



# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020

## JOHN



### FOLLOW THE SIGNS TO LIFE

# **Saturday November 21: John 1-2**

Your personal guide to life, the universe and everything. Today Bern Leckie writes:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Of all the accounts of Jesus' amazing life, I find John's gospel the most breathtaking. If we think of the gospels as cameras at a football match, all watching the same game from a different angle, Mark is the neat, efficient one at the halfway line. Matthew and Luke cover from opposite ends, just as they are written for Jewish and Gentile audiences respectively. These three are clearly similar and naturally complement each other. But what about John?

John is the blimp camera with a unique view, not just showing the game but the Big Picture where it takes place: the stadium, the city, the world... Actually, it's more than a blimp. It's whatever you need for a universe-spanning, spiritually aware, multi-dimensional opening shot of all creation, God and the beginning of time. How can we get our heads around this?

John knows the scope of what he's trying to describe and that we can only grasp it if he zooms in on a person we can follow. Here he is! Jesus? No – John! (Not the writer but a different John, just in case you thought this was going to be too easy.)

I love how John the writer is still bursting with glorious, epic pictures of darkness and light as he starts to focus on John the Baptist who demonstrates something vital. What God is doing is massive, but a faithful person can point the way to following along. God chose John the Baptist to be the person who would grab Israel's attention, see the Spirit coming down to remain on Jesus, and then be able to tell others with conviction: go and follow him!

What's so special about Jesus? This is the main thing the writer John wants to show us. It would help us to believe the testimonies of other people who are pointing to and following Jesus, but we probably need to see for ourselves too. So, John maps out seven signs of Jesus' miraculous power. The first is Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding where everyone got to enjoy the fruit of God's transformational work, and the servants became the ones privileged to see how this happens. Can you imagine being there? No-one would have walked out of that feast with a theology degree, but everyone would have a taste of God's kingdom and the new life to come, and they met the man God sent to guide us into it.

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants to do massive, world-changing things through faithful people who will listen to and obey him. But he knows that there is too much for most of us to grasp without relationships and people we can get to know and follow. Jesus is our ultimate guide to a new way of life and understanding everything. The Spirit helps people to recognise Jesus, follow him and do what he does. We might recognise his work through God-given spiritual sensitivity, or we might just like good wine. If we are willing to drop what we were doing and go with Jesus, he will show us everything.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I want to spend time with Jesus the way these disciples did! I will enjoy what he shows me through this gospel and expect that it will help me to see life in a fresh way.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and other people I follow Jesus with.

## **Wednesday November 25: John 3-4**

**He said what?** Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

If you've been a Christian for more than a few weeks, you can probably explain what your faith is about. If, like me, you have been following Jesus for years, you might be pretty confident that you could answer a lot of awkward questions about it too. Have you ever imagined what it would be like to meet Jesus and have a good old chat about it?

I love that whenever I spend time with Jesus in Gospel stories, and especially John's Gospel, I'm reminded that it might not be as cosy and comfy an experience as I would like. To be clear, I am very much looking forward to meeting Jesus face to face one day, but these chapters remind me that it's an awesome thing to be in God's presence. I have not yet got my head around faith, the kingdom of God and everything he wants for us and the world.

Look at what happened when the learned, senior, leading Pharisee Nicodemus came out to bump fists and see how they would get on together. Jesus undid his assurance of understanding with a few words. What do you mean, we must be "born again"? That's such a humbling challenge to anyone who has spent their life building wisdom and respect.

On the other hand, when Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman who seemed far from God by every measure ("Jews do not associate with Samaritans", let alone women with questionable love lives), his words drew her into faith and empowered her as a witness so that her whole town came to believe they had a Saviour, the Saviour of the world.

And as amazing as that was, John didn't count it as a miraculous sign, but his story of Jesus healing a child from a distance with only his word certainly did count. It wasn't just a nice thing that happened to one family, but a sign that we can all believe in a power and a new reality which is far beyond the business as usual which keeps us comfy. So, do we believe?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

Jesus did not live to affirm to religious people that they are doing all the right things, keep going. Nor did he live to reinforce the barriers anyone had built in their heads between who is right and acceptable to God and who is outside the boundaries of respectability.

