where God should be worshipped. However, Jesus announced that because he had arrived as the promised Messiah, the place was now irrelevant. What matters is that the Father is worshipped in spirit and in truth. We must worship him from the heart (in spirit) and also in the way Jesus tells us (in truth).



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WE WERE MADE FOR

The talk will make the claim that Jesus is not an optional extra for those who like that sort of thing. No, he is the bread of life. He is essential for everyone. One of the implications is that every single one of us has been hardwired to need a relationship with the Trinitarian God who made us. The talk explores some of our hardwired needs and then considers a few popular God-substitutes. It also explains how these God-substitutes affect both us and God.



HAVE YOUR SAY

Here is an opportunity to explore God-substitutes in more detail. You could help people identify what God-substitutes they currently have in their own lives. Please note that these counterfeit gods, or idols as the Bible calls them, are also a problem for Christians.

We're aiming to discover what people look to for their ultimate security, significance, worth, satisfaction and love. People may have more than one God-substitute. They may look to different things and people to meet different needs. Some of the most common ones are: a job, family, a sport, children, and a close sexual relationship. So often God-substitutes are not bad things in themselves. They are so often the good gifts of God used in the wrong way. We're always in trouble when we forget the Giver of the gifts. We are hardwired to need a relationship with our Creator. He desires our deepest passions and praise. It's not that we forget the gifts. No, we are to devote ourselves to the great Giver as a first priority and then enjoy his gifts in the way he designed.

You could ask your group what they think their God-substitutes are. The following questions may help your group identify them.

- 🌀 **What do you do with your spare time?**
- 🌀 **What do you do with your spare money?**
- 🌀 **What do you daydream of?**
- 🌀 **What do you think about when your mind is in neutral?**
- 🌀 **What is your mental screen saver?**
- 🌀 **What do you prioritise in your life?**
- 🌀 **Who or what never hears a 'no' from you?**
- 🌀 **What causes your emotions to go up and down?**

The talk has already explored some of the effects of God-substitutes on us. They cause us to settle for too little and they cause us to ruin the good gifts of God by expecting them to deliver more than they were designed to give. You may want to expand on these effects and also explore any other effects you think God-substitutes have on us. For example, you could discuss how God-substitutes can end up controlling us in unhealthy ways. We can easily become 'slaves' to other things and other people.

Or what about discussing how many of the counterfeit gods we trust in for security let us down and make us anxious? Counterfeit gods often work for a time but never supply what we need over the long term. They are a temporary fix. Encourage your group to share their past experiences of God-substitutes.

Jesus claims he is **the** bread of life. He is essential for everyone. He is not an optional extra for some of us. Every human needs a personal relationship with Jesus. It's not about personal preference.

We must replace God-substitutes with Jesus. If not, then we will simply replace a previous counterfeit god with a different one.

You may also want to talk about how important it is to 'eat the bread of life'. Jesus will do us no good if we simply stare at him. We must commit to him personally.



BIG QUESTION: WHERE CAN I FIND LASTING PLEASURE?

This big question reinforces the truth that God is not a cosmic killjoy. It encourages people to avoid two extremes. First of all, to avoid assuming that their ultimate needs will be met by the next God-substitute they try. Secondly, to avoid settling for too little. Those who say they are quite happy without a personal relationship with Jesus need to be told that they are settling for too little in life. We were made to enjoy **both** God and his gifts.



HAVE YOUR SAY

When we become Christians we are to stop running after God-substitutes as the answer to our ultimate needs. This will involve changes in our behaviour. God-substitutes can no longer consume our spare time and money. They are no longer to control us and set the direction of our lives. You may like to discuss specifics with your group. However, don't communicate this change as bad news! Remember God-substitutes are rubbish in comparison with the true and living God. Becoming a Christian is the way of liberation. It is moving from the beach into the ocean! The change required is change for the better.

Encourage your group to **take a look** for themselves at John 10:1-16 before the next session. There are a few questions to help them understand what they will read. You will discuss this section of John's Gospel at the start of session 4.

