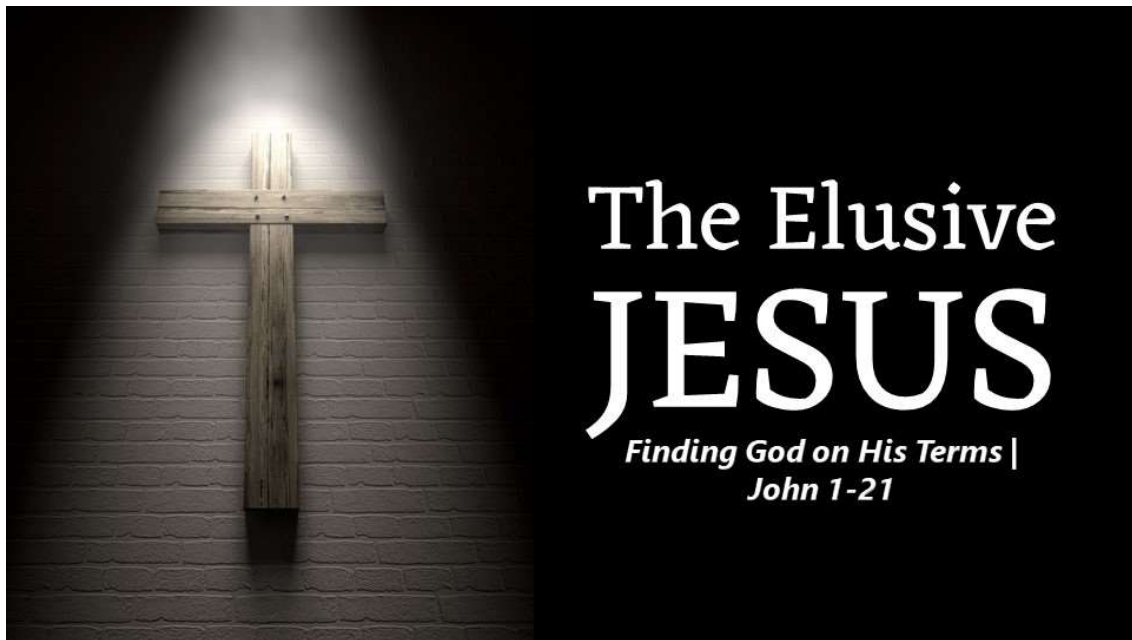


Name: _____



Growth Group Booklet

Term 1, 2021

**CALLIDE VALLEY
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**



Series Introduction

We love stories, don't we? We read them and tell them and watch them and retell them. Whether it's at the dinner table, from a library, on a screen or over your back fence, our lives are filled with stories. You probably have your own favourite stories and even your favourite story tellers. Because there is something full of wonder about the way a good story is crafted by a great storyteller, isn't there?

This year we're all part of several sister churches undertaking a series in the New Testament book of John. This term Goondiwindi, Warwick, Callide Valley and Toowoomba churches are journeying through John together, and next term we'll be joined by our fellow congregation in Stanthorpe.

Here's a quick lay of the land about the story of this great book, as we head into our series called 'The Elusive Jesus: Finding God on His Terms'.

Now, John, the writer of John's gospel, is a storyteller, through and through. This isn't to say he made it up - it is the eyewitness account of Jesus, but it is more than mere data transfer that John gives us. He crafts the story. John honours us in communicating who Jesus is, in a particular way. Here are 2 things about the way the story is crafted, to help us as we tackle this great story.

On the one hand he introduces Jesus, and he is, well, 'elusive'. John captures the mystery of God become flesh. Jesus, it turns out, is kind of hard to grasp, both physically and figuratively. He refuses to be defined or confined by people's expectations. To get to know Jesus and follow him, is always done on Jesus' terms and never our own. We'll experience time and again this elusive nature of Jesus throughout the story.

But on the other hand, the way John tells us this story of Jesus, he does also really want us to see Jesus. While mysterious, he isn't unknowable. Jesus will be revealed. And so, the way John tells this story will give us, the reader, a big helping hand. Throughout the book, John gives us time and again, moments of insight, where we're privileged with the inner workings of people's thoughts, or explanations, or descriptions of things that people who were with Jesus at the time just don't have access to. John gives us, as we meet Jesus, inside information about Jesus: who sent him, why he came and how to follow him. There is a certain privilege in being in this 'storyteller - reader' relationship with John. John privileges us. We're privileged!