Jesus shakes all of these things up with his words, and backs up his authority with his actions. It's absolutely right for us to feel uncomfortable, though hopefully also excited, because Jesus shows that life God's way is very different from what we might be used to, and much better than anything we could reasonably expect or even dream.

God knows our problems with seeing life the way he does, wanting what he wants and changing our minds to think and live differently. But Jesus makes this possible.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Ask God to challenge where I am too comfy, and thank him for faith and new thinking received, and still to come, from him.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

# **Saturday November 28: John 5-6**

The power of believing in Jesus. Today Bern Leckie writes:

## **What did I like about today's reading?**

Over our lives, many voices have shaped what we have done and who we think we are. Some come and go, like the people trying to sell us things this Black Friday weekend, but some stick with us. Teasing classmates might have made you sure you were bad at sports, but an encouraging teacher might have told you about something you were great at, and that might have defined you, influencing your choices right up to today.

What I love about these stories of Jesus is how his words shape and change the people who believe them. The “invalid” of 38 years was used to not getting around and didn’t believe they could qualify for healing from a special pool. Jesus’ words healed and redefined him. Then, out of his belief, this man did what Jesus said and walked, no longer an invalid.

I don’t think John included that story just to tell us about one fortunate man. It’s a picture of Jesus and us too. Jesus confesses that “he can only do what he sees the Father doing” – his life is a demonstration of belief. And this is what he tells his followers to do, to hear and believe the word that God has life to give. This word redefines us, and the life God offers is eternal, overcoming judgement and death. Can we believe and accept this? Is there a catch?

I love how Jesus knows that we’ll struggle to accept this incredibly good news. Why? Because we currently feel defined by other words and look for life in other places, including religious activities and texts, and we don’t see things God’s way – “you do not have the love of God in your hearts”, Jesus said – until we can believe and accept Jesus.

So, Jesus offers more signs here that his word is authority, including feeding the 5,000 and walking on water. That’s difficult stuff to copy if we try! But when people ask what they need to do to meet God’s requirements, his answer is simple: to believe in him, and receive life from him. I find it amazing that Jesus can redefine us. Have you let his words do that?

## **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants us to know how to receive life from him, and Jesus provides a memorable practical demo of this in the communion bread and wine which represent his body and blood. Jews were forbidden from eating certain foods and drinking blood in strict laws which could only be broken if they would otherwise die. Jesus’ invitation to consume his flesh and blood was rightly received not just as an attractive offer but a difficult challenge. It meant believing Jesus when he said that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” We will die unless we receive this. We will live if we do.

God doesn’t want our belief in him to be a hobby or accessory in our lives. He wants us to accept Jesus so that our lives can be redefined by him and the Spirit which grows love in us.

## **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Reflect this weekend on the different words and influences which are not from God but I accept as limitations or imperatives to do things, and thank God for the life he has given me.

## **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others in our church.

## **Wednesday December 2: John 7-8**

Who does Jesus think he is? Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

There is a way of thinking about Jesus which looks like believing in him but is actually just thinking he is a good human being, a great teacher and an inspirational leader. These are all nice things, but what amazes me about this passage is that John does not leave us the option of believing in Jesus while only thinking that. Jesus claims to be much more.

Firstly, Jesus claims that his teaching is not his own clever invention but comes from God, who sent him. That's quite a claim to authority! Teachers in Jesus' time were used to looking at scripture from slightly different angles, coming up with different interpretations and bringing these together to get a multi-dimensional view of God. Arguing about who had authority was as common then as now, and for everyone to accept a single human authority was ideal but almost unthinkable in practice. Why should this be Jesus? Who is he, anyway?

Jesus expands on this to say directly that his authority comes from God. Anyone could say that, but I love how Jesus then offers things only God could supply, like the "living water" of his Holy Spirit. Incredible words, if true. How can Jesus offer this? Who does he think he is?

Jesus goes even further when he says, "I am the light of the world." These words are going beyond humanity and touching divinity. He isn't just teaching God's teaching or working under God's authority. Jesus claims to be closely related to God, and calls him Father. He also states clearly, "I am not of this world." Can Jesus really be more than human?

