

Study Guide to Clarion Call

*Finding Joy in Christ
with John the Baptist*

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PESIOD
Eager & Earnest

1. PROLOGUE: HIS NAME IS JOHN

PERSONAL REFLECTION

*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because He has come to His people and redeemed them.*

a. The Past

What burdens of unfulfilled expectations or hopes do you carry from your past? How can you surrender these to God?

In what ways and at what times has God surprised you with his faithfulness and grace?

b. The Present

What aspects of God's character do you struggle to understand or grasp?

Take time to express praise to God for who He is and what He has done. Use Zechariah's words to help you.

c. The Future

Ask God to open your eyes to see his work in your life each day so your worship and service for him will be more than empty ritual or mindless routine.

Pray that this book might increase your joy in Christ as you read it and take time to reflect upon it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How familiar are you with the history referred to in this chapter? Rehearse it together, ensuring you have grasped the major movements. The following timeline (dates B.C.) may help.

c.2000	c.1500	c.1000	6 th Century	129	63
Abraham	Moses	David	Exile	Hasmonean	Roman
Promises	Law	Jerusalem	& return	Kingdom	Conquest

2. How do you understand prayer? How should we respond when we pray for something, and God does not give it to us, at least when we hoped he would? Matthew 6:9-13 and 7:7-11 may help.
3. What do we know about angels from the Bible? Are angels still active today and, if so, what are they doing? See Hebrews 1:14 and consider other biblical accounts about angels for further insights.
4. Have you ever chosen (or helped someone choose) a name for another person? How did you go about doing so? Did its meaning express any hopes you had for that person?
5. If you had to choose a name for yourself to express your understanding of who God is, what would it be (or what meaning would you want it to have)?
6. In practical terms, how can we avoid our worship becoming empty ritual and our service becoming mindless routine? How can we keep alive our expectation that God will act in our experience?

2. THE BABY LEAPED: THE SURPRISING ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

a. The Past

How does it make you feel to know that God has watched over your life since before your birth?

What gifts has God woven into your personality and how can you use them to serve him and bring him glory?

b. The Present

What causes for joy do you find in the person and purposes of God and especially in the Lord Jesus?

Take time to express your joy in Christ in whatever way you can – verbal or physical or both.

c. The Future

What is God speaking to you? What is he calling you to do in obedience to Him?

Pray that you may follow the Spirit's leading in obedience to God's calling on your life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Slowly and thoughtfully, read Psalm 139:15-17. What questions does this passage raise? How can other Bible passages and the whole story of Scripture help you resolve those questions?
2. God's plan for John's life was made clear through the angel's words and Old Testament prophecies. How can we follow God's specific purposes for us?
3. This chapter emphasises the value of unborn lives. How should Christians speak and act in response to the issue of abortion in the contemporary world? What part can you play in that?
4. Every human life has value and every person can respond to God as the Spirit leads. Knowing this, how should our churches treat people with disabilities, both physical and intellectual?
5. How can recognition of every person's value to God and uniqueness in his purposes free us from unhealthy comparison and competition? What difference should this make in practice to how we relate to each other in church, work and leisure?
6. This Chapter suggests that your praise of God can prompt other people to think about Him. How can you make praise of God a more natural part of your daily life and conversations?

3. AS IT IS WRITTEN: THE PROMISED ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight

a. The Past

What difference does it make to you to remember that your personal story is the continuation of God's work through history?

When have you seen God fulfilling one of the promises of His Word in your experience? Give thanks to Him for this.

b. The Present

To what degree is your present lifestyle and thinking shaped by Scripture? What hills and valleys obstruct God's work in you?

Fill in valleys and flatten hills by applying specific Bible promises, warnings and commands to your thinking and behaviour.

c. The Future

How will your next steps be shaped by God's promises? Who should be speaking to in accordance with God's Word?