The God who wants to comfort us



4

You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com



TAKE A LOOK

Please read John 10:1-16

1. How does the shepherd in verses 1-6 gather and lead his sheep?

The important point to bring out to the group is that the shepherd calls and leads his sheep by his voice. He does not use a sheepdog! He calls out to them and they respond to his words.

If we had been alive at the right time and lived in the right place then we could have heard the audible words of Jesus. When Jesus was alive he gathered and led his people through his words.

What about today? Jesus continues to **gather** and **lead** his sheep through his words. His words are now preserved for us in the Bible. If anyone wants to become a follower of Jesus and learn what it means to live with him as their Saviour/King then they should actively read and listen to what the Bible teaches. It is here where they will hear the voice of the shepherd.

2. Why does Jesus call himself the gate for the sheep?

(See verses 7-10)

In verses 7-10, Jesus calls himself the gate for the sheep. A gate in a sheep pen would provide **protection** and **pasture**. Go through one way and the sheep would be protected within the walls of the pen. Go through the gate in the other direction and the sheep would find pasture. Jesus says he is the gate for the sheep. By this he means that he is the one who offers protection and pasture. First of all, Jesus is the gate that leads to salvation. What a joy to know that there is certainty as regards our eternal destiny. Confusion on these matters is not helpful. However, Jesus is very clear. He is **the** gate for the sheep. Not one of many gates. Rather he is the unique person who can rescue us from the judgement we rebels deserve. He provides protection because he is the one who suffered in the place of rebels. Also, like a gate in a sheep pen, Jesus is the one who provides access to 'pasture'. Jesus is no cosmic killjoy. He has come to offer life and life in all its fullness. Through Jesus we have access to the very life of our Trinitarian God!

3. What do we discover about Jesus in verses 11-15?

In verses 11-15, Jesus refers to himself as **the good shepherd**. Please don't try and confuse the metaphors of the gate and the shepherd. The images are used to illustrate different aspects of who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Notice that Jesus calls himself not simply the shepherd but the **good** shepherd. He genuinely cares for his sheep and will do his utmost to protect them from danger. Any good shepherd would protect his flock from harm. However, Jesus is so concerned for his sheep that he will lay down his life for his sheep. Here is a pointer towards the cross. The eternal Son of God came not simply to reveal truth but to rescue people from eternal danger. He did this supremely by suffering on the cross as a substitute for rebels. You may like to explore the meaning of the death of Jesus once again with your group. Check that they have grasped what happened when Jesus was dying. Discover if they have grasped that Jesus died as a substitute and suffered the penalty that others deserved.

Verses 14 and 15 tell us what kind of relationship Jesus will have with his followers. It is close and intimate, just like the relationship he enjoys with his Father.

4. Why is verse 16 such good news for non-Jews?

Jesus arrived as the promised Jewish Messiah. His first priority was to gather Jews to himself. He was forming a new community of faith around him. However, the offer of Jesus is not restricted to those from Jewish descent. His intention was to gather **a global people** from all parts of the world. Jesus is the centre of the community. Access is granted simply through faith in him. Indeed, we don't have to change our culture to become Christians. Jesus will transform any rebellious behaviour that is out of line with his commands. However, the Christian community has plenty of room for cultural diversity.



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WHO WANTS TO COMFORT US

This talk focuses on what happens after we die. Death is not a popular topic of conversation. It's not on the top three topics of general chitchat, is it? However, the followers of Jesus have nothing to fear. Jesus promises life that will start before the grave, continue after the grave and will ultimately end in bodily resurrection. In summary, without Jesus we exist but don't truly live. When we surrender to Jesus we are connected to our Creator and so begin to experience real life. Death cannot separate us from God and so we continue to live after we die physically. However, the ultimate end for the followers of Jesus is not disembodied relationship with God. No, it is bodily resurrection. Christ's followers will enjoy a relationship with God in a physically transformed body that will never perish or fade. This is not wishful thinking. We have the promise of Jesus and the demonstration of Jesus' power over death as evidence for our beliefs.



HAVE YOUR SAY

People hold all kinds of beliefs about life after death. Let your group talk freely about what they genuinely believe. However, make sure you talk about **the basis** for the beliefs people hold. Often we are very sceptical about what we believe. However, in this area of life after death, people hold all sorts of opinions without any evidence at all! Point people to the assurance and joy of Jesus' promises to anyone who will put their trust in him.