I love how Jesus develops his claims about himself in the face of rising incredulity and opposition. This isn't an argument about an issue he's teaching about on which he can be proved wrong if his ideas aren't seen as helpful or reasonable. Jesus is making claims about his identity and sounding very unreasonable, literally incredible, for anyone who doesn't believe in him. Chapter 8 ends with the utterly mind-blowing "before Abraham was born, I am!" This is not something a human can claim. It sounds like Jesus says he is God. Is he?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants to grab our attention here. In case we were expecting his promised saviour Messiah to be merely a strong, capable, clever, inspirational person, God reveals his plan to be much better than that. His intervention in the world through Jesus is a more direct one. He hasn't just asked someone to do his work, he has poured himself into humanity.

By embodying God's nature in human form, Jesus gives us a way to see, know and start to understand God. By being human, Jesus also shows that life without sin is possible. Then by believing and following Jesus, we can connect with God and live this life for ourselves.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I believe Jesus is who he claims to be, but sometimes I live as if his teaching is only a wise serving suggestion rather than the substance of life itself. I want to grow in my belief that Jesus delivers all he claims, and in my faithfulness to doing everything he says.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

## **Saturday December 5: John 9-10**

**What if it's not about what we should do but what God is doing?** Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

These stories expose a massive difference between people's approach to religion and God's approach to loving us. I love how Jesus dealt with the popular false idea (addressed in the Bible many times) that people get what they deserve, and if someone is suffering, it's because they did something wrong. If you want the lengthy, painful account of how people insist on this and God answers mysteriously, take a deep breath and tackle the book of Job.

Jesus' answer is much shorter but still shifts the focus from what we do to what God does. This is A Good Thing because, as Jesus demonstrates, even religious people can be spiritually blind, missing God when he is right in front of them. But I love how Jesus shows, not just talks about, how God wants to heal all kinds of blindness. This means that one man's eyes can heal, and many more people can see and believe that God is at work among them.

What else is God doing? Jesus describes how he is gathering and leading people who recognise his voice. Being described as sheep doesn't seem flattering or desirable to people in our culture today ("wake up, sheeple!") but I love how Jesus is not talking about a system of domination and control. He describes himself as a shepherd who leads through trust.

"I am the good shepherd," said Jesus famously. I love the way his picture of shepherding looks like someone who loves and cares, respecting the people in his society who did one of the hardest, loneliest and most thankless jobs. But I'm amazed how high he sets the bar for what counts as "good".

Dying for his sheep? That seems above and beyond the job description. It reminds me that Jesus is talking about goodness and love which far exceed our expectations of ourselves and each other. This is what God is doing – supplying self-sacrificial love which will change everything. If we try and assess Jesus' demo of this in terms of what we think we can do, we'll meet the impossible looking barrier of death itself. But Jesus doesn't want us to worry about what we can do; instead, we should marvel at what God can do. This is where life is.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God wants to show us a different way of life in which we are not centred on ourselves but on him. When we live like this, following Jesus' lead, God will show us things we missed, even if we had belief in his existence and practiced religious things religiously.

Jesus describes his purpose as having come so we "may have life, and have it to the full." God's intention is for us to be healed, go from blindness to seeing, and enjoy the freedom that comes from knowing that we can be forgiven and not get what we deserve.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Thank God more for what he is doing and look for his lead to shape what I do next.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family.

# Wednesday December 9: John 11-12

It's no small thing to believe in Jesus. Today Bern Leckie writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

The last of Jesus' miraculous signs showing his authority and power is a huge deal. Lots of people have impressive sounding ideas and teaching. Few can back up their credentials by showing the power of their words. Only Jesus showed he had the ultimate power to turn death to life. We should be shocked and awed by this, because if someone can do that at will, is there anything they cannot do?

The strange thing is that after demonstrating power like this, I might expect Jesus to win over every doubting heart and mind. Why didn't everyone who knew then believe and follow him?

This line grabbed my attention: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation." It looks like it was possible to recognise what Jesus was doing as true, accept it as true, and yet still not allow him to change your mind. Was it starting to sink in with Israel's spiritual leaders that the change God had in mind for them and the world was bigger than they were ready for? Or were they simply driven more by fears and doubts than by faith in God?

