

# Discover Life: The Gospel of John

## Sample Lesson



John 4



This sample lesson is from the Level 3 course **Discover Life: The Gospel of John**.

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# Introduction

Our Open Learning courses are designed to help you learn by means of:



## Home Study

**Each course** is made up of **five Blocks** and each Block has **eight lessons**. If you have about  $\frac{3}{4}$  hr to spare (very roughly), you can complete one lesson. These lessons require you to read and interact with the course material as well as with your Bible.

Each lesson is **programmed** to help you check your progress as you work through. To get the maximum benefit it is important that you use the course in the way it was intended:

1. Read section 1 (often referred to by the technical term 'frame' 1).
2. Make the response required, if there is one.
3. Check that your answer corresponds with the feedback given in the 'feedback' section at the end. (Wherever feedback is given, it is marked with a raven).
4. Proceed to section 2.



Note that the **course** is programmed—**you** are **not** being programmed! The aim of programming is that:

1. you can check frequently that you have understood the material presented;
2. you are stimulated to active and critical thinking;
3. you reinforce what you learn and are better able to remember it.

Sometimes, discussion frames are given. These are clearly indicated by a heading 'For Discussion' and box. Here you should answer the question in your own words and come to the group meeting prepared to discuss the question as indicated.

At the end of each lesson, we encourage you to spend some time in reflection on how what you have learnt applies to you in the situation where God has placed you.

## **Group Meeting**

Regular group meetings take place (normally fortnightly) where you will have the opportunity to discuss points of interest that have arisen and think through with others how your learning may be applied. At the end of each block of home study, you will also normally be given a five-minute quiz.

The group meetings give the opportunity for you to clarify ideas and to share your own thoughts and to listen to the ideas of others. The process of learning from the Bible in a group is an essential part of the programme. It is here that you are able to think through areas of application and to pray and support each other in your studies.

## **Practical Application**

Built into our courses are questions that encourage you to apply the message of the Bible to daily life. You are also encouraged to think through how your studies relate to your own discipleship and the mission and ministry of the local church.

## Block 2 Lesson 6

### The Bread of Life and the 'I am' Sayings




<b>Preparing for this lesson:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take a moment to pray that God will help you as you consider the claims of Jesus in the Gospel of John.</li><li>• Remember to keep a notebook handy to note down any questions or issues for discussion.</li></ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>At the end of this lesson you will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. give your own answer to the question, 'What is the meaning of 'I am the bread of life', and how is it related to the Lord's Supper?';</li><li>2. list the 'I am' passages and;</li><li>3. state the main point of each in your own words.</li></ol>

### a. The Bread of Life and the Lord's Supper

1. After summarising the whole of Chapters 5-7 in our last lesson, perhaps we can go back now and have a more detailed look at **chapter 6**. This is a good example of a miracle or sign followed by a discourse or sermon by Jesus which explains the significance of what has happened and applies the lessons to his audience. In the case of chapter 6, what is the miracle and what is the main topic of the sermon?


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2. As a way of studying this chapter perhaps we could ask the simple question: What is the meaning of 'the bread of life' as used in this passage? Here are some suggestions that have been made. Check them against **6:25-58** and then simply tick the ones that you think are possible.



- a. Jesus was in fact talking about ordinary bread which had saved the people from starving.
- b. The bread of life is Jesus himself and that believing in Jesus (believing his claim that he has been sent by God) is like having a 'spiritual' meal.
- c. The bread of life represents Jesus' teaching.
- d. The bread of life is just another way of saying 'eternal life'.
- e. Jesus is actually talking all along about the effects of the communion service as celebrated in the early Church.
- f. The bread of life is Jesus' flesh and he is talking about the way that his body will be treated at the crucifixion.
- g. Jesus is saying that it is impossible for people to have eternal life here and now, as impossible as it would be for them (all) to eat his flesh. 

**3.** Of course many of these overlap. Besides, it is clear that John's Gospel often takes 'literal' situations (point a. above) to discuss more significant matters. The bread in John 6 is truly a sign because it has significance far beyond the ordinary bread. In some ways we can narrow the whole discussion down to two main areas.


- a. The bread of life refers to God's revelation in and through Jesus, but perhaps especially to his teaching (see e.g. v. 45).
- b. John wrote this passage in the light of the communion service when Christians 'eat the flesh of the Son of Man' (v. 53) at the communion table.

What do you think about this?

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**4.** It seems to me that there must be some allusion to the Lord's Supper, for it is difficult to imagine a member of the early Church reading this and not thinking of this. But there are at least two ways of understanding this:

- a. 'Eating my flesh' *means* eating the bread at the Lord's Supper.
- b. The Lord's Supper points to a spiritual reality to which Jesus refers here (e.g. partaking of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice for us; compare the sacrifices of the Law that were eaten by the worshippers, e.g. Dt 27:7).



### For Discussion

What does Jesus mean by saying 'I am the bread of life'?

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What is your opinion about how this is related to the Lord's Supper?

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## b. The 'I am' sayings

5. One of the most famous aspects of John's gospel is the way that it records statements of Jesus about himself, in which Jesus associates himself with various images. The first of these 'I am' statements with an image appears in this chapter. There are seven such statements (though some are repeated) and there are churches where every year they hear a sermon on each of these statements consecutively, the series lasting a week. Rather than my just telling you what they are I have listed the references and am leaving you to fill in the rest.

6:35 (cf. vv. 41,48) \_\_\_\_\_

8:12 (cf. 9:5) \_\_\_\_\_

10:7 (cf. v. 9) \_\_\_\_\_

10:11 (cf. v. 15) \_\_\_\_\_

11:25 \_\_\_\_\_

14:6 \_\_\_\_\_

15:1 (cf. v. 5) \_\_\_\_\_



6. When you consider how long it took us to decide what was meant by 'I am the bread of life' you will probably agree that there is plenty of scope for thought here. Also, there are no doubt many different ways of approaching these famous sayings. I want to suggest just two. Here is the first one.