In verse 26, Jesus asks Martha a very personal question. Has she reached the point where she believes what Jesus has said? We don't need to know everything to become a Christian. We should be convinced by Jesus' claim to be the promised Messiah and the eternal Son of God. We should understand that Jesus died as a substitute to save rebels from judgement and that he was raised physically from the dead. If some in your group have reached this point and have considered the cost of surrendering to Jesus then it would be appropriate to encourage them to become Christians. The prayer at the back of the Guide Book is a useful resource for helping someone become a Christian. Ask your group how convinced they are about the identity and mission of Jesus. Ask them if they are persuaded that Jesus is the promised Messiah and the eternal Son of God. Ask them if they are convinced that they are rebels in need of a Saviour and Jesus is that Saviour. Keep the discussion specific rather than vague. You won't have a fruitful conversation if people talk about not quite understanding 'it'. Ask them what they mean by 'it'.



BIG QUESTION: WHY DO WE SUFFER?

Before beginning to answer this question it is vital to remind people of the conclusions that we have already reached because of the identity and mission of Jesus. This talk starts by doing exactly that. We can be assured of God's existence, his care, his love and his power as we look at who Jesus is and what he did. The existence of suffering cannot change these conclusions. However, the existence of suffering does raise many questions. This talk focuses on the suffering caused by human rebellion in God's world. Much of the suffering we experience, whether physical or emotional, is caused by other human rebels. Our challenge as Christians is to trust that God's plans are for the best. We don't have access to the 'Heavenly Computer Screens' and so our daily choice is to trust that God knows what he is doing.



HAVE YOUR SAY

Be aware that many questions about suffering are asked from personal experience. It is wise to ask someone why they are asking a question about suffering. Their answer may reveal something deeply personal.

The Big Question doesn't deal with what many people call natural suffering. This type of suffering would include natural disasters, suffering caused by accidents and many diseases that people experience. Your group may like to explore this type of suffering. However, do realise that Bible-believing Christians disagree about why such suffering occurs. Some argue that all such suffering only commenced after the rebellion of our first ancestors. Others would claim that such things were always part of God's original creation but became more common after the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Some would maintain that only after the Fall were humans affected by natural suffering. Other Christians would argue that natural suffering was always part of the original creation and anything alive on planet earth would have experienced it.

It is often more profitable to look forward to the future removal of all such suffering than it is to look back for a reason why a person may be currently experiencing it. Jesus confirms that this type of suffering will always be a feature of our existence until he returns. And no one is immune from

encountering it. Both Christians and non-Christians experience the pain caused by this type of suffering. We must be careful not to point the finger and pronounce that this earthquake or that tsunami or that cancer is a direct judgement because of a specific form of rebellion against God. However, there is a day coming when all suffering, of whatever type, will stop for the followers of Jesus. It is that day we need to be prepared for.

The question about meeting God in a minute's time is very personal but it is designed to reveal whether your group are ready to meet Jesus. Beware that some may have false assurance. Some may be trusting in their own good works and so may feel confident that they will be welcomed into heaven. This is a delusion. Only those who surrender to Jesus now will meet him as a friend and so be granted an experience of loving intimacy for all eternity.

You could use the **Heavenly Passport Control illustration**. Ask your group to imagine that such a place existed. What do they think will happen when they arrive at the Heavenly Border Agency checkpoint? Some will think they will be asked to show a record of their moral performance and if they have done enough then they will be ushered in. This is nonsense. Others may think they will be given a religious test and if they know enough answers to the questions then they will be granted access to paradise. Again, this is nonsense. No, if such a place existed then we would simply be asked: Are you a personal follower of Jesus? Well, if so, come on in, because Jesus has done everything necessary for you to spend eternity in this place.

Encourage your group to **take a look** for themselves at John 14:15-21 before the next session. There are a few questions to help them understand what they will read. You will discuss this section of John's Gospel at the start of session 5.