Now, any good story is worth taking your time and that's what we're going to do. We're covering the whole of John's gospel over the first half of 2021. During term time we'll use this booklet to guide our growth groups, and during school holidays we'll keep pushing on through the story - even when our groups are having a break. We'll also be staying in John's story during Easter.

Each episode has a 'big idea' - our summary as pastors of the main point we believe the passage is teaching. In fact, we've also come up a big idea for the whole series - a series big idea: *'John reveals the Elusive Jesus so that, by finding Him on His terms, we may have life in His name.'*

Each episode in this booklet assumes about 1.5 to 2 hours together, for discussion in a group sized anywhere from 2 people up to 7 or 8. We're also working hard to align our Bible Talks in church with the discussion questions in this booklet. To make the most of your time in John's gospel this year, we encourage you to do the following:

Before Church: Read each week's Bible Reading, the day before church.

To Church: Take this booklet with you to church, using it to make notes.

After Church: Invest an hour or two by yourself sometime after church, working through the questions before your growth group meets during the week.

When we meet in Growth Groups, you'll notice we're using our 6 R's model: *Reflect, Read, Refresh, Research, Relationships* and *Respond*. The most important of the 6 R's are the last two: *Relationships* and *Responding* in prayer. Try to work through the first 4 R's efficiently in your group time so that you can slow down, savour and really enjoy the last two together.

Finally, please familiarise yourself with John's gospel in anticipation of this series. This is for you. And be prayerful for the churches seeking the blessing of hearing God's Word. This is for all of us. But also, please be open yourself, to what meeting Jesus in John's Gospel will do *in* you, and *in* us. This is a story for defining faith, being serious about discipleship together and having life in Jesus Christ. It is our prayer that encountering The Elusive Jesus will do that deep work in you, and us, together – as we truly 'Find God on His Terms'.



Your brothers in Christ

Reverends Joshua Rowe, Peter Evans, Brad Dewson, Andrew Purcell, David Bailey and Elders Nick Prins and David Coburn.



Episode 1:

John announces the arrival of the elusive Jesus, with a broadside of mysterious titles about the One who offers us the right to become children of God.

Following Sunday 31 Jan

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 1:1-18

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. Who is speaking in verses 1-18 and who is he speaking to?
2. Most stories begin with a sense of 'once upon a time'. But the story of Jesus is like no other. When does His story begin?
3. How do verses 9-11 show that we are dealing with 'The Elusive Jesus'?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. John (the storyteller) privileges readers with heaps of info about the elusive Jesus. He gives us the inside scoop. What are we told at the outset about Jesus, that characters in the story will have to find out for themselves?
2. Verses 1 and 18 (the 'bookends' to the intro) tell us who we are ultimately dealing with. When we're dealing with Jesus, who are we really tangling with?

3. Verse 17 hints at the backstory we need to help us recognise this 'Elusive Jesus'. Where is the backstory and who is John saying is a better, new Moses?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. If this is the elusive Jesus that we're tangling with, how will this change our attitude to Him as we hear the rest of John's story, this term?

2. In verse 14 which two realms have collided, and why could it be that we can only find God living among us, on His terms?

3. In verse 12 what is the central promise that the storyteller offers to us, his readers, if we take up his challenge of reading his story?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise Jesus for who he's revealed to be in this passage, so we may become children of God.

2. Thank God that like Moses led God's people out of slavery to Egypt, Jesus will lead us out of slavery to sin.

3. Ask God to reveal himself to us through the Elusive Jesus this term, so we may find God and find life, on His terms.



Episode 2:

In a world of people claiming to search for God; the Messiah, instead, insists on asking seekers what they're really looking for.

Following Sunday 7 Feb

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 1:19-51

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. When Jews from Jerusalem ask John the Baptist who he is, what is his reply in verse 23?
2. How did John the Baptist know who the Messiah was? (verse 33)
3. What are the first words we hear from the mouth of Jesus in verse 38, and who else is this question directed at?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. What would the experience be like for those hearing John's answer about the elusive Jesus, in verses 26 and 27?
2. What are we discovering about who Jesus is when John the Baptist calls him 'the Lamb of God', in verses 29 and 36?
3. In verses 42, 47-48 and 51 what are we learning about the danger of starting a conversation with Jesus?