Pray that you may have courage to make the changes you need to make in response to the Word of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Malachi 3:1 and any commentaries you have on it. Do you think one or two messengers are in view? Does it make any difference to our faith which interpretation is correct?
2. What does Isaiah 55:10-11 teach us about the Word of God? What other passages of Scripture help us appreciate the power and trustworthiness of God's Word?
3. What specific promises of God can we place our trust in? Why do you think there is so often a delay in God's fulfilment of his promises? 2 Peter 3:9 may help you in thinking about this.
4. How should trust in God's Word impact our emotions, our thinking, and our life choices? Consider a specific recent emotion, thought or choice and how God's Word speaks to it.
5. How can you help each other to level out the 'valleys' and 'hills' in your lives in accordance with God's Word so that you make level paths for God's work in you?
6. Why do we so often go quiet when we have opportunities to evangelise? How can we develop more courage to speak for God? How can we help each other in this?

4. A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS: THE NEEDED ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

a. The Past

What positive and negative examples have you seen in people in positions of Christian leadership?

As you reflect on these examples, ask God to guide you to forgive what was bad and to be inspired by what was good.

b. The Present

How would you rate your life presently in terms of:

- a) Hypocrisy – superficial piety with sin hidden beneath?
- b) Fruitfulness – blessing to others and glory to God?

c. The Future

What will the fruit that accompanies repentance look like in your life?
What specific changes do you need to make?

Do you think God wants your future life to be as radical as John's? To what extent will that be visible and set you apart from others?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Summarise in one sentence the key features of these groups of people who were active among the Jews in Jesus' day?
 - Pharisees
 - Sadducees
 - Herodians
 - Zealots
 - Essenes
2. What were the main similarities and differences between John the Baptist and Elijah?
3. This passage talks about coming wrath. Do you think Christians think and talk enough about these themes? Why might they be neglected and what risks would doing so carry?
4. Have you seen or read about examples of hypocrisy among Christian leaders? What practical steps can we take to counter it or support and encourage faithful leaders?
5. Is a radical lifestyle like John's only something God desires from a few people? How far can we follow John's life as an example?
6. What would the fruit of repentance look like in your lives? How can you help each other develop habitual repentance?

5. I AM NOT THE CHRIST: THE UNIQUE ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'.

a. The Past

How much of your past service (even if done in God's name) has failed to give glory to Him?

Confess to your Father the pride and timidity that have held you back from confessing His praises and sharing the gospel.

b. The Present

In what senses do you feel like a voice in the wilderness (someone who is an outsider and different from the values of the majority)?

Ask God to comfort you in the pain and loss this brings and confess to Him any areas of compromise you have identified.

c. The Future

What specific changes do you need to make to your life to be more effective as a voice in the wilderness?

Ask God to give you wisdom to see who you can speak to and courage to cry out to call others to Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. John said he was not any of three figures who were expected by first century Jews. Who were these three figures and why were they expected?
2. How do you square John's claim that he was not Elijah with to Jesus' statement that John was "Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14)?
3. Why was Jesus the only person who qualified to be the Prophet like Moses?
4. Do you agree that our contemporary Western culture is "obsessed with identity"? What evidence do you see of this and why do you think it has come about?
5. What does the Bible teach about how Christians can come to understand their true identity? How does it relate to knowing God through Jesus Christ and the Spirit's work in us?
6. In specific ways, how can you (individually and together, in workplaces, local communities and churches) make a difference in the world using the gifts and resources God has entrusted to you without thinking of yourselves as saviours, taking the glory for yourselves or failing to point people to Jesus?

6. MIGHTIER THAN I: THE SURPASSING ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

a. The Past

What acts of service have people made towards you? How did they make you feel and in what ways did they reflect Christ?

Have you lived as someone who would be happy to serve in the most menial ways or has pride held you back from doing so?

b. The Present

To what degree are you filled by the Spirit? Are you consciously bringing your whole life under His influence and following Him?

Allow the Holy Spirit to show you those attitudes and actions in you that are unholy – those things that would grieve Him.

c. The Future

What pathways of service is the Spirit leading you into? Are you willing to do the menial tasks as well as those that gain attention?

