

**January 22-28, 2012**  
**Good Questions, Straight Answers: Pointing Our Lives Toward Jesus**  
**Daily *Life Notes* for Individuals and Couples**

As we study the gospel of John together during 2012, we encourage you to find time to sit and read the entire gospel as a letter from John to you. You can read John in one sitting or read 3-4 chapters a day until you're done. Allow John's telling of God's story to unfold for you.

Pastor Mark has talked with us about the balance between asking questions and knowing that we cannot fully understand or explain God. At MISSION, we are working together throughout 2012 to deepen our understanding of God, as we explore tough questions and expect straight answers. We all wrestle with ideas and truths we cannot fully comprehend, and that's a good thing. In fact, the more we get to know God, the more we'll encounter teachings that seem difficult. We are in great company. Even those who walked closely with Jesus each day of his public ministry struggled to understand much of what he taught.

Our goal, with ***Life Notes***, is to help you question, discover, and draw closer to an intimate, honest, real relationship with our Creator. It is our prayer that God the Father, Son and Spirit become deeply and more intimately known by you during 2012.

**Monday**

Start today by reading the Scripture passage referenced by Pastor Mark in this week's sermon. Read the whole passage slowly and carefully, looking for insights, words or phrases that stand out for you. We suggest that you journal your responses and freely make note in your Bible of what God seems to be saying to you.

**Journaling:** We had someone ask about journaling this week, and here are three insights to better understand the practice. First, our minds tend to wander freely when we're thinking, following this idea or that one. We rarely stay with a thought to its conclusion. When we write, we tend to follow an idea to its end. Second, when we write we tend to include more of the emotions or heart-reactions to a topic, and that can be very helpful to us. Third, journaling gives us a chance to look back on what we've written, learned or prayed about as we grow.

*"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ.'*

*They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'*

*He said, 'I am not.'*

*'Are you the Prophet?'*

*He answered, 'No.'*

*Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'*

*John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord."' "*

*Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, 'Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'*

*'I baptize with water,' John replied, 'but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'*

*This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.'*

*Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.'" (John 1:19-34)*

Stop and pray for a moment, letting what you've just read stay present for you.

Let's begin this week's time focusing on baptism. Pastor Mark talked about the importance of believer baptism and he invited those of us who are believers but haven't been baptized to take that next step of faith. He reminded us that it's a personal decision, but one he believes every believer should take. Baptism is one of the ways we point our lives toward Jesus. Scan the passage we just read in John as you reflect on these questions. Talk about the questions, if there's a trusted friend or loved one going through **Life Notes** with you. Journal your thoughts if you're alone. And don't forget to include Jesus in your conversation and discovery. He's right here, longing to shed light on our understanding.

*What was the importance of John baptizing people?*

*What was John's message? (Put it in your own words.)*

*Why do you think Jesus chose to be baptized?*

*Can you think of anything that changed for Jesus or after Jesus was baptized?*

If you're a believer who hasn't been baptized, spend a few minutes thinking about why you haven't taken that step and talking with God about his thoughts on this for your life. If you think God is leading you in that direction, know that you can call MISSION and we'll help you take that next step.

If you're a believer who has been baptized, respond to the following:

*What drew you to baptism (why were you baptized)?*

*Where were you when you were baptized? Who was with you? What was the setting?*

*What did you experience in baptism?*

*Do you think the way you were living your life changed after baptism? Why or why not?*

*Has baptism continued to be an important factor in your life? If so, in what way? If not, why do you think not?*

As your time reaches an end, read today's verses in John one more time. Ask God to reveal more about himself to you throughout this week.

## **Tuesday**

Begin today reading John 1:29 and Isaiah 53:4-7 at least three times. Pray for God to give you time and space to spend with him right now and just let his word spread through your thoughts and heart. Tune in to God's presence in these words for your life.