4. Nathanael attempts to nail down the elusive Jesus in verse 49. How does Jesus' response in verses 50-51 show that Nathanael's belief is not yet on God's terms?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. How does John the Baptist's words in verses 20-21 help reveal what true belief is, on God's terms?

2. What do both Andrew and Philip do after they meet Jesus, in verses 41 and 45? What have they got right about being disciples who follow the elusive Jesus?

3. Jesus sets the terms for true discipleship with calling language, such as 'come' (1:39), 'follow me' (1:43) and 'I saw you' (1:48). Where are you tempted to reverse this, and set your own terms for discipleship?

Respond in Prayer

1. Thank God for sending the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

2. Ask for God's strength to seek a life of humble self-forgetfulness, like John the Baptist, realising that you cannot be the Messiah for your own life or anyone else.

3. Pray for each other that we would be 'finding' disciples; leading others to find Jesus too.



Episode 3:

In His first sign, the elusive Jesus offers a taste of eternal life to everyone, yet most of those present don't recognise who is behind the greater celebration.

Following Sunday 14 Feb

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 2:1-11

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. When, where, why and how does Jesus turn ceremonial washing water into a truckload of the finest of wine?

2. What parts of the short conversations at this wedding are strange, and what questions do they make you ask, as we listen in?

3. How does everyone else in this episode seem to make a mistake with the elusive nature of Jesus' identity? (look for a family identification, Jesus' deliberate hiding of identity, a case of mistaken identity, and an assumed understanding of His identity)

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. What does the phrase 'on the third day' remind us of, from the Old Testament story of God's people? (Eg. Isaac, Moses, Jonah)
2. How do the different reactions (of the master of the banquet and the disciples) resonate with what John told us to expect about the elusive Jesus in 1:10-14?
3. Jesus does this 'sign' elusively, at a wedding. What are we told about this sign and what should we now expect with the introduction of wedding language into the story?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. What is strangely elusive about Jesus' claim that 'my hour has not yet come?' When does it come, showing what must happen for Jesus' glory to be properly 'revealed'? (See John 12:23)
2. How does that ultimate revealing of the elusive Jesus challenge what it means for followers 'to believe in him' on his terms?
3. Ceremonial water was normally used by God's people for washing the *outside* of the body. But Jesus' sign makes it for the *inside* of the body. What greater washing is promised here for followers who truly believe in this elusive Jesus?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God for this joyous occasion, where Jesus chose a humble country wedding to first reveal his glory to his closest friends.
2. Pray that God would help us to taste the true joy of the new life he gives us in Jesus.
3. Ask God to help others around us taste and see the new life Jesus offers.
4. Pray that God would continue his radical work of transforming our lives from the inside out through Jesus.



Episode 4:

John privileges us with inside knowledge about the elusive Jesus and His divine work to replace religion with the Revealer.

Following Sunday 21 Feb

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 2:12-3:21

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. The clearing of the temple and the visit by Nicodemus seem to be very different episodes. Yet one happens by day and the other at night. What 3 links between 2:23-25 and 3:1-2 show they are connected?

2. The clearing of the temple is 'timestamped' twice, at bookends of the episode (2:13 and 2:23). What did this festival celebrate, and how does this remind us of John the Baptist's elusive label for Jesus in chapter 1?

3. This records the first explicit mention of resurrection in the story (2:22). When reading it for the first time, what affect did this have on your understanding of the elusive Jesus?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. In 2:19, how does Jesus speak in a way that conceals his identity, yet promises to reveal it?

2. Verse 19 seems elusive and prophetic, yet the storyteller interrupts to explain it, in 2:21-22. How else does the storyteller also interrupt earlier (2:17), and later (3:16-21)?

3. What seems to be the storyteller's goal for us as readers?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. Jesus' disciples seem to be missing for much of the action here. How does the storyteller include the first disciples in the daytime episode and include would-be disciples in the night-time episode?

2. In these episodes John the storyteller contrasts before and after, day and night, light and dark, heaven and earth, teacher and teacher, coming and going, truth and evil. What is he showing readers about the true nature of following the elusive Jesus?