The God who loves relationships



5

You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com



TAKE A LOOK

Please read John 14:15-21

1. How can we identify the people who love Jesus?

(See verse 15)

Many non-Christians will identify themselves as Christians. This happens for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's because people assume that trying to be good equates to being a Christian. Sometimes it's because they assume that a particular religious ceremony actually makes someone a Christian: an event like baptism or confirmation. We need to work with the right definition of what it means to be a Christian, otherwise someone may be sincerely convinced they are a Christian when the truth is that they are still desperately in need of the Saviour. A Christian is someone who is a personal follower of Jesus, someone who has surrendered to the loving rule of Jesus the Saviour/King. Therefore, genuine Christians will do what Jesus commands. They will not be perfect and at any moment they will not have surrendered every area of their life to Jesus. However, authentic Christians have a desire to submit every area of life to the loving and joyful rule of the King. His instructions are for our best. We thrive under his leadership.

Sometimes we will meet people who like **some** of the things Jesus says but have no desire to obey all that he says. Instead they like to pick and choose what they find acceptable and liveable. What are we to make of such a person? He or she is not a Christian. Such a person still remains firmly seated on the throne of their life. They are still calling the shots. They simply think Jesus has got it right in certain areas. Or in other words, they like what Jesus teaches at certain points because this is what they would say. The real test of who is in charge of our life is when we encounter something that Jesus taught which we disagree with. At this point a Christian will know that it is right to change their thinking or practice so that it is in line with what Jesus says.

Be careful not to communicate that being a Christian is simply about obeying religious rules, even if they are from the lips of Jesus. Obedience to Jesus is a consequence of relationship with Jesus. Simply trying to keep Jesus' commands doesn't make anyone a Christian. Personal relationship with Jesus is the crucial first step. However, do note that, in verse 15, we read that if someone loves Jesus **they will** obey what he commands. So, if someone claims to love Jesus but doesn't actually do what he says then we have every right to question whether they genuinely have a personal relationship with him.

2. What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in verses 16 and 17?

The explanation in the Guide Book is helpful to read at this point. The word in the original Greek language translated as 'Counsellor' is '*parakletos*'. This literally means someone who is called alongside someone else. Counsellor is an okay translation as long as we think about the work of a legal Counsellor, one who takes his place alongside his client and is their personal helper in all things legal. The Holy Spirit takes his place alongside Christians and helps them to live the Christian life.

The Holy Spirit is one of the members of the divine family. He was sent by the Father to be **another** Counsellor. Not a different kind of Counsellor but another one of the same type. The word **another** suggests that these first followers of Jesus had already experienced the work of a Counsellor, that is, someone who was called alongside them to help them live godly lives. His name was Jesus.

Notice that the Holy Spirit is not referred to as an 'it'. He is not an impersonal power but one of the personal members of the divine family.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. That is, he has a great concern for truth. In practice, this means that he will bring Christians to understand the truth preserved in God's written word, the Bible.

The promise from Jesus was that his early disciples would receive another Counsellor to help them live as Christians. The **world** is a reference to those who rebel against God, those who want to call the shots in their lives. These people cannot accept the Spirit because they can't see him and have no experience of him. However, the early disciples of Jesus already had experience of the Holy Spirit. He was already with them and would be in them (see verse 17). He was already with them in the sense that Jesus was with them and Jesus himself was full of the Spirit. So the first disciples already had experienced some of the Spirit's work in the life of Jesus. But now Jesus promises that at some point in the future the Spirit would dwell **within** his followers. This was not a promise restricted to the first followers of Jesus. The Bible repeats this promise for every Christian. Every follower of Jesus can be assured of the Spirit's internal presence and power to help live the Christian life.

You may want to explore this truth further with your group. Jesus wants to transform us for the better. The Holy Spirit effects this change deep within.

This is such good news for those struggling with all sorts of addictive behaviour. Lasting change is possible because of the power of the Spirit!

3. What does Jesus promise in verses 18-20?

Jesus promised not to leave these early disciples as orphans. He had been their guardian for three or so years but now he is only hours from his crucifixion and death. However, this will not be the end of the story. His disciples will not be without their master forever. Jesus promises that he will come to his first disciples. What did he mean? There are two possibilities. Either he is referring to his resurrection appearances (see John 20) or the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2).

