

PORTRAITS OF GOD'S LOVE

A Leaders Guide for this study of John's Gospel

Outline and background helps for the leader:

A 12 Week Bible Study in the Gospel of John

Use the Study Guide as a discussion stimulator. The Study Guide will also help you to keep on track so you are able to complete your designated questions. Encourage your women to study and answer the questions before coming to your group study. This will enrich and deepen your study time.

Lesson #1

John's Background & Introduction to John's Gospel

Jesus, the Son of God became the Son of man in order to demonstrate the depth of the Father's love so that we could become the children of God and in turn represent God in our world.

Welcome to a new study about the incredible love of Almighty God. Right from the beginning of time God and His love is about relationships. It begins with the relationship of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, when God said, "Let us, make man in our image." (Genesis 1:26) John the beloved disciple and friend displays this relational love that Jesus demonstrates in the Gospel of John.

John 1:1-18, John 3:16 and 1 John 3:1

Begin by discussing God's eternal plan to reveal His unconditional love for mankind in order to have an unbroken relationship with His created beings such as He had before sin entered the world.

In question # 1 of the study guide it will be interesting to see how many different answers you receive as you allow women to imagine the discussion and the preparation for Christ to come down to earth.

#2 Matthew depicts Jesus as the King of the Jews, Mark as the Son of man and Luke as the Great Physician where John shows Jesus as the Son of God or as God incarnate – God in human flesh.

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These extra notes are written specifically for those who lead in this 12 week study in John's Gospel. It is written to correspond with the outline and the study guide notes to the study available at www.womeninfocus.com.

For John's background I encourage you to see what the women come up with in their own study and then fill in a few details which you will find in your introduction to John in your study Bible.

The Purpose: To Show us the full extent of God's Love

Lesson #2

The Portrait of God's Presence at a Wedding

John 2:1-12 "The Show Begins!"

In preparation for this study you would do well to do a little research on the traditional Jewish wedding festivities. Allow for freedom for the women to report on how they were able to "walk into" the wedding celebration as a photographer. It will be interesting to find out where the different women found their most captivating scenes. Was it on Mary's expression? Was it on the expression of those who tasted the water turned to wine? Discussion will flow freely as you follow the questions of the study guide.

Lesson # 3

The Portrait of God's Purpose for Sending Jesus

John 3:1-21 "The Key to the Kingdom"

Following your introduction I suggest asking the women how they responded to the question at the end of last week's study guide. Have a few women share what they wrote as they completed the possible sentence of Jesus' statement, "My specific reason for coming is to ___" This is a good time to hear some personal testimonies from the women. In question #2 of this lesson we go to the Old Testament and see how the healing or redemption from the sin of rebellion was accomplished by looking at the bronze snake. It was the look of faith that took away the curse of death. On the cross Jesus became sin for us, He bore our sin and then became the sacrificial Lamb to redeem us back to Himself. We also must look to Jesus by faith and know that it was on the cross the full extent of God's love was demonstrated so we could once more have a personal relationship with a Holy God.

Lesson #4

The Portrait of God's Unconditional Love and Compassion (Women Included)

John 4:1-26 "To Know Me is to Love Me"

As we enter this lesson I chose to pick up the idea of being photographers who intercept the woman from Sychar as she heads towards the well with her empty water pots. What questions would you ask of her and what portraits might you snap? This encounter should lead comfortably into question #1 where we move into looking into the need Jesus had for a physical drink and the need this woman has to satisfy a deep inner thirst. Jesus looked at her and he saw her worth at her longing to have her inner emptiness replaced with peace, joy and forgiveness of sins. Jesus was thirsty but His greatest thirst was to connect with her and meet her deepest need.

The Samaritans were a hated mixed race. Traveling Jews would avoid going through Samaria by crossing the Jordan River and traveling up down on the East side. Jesus, on the other hand, was compelled to go through Samaria. (For further understanding of the animosity see the notes for 4:4 in the New Living Translation study Bible) See also 2Kings 17:24 and Genesis 33:18,19.

