

Meeting God In John

A COMPANION FOR LENT, HOLY WEEK,
EASTER AND BEYOND

DAVID FORD

spck

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

Session 1 - The Big Picture: Meaning, love, Jesus

Suggested by Revd Canon Amiel Osmaston

“The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth ... No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (John 1:14–18). As you think of Jesus (in the Bible and in your experience), what has Jesus shown you about God?

In the Gospels, is there any particular person, situation or story which speaks to you most strongly about responding to Jesus, trusting him and following him? Why is it meaningful for you?

David Ford writes in his introduction to this book, “John’s Gospel is about meeting and trusting God through meeting and trusting Jesus, and then maturing into that core relationship of being loved and learning to love, open to the superabundance of life that he gives.” Can you remember any occasion or experience when Jesus has seemed particularly “real and alive” to you?

The Christian worldview and understanding of true reality, of what life is ultimately all about, is radically different from many aspects of our multi-faith and multi-secular Western culture. Can you think of some of the main ways in which they conflict? How should we respond as Christians?

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Session 2 - Identity: 'Who are you?'

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Looking at the story of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well, what seems to you the most significant way in which it reveals who Jesus is – his identity and character? Also, as we see Jesus speak to and relate to the woman, what does it show us about ourselves as we engage with Jesus?

The Samaritan woman was 'transformed' by her meeting with Jesus. Can you think of a person you know who has been transformed by meeting and following Jesus? What difference has it made in them?

"To all who received him, who believed [or trusted, or had faith] in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). David Ford writes, "To be 'born ... of God' is to receive our life from God. This is to be the heart of who we are, more important than family, gender, race, culture or any other marker of identity." Do you agree? Is this really possible for us?

John's Gospel records Jesus saying, "I am the bread of life" (6:48), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). Which of these 'I am' statements or images speaks to you most vividly about the identity of Jesus? Why?

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Questions for Discussion or Reflection Session 3 - Desire: 'What are you looking for?'

Suggested by Revd Canon Amiel Osmaston

At the start of chapter 3, we read, "A huge amount of our personal lives and our culture is about desire. Life is full of choices, decisions, hopes, fears, things we want and things we don't want ..." How does our society and consumer culture shape and pressurise us to desire? What should we do about it?

David Ford writes, "The purpose of the whole Gospel and each of its chapters is to draw us deeper and deeper into this drama of desire, inspiring us to devote ourselves more and more to desires that are in tune with the desires of Jesus." What are we most deeply desiring and looking for, as individuals and/or as a church? Is it in tune with the desires of Jesus?

In the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, David contrasts the crowd's desire for power, food and signs with the desire for Jesus and the life he gives. Are we truly 'looking for Jesus', desiring to come closer to him, hungry to receive from him in our everyday lives? What has most helped you in doing this?

David writes, "Repairing inadequate or harmful patterns [of desire] ... is one of the great challenges in any family – or society, or church ... The education and re-education of our desires continues through life ... The forty days of Lent is a time when Christians are encouraged especially to focus on our desire for

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Questions for Discussion or Reflection Session 4 - Home: 'Where are you staying?'

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Where are your roots? Where do you belong? Where feels like 'home' for you? How do you think this has shaped you?

Reflecting on John 14, David Ford concludes, "We have an astonishing, mind-blowing reality: ourselves as utterly and for ever at home, beloved and loving, with the Holy Spirit, the Father and Jesus." Do you feel equally 'at home' with all three members of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit, the Father and Jesus? Does this affect how you pray and how you envisage God's presence with you?

Jesus says, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you" (John 15:7) and, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love" (15:9). How can we / do we 'abide in Jesus'? What has most helped you to do this? How has your church helped you to do this?

Is there anything in this chapter which has helped (or could help) you and others to feel more confident and peaceful in the face of death?

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Questions for Discussion or Reflection Session 5 - Glory: Meeting God in John

Suggested by Revd Canon Amiel Osmaston

How can we even begin to imagine God's glory? How can we respond to the eternal, uncreated, awesome life of God in its infinite intensity and extensity of glory and love? Think of the Gloria in the Eucharist, or some of the Psalms, or great music, or the glory of creation, or the face of Jesus in icons of the transfiguration, or great poetry, or whatever or whoever inspires your wonder and admiration. What resonates for you? What has helped you to glimpse God's glory?

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:22). In what ways have you seen something of the glory that Jesus has passed on to the community of his followers? Do you have any examples or experiences? How is the glory related to our unity?

Jesus performed 'signs' and said to his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (20:21). David asks, "What signs of abundant life for all, within and beyond the Christian community, might his followers in the twenty-first century be sent to do?" Can you think of any examples or suggestions?

Towards the end of chapter 5, David draws out some of the 'resonances' between John 17 and the Lord's Prayer. Which of these resonances or connections do you think might help you to pray the Lord's Prayer with even more depth and insight?