Pray for a fresh awareness of the joy of serving Christ as an unworthy person and for the Spirit's power to keep serving.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that baptism in fire refers to judgement? How should the realisation of the reality of God's judgement motivate us in evangelism?
2. What do you believe about water baptism (how should be done and to whom)? How can Christians live with or resolve their differences of view on this issue?
3. How do you understand the baptism in the Spirit? Do you agree with the perspective presented in this Chapter that it is something that all Christians were included in at conversion?
4. Why do you think the Holy Spirit is often so misunderstood? How should we think and speak about Him?
5. Have you observed any of the unhelpful ways of speaking about the Spirit and His work identified in this Chapter (or perhaps others)? How can we correct these?
6. What is the difference between actions that are led and empowered by the Spirit and those that are not? How can you ensure your life is lived in step with the Spirit?

7. DO YOU COME TO ME? THE HUMBLE ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness

a. The Past

Think back to your baptism or about the words that were said at it. What was its significance?

How have you lived since your baptism? Has its meaning (of death to self and living for Christ) been lived out by you?

b. The Present

Meditate on the sinless character of Jesus and compare it to yourself, asking God to enlighten you.

How does this gaze at Jesus bring you joy and hope? How does it challenge you and inspire you to change?

c. The Future

Have any people close to you professed faith in Jesus but not been baptised? How can you encourage them to do so?

What will it mean for you in coming days to live out the truth expressed in your baptism?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so helpful and humbling to realise that Jesus had to come to us before we could come to Him?
2. Why do you think Jesus insisted that John must baptise Him? What did it mean when He said it was to fulfil all righteousness?
3. Look at these verses that refer to the sinlessness of Jesus in their context: John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5. Why was it essential that Jesus was sinless and what significance does this truth have for us?
4. Why is baptism such a helpful symbol of our salvation? What does it signify?
5. How might meditating regularly on the meaning of your baptism help you to maintain your commitment to live for Jesus?
6. Do we meditate on Jesus as much as we should? How can we gaze more often on Jesus and help each other to do so?

8. THE LAMB OF GOD! THE SAVING ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

a. The Past

Think of times when you have taken part in the Lord's Supper and truly beheld Jesus in the way He intends us to.

What made that occasion special? What attitude did you have and how was it conducted? What words and thoughts stick with you?

b. The Present

What does it mean to you presently to realise that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away your sins?

Take time to meditate on the cross. If it helps, imagine God lifting your sins and laying them on Jesus. Give thanks and repent.

c. The Future

Does the Lord's Supper need to become more central for you in your worship of God? How can you make it so?

How might you be like John in encouraging others to behold Jesus, the Lamb slain for their sins?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are sheep a helpful image for us of our relationship with God? How is sin like wandering and how is God like a Shepherd?
2. What do you understand of the Old Testament sacrificial system? Read the first few chapters of Leviticus if you are unsure. Imagine what it would have been like to take part in it. How do you feel?
3. Why is it so important to realise that the idea of Jesus as Lamb of God is both about Jesus being the conqueror and the sacrifice. How do these ideas belong together?
4. How would you describe to someone why Jesus had to die? What does the idea of the sacrificial lamb emphasise for us? Look at 1 Peter 1:19 and 2:24 for help if you are uncertain.
5. Do you agree that the Lord's Supper should be the central act of worship in the Church? Why is it so often not (what displaces it) and how can we restore it to that position?
6. What challenges might come with telling a person today who is unfamiliar with the Bible that "Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world?" How would you explain the key concepts in this statement (sins and sacrifice) to them?

9. UNLESS IT IS GIVEN: THE SOVEREIGN ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

a. The Past

What achievements or successes have you had in the past? To what degree were you responsible for them?

Think through the factors that enabled the things in your past of which you are proud and appreciate that God gave every good gift.

b. The Present

In what ways has envy or jealousy held you back from encouraging others or opening up opportunities for them?

In those things that are given to you, are you ensuring that God receives the glory and appropriate others are given opportunities?

c. The Future

Are you planning for succession or intentionally sharing opportunities for service with other suitable people?