The woman saw the worship ritual of the past & present as a way of connecting with the living God. (She believed in God and was waiting for the Messiah) Jesus, on the other hand, was her only way to connect with God. She seemed to have one excuse or reason after another but Jesus told her just enough to bring her to the point where she began asking questions. He affirmed her for telling the truth and brought her to the point of acknowledging His uniqueness so she would be able to accept Him as the Messiah and her Redeemer.

It is helpful for women to realize that we reach out to them to connect them with the love of God. We reach out to help them meet their need in the specific circumstances they find themselves. Sometimes as we reach out and ask our neighbors to help us meet a need the door opens so we can in turn help them meet their needs.

Lesson #5

The Portrait of God's Power over Physical Problems

John 5: 1-30 "God Pictures Total Wholeness"

The introduction to this lesson will be determined by how women have prepared and considered the bigger picture of God's love for those who are sick as well as for those who have not yet found wholeness in Jesus?

(Encourage women to do the preparation and write in their notebooks ideas and questions they have as they consider the assignment for the coming study at the end of each worksheet).

The second sign, (John 4:36-54) was the healing of the nobleman's son and with this sign John made the emphasis that the power to heal the physical body could work from a distance but Jesus expected people to exercise their faith.

I would encourage you as a leader to allow the women to respond with what they have discovered before you add thoughts and truth you have discovered in your own personal study.

As you discuss the healing of this man in John 5 I believe Jesus was more concerned about his heart attitude than his physical healing. Both needed His touch. Jesus also knew that if he healed this man he would have the attention of the Jewish leaders. So in this healing Jesus targeted not only this man but the Jewish leaders. He wanted to show that His touch could change lives, both physical and spiritual, and that He and His Father were in this healing-restoring business together. If we can pray to see the sick through the compassionate eyes of the Father I believe we will begin to see that the need to be cleansed from sin and spiritually healed may be even more important than physical healing.

Lesson # 6

The Portrait of God as the Bread of Life

John 6:1-40. "Feed me till I Want no More"

At the time we first did this study Haiti had just experienced it's massive earth quake. The TV news was constantly showing pictures of people begging for food. If you can bring an up to date example of human hunger and discuss how it must feel not to have enough food to eat everyone will soon be involved. You might even have someone open with a prayer of thanks for our daily food.

When Jesus fed the 5000 He knew that the food shortage was due to people being caught up with seeing miracles. Some had brought food and some just attached themselves to the movement of the crowd not even having thought to bring food. If you were a part of this ever growing crowd would you have shared your food?

This is a great scripture to encourage personal involvement and use of gift of imagination. Eg: What lesson might you have learned from the interaction Jesus had with his disciples? How might you have been involved?

After reading 6:22-40 hear the answers from questions 3 & 4. Most of the time people are very caught up with the peripheral details of the situation at hand. "How did you get here?, Will he multiply the loaves and fish again?, I wonder what miracle he'll do today?" The woman at the well (John 4:15) wanted the living water so she wouldn't need to come every day. The people wanted Jesus to provide bread for them on a regular basis. This reminds me of people who say, "Sure, I believe in Jesus. I prayed the prayer when I was a child but what does that have to do with today and finding fulfillment in my life.

Encourage women to share at what point they were able to understand more fully when God or Jesus became more than a religious figure who is far away and hard to understand or know in a personal way.

Lesson #7

The Portrait of Jesus as the Good Shepherd

John 10: 1-21 “Secure in Him”

As I have suggested in the introduction for this lesson the study guide suggests we give some background and read John 9:1-7. As we move into the parable of Jesus as the Good Shepherd lets imagine Jesus sitting on the Judean hillside not too far from a group of shepherds who are watching their sheep. They may even come closer and hear what is being taught as they glance from time to time to their grazing sheep. His disciples and all who listen find themselves being compared to sheep while Jesus is this amazing shepherd. In John 10:7 Jesus says He is the gate for the sheep and in chapter 14:6 He claims to be the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is the only way to abundant, safe, life in fact He is the only way to a knowledge of God. He is demonstrating that the only way to becoming a child of God and getting to know God as Father is by knowing and accepting Him.