I think it's more likely to be a reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This has most appeal for the following reasons. First, the surrounding verses are full of references to the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit. Second, Jesus says he will not leave them as orphans. The resurrection

appearances were only for a time. The presence of the Spirit is forever. Third, we're told that on that day these first disciples would realise that Jesus was in them. This seems to be a reference to the internal presence of the Spirit. So when Jesus promised in verse 18 that he would come to his first disciples he meant that he would come in the presence of the Holy Spirit. He also knew he would appear physically after the resurrection but this is not what he was referring to here!

How does the Holy Spirit bring the presence of Jesus? It may be that because the Holy Spirit is so like Jesus, Jesus can simply say "I am coming" when referring to the arrival of the Holy Spirit. This says much about the divinity of the Holy Spirit. It also continues the theme of another Counsellor.

In addition to this Jesus may also be referring to the way in which the Holy Spirit will focus attention on the words of Jesus. A person's words make them present to us. These first disciples were promised that the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything Jesus had said to them (see John 14:25-26). The Holy Spirit also enabled them to record these words for future generations. The Spirit now takes Christians to the Bible to hear the words of Jesus and so enables us to have a personal encounter with him.

The promises in verses 15-20 need to be applied first of all to Jesus' original disciples and then read in the light of the rest of the New Testament. They do have relevance for every Christian in every generation. However, we need to remember that we didn't physically walk with Jesus and weren't around on the Day of Pentecost. These first disciples had to wait for that day until the Spirit was poured out within them. However, in our day the Spirit is received when someone surrenders to Jesus. There is no waiting.

4. What can those who love Jesus expect from him?

(See verse 21)

Notice the use of the word '**whoever**' in verse 21. As we've already seen, the original application of the previous few verses was to Jesus' **first** disciples. However, this verse refers to **whoever** obeys his commands. Notice again that Jesus makes the connection between love for him and obedience to his commands. A person who genuinely loves Jesus will demonstrate their love by obeying whatever he says. What is the promise to such a person? Jesus promises that those who love him will receive more illumination about him. This is what 'show myself to him' means here. It cannot be referring to a physical appearance of Jesus to all his followers throughout all the generations. This doesn't happen on a daily basis. Therefore, it is right to conclude that Jesus used 'show' in a different way. This is about learning and understanding more about Jesus throughout a disciple's life. We are to increase in our appreciation of Jesus as we follow him. We never move away from him. We can always learn more of who he is and what he has done. Notice how this illumination is connected with obedience. How true to life! The obedient disciple is the one who experiences the most spiritual insight.



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WHO LOVES RELATIONSHIPS

This talk explains in more detail what type of relationship we should expect with Jesus. It is not formal and distant. It is close and intimate, just like the relationship he enjoys with his Father. We keep this intimate fellowship as we obey whatever our Saviour commands. Jesus stresses the importance of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. Becoming a Christian is always personal but it is never to be individualistic. Obeying Jesus is not the way of dullness. Serving Jesus is the way to experience deep and lasting joy.



HAVE YOUR SAY

We should not fear putting the commands of Jesus into practice because he is the loving Saviour. He laid down his life in a sacrificial act of love. The commands we read were spoken from the lips of the loving Saviour. Also, Jesus promises that obedience to him will bring joy.



BIG QUESTION: DO I NEED TO GO TO CHURCH TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

The talk stresses the privilege of meeting with some of Jesus' followers on a regular basis. It is not so much that we *need* to go to church to be a Christian. It is that we *get* to go to church as a Christian. This talk also challenges people to see meeting with other Christians as a priority.



HAVE YOUR SAY

It is possible to be a regular churchgoer and yet not be a Christian if no personal relationship with Jesus is ever started. It is possible to be associated with God's people and yet not truly belong to Jesus. Remind your group of the baseball illustration. You need to go to first base before second. Some regular churchgoers have missed spiritual first base. They have never surrendered personally to Jesus. This is a vital first step. Explore whether any in your group are like this.

Christians should meet regularly for a number of reasons.

