

CHURCH.

LESSON 16

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> EPHESIANS 2 - 5
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Ephesians 2 - 5).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE]</i> (4) ECCLESIASTES 8:5b-6a
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Review two by two.

(4) Proper timing: Ecclesiastes 8:5b-6a. The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <i>[THE GOSPEL OF JOHN]</i> JOHN 6:1-71
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Introduce. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study John 6:1-71 together. John 6 describes the Word, Jesus Christ, rejected in Galilee, after feeding the five thousand.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
Read. LET US READ John 6:1-71 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

6:5-13

Discovery 1. The necessity to exercise faith.

Jesus and his disciples were at a lonely place, but a great crowd of people followed them. There were five thousand men and besides them very many women and children! Then Jesus tested one of his disciples, Philip, saying, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" And Philip answered, "Eight months' wages (200 denarii) would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Philip *calculated instead of exercising faith in what Jesus could do!* Jesus tested Philip. Jesus gave Philip an opportunity to show if he had sympathy for the crowd of hungry people and if he had learned the meaning of the miracles of Jesus as "signs". The miracles as signs intended to point to the majesty, power and glory of Jesus, to his willingness and ability to supply every need of people. However, Philip calculated and forgot that the power of Jesus surpasses every possible calculation! It did not occur to Philip that just as Jesus had shown his ability to supply abundant wine at the wedding at Cana, he would be just as able to furnish bread here.

Another disciple of Jesus, Andrew, said, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Andrew also looked at the many people and calculated in stead of exercising faith in what Jesus could do! All the disciples of Jesus Christ looked at the situation and began to rationalise. All of them *calculated and doubted if there could be any solution for this problem!* No one thought about the previous miracles of Jesus. No one believed in what Jesus could do!

The greatest truth for me is that Jesus is not dependant on the physical world that he created. If he created the whole universe, he can create wine (John 2) and bread and fish (John 6) or anything else. I must learn not to look at life with

all its problems, but to Jesus Christ with all his abilities (cf. Matthew 6:25-27)! I must learn to look to Jesus Christ, who has the ability to solve all problems. I must learn to exercise faith in Jesus Christ and his words!

6:35-46

Discovery 2. The relationship between divine predestination and human responsibility.

(1) God the Father gives people to Jesus in a sovereign way.

In John 6:37, Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away”. There is complete harmony and co-operation between God the Father and God the Son. All those people that God the Father gives, God the Son welcomes. In this verse Jesus emphasises God’s sovereign choice to give certain people to Jesus. In this verse Jesus emphasises the predestination of God (cf. John 17:2,6; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4).

However, in John 6:36, Jesus says, “You have seen me and still you do not believe!” In this verse Jesus emphasises man’s responsibility to respond when they hear the gospel. Many who listened to Jesus that day, heard the gospel and even saw the miracle of Jesus, and yet they refused to believe! Jesus clearly places the blame upon these unbelievers themselves as people who are fully responsible for their choices and actions. In this verse Jesus emphasises the responsibility of man (cf. Romans 2:5-6)!

(2) God the Father draws people irresistibly to Jesus.

In John 6:44, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”. In this verse Jesus emphasises the sovereign predestination of God as it is carried out within history. “Drawing” means much more than “giving knowledge and moral influence”. The Father does not merely *beckon* and *advise* people, but he *draws them irresistibly* to Jesus Christ!

The same word “drawing” is used in John 12:32, where after his exaltation (that is, his crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and enthronement) Jesus would *draw* people from all over the world irresistibly to himself! The same word “drawing” is used in John 18:10, where the sword of Peter is actually *drawn* out of its sheath. The same word is used in John 21:6,11, where the net full of big fishes is actually *drawn or dragged* ashore! The same word “drawing” is used in Acts 16:19, where Paul and Silas are *dragged* into the forum and in Acts 21:30, where Paul is *dragged* out of the temple. The same word “drawing” is used in James 2:6, where the rich people *drag* the poor people before their judgement-seats. It is clear that Jesus is speaking of the irresistible way in which God the Father is drawing people to Jesus Christ!