I love how the people who were excited by Jesus started to show this in extravagant ways in the week before his crucifixion. From the woman who poured out perfume which probably represented her life savings, to the crowd who greeted Jesus as king, these were not small, subtle acts of belief. They showed that following Jesus is far more than accepting an idea, it's a huge, life changing thing.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Jesus does not accept people's belief, honour and praise as something which relates to himself alone. Instead, Jesus insists that belief in him is also belief in Father God who sent him. While God has always been mysterious and invisible, except for some physical signs (clouds, fire, etc), his plan was to become knowable and visible through Jesus.

So, it shouldn't be too surprising that Jesus is hard to accept. If he were only a good man, we could take or leave him easily. But to embrace Jesus is to know and embrace God, and that is a very big deal indeed, one which inevitably changes us when we do so wholeheartedly.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

The polarisation of people in this passage seems familiar in our culture, sharply divided over the biggest issues like Brexit and our response to the coronavirus. Looking at Jesus and his power over death and life, I would love more friends to see, believe and follow him, but I recognise that it's such a big deal, it is bound to be difficult and polarising.

So I need to admit that I can't change anyone's mind about God in my own strength. Instead, I want to grow in faithfulness following Jesus, keep pointing people to him and let him excite the people who need and want what he offers. I need God to guide me in this.

## Who am I going to share this with?

I will pray about what and how to share with people in my community!

## **Saturday December 12: John 13-14**

**We can only get the big things by getting the small things.** Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

John has a way of capturing the essence of Jesus – massive proof of God’s enormous love and power to change the world, embodied in a single person, a newborn child as we remember at Christmas.

In chapters 11 and 12 I was struck by the huge implications of believing in Jesus. He isn’t someone who can easily be dismissed as simply a nice or wise person. But since then, our Advent Calendar story reminded me that God likes to grow big things from small beginnings. In chapters 13 and 14, I think John has recorded the way Jesus addresses his followers who are struggling to get their heads around the vast scope of his power and promises.

Unexpectedly for a mighty leader, he becomes a servant. Washing people’s feet wasn’t something expected of the most capable servants either, just obedient ones willing to lower themselves. Could we do that? Jesus says we should. In the status-obsessed Roman world, that was even more shocking than it might be to us.

It’s not a pointless shock, though. I see it as an approachable, doable thing. Fully grasping God’s plan for a new kingdom reality is hard. Washing feet, not so much, if we are willing. Maybe that’s a big if, though. What would get in the way, if not skill? Pride, perhaps?

I think Jesus knows that when he asks to us to change our minds, believe and follow him, we run into big resistance within ourselves. But he offers small things we can do to start to overcome this. There’s a physical symbol in washing. There’s trust we can start to build in Jesus. We do this by making small steps of obedience to him. Does that seem like too much?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God invites us into the massive realm of new life through small, graspable things. This can begin with faith in and obedience to one person, Jesus.

When his followers ask for more details about the way he is going, Jesus simplifies things even more – he is the way. By sticking with Jesus, we won’t miss a thing, even though the scale of what he is doing in the world is incredible and impossible to grasp without him.

Jesus embodies and demonstrates servant leadership of people and obedience to God the Father. He calls us to follow him, do the same and receive the Holy Spirit, which no-one else is looking for but empowers believers in massive ways.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Sometimes I feel that I don’t have the “peace of mind and heart” Jesus promises, and that is usually because I’m looking for it from things in the world other than Jesus. I’m going to spend time between now and Christmas narrowing my focus on him, growing awareness of what isn’t close to him, and seeing if there is anything God wants me to simplify in my life.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family.



## **Wednesday December 16: John 15-16**

This is our purpose in life. Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

Have you had days, maybe stressful recent days, when you've wondered – what's the point? We might think we know what we want and what to expect from life, but in the turbulent times when our plans collapse and hope seems far off, it's a good question to ask. What are we here for? Without a good sense of that, it's hard to know what to do next.

I love that Jesus knew that this was exactly what his followers needed to hear before their plans would seem to fail and their world would change completely. He had become their hope, following his lead had become their life, and even though Jesus had told them he had to die, they were obviously not ready to grasp what this meant and why it was good.