Leave room to hear how the women respond to the question: What is abundant life or life to the full?

Be careful not to get bogged down on question #5. There are many “kidnappers of truth” who have just enough good news to be dangerous. They claim to know the gospel but do not have the whole picture before they add to the truth and draw others away from a fuller understanding of what it means to truly know the relational, Almighty God. Jesus, as revealed in the Scriptures is the only way we can fully know God because He is God and came to show us how much we are loved. Once we truly know Him we will recognize His voice.

Lesson #8

The Portrait of God’s Power over Life & Death

John 11:1-44 “Unwrap us and set us Free”

Each one of us have at some point in our lives stood beside those who have lost a loved one or regretted the fact that we were unable to be with family or friends during their deep time of loss. It leaves feeling we have let them down. It seems this is what Mary and Martha felt when Jesus did not come in time to heal their brother Lazarus before he died. Now he has already been in the grave for 4 days. Jesus, however has a major lesson to teach his friends and disciples before He goes to the cross.

Let’s get a little background to this Bethany story. Bethany was only about two miles east of Jerusalem. This was the place Jesus went to enjoy a break from His busy schedule; a place where he could be totally relaxed and fully accepted. It was here that Martha cooked and served where Mary clung to His every word and he and Lazarus talked man to man. Jesus had been in Jerusalem for the Jewish festival but when his words, “I and the Father are One” irritated the Jewish leaders they tried to arrest Him so they left. He and His disciples headed up to a place ‘beyond the Jordan’.

When word came that Lazarus was very ill and the disciples couldn’t understand why they didn’t go to him immediately Jesus sought to impress upon them the need to discern what is the most important task of the moment. His disciples were also concerned for the safety of Jesus if He did go back.

In working through the study guide seek to see how differently Jesus looks at the situation than did Mary and Martha. Martha was concerned about the bad odds. Jesus was concerned about the amazing truth He was about to reveal; that He had power over death and that He Himself was the resurrection and the life.

We get all hung up on how messy it might be if we really allow Jesus to ‘unwrap us and set us free’.

Lesson #9

The Portrait of Extravagant Acceptance

John 12:1-10 “Much Forgiveness=Much Love”

To introduce this lesson I used the example of Olympic skater Joannie Rochette skating for her mother who had just passed away after her sudden heart attack. This was very fresh in our minds when we came to lesson 9 of this study. You may wish to use an illustration that is applicable to your present time and place. As you pray in your preparation the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind which illustration to use or how to best move into this study.

After the amazing resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus and His disciples removed themselves from the scene where tension was building. They Moved upward to a small desert village called Ephraim. We do not know just what he did or who he visited. This was closer to Nazareth, Galilee, and the area where He began His ministry. It seems to be an area where He felt safe so He could prepare Himself and His disciples for His upcoming ordeal of the cross. He may well have had some major teachings He wanted to accomplish before He allowed Himself to be taken captive.

In today's lesson they have returned to Bethany. It is six days before the Passover Celebration and Jesus is attending a dinner party where He is the honored guest. Imagine yourself at the table as an invited guest. We want to look closely at the needs of those attending this dinner party and how these needs are being met. As the questions in the study guide are discussed and answers shared be sensitive of where your participants are coming from. It may well be that unmet needs are expressed and need to be sensitively addressed.

In small prayer groups encourage the women to share their experience of God's unconditional love for them. Pray specifically for those who feel God did not meet their needs but try not to get bogged down with the negative. It may well be that someone is finding they are in the midst of a deep need and God wants to help meet that need by the women around her. Referral for further personal prayer may be needed.

Lesson #10

The Portrait of Servant Love

John 13:1-20 “Serve one another in love.”

The introduction here is self explanatory. Once again share your story or allow one of your women to share as you move into this story of our Lord's amazing servant love demonstrated in a very practical way.

You may wish to read Luke 22:7-23 to show how Jesus had instructed His disciples to prepare for their Passover Supper. Why might this have been a difficult task for the disciples? Who would be the host? Who would serve?