How will your attitude to ministry or work change in light of John's principle that we only receive what we are given?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Try to think of something that you (or another person) might take credit for. Help one another to see why that thing is really the result of gifts that come from God. List as many ways in which that is true as you can (abilities, opportunities, resources etc.)
2. Where does jealousy and envy come from? Think of all the reasons you can? What do John's words suggest the root issue is?
3. Have you experienced people who have intentionally, generously and frequently made it their aim to open up opportunities for others? If so, what motivated those people? If not, why might that be?
4. If you were aware that someone else was more gifted than you or advancing further in an area of service, what would you do (honestly)? What should you do?
5. If you were sure that you were not advancing in an area because of a system that was unfair or people who were jealous (share if that has been your experience and you can trust the others in the group) what should you do about it?
6. Why is it important that our service for God is not measured as successful in the short term and visible? How can an eternal perspective help us keep going when it is tough?

10. HE MUST INCREASE: THE ONLY ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

He must increase, but I must decrease.

a. The Past

What people have shown you most clearly what it meant for them to decrease so Jesus could increase?

Give thanks to God for their example and ask for grace to be like them.

b. The Present

Are your thoughts predominantly about yourself, about others or about Jesus? Try to put an honest percentage on each of these.

Take time now to think about Jesus and let Him increase in your estimation. Think of His character shown in His words and deeds.

c. The Future

How does the anticipation of our eternal ‘marriage’ union with Jesus bring you hope and joy in the present?

How should this anticipation shape your church experience, your private life and your conversations with others?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the implications of the idea that God wove parenthood and marriage into the experience of human beings to teach us about His love for a culture in which these relationships often go wrong? What can Christians do in response?
2. If you are married, to what degree does your marriage reflect the love of God for His people to others? How could it do so better? If you are not married, how can you help Christian couples to do this or prepare to do it if you expect to be married in future?
3. Read Ephesians 5:22-33. What does this passage teach us about how Christian marriage works and how Christ loves the Church?
4. What do you find helpful or strange about the idea of Jesus as the bridegroom of the Church? Help one another understand this.
5. How might thinking more of life as marriage preparation impact you in these areas:
 - a. Private life?
 - b. Conversations?
 - c. Church life?
6. How can you help your pastor (or yourself if you are a pastor) to find it easier to become less and make Jesus more? Clue: encouragement might be key!

11. ARE YOU THE ONE? THE SUFFICIENT ONE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he

a. The Past

Think about the time when you came to trust in Jesus at first. How did you feel? How did Jesus seem to you?

Thank God for your salvation and ask Him to restore to you the joy that comes from knowing Him as your Saviour.

b. The Present

What questions do you have about God and your faith? Look for answers to these in Scripture.

If there are some questions without revealed answers, ask God to give you grace to endure and to trust Him as you live them.

c. The Future

What do you think life in the new creation when Christ restores all things will be like? Use sanctified imagination as you think.

How will you shape your life in light of the hope you have and how will you continue to learn more about Jesus as you live?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which Old Testament prophecies have already been fulfilled by Jesus and which are awaiting His future return?
2. In what ways might we be tempted to think that Jesus is not sufficient? Think about teachings that suggest we need something more than Him or areas of life where we may not instinctively realise that He and God's promises in Him are sufficient.
3. Specifically thinking about physical and emotional healing, to what degree should we expect it in the present and to what extent is it something we can only look forward to after Christ's return?
4. What blessings, experiences and knowledge do we have as Christians who are in the Kingdom of God that Old Testament believers did not have?
5. What things do we still not know because God has not revealed them? How should we live with these uncertainties? What dangers come with being speculative or argumentative about them?
6. What do we know from Scripture about our eternal destiny? How might thinking more about these things motivate us now?

12. EPILOGUE: THEY WENT AND TOLD JESUS

PERSONAL REFLECTION

[Herod] feared the people

a. The Past

In what ways have you been like Herod Antipas, either as someone who tries too hard to please people or who is too easily distracted by entertainment and the promise of pleasure?

Confess these sins to God and embrace His forgiveness and cleansing.

b. The Present

Which people are you tempted to be afraid of at this point in your life? What would faithful testimony to God mean before them?

Remember that faithfulness can mean speaking out, like John to Herod, or staying silent, as Jesus did, but both will be costly.

c. The Future

What would you be willing to die for? How can clarity about this question help you know what you should live for?

Make a fresh commitment to live, like John the Baptist, until the day of your death in faithfulness to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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