If you look at your answers to the frame above you will see that there is one word which occurs more frequently than any other, namely:

\_\_\_\_\_.



7. Scholars have suggested that all of the pictures that Jesus uses when he says 'I am this or that' are pictures which illustrate the way that he brings

life. Suppose for a moment that you had been asked to preach a sermon on John 10:10, 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'. How many of these great sayings of Jesus could you use in your sermon to illustrate the way Jesus brings life?



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8. How would you relate each of the sayings to the concept of *life*?

Bread \_\_\_\_\_

Light \_\_\_\_\_

Door of sheepfold \_\_\_\_\_

Good shepherd \_\_\_\_\_

Resurrection \_\_\_\_\_

Way, truth, life \_\_\_\_\_

True vine \_\_\_\_\_



9. Another way to look at these sayings is to examine them in their contexts and to work out what was the negative situation, so to speak, which produced these positive statements. Let me do a couple of examples and then leave you to do the rest.

Bread of life contrasts with manna: gave life for a while and then they died (6:49f.)

Light of the world contrasts with John the Baptist, who was a temporary 'burning and shining lamp' (5:35), and bore witness to the true light that gives light to everyone (1:8f.)

Try looking at the contexts of the other five and jot down the contrasts. I'll give you the references again for convenience: the door of the sheepfold (10:7); the good shepherd (10:11); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way and the truth and the life (14:6); the true vine (15:1; cf. Isa 5:1-7).

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10. Our final suggestion for looking at these 'I am' sayings with an image is to consider the significance of these images in the Old Testament and Judaism. What light do the following Old Testament passages throw on the 'I am' sayings that we have looked at?




Ex. 16:4 (Neh. 9:15) \_\_\_\_\_

Isa 9:2 \_\_\_\_\_

Ezek 34:7-16 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa 40:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Isa 5:1-7 \_\_\_\_\_ 

## c. Review

11. a. Check that you could answer the question, 'What did Jesus mean by describing himself as the bread of life, and what connection is there between that and the Lord's Supper?'

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- b. Write down from memory the seven 'I am' statements and check that you could say something briefly about each one in terms of its relation to 'life' and the contrast given in the context.

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## Reflecting on this lesson

Note down in your notebook anything from today's lesson:



- that you want to discuss in your group meeting;
- that is significant for your own personal faith;
- that is significant for explaining John to others.

Take some time to think about the life that Jesus gives. Reflect on the significance of Jesus' 'I am' sayings for today and pray that God will help you apply what you have learnt.

**For Further Study**

For the relationship between Jesus and the Jewish Feasts in John, it is worth looking at various commentaries about the passages where the feasts occur (i.e., 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 11:55). We will consider the relationship of chapters 18 and 19 to the Passover in Block 4.

Smalley has a significant discussion about whether John should be regarded as 'sacramental' with a special focus on John 6. Beasley-Murray also has a helpful discussion of the 'sacramental' nature of John. See:

**S.S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Carlisle/Downers Grove: Paternoster/IVP, 2005) , pp. 232-238.**

'Chapter 5: Sacraments in the Fourth Gospel,' pp85-101, in **G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991)**



## Feedback: The Bread of Life and the 'I am' Sayings

## block 5 lesson 2

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- 2.6.1 The feeding of the five thousand and the discourse on the bread of life.
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- 2.6.2 Let's rule out g. before we go any further. Read on.
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- 2.6.3 Your answer. One possible response is that vv. 33-50 refer to the former and vv. 51-58 to the latter.
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- 2.6.4 Your answer. My main problem with the first option is two-fold: first, the passage occurs at a time in Jesus' ministry before the institution of the Lord's Supper (and so begs the question as to how John deals with history) and secondly, John seems at pains to point to Jesus as the reality (the true bread) rather than the ritual.
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- 2.6.5 the bread of life : the light of the world : the gate (the door) : the good shepherd : the resurrection and the life : the way and the truth and the life : the true vine
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- 2.6.6 life
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- 2.6.7 I think all of them. Read on.
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- 2.6.8 Your ideas. E.g. what you need to live : necessary for life? — anyhow see Jn 1:4! : safety from being killed by wild animals : gives his life to save ours : means return from death : how we get to the Father, the source of all life : source of sap without which the branches die
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- 2.6.9 Your answer. Here are my suggestions:
- Door and also good shepherd contrast him with the thieves and bandits, strangers who are not known to the sheep, and cowardly hired hands.
  - Resurrection and the life contrasts with the helplessness of Martha and Mary in the face of their brother's death.
  - Way, truth and life contrast the chance the disciples have of knowing God without Jesus and with Jesus.
  - True vine in contrast to the old Israel which is a vine which never did bear good fruit.
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- 2.6.10 Your answer. Here are some suggestions:
- There is a clear link between the Bread and the wanderings of the people in the wilderness.
  - I think this shows the link between John 7:52 and John 8:12. It is true that no prophet is to come from Galilee; instead the light of God will come!
  - The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees in John 10 is similar to the conflict that God has with the leaders of Israel in Ezekiel's time.
  - Isaiah predicts a time when God will provide a 'way' of salvation for the Jews, which is referred to by John the Baptist in John 1:23 and may help us understand what it means for Jesus to be the 'Way' in John 14:6.
  - True vine in contrast to the old Israel which is a vine which never did bear good fruit.
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- 2.6.11 a. Check with your answers in frame 4. b. Check with frames 5-9.
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