But as they walked through Jerusalem from their last supper towards the place where Jesus would be arrested, they would have passed the temple which was engraved with vines, the symbol of Israel's hope for peace and prosperity. People longed for the stability which made it worth cultivating vines, as well as the good soil, patience and skill required for good fruit.

I love how Jesus turns this symbol and all expectations attached into a fresh picture of life, its purpose and what to expect next. Instead of hoping for stuff, hope for him. Connecting with Jesus is like being grafted into "the true grapevine" in which we are branches and Father God is the gardener. Our purpose is to be fruitful simply by remaining in this vine.

What kind of fruit are we growing? This isn't Jesus' command to make more disciples – they aren't our fruit. They would be branches too! Instead, Jesus is talking about the quality of our lives, what comes out of our minds and hearts. It's the replacement of bitterness, fragility and anger with peace, joy and ultimately love.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

Jesus' tremendous encouragement is that these are not things we have to strain to manufacture. Instead, it is God's purpose to grow them in us, using his skill, the pruning and purifying done by Jesus' words to us, and the new life and power supplied by the Holy Spirit.

I love how my worries about change in the world and my attempts to define or redefine my purpose in life are all overtaken by being defined by Jesus as part of his vine. My life is now about God, his skills and his purposes, and the best products of my life are the things he produces in me, especially love. It brings glory to God that our lives produce love and joy.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

This reminds me that my ability to do anything particularly well, with love, patience and faithfulness, is a product of God's cultivation of me – sometimes pruning back, always with the purpose of growth and more fruit in the end. I would not be able to be a parent, husband or capable worker without the fruit of the Holy Spirit first and foremost. So, I will thank God for this and bring him my requests for whatever else I think I need for the school holidays and next year. Jesus promises: "ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!"

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and, I hope, in work relationships where we can talk about our plans for 2021.

# Saturday December 19: John 17-18

## What Jesus prayed for you

Today Bern Leckie writes:

### What did I like about today's reading?

Did you know Jesus prayed for you? John wrote it down! This isn't the famous "Lord's Prayer", but it is the longest prayer we know from Jesus, prayed when his time was most limited, revealing his top priorities in this precious moment.

Jesus' closeness to his Father is certainly front of mind for him, and his purpose is clear – for people to recognise that knowing Jesus means knowing God and gaining life.

But as Jesus specifically prays for his followers and "all who will ever believe in me through their message" (that's you and me!), I'm struck by what he wants for us. Jesus asks that we would be as united and close to each other as he is to his Father. He then expects that others will believe as a result.

This relationship-based faith is massively different from the old ways of religion. Whenever we get into debates about religious rules, we tend to divide ourselves. Everyone has their own interpretation, and no-one can agree who is right. Jesus clearly wants something else for us. Is this possible? Do we want this? Or would we prefer the satisfaction of feeling right in our own ways instead of the "perfect unity" Jesus requested for us as we live in his way?

### What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is relational. He cannot be understood only as thing that exists but as a Father. He wants us to know new life and get this through relationships rather than abstract study or self-improvement. In this new life, we will have a closer relationship with him than was ever possible when people tried to approach God through religious beliefs and rituals alone.

Jesus' words here are remarkable, but what happens next shows that God is not just talking about changing the world. His plan for Jesus to be a sacrifice for the world is about to come to fruition in practice.

### What am I going to do differently as a result?

On reflection, I find it easy to retreat from relationship into ideas and self-guided "rightness" too often. I'm reminded by Jesus' prayer that the life he wants for us is only possible through relationships with him, the Father and each other.

So I'm going to spend more time in the new year sharing about where I am in faith and being open to help others too.

This walk with Jesus through John's gospel has also reminded me how open he wants his followers to be to changing how we think about and deal with things we thought we understood. So I want to become more willing to grow relationships in which we share how God is changing our minds or prompting us to take a fresh look at his world.

### Who am I going to share this with?

My family and others I follow Jesus with.

## **Wednesday December 23: John 19-20**

**Who did Jesus die for?**

Today Bern Leckie writes:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

While Christmas is about remembering Jesus' birth, it is unexpectedly his death here which is our biggest reason to celebrate.