First of all, it is good for our own souls. It is a place to feed on the Word of God.

Secondly, a church meeting is a small taste of our heavenly future.

Thirdly, attending church is one way to practically love our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we love someone we want the best for them and we act in such a way that leads to this result. The best for our spiritual family is for our brothers and sisters to endure and grow as Christians. Now if we love them then we will do things that achieve this result. One of the primary ways God uses to keep us going in the Christian life is the local church. How? First of all, our very meeting together provides spiritual encouragement to keep on living the Christian life. To look around and see others who believe what we believe is a spur not to give up the faith but to keep on persevering. Secondly, meeting

together provides many more opportunities to love one another practically. For example, we can sing together, pray together, hug each other, learn together and teach one another a part of God's word. These loving acts are for our spiritual good. They help us to keep running the spiritual race. So one of the ways we obey Jesus' command to love each other is by meeting our spiritual family on a regular basis.

Christians should make it a priority to attend church. This may require saying no to other good things so that we can do the best thing. You may like to discuss what would hinder any in your group from meeting regularly with other Christians. It may also be appropriate for you to challenge people to change their priorities in response to what Jesus says is most important.

Encourage your group to **take a look** for themselves at John 15:18-21 before the next session. There are a few questions to help them understand what they will read. You will discuss this section of John's Gospel at the start of session 6.

The God who died for us



6

You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com



TAKE A LOOK

Please read John 15:18-21

1. How should Christians expect to be treated by the world?

(See verses 18-19)

The world is a reference to people who rebel against God's rule. Christians have surrendered to the loving rule of Jesus. Therefore, we can expect there to be a clash between Christians and the world. Conflict is inevitable. We mustn't be naïve. The world will not agree with Jesus on what is right and wrong. Therefore, Christians who want to submit to Jesus' teaching will find themselves at odds with what people in our culture think is normal. As a result, Christians will often find themselves despised by those around them.

We must emphasise that although being a Christian is deeply joyful, it is also very costly. However, it is most certainly worth it. Consider our eternal joy in the presence of God or contemplate our protection from the judgement we deserve.

Jesus explains that the cause of the hatred experienced by his disciples is because they are distinctive from the world. Christians have a different value system, different priorities and a different person who is in charge of their lives. We confess Jesus to be our King and so because we are heading in a different direction from the world there are bound to be collisions. However, Christians are not called to leave the world and join secluded communities. We are to live as followers of Jesus in the midst of rebellious people.

2. What does Jesus teach about persecution in verse 20?

Jesus highlights how he was treated by the rebellious world. They persecuted him even though he did nothing wrong. No servant is greater than his master. The point is obvious. If the world persecuted Jesus, they will persecute those who try to live as he did.

Persecution can come in various forms, ranging from physical violence to verbal insults. You may find it helpful to discuss what kind of persecution those in your group have already experienced after becoming Christians or what kind of trouble might come their way if they did. For example, you could explore how a person's family might respond if he or she became a Christian. Sometimes they are very accepting, particularly when they assume this is simply a new phase or a new hobby. However, it's often the case that biological families resent the influence of Christ on a family member and can

frequently be very insulting. They may also put pressure on the new Christian to lighten up and not take things so seriously.

3. What do we discover about the name of Jesus in verse 21?

There is often something about the name of Jesus that causes hardship for Christians. Time and again we see the followers of Jesus persecuted simply because they bear his name.



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WHO DIED FOR US

This talk focuses on the final words of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel before his death. Jesus said, 'It is finished.' Not *he* is finished but *it* is finished. His mission to do everything necessary to prepare rebels for an eternity in the presence of their Creator has been achieved. We explore how Jesus both *suffered* and *lived* in the place of others. He offers both a pardon and a share in his perfection.



HAVE YOUR SAY

We may not always feel the weight of our rebellion against God but if we look to the cross we will see what price had to be paid for our wrongdoing. The suffering of Jesus testifies to the seriousness of our crime against our Creator.