*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)*

*"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." (Isaiah 53:4-7)*

John called Jesus the lamb of God. We think of lambs as gentle creatures in children's stories and petting zoos, but this lamb was different. He was love. He saved our lives. He carried the sins of every human being who ever lived or ever will live. He was led to slaughter, and the slaughter was for us. Pastor Mark said,

*“Out of infinite love for you and me, Jesus willingly and intentionally took upon himself all the guilt and shame and filth of all our sin. All the vile, ugly, hurtful, putrid sin of each one of us – all this was laid upon him. Every ounce of it was laid on him. Every lie, every act of deceit, every broken promise, every sexual sin, every bit of pride and greed, all of it that ever was and ever will be was laid upon Jesus. Then with the full weight of guilt and shame from our sins, Jesus allowed himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. He didn't fight back. He didn't put an end to the cruelty. He willingly went to his own brutal, bloody slaughter. And there on the cross, our Lord, in perfect submission to the Father, and perfect love for us, was crushed for our sins. He bore our suffering in his body, so through faith in him we could be forgiven. Through faith in him we are declared not guilty, because the guilt of our sin has already been paid for in the sacrifice of Jesus. Then after the suffering and death, when the enemy thought he had won the battle, Jesus turned the tables and rose from the dead, conquering sin and death once and for all. And our risen Lord says to us, 'follow me, and you too will rise to new and eternal life.'”*

*This is the gospel, the good news. This is why we gather to worship Jesus, because he is in every way worthy. He is our Savior, our life, our hope, and our Lord! This is the good news John the Baptist was pointing to... Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”*

Spend a few moments focusing on Jesus as lamb.

*Why do you think this metaphor was used in Scripture?*

*What did the lamb of God accomplish for us? Be specific and personal.*

*How does the “lamb of God” impact your life today?*

If you have a few more minutes to spare today, write a psalm, song, prayer or paragraph of your own that expresses how you think about or experience the lamb of God. Ask God to continue to deepen that relationship and your awareness of him in your life.

## Wednesday

Today, begin your time thinking about those you come in contact with every day who do not seem to know Jesus on a personal level. Maybe it's someone you work with, go to school with, buy groceries from, live alongside. Think of them by name, if you know the name, and ask God to bring them to mind today as we spend time around the gospel message.

Often, in our evangelical traditions, we talk about the historical impact of "the gospel" on our lives or we talk about sharing "the gospel" with others as a euphemism for sharing our faith with someone.

*But what if the gospel is more than that moment on the cross?*

*What if the gospel is more than a decision you made to believe in Jesus' work on the cross?*

*What if the gospel impacts your life each moment of the day?*

If you're reading **Life Notes**, you likely believe the gospel message, but

*Is the gospel's impact on your life an historical one or is the gospel actively influencing your life?*

In one of Pastor Mark's comments that we looked at yesterday, he said these words about the gospel, after reading to us from Isaiah 53:4-7.

*"This is the gospel, the good news. This is why we gather to worship Jesus, because he is in every way worthy. He is our Savior, our life, our hope, and our Lord! This is the good news John the Baptist was pointing to... Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."*

In other words, Jesus is alive and well today and his life impacts everything about our lives.

If you do a search for "gospel" on a site like [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), you'll see that the word "gospel" or "good news" is peppered throughout the New Testament. And it is described as first being preached to Abraham. The reality that God would redeem his people is a story that goes back all the way to the beginning.

The gospel is the good news of Jesus co-creating the world with Father and Spirit, stepping in to this world, emptying himself of his rightful power as God, walking as a human being for some 33+ years, carrying our sin on his body literally in death, defeating death through his resurrection and living eternally again as God (Philippians 2:6-11). Jesus' power did not start or stop on the cross, and being a follower of Jesus is being able to experience the power of

that good news continually. We simply have to live as followers, as heirs, as beloved children, as people of the good news. The gospel is the life-transforming power of Jesus.

Reflect on the following passages as you focus on the ongoing impact of the gospel.

*“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (Galatians 3:7-9)*

*“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David. And who, through the Spirit of holiness, was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:1-6)*

*“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-18)*

The “good news” of Jesus is God’s plan from the beginning. The gospel is alive. He is our good news, and his life impacts our life every moment of the day.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you complete the following sentence:

*In the past 24 hours, I have experienced the gospel’s impact on my life in this area or in this way...*

*Right now, I need the gospel to impact my life in this way...*

Spend some time asking God to help you be more and more aware of the power of the gospel throughout your day today.

## Thursday

Read the following passage out loud at least three times, focusing on what stands out to you as you read.

*“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, “A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.” I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’*

*Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”’*

*I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:29-34)*

Pastor Mark helped us see that John’s purpose was to point to Jesus. Through his words, through his lifestyle, through his actions, he pointed to Jesus. John prepared the way for Jesus to enter this world and transform lives. John could have created his own following, but he knew that he had nothing to offer in comparison with Jesus. Jesus was the way, not John.