I love how John draws our attention to why Jesus died. This was not random or meaningless. It was the result of a choice people made about who should lead them. The fact that God's people, Israel, chose the occupying power of Caesar over the rescuing power of God embodied in Jesus seems unfortunate misjudgement at best, ironic and self-defeating. Everything in John's gospel has a purpose, though, and I don't think he meant simply to report the news here.

I feel the spotlight on my own heart, my own choice of who I want to lead in my life. If I am ready to let God lead, I believe God reveals himself. If I am not, then even if God were in plain view, I would fail to recognise him or see how wide his arms stretched out for me on the cross.

Incredibly, I am reminded here that Jesus did not only die for his faithful followers. He died for every person in the crowd who feared and hated him, everyone who rejected God and his love for them, and everyone who was miles from faith and salvation across a hopeless divide. In his death, he showed there was nothing more that any opposition to him could do.

But in his defeat of death, he bridged that divide. He proved that there is no power which can get between us and God's love for us. And so he made the way for us to receive this, and the new death-proof life which comes with it, by believing and following him.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

God has a purpose for us which is far bigger than getting involved in some religious stuff which makes us feel nice. He wants us to know the full extent of his love for us, so that we can respond and be filled with his love for others too. This is not a soft, sentimental love but a strong, self-sacrificial, earth-shaking, world-changing, unstoppable love that can stare death in the face and defeat it.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

It's humbling to remember that it took a force this strong to unseat my poor choice of leader before I said yes to Jesus becoming "Lord" in my own life.

As I think about and pray for family, friends and colleagues who feel separated over Christmas – from each other physically, but also spiritually if they aren't yet believers in Jesus – I will thank God for his ongoing love for all of us. Who needs to know more of his love and how can they see it in 2021? I would like God to lead me in how to share this.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

My family and people in my school community who have different positions on God but a common need and strong desire for better leadership, fulfilling purpose and massive love.

# Friday December 25: John 21

No longer death but new beginnings. Today Bern Leckie writes:

## What did I like about today's reading?

While this looks like the end of a story, we are celebrating a beginning today.

I love how clear John makes it that Jesus' victory over death was not just a spiritual ideal but a physical reality. This is important, partly because it's a clear statement that we have real, physical hope in Jesus and his resurrection. He is more than an inspirational spiritual motivator but a true conqueror of the worst things that can happen to us.

The risen, perfect saviour sharing a breakfast feast also shows me that breakfast feasts are good too! It's not like we need excuses to enjoy food in our house, but some people in John's time worried a lot about staying spiritually pure by avoiding everything earthly. As he shows us Jesus eating, John is reminding us that we don't need to make that division. We can enjoy all of God's things today.

Of course, that isn't just stuff to feed ourselves. Jesus used this time to restore Peter, who was probably feeling that he had failed by denying he knew Jesus in difficult times, just as Jesus said he would. Jesus loved, trusted, empowered and appointed him anyway. Was that based on some special ability he knew Peter possessed? No, I think it was solely down to the love Peter readily confessed when it really mattered – when Jesus asked.

Jesus knew how responsive Peter would be when the Holy Spirit would move him, give him boldness and change his mind when God wanted to begin showing him how much further his kingdom would extend to include everyone God loves. That includes you and me.

## What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God's kingdom plan is all about new beginnings. His love for us took understandable human form in Jesus, as we celebrate today. This love was not just words but actions showing how much God values and believes in us. Jesus shows us how to put this love into practice too.

## What am I going to do differently as a result?

When I think back to past family Christmases, they have often felt deathly difficult, especially when people have brought the emotional baggage of disappointment with themselves or each other. We have had some really horrible ones, to be honest!

But over recent years, I am very thankful that love, which I would credit to God as the source, has been at work. We've seen and felt a lot of restoration, affirmation of each other's value and especially appreciation of new life – our son, for example. Family gathering has moved from pain to joy, and several have shown new interest at times in the faith some of us share.

This year presents unique challenges, though. As we look to catch up online instead of face to face, I'm thinking how much we will miss eating together. It also feels hard to talk about anything particularly deep, meaningful and faith based. But the end of John's gospel reminds me that Jesus has incredible power and, when we love him, we are only at the beginning of what he can do with us to express this, restore relationships and save the world. Pray for us!

## Who am I going to share this with?

My family. And to you, I pray you find renewal with your loved ones too. Happy Christmas!