However, *when God draws people, he deals with them as responsible beings*. He powerfully influences their mind, will, heart, yes their entire human personality so that these begin to function in their own right. God the Father draws people in such a powerful way that these people accept him by a living faith. But God’s predestination never excludes human responsibility! Nevertheless, both initiative at the beginning and the power throughout are always from God! This drawing-power of God is very real, strong and effective, because God himself is wielding it!

In John 6:45, Jesus says, “They will all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me”. With respect to the way people are being saved, God’s teaching and man’s listening are not simply placed side by side. The Bible teaches that it is always God *who takes the initiative* and *who is in control from the beginning to the end*. God the Father must draw before people can come to Jesus. God the Father must teach people before they can listen and learn from God. God’s predestination to draw certain people includes these people’s responsibility to listen and to learn. The negative side is that unless God the Father draws, no one can come to Jesus! Unless the Father teaches, no one can hear and learn. The positive side is that whoever the Father draws definitely comes to Jesus. Whoever listens and learns will certainly be saved! God’s grace always conquers. It does what it purposed to do. *God’s grace is irresistible!*

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 6:1-71 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

6:26-29

Question 1. What does Jesus mean when he says that we must not work for the food that spoils?

Notes. This is a saying with a hidden meaning (Hebrew: *marshal*, a comparison). Just like the Samaritan woman did not understand his saying about *the living water*, so the Jews now did not understand his saying about *the food that endures to eternal life*. They both gave the statements a literal meaning. *The food that spoils* is ordinary food, which does not

enter the heart and therefore has no abiding value. *The food that endures* is Jesus Christ himself, who gives himself as an atonement sacrifice for sins. This food produces and sustains eternal life! God the Father has, by means of all the witnesses mentioned in chapter 5, certified that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God. By means of all these witnesses, God the Father “has put his seal of approval on Jesus Christ” (John 6:27).

“The work” that God requires is to believe in Jesus Christ (John 6:29)! *The work of faith* does not mean that people are saved by doing some good work or religious duty. No one can earn eternal life! “The work that consists of faith” means that the believer *receives* the gift of God *by faith*. Salvation is given by God’s grace and is received by man’s faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, Jesus urges the Jews not to simply work for material things, but to endeavour to receive eternal life from him.

6:39-40

Question 2. What does the Bible teach about perseverance of Christians?

Notes.

(1) True Christians will persevere to the end.

In John 6:39-40, Jesus says that the will of God the Father is that Jesus loses nobody of all the people that God the Father has given to him, right up to the second coming when he will raise their bodies from the dead. Everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life. Thus true believers will persevere until the end! “The last day” refers to the second coming and Last Judgement.

(2) Perseverance does not exclude human responsibility.

The truth concerning the perseverance of Christians is in John 6:39 viewed from the point of view of divine predestination and in verse 40 from the point of view of human responsibility. From God’s point of view, all Christians are collectively given to Jesus Christ (cf. John 10:29) and Christ preserves them to the end! He cannot and will not fail in his task! But from man’s point of view, every Christian has the personal responsibility to keep on believing (see John 3:16 where the verb is in the continuous present tense).

(3) The perseverance of believers is taught in the whole Bible.

John 10:28 says that Christians

- have received eternal (never-ending) life
- *will never perish*
- *nobody will snatch them out of his hand*

Romans 8:28-33 says that God

- *in eternity* chose (foreknew) and predestined people
- *in time* called them (through preaching of gospel) and justify them (through faith)
- *in the future* finally glorify them

Romans 11:29 says that God’s gifts and call are irrevocable!

Philippians 1:6 says that God, who began a good work in Christians, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ’s Second Coming!

2 Timothy 2:19 says that God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, “The Lord knows those who are his”.

1 Peter 1:4-5 says that God has given us an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, which is kept in heaven for us and that Christians are preserved by God’s power until the last day.

Thus, the Bible promises that God’s plan from eternity on cannot be changed, God’s calling in time cannot be revoked, the inheritance of Christians in the future cannot be defiled, God’s foundation cannot be shaken, God’s seal cannot be broken and the life of Christians in God cannot perish. Moreover, the truth of the preservation and thus perseverance of Christians is surely implied in the term “eternal life”.

6:50-58

Question 3. What is the meaning of “eating the flesh of Jesus” and “drinking the blood of Jesus”?