Over the past three years of walking with His disciples Jesus had been teaching and preparing them to carry on a ministry of love and by reaching out in love others would be drawn to Jesus. Now He was about to demonstrate this in a very practical way. I believe He was saying to them, “Take the time in your every day routines to make servant love an intricate part of your life. Remember and demonstrate to others what I have taught you and shown you during our time together.”

As a response to #4 it is helpful to understand that in the Eastern culture it is the servant, not the teacher who would wash the feet of the guests. Peter had not stepped up at the door to act as host or servant but in his aggressive way he was not about to allow this to go any further. It was here that Jesus impressed upon Peter's heart and mind that he had been 'cleansed' by the forgiveness of Jesus so he was only in need of keeping himself free of the daily dust of living in an unclean world.

I believe the disciples didn't fully understand what Jesus was doing but it opened the door for them to realize that they would need to demonstrate the love of Jesus as they became messengers of the Good News after Jesus was no longer with them.

Lesson #11

The Portrait of God in the Vineyard

John 15:1-16 “The Triune God at Work”

The background in helping me have a fuller understanding of the Trinity was found by reading “Experiencing the Trinity” by Darrel Johnson and “The Shack” by Wm. Paul Young. Whatever your experience is in your experience with our relational God I would encourage you to see our Almighty God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is totally “other” than we are and yet all three were involved in creation, as well as in the incarnation and in redemption. The Father invites us into this wonderful relationship He has with the Son and with the Holy Spirit. It’s as if the Father and Son are encouraging the Holy Spirit as He does His work in our lives and the Spirit is waiting in anticipation as we pray to the Father or to Jesus. Ask the Lord God to give you a fuller understanding of the Trinitarian Love as you prepare for this lesson.

In the introduction you may wish to ask the women whether the Spirit of God spoke to them in some specific way when they read John 15-17 in preparation for today’s lesson.

The teaching of these truths may well have taken place as they were walking slowly through the olive groves on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. I believe the main truth Jesus was trying to impress on the minds of his friends before He went to the cross was the importance of remaining in and close to Him. This was important for two reasons:
1- to know what is expected of them as they represent Him and
2 –to be able to carry out those expectations.
Being fruitful is being able to come alongside God the Father in the work He is doing so that our prayers and concerns are aligned with His desires. Bearing fruit is not just bringing others to a knowledge of Jesus and His love for them but it is allowing Jesus to dwell in me so that those around me will see His love and be attracted to Him. As we allow the Holy Spirit in us to develop our love, joy, peace and gentleness others will be attracted to Jesus.

Lesson #12

The Portrait of God on His Knees

John 17:1-26 – “Your Love for Me will be in Them”

This prayer of Jesus which I call the true “Lord’s Prayer” is also called “The High Priestly Prayer”. Here Jesus truly intercedes for Himself, for His disciples and for those who would yet believe in the future and that includes you and me.

I believe the deepest longing in the heart of Jesus as He prays is the oneness that He experienced with the Father and the Spirit before He entered our world. He longs for the restoration of this oneness, this glory, and longs to bring His friends and future believers into this unique oneness.

In answering question #3 research the meaning of the word “Jesus” for a fuller understanding of being protected by His name.

See: Matt. 1:21 and 23.

When we realize that “Jesus” is the Savior and “Immanuel” we see how important it is to remain in Him for protection. “Immanuel” means, “God with us”!

In His prayer Jesus is asking the Father to keep His disciples safe from the evil one. Our security is found in our remaining close and as we remain close we will be safe from the evil one. We will be filled with joy and that will be evident to others. We will also find our strength in the truth of the Word. We are made holy by the truth encourages us not to neglect God’s Word in our daily walk.

As you bring this study to a close I would encourage you to take time to celebrate together by having a time of communion.

This study is adaptable for a fall or winter study. It is especially suitable for a winter study followed by a special Good Friday lunch where the death and resurrection of Jesus are celebrated. A similar celebration could happen at Christmas following a fall study.

May God bless you abundantly as you study His word together.

Your Ambassador for Him,

Marleen Bahr