3. As Jesus' identity becomes clearer to the Jewish leaders, they begin their own journey of increasing hostility to Jesus and his insistence on finding God on His terms (in 2:18). How is their hostility a model for what followers of Jesus should expect today?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God for Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

2. Thank God for revealing himself to us, even as Jesus' true identity remains concealed to so many people who refuse to come into God's light.

3. Ask God to reveal more of himself to us this week, and to our friends, as we discipline ourselves to listen more to the elusive Jesus.



Episode 5:

John the Baptist's role as Best Man is to joyously spotlight the arrival of Jesus the bridegroom.

Following Sunday 28 Feb

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 3:22-4:3

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. Who are the people involved in this passage and what is the presenting problem?
2. What is John's summary of the situation in verse 30?
3. Compare verse 36 with John 3:16. How are they similar? How are they different?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. What is the picture John the Baptist uses to describe the identity of Jesus in verse 29?
2. How is Jesus described in verse 31? Where is this elusive Bridegroom from?

3. John the Baptist speaks about 'receiving from heaven' in verse 27 and this idea of 'receiving' is continued in verses 34 and 36. What are the gifts promised for those who receive Jesus as Bridegroom, and what would make them precious to the recipient?

4. What is a person left with if they reject Jesus (verse 36)?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. Put yourself in John the Baptist's shoes in verse 26. How would these words make you feel?

2. What does John the Baptist say is a defining feature of his relationship with Jesus, in verse 29? How does that feature look in your own life, as you seek to live out verse 30?

3. In the past week how has God called you to be 'less', so that Jesus may be 'more'? Where is he calling you to that, this coming week?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God that he has sent the Bridegroom from heaven, to bring us into relationship with him.

2. Pray for each other as we seek to be disciples who decrease, so that Jesus may increase.

3. Pray for those around you, your friends, family, colleagues and neighbours who are yet to receive Jesus.



Episode 6:

John portrays a highly provocative marriage-betrothal scene for the elusive Jesus to reveal not only Himself but a stunning, surprising ideal disciple.

Following Sunday 7 Mar

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 4:4-54

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. In this episode we meet the ultimate outsider: guilty, ashamed, and exposed. In what ways is this woman an outsider?

2. How does Jesus surprise and honour her?

3. How are we as readers privileged over everyone else in John's gospel, being able to hear this conversation?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. How does the setting of this passage remind us of engagement and marriage scenes from the Old Testament, especially in Genesis?

2. The number 7 is important to John the storyteller, as the Jewish number of peace and rest. How many men has this woman had, and who is the seventh man coming into her life now?
3. In verse 26 this is the first time Jesus clearly declares himself to be the Messiah. Why is this so significant, given this woman's reputation?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. What does the storyteller show us about the knowledge Jesus has about our own dirty secrets?
2. This outcast, promiscuous, Samaritan woman becomes the most faithful and fruitful follower of Jesus in all of John's Gospel. What does her story tell us about God's intention for us, no matter how much dirty laundry we have hidden in our lives?
3. What does this woman do that shows us she is becoming a true disciple and follower of Jesus?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God for taking a guilty outsider - ashamed and exposed - and freeing her to become the most fruitful disciple in all of John's gospel.
2. Thank God for Jesus' honesty with us, in insisting we face up to our own guilt and shame, so that we too can be set free and become fruitful.
3. Ask God for help so that we can all worship Him in Spirit and in truth, following the elusive Jesus and becoming fruitful, on His terms.



Episode 7:

When the Jews put the elusive Jesus on trial for His ability to give life, He gives them the slip and they end up on trial for rejecting life.

Following Sunday 14 Mar

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 5:1-47

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. What is strange about the man's answer to Jesus' question in verse 7?
2. What is similar about how the healed man and the Jews respond to the Elusive Jesus?
3. The Jews persecute Jesus for breaking their sabbath rules, but Jesus turns the tables on them and judges them. What are the four witnesses he marshals against them in verses 31-47?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. John heightens the tension by not telling us that Jesus is healing on the Sabbath until verse 9. Why do you think Jesus deliberately healed this man on the Sabbath?

2. Jesus uses this confrontation to make some big claims. What does Jesus reveal about himself in verses 16-30?

3. According to these verses, what does it look like to respond to the Elusive Jesus on his terms?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. Like the former invalid, we can cling onto other things for life rather than finding true life in Jesus. What shadows of life are you tempted to cling to? Why?