It is great news to hear of the possibility of sharing in the perfect life of Jesus. Otherwise, we would simply have a blank sheet of spiritual paper that we would have to fill with our own obedience. However, Jesus offers us both a pardon and a share in his perfection. This means that anyone who trusts in Jesus can be absolutely confident that they are destined for heaven. This is not arrogance. Why? Because our assurance is not based on our moral performance. Rather it is based on the finished and unchanging work of Jesus. Emphasise that **all** Christians can be completely confident where they will spend eternity. Jesus' work is complete and sufficient. Jesus doesn't say, 'It is partly finished. I have done some of what is required.' No he says, 'It is finished. I have accomplished everything necessary.'

Explore whether those in your group have understood the implications of Jesus' finished work. You may find Christians on your tables who lack assurance. You may find some in your group who have false assurance because they are trusting in their own good deeds. You may find others who long for certainty as regards their eternal destiny. Keep on pointing people to the finished work of Jesus.



BIG QUESTION: DOES GOD CARE ABOUT JUSTICE?

The cross demonstrates both the love of God *and* the justice of God. It is good to desire justice. And in the future there will be a day of accountability. God will scrutinise the lives of all his creatures. And only those who have taken refuge in Jesus will be protected from the judgement they deserve.



HAVE YOUR SAY

If anyone is not persuaded that God cares about justice then encourage them to look back at the cross. The cross is the guarantee that there will be a future day of accountability in God's court. In our better moments we want God to open his court of justice. How many continue to cry out for justice, even when human courts do the best they can! However, if we had our choice we would rather be spectators in the gallery rather than in the dock ourselves. Only Jesus can protect us from the judgement we deserve.

Some in your group may be counting the cost of following Jesus. Encourage them to count the cost of not following Jesus. A good question to ask is: *Where will you be in 500 years time?*

Encourage your group to **take a look** for themselves at John 20:1-23 before the next session. There are a few questions to help them understand what they will read. You will discuss this section of John's Gospel at the start of session 7.

The God who wants to persuade us



7

You can watch a short video tip on how to lead this session at www.identitycourse.com



TAKE A LOOK

Please read John 20:1-23

1. How do we know Mary Magdalene wasn't expecting the resurrection of Jesus when she went to his tomb?

(See verses 1-2)

Notice what Mary says in verse 2, "**They** have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where **they** have put him." I love the honesty of these verses. Jesus had already predicted that after his death he would be resurrected (see John 2:20-22). However, on resurrection morning Mary's first instinct when she didn't see Jesus' body in the tomb was to assume that someone had taken it. She certainly wasn't expecting his resurrection.

2. What did Peter and the other disciple discover when they arrived at the tomb?

(See verses 3-9)

They saw that Jesus' tomb was not completely empty. His body was gone, however, the strips of linen that were around his body and the burial cloth that was around Jesus' head were still there. This would not have been the case if someone had moved or stolen the body. Why would they unwrap Jesus' body first? This certainly made an impact on John [most probably the one referred to as 'the one Jesus loved']. We're told in verse 8 that "he saw and believed." It seems the evidence of the almost empty tomb persuaded him of the resurrection of Jesus.

3. What persuaded Mary Magdalene to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus?

(See verses 10-18)

We've already seen that she was not anticipating the resurrection. She even asked Jesus if he knew where **they** had taken her Lord! For some reason, it was when Jesus said her name that she recognised who she was talking to. What persuaded her that Jesus was alive? Look at verse 18. "Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have **seen** the Lord!'"

No one who was inventing a story at this time in history would write about such an encounter between Mary and Jesus. In the 1st Century Jewish world the testimony of a woman was not regarded with the same weight as a man's. So why record this meeting between Mary and the risen Jesus? Simply because that's what actually happened. There is real honesty all the way through the Gospel accounts.

4. What transformed the mood of the disciples we meet in verses 19-20?

Quite simply, their mood was changed when the risen Lord Jesus stood in their midst. It's recorded that Jesus showed them his hands and his side. They still bore the marks of his crucifixion (see also John 20:25-27). Jesus' resurrection was obviously physical. It had to be for him to behave like this. Jesus was no floating spirit. Also, by showing them his hands and side, he was able to convince the disciples that this man in front of them was the same Jesus who was crucified days before.