Think about our lives for a moment. We are taught to prepare. We go to school to prepare for the future. We practice to prepare for a game, a contest or a concert. We study to prepare for a test. We choose professions to prepare for a career. We choose careers to prepare for our success. We save money to prepare to buy a house or a car, to continue our education or get married. We save money to prepare for losing our job or other hardships we cannot yet see. We save money to prepare for our retirement.

We are constantly preparing for our own future, trying to “get ahead” or hedge ourselves against some yet unnamed change or challenge. We prepare, and then we try to figure out how to add Jesus to our equation.

Ask God to reveal your life patterns. (These questions aren’t asked to induce guilt, but to help us focus on the real message of our lives.)

*What are the main things you think about?*

*What do you do with your time?*

*What do you pray about the most?*

*What are you preparing for and how are you preparing?*

Now consider your life through the lens of those around you. Think about people who know you really well.

*What do you talk about or do with your friends?*

*What do you talk about or do with your family?*

*What do you talk about or do with coworkers?*

*What do you talk about or do with teammates or activity groups you belong to?*

*What would those who know you best say are some of the purposes right now in your life? What might give them that impression?*

*In summary, what do you think is the main focus of your life or where does your daily life “point?”*

*Where do you sense God asking you to point your life?*

Our lives have this magnificent purpose – to allow the Gospel to grow us up in all aspects (Ephesians 4:15) and to point the way to Jesus. As we allow Jesus to light our lives, we carry his light to others and point them toward him.

*Is there anything that the Holy Spirit is saying to you right now about your life's direction?*

As you draw this time to a close, just be with Jesus. Be still, be quiet, journal any words that come to mind and ask him to help you point your life in his direction.

## **Friday**

This week, we've been focusing on the gospel: on the testimony of John the baptizer, on the way John's life pointed to Jesus, on the way our lives are focused, on the life-transforming power of the gospel in our lives each day. Take a few moments to look back over any notes you've made this week or any way you've been more aware of God at work in you and through you.

Read over the following passages at least three times, asking the Holy Spirit to show you what he wants you to understand today.

*“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” (Colossians 2:9,10)*

*“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:1-7)*

*“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)*

If you regularly attend MISSION, you'll recognize the last verse as our vision. We act justly, love mercy and walk humbly, and it's a commitment we all share and try to live out together. (Check the MISSION website at [www.mission68.org](http://www.mission68.org) for details on how we express our vision.)

As you read the above passages and become even more aware of the gospel's impact on every aspect of your life, think through the grid of Micah 6:8, and ask God to show you what he has for you in each of these areas.

*Father God, is there some way right now where you need me to act justly?*

*Father God, is there someone in my life who needs your mercy to extend through me?*

*Father God, please teach me more about walking humbly with you today. Help me to invite you into every aspect of my life.*

Pay attention to how God speaks to you about these areas and record any thoughts you have.

We are on a journey together. You are never alone, even when it feels that way. We are believers together, praying for each other and learning what it means to be followers of Jesus. Step into the journey as fully as you're able, and expect God to lead you every step of the way.

And don't forget to reach out if you need help. There are many ministries at MISSION designed to support you in various times of need or on your search for a deeper walk with Jesus. Email any questions you would like Mark or one of the pastors to address to [markc@mission68.org](mailto:markc@mission68.org).

### **Saturday**

We want to encourage you to let Saturdays be a “mini Sabbath” moment. If Saturday is a work day for you, simply exchange this day in **Life Notes** for the

day you have off. It's really important to learn to simply "be" with Jesus, with yourself, with those you love without an "agenda."

Sabbath simply means "cease" and "rest." So, today, spend a few moments truly resting with God the Father, Son and Spirit. You might take a walk or sit outside. You might need a long period of physical rest. You might listen to music or sing a song that comes to mind. You might journal. You might laugh or cry with God about things that have happened in your life this week. You might appreciate creation. Just let the time unfold. Sense God's love for you; seek his peace and pursue it.

Today, as you have fun with friends and family or read a book or take a ride or hike or have friends over, look for the power of the gospel everywhere. Jesus is alive and well and always on the move in you and through you. Ask God to reveal himself in all you see and do. Watch for Jesus at work. He'll delight and amaze you.

If you have your Bible nearby, read John 1:35-51 sometime today in preparation for Pastor Mark's sermon this weekend.