Notes. In John 6:51,54 Jesus again uses a saying with hidden meaning (a “*maschal*”, a comparison). “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats (Greek: *esthió*, *efagon*) (subjunctive, aorist, active) of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. ... Whoever eats (Greek: *trógó*) (present continuous tense) my flesh and drinks (Greek: *pinó*) (present continuous tense) my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day.”

(1) These words may not be interpreted literally.

Many people have taken these words of Jesus in a more or less literal way and have failed to understand what he was saying. The Jews certainly interpreted the words of Jesus literally, as if he had intended that in some way or other people must partake of his physical body. To the Jews drinking blood was very repulsive. And the ceremonial law says

that God sets his face against anybody who eats blood (Leviticus 17:10). Jesus Christ certainly did not advocate cannibalism.

(2) Flesh and blood are symbols for the body and the soul of Jesus Christ.

If the Jews had studied the Bible, they would have been able to recognise the symbolism in what Jesus was saying. In Leviticus 17:11 the Bible says, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

The blood was viewed as *the seat of life* and represented *the soul*. Apart from the soul, blood has no intrinsic value! In Hebrews 9:22 is written, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness”. Thus, just as a lamb had to shed his life-blood and die in order to make atonement for the life of the sinner in the Old Testament, so Jesus Christ had to shed his life-blood and die, in order to make atonement for the sins of all his people in the world. The shedding of the blood of Jesus, that is, the shedding of his soul or life, was the punishment for our sins and satisfied God’s holy anger against our sins. This was the most important event in human history!

(3) Eating and drinking are symbols for receiving and assimilating.

Just as food and drink are offered and accepted, so also the sacrifice of Christ is offered to believers and accepted by them. Just as the body assimilates food and drink, so the soul assimilates the sacrifice of atonement of Christ. The flesh and blood of Jesus are symbols of the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus on the cross. Eating and drinking are symbols for accepting into your deepest being Christ as the only atonement for your sins. Jesus never meant his saying to be interpreted as literal, but as symbolic. He meant to say, “The person who accepts me into his heart and life as the only sacrifice of atonement for his sins has eternal life, that is, he will be saved”.

In John 6:66-69, “following Jesus as a disciple” means believing in Jesus as the Holy One of God (the Son of the living God). Likewise, “eating his body and drinking his blood” means believing in Jesus Christ as the only sacrifice of atonement of your sins. In this way the Christian today identifies himself with what Christ did for him 2000 years ago. The spiritual life of the believer is nourished and sustained by the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross.

(4) The teaching in the context is spiritual, not literal.

The parallelism¹ in verse 35 shows that Jesus intended to say that “coming to Jesus Christ” means “believing in Jesus Christ”! We can very easily see that Jesus meant his words to be understood symbolically by comparing verse 54 with verse 40. While verse 54 speaks of “eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus” (symbolic language) and verse 40 speaks of “looking at Jesus (Greek: theoreó) and believing in Jesus Christ” (straightforward language), the result in both is exactly the same: namely “having eternal life and being raised up in the last day”. See also the result in verse 56: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood (symbolic language) remains in me and I in him (literal language)”! These are all spiritual concepts and prove that this passage does not deal with literal concepts, but with spiritual concepts.

John 6:48-59 does not speak of the Lord’s Supper, but in figurative language about believing for the first time in Jesus Christ! The tenses of the verbs “to eat” (Greek: esthió, efaion) and “to drink” (Greek: pinó) in verse 50 to 53 are in the aorist tense pointing to *a once for all time* receiving Christ by faith into one’s life. The tenses of the verbs “to feed” (Greek: trógo) and “to drink” (Greek: pinó) in verses 54 to 56 are in the present continuous tense pointing to *the abiding relationship* of faith and remaining in Christ (John 6:40). Jesus himself explains what he means in verse 40, 47 and 54, “Everyone who *believes* in the Son shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”. Jesus does not teach that the bread and the wine in some magical way become the body and blood of Christ.² He teaches that *eating bread and drinking wine* are words symbolising *believing and receiving* Christ into one’s heart and life! In the context, Jesus was speaking to unbelievers about faith in him (John 6:41-42) and he was not speaking to believers about the Lord’s Supper.