2. How does hearing Jesus' words in verses 24 to 26 help us to let go of the shadows, to come to Jesus for true life?

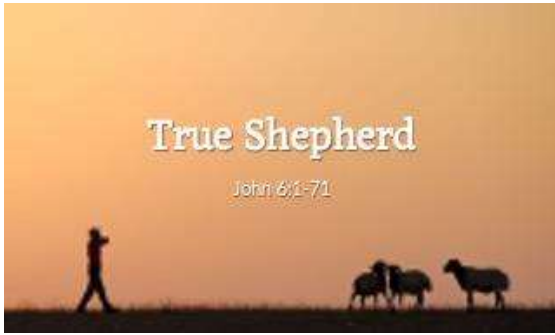
3. In verses 5:16-17 we see the extent of the Jewish leaders' hostility towards Jesus. How does this set our expectations for the rest of John's story about the Elusive Jesus? What does this reveal about what it means for us to follow the Elusive Jesus?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God for the true life he gives us in Jesus.

2. Ask God to help us stop clinging to shadows of life and hold fast to true life in Jesus.

3. Pray for those you know who don't have life in Jesus. Pray that they would hear and believe Jesus, to find true life.



Episode 8:

Jesus as the True Shepherd uses a 'hard teaching' to sift those who really want to feed on Him, from those who just want a feed.

Following Sunday 21 Mar

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 6:1-71

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. John gives us two more 'signs' in verses 1-20. What are the details of these signs?
2. Jesus speaks of the 'work God requires' in verse 29 and the 'Father's will' in verse 40. What is similar about these verses?
3. Compare verses 31-58 with Exodus 16:1-8. What are the similarities?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. In verses 1-20, there is a picture of the serene and abundant provision of Jesus with both the multiplying food and overcoming the storm. But how are we shown (by John's inside information) that there is more going on beneath the surface? (eg. verses 6, 15 and 17)

2. What are the promises offered by Jesus in verses 53-58? What makes them hard to receive?

3. Why is Jesus not happy with mere followers but instead seeks disciples (contrast verse 15 with 66)?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. What does it look like to daily 'swallow this hard teaching' of Jesus?

2. How is 'being misunderstood' also a part of being a disciple of Jesus? What might be the results of that for us?

3. Why does that make it all the more important to be disciples in community?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God for his provision in sending Jesus, and that he will lose none that have been given him.

2. Ask God for us to be nourished by him alone, and to be aware of the life that he gives.

3. Give thanks for the particular ways God has provided abundantly for you this past week.

4. Ask for courage to trust God on his terms, especially when we receive 'a difficult word' in Jesus' teaching.



Episode 9:

Jesus is the elusive Messiah sent by God to call people to Himself, but no-one grasps either Him or His teaching, at His timing and on His terms.

Following Sunday 28 Mar

Reflect on the Service

Where in the Sunday service were you able to see or experience God at work (this could be in the sermon, Bible reading, songs, prayer or a conversation)?

Read John 7:1-53

What stood out to you?

Refresh

1. What are Jesus' brothers wanting him to do in verses 3-4? Why?
2. What are the opinions of the crowd about who the elusive Jesus is?
(see verses 12, 13, 20, 31, 40-44)
3. How would you describe the attitude of the Jewish leaders towards Jesus in verses 45-52?

Research: Finding the Elusive Jesus

1. What do we learn about the timing of Jesus from verses 6, 30 and 39? What do we know about his 'hour'?
2. What is the declaration of Jesus in verses 37-39? What is the word picture? Contrast the response of the people here to the response when Jesus used this picture in chapter 4 (see especially 4:39-42).

3. What do we learn about the Spirit from John's inside information, in verse 39?

Relationships: Following the Elusive Jesus

1. What are some opinions that people hold about Jesus (e.g. your neighbours, work colleagues, family)?

2. In your journey with Jesus, what have been some of the most challenging things you have discovered about him and what he calls us to?

3. What have you learnt about being a disciple of the elusive Jesus during this series? What has stood out to you? Where has He been working in your life?

Respond in Prayer

1. Praise God that He gives living water through Jesus and dwells among us by His Spirit.

2. Ask God to continue His deep work in us, seeing and savouring the elusive Jesus.

3. Pray for those you know that are confused about or dismissive of the identity of Jesus, that they would come to recognise their own thirst and receive Jesus' offer to them.