

March 22. Read John 5:1-30. Many people in Jesus' day thought the pool of Bethesda (or Bethsaida) had healing power. It hadn't worked for the man Jesus met—he'd been there for 38 years! Jesus asked him, "Do you WANT to get well?" He healed him on the Sabbath, and his critics fussed about rule-breaking rather than celebrating the man's healing. Jesus responded by declaring that his power and mission came from his divine Father—which only upset them more. • John called Jesus the Creator (cf. John 1:1-3), and said Jesus' mission was to remake the world as God wanted it. Healing the sick man at the pool was a sign of what that new world was like. In what ways did the question "Do you WANT to get well?" and the command "Get up" both invite and empower the man to team up with God in his own renewal? In what ways have you been healed and freed (or do you want to be healed and freed) as you take part in Jesus' new creation? • In verses 24-25, John had Jesus using the present tense: "I assure you that whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me HAS eternal life ... HAS passed from death into life." How have you "passed from death into life"? What is one aspect of your life where you are experiencing the eternal quality of life now, before your physical death ever happens?

March 23. Read John 5:31-6:15. This section almost sounds as though Jesus was on trial—and, in one sense, he was. He said he had many witnesses to show that he was who he said: his works, John the Baptist, his Father, and Moses' words in Scripture. Many people were positively impressed when Jesus fed them miraculously—but they wanted him to be a political king who changed their circumstances, not a spiritual king who changed their hearts. • Jesus told his critics that they had been reading the right book, but had been reading it in the wrong way (John 5:39-40). Read rightly, he said, the Scriptures testified of him. How, when, where and for what purpose(s) do you read the Bible? Pastor Hamilton has taught us to avoid getting stuck on things we don't understand in the Bible, but to focus on what we do understand, and submit to God's leading in those areas. • Feeding the huge crowd seemed impossible to the disciples. Andrew brought a lad's small lunch saying, "But what good is that for a crowd like this?" As you consider what Jesus did with that small lunch, what talents and resources do you have that you might offer to Jesus, trusting him to creatively multiply your gift and bless others through it?

March 24. Read John 6:16-40. Jesus' ministry grabbed the attention of many. If he were ministering today, you might expect the major news networks to be talking about his latest miracle or healing. But John sharply contrasted the people's earthbound outlook and Jesus' desire to share the truth of God's eternal world. "Believe in him whom God sent," he pleaded. "I am the bread of life." Jesus challenged his listeners to consider what kind of "food" they were working for: "Don't work for the food that doesn't last but for the food that endures for eternal life." (verse 27). Physical food wasn't bad—he'd just fed the hungry crowd with bread and fish—but it doesn't give lasting life. How clear is your sense of the two worlds, the two kinds of food, Jesus spoke of? Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." In what ways are you consistently nourishing yourself spiritually on him? Scholar N. T. Wright noted that the story of Jesus walking on water can be a metaphor for our journey through life. Many times life's waters get rough, and a strong wind is blowing. Yet in the midst of the rough waters Jesus is there, even walking on water to help and comfort you. When have you faced "rough waters"? How did Jesus help you "reach the land" on the other side? If you're dealing with rough waters right now, how can you remain open to seeing Jesus helping you reach the shore?

March 25. Read John 6:41-71. Jesus' words in this section echoed his talk with the woman at the well (cf. John 4), but now he used the image of bread rather than of water. His vivid imagery about eating his flesh and drinking his blood made people squirm. Many turned away. But he was describing the spiritual reality we act out in the Lord's Supper—taking Jesus in to nourish our eternal life. Some "got it"—the Twelve didn't turn away. "Lord, where would we go?" Peter asked. In John 6:35 (yesterday's reading) and verses 48 and 51, Jesus used the words "I AM." This was loaded language—"I am" was a central meaning of YHWH, the divine name God told Moses about in Exodus 3:14. Watch for this in the rest of John —Jesus made major "I am" claims six more times. How did Jesus' use of "I am" stress his astonishing claim to tell us about God from direct knowledge? How easy or hard do you find it to accept, and live into, what Jesus claimed when he identified himself as the "I am"? This passage is typical of John's desire to show us what Jesus' life meant, rather than just what happened. John didn't include the story of Jesus eating the Passover with the disciples, but here he showed Jesus teaching the Supper's meaning. In what ways does taking part in the Lord's Supper mysteriously nourish your spiritual growth?

March 26. Read John 7:1-30. Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him (verse 5), the crowds had mixed views (verse 12), and Jewish leaders wanted to kill him (verse 1, 25). Jesus was inner-directed, and chose his own course under God. He clarified the true purpose of the Sabbath (verse 23). He spoke firmly of his heavenly origin and life-giving mission, saying "I haven't come on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don't know him. I know him because I am from him and he sent me" (verse 28, 29). It's worth noting how John used the word "world." Jesus' brothers used "world" to mean the physical planet Earth and all who live in it (verse 4). But Jesus used it to mean an inner spiritual orientation that turns away from God and tries to live without God and God's values (verse 7). In what ways does "the world" (in that second sense) try to draw you into its values and way of life today? How is your life better when you live in Jesus' world, rather than in "the world" that hates him? John was a master at showing denial (what we today might call "cognitive dissonance"). Verses 1 and 25 recognized that leaders wanted to kill Jesus. Yet when he spoke of it openly, there was heated denial: "You have a demon. Who wants to kill you?" (verse 20) When have you been in settings where you or others wanted to deny "the elephant in the room"? How can you and Jesus face any issues in your life more honestly?

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