The physical body of Jesus Christ is not in some mystical way present in the Lord’s Supper or anywhere else on earth. With respect to his glorified physical body, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father (Acts 1:9-11)! Therefore, nobody on earth can do anything with the glorified physical body of Jesus Christ in heaven.

Finally in verse 63 Jesus clearly teaches that he is not speaking about literal things, but about spiritual things. “The (Holy) Spirit (of Jesus Christ) gives life, the (human) flesh (body)(of Jesus Christ) counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” His words are not dead letters, but have deep spiritual significance and bring about spiritual life. He says that his (divine) “Spirit” brings about rebirth (regeneration) (John 1:13; John 3:3,5) and that his “flesh” (his human body) in itself cannot bring them any good. He intends to say that people must stop thinking that he is asking them to literally “eat his flesh” and “drink his blood”. It is his (Divine) Spirit that on the ground of his death and resurrection from the dead gives eternal life to believers³. He intends to say that his words and sayings must not be

¹ Parallelism is a figure of speech in which two different words are used to explain the same thing. In this case the words “coming to Jesus” is parallel to the words “believing in Jesus”.

² The doctrine of transubstantiation in which the bread and wine is miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Christ is NOT a biblical teaching!

³ Or that his (human) spirit (he himself, completely voluntarily) (John 10:18) allowed his human body to be nailed to the cross and his blood to be poured out that gives eternal life to believers.

understood literally, but spiritually. They are symbols that point to spiritual realities. Whoever accepts the literal truth to which his figurative words and sayings point, will literally inherit eternal life.

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from John 6:1-71.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from John chapter 6:1-71.

- 6:5-9. Stop arguing rationally and stop calculating mathematically whenever Jesus says something to you. Jesus wants us to accept his words by faith.
- 6:15. Whenever people want to force you into something or enforce their will upon you, it is the best to withdraw from them.
- 6:27. Do not give your time, energy and money to things that are temporary and spoil. Give yourself and what you possess to whatever lasts forever! Only Jesus can give you such things.
- 6:28-29. The works that God requires is not *human (good or religious) works*, but *the exercise of faith* in God's words, in God's works and in God's Son, Jesus Christ.
- 6:35. Believe in Jesus Christ and you will never be spiritually hungry or spiritually thirsty. Believe continually and you will live continually and be satisfied continually.
- 6:37. Believe in Jesus Christ and he will never drive you away.
- 6:38. You are here on earth, not to do your own will, but to do the will of God.
- 6:39. Believe that Jesus Christ will never allow you to go lost! (John 17:12)
- 6:40. Believe that Jesus Christ will raise your body up in the resurrection at his second coming.
- 6:44,65. Don't try to understand and don't question the fact that God the Father draws people to Jesus Christ. Rather accept it with faith, amazement and thankfulness.
- 6:45. Listen to God the Father and learn from him, because that is how God draws you to Jesus Christ!
- 6:54,40. Do not take everything in the Bible literally. Rather, take everything in the Bible in the way God wants you to understand it. Even the symbolic or figurative expressions in the Bible refer to literal realities that far surpass the literalness of the symbol. For example, the symbolic or figurative expression "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) far surpasses a literal lamb and refers to the literal Jesus Christ!

2. Examples of personal applications from John chapter 6:1-71.

I do not want to allow the appearance of things around me to cause me to take my eyes off Jesus. *I want to learn to exercise faith.* Instead of trying to find a solution for all the difficulties I am facing and rationally calculating the odds and the risks, I want to exercise faith in the majesty, power and glory of Jesus Christ. He, who can turn water into wine and multiply bread, can also meet all my real needs.

I want to remain deeply convinced that God is sovereign in every aspect of my life. He drew me to Jesus Christ and gave me to Jesus Christ in a sovereign way. He taught me, saved me and controls my life now in a sovereign way. He always takes the initiative and commands me to respond to his initiative. I want to dedicate myself to be responsible and always respond to his initiatives in my life. I greatly rejoice to know that God's grace is irresistible and always conquers!

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in John 6:1-71.

(Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5

PRAYER (8 minutes)

[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS

Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the Bible study of John 6 together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Ephesians 6 and Philippians 1 - 2 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (5) Right priorities: Matthew 6:33. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
6. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.