5. What do verses 21-23 teach us about the Christian life?

Notice, first of all, that Jesus offers his followers peace. The former enemies of God have the assurance that when they follow Jesus they are at peace with their Creator. War has ceased. Rebellion has ended. The consequences for cosmic treason have been dealt with by Jesus at the cross.

Secondly, the followers of Jesus are being commissioned for a special task. Former enemies are now to be employed in the service of Jesus. What a turnaround! The theme of sending has been a major one in John's Gospel. The Father sent his only Son into the world to accomplish a dramatic rescue mission, and now here is the Son sending his disciples to continue the mission. Jesus has died as the unique Lamb of God, and now forgiveness is available for any who will follow him. However, this news needs to be announced to the world. It needs to be broadcast around the globe. Christians are the heralds of this good news. See John 17:18-20 for more detail about this sending.

This commission to go into the world and speak of Jesus' identity and mission may seem overwhelming to many. However, notice that we are empowered for this task by the Holy Spirit (see verse 22). We also have the promise that the Holy Spirit will be working in the hearts of the people we speak to (see John 15:26-27 and John 16:8-11).

It may seem arrogant that the disciples of Jesus can pronounce when someone is forgiven and when they are not. However, it's not arrogant when we remember the reason why we can do this. Anyone who responds to the message they hear from the disciples of Jesus by becoming a follower of King Jesus can be declared to be forgiven in God's sight. Granting forgiveness is not an arbitrary decision. It is based on where people stand in relation to Jesus. Anyone who has personally surrendered to the Saviour/King is at peace with their Creator. However, anyone who remains distant from Jesus is not forgiven, regardless of what they might feel.

It would be good to explore with your group what they think about sharing the good news of Jesus with their friends, families, neighbours and work colleagues. Think specifically about whom they could speak to. Share your own experiences of explaining the gospel. Emphasise that we have a good news message to tell. However, don't pretend this is always easy to communicate with everyone. Some will love to hear it, others will be antagonistic and many others will simply be apathetic to the life changing news of Jesus.



MAIN TALK: THE GOD WHO WANTS TO PERSUADE US

This talk seeks to persuade people that faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It is a response based on evidence. The primary evidence we are asked to believe is the written accounts of those who saw the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We do not need to see for ourselves in order to make a commitment to Jesus. We can believe what others have seen. This is how juries make decisions in Courts of Law.



HAVE YOUR SAY

The Big Question of this session will present a few reasons why we can believe that John's Gospel is telling the truth. Do remember there is an extra section at the back of the Guide Book that explains why we can be sure that what we are reading today is what was written down all those years ago.



BIG QUESTION: DO I NEED TO SEE IN ORDER TO BELIEVE?

The main talk has already touched on this question and argued that the answer is 'no'. This talk continues this theme by discussing the trustworthiness of books like John's Gospel. There are two distinct questions regarding accuracy. First of all, can we believe that what we are reading is what was written down? Or in other words, was the text transmitted accurately from generation to generation? Secondly, can we believe that what was written down actually happened? This is a question much more concerned with the honesty of the original writers and their ability to write an accurate account of the facts.



HAVE YOUR SAY

Every one of us needs an explanation for the empty tomb of Jesus **AND** the transformation of these first disciples. You could explore with your group what they think happened. The resurrection of Jesus is the most plausible explanation.

People don't need to know everything before they become Christians. There may be some in your group who have reached a point when they should surrender to Jesus. If they are convinced that he is the promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God, and that he died in the place of rebels to suffer the judgement they deserved, and was raised from the dead, then there is no real reason why they shouldn't become Christians.

You may find it helpful to speak about marriage vows as an illustration of commitment to Jesus. When two people get married they don't know everything about the other person but they do know enough to say 'this person is for me'.

It may be appropriate for some in your group to say the prayer of commitment at the back of the Guide Book. They could say it as the DVD response is played or perhaps you could lead this part of the session yourself. However it may be more appropriate to meet up with individuals at another time, or perhaps you could encourage them to pray it later when they get home. We want people to make a personal response to Jesus. This prayer is simply one way of helping people surrender personally to the Saviour/King.

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