Visualising blessing in the Gospel of John:

What is the essence of the gifts of light and life that the Jesus of John’s Gospel offers to those who abide – that is, remain or reside – in him?

How can I best visualise Jesus’ offers of life and light through a series of paintings depicting the impact of rainwater in the Australian outback, which may be incorporated into an illuminated manuscript of the Gospel?

Volume 1: Essay in accompaniment to the exhibition of original watercolour paintings and digitally-produced illuminated manuscript of John’s Gospel

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‘... Such ever was love’s way: to rise, it stoops...

...Is not God now i’ the world His power first made?
   Is not His love at issue still with sin,
   Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
   Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?
   Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise
To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,
When such truth, breaking bounds, o’erfloods my soul,
   And, as I saw the sin and death, even so
   See I the need yet transiency of both,
   The good and glory consummated thence?

...Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both
That moving o’er the spirit of man, unblinds
His eye and bids him look. These are, I see;
   For life, with all it yields of joy and woe
And hope and fear, — believe the aged friend, —
   Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
   Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all...’

Robert Browning
Mock-up sketch for chapter 5

Field sketch, Menindee
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Field sketch: Living Desert Sturt Desert pea
Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the dissertation.

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I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

Fiona Pfennigwerth
Field sketch Mundi Mundi Plains 1
Abstract

How can I best present John’s Gospel in an inviting and informative way? More specifically, how can I best visualise the blessings Jesus offers in John’s Gospel through the layout of the text, and the subject and style of illustrations of the Australian outback that accompany it?

My thesis comprises a creative component comprising watercolour paintings and a digitally-produced illuminated manuscript of John; together with supporting essay. This essay exegetes the manuscript in answer to my question above.

The manuscript is based on research into the text of John, focussing on its literary forms and overall themes. I was particularly struck by the interwoven themes of light, life and water; garden and trial motifs; and abiding and the blessings that flow from it.

This textual study led to investigation into visual responses to it. Firstly, aiming to honour its original author, John’s text is laid out thematically in double-page units, with changes in font to highlight both themes and literary devices. Secondly, I sought an appropriate habitat, images of which could convey my holistic response to the Gospel; and through illustrations of aspects of that habitat, convey my responses to units within it.

A field trip to Broken Hill, Menindee and surrounding regions, and Mungo and Mildura produced sketches and photographs of the impact of rain in semi-arid regions that formed the basis for the illustrations.

Further research led to a mock-up manuscript of text and illustrations, which addressed the issues of faithfulness to the text and pleasing design.

The original paintings that are later scanned and incorporated into the digital manuscript are naturalistic watercolour paintings that aim to reflect the truth, beauty and goodness of the text, the Lord whom it presents, and the landscape itself.

The digital work required substantial time – with technical assistance – in Photoshop and InDesign programs.

The complementary essay reports the journey I undertook from reading John to producing the final illuminated manuscript, in accordance with the model of Autoethnography.

My aim is to publish John Illuminated to present it to a contemporary Australian audience in a manner that is both inviting and illuminating.
Introduction

Preface

What is the essence of the gifts of light and life that the Jesus of John’s Gospel offers to those who abide – that is, remain or reside – in him?

Building on that research, how can I best visualise Jesus’ offers of life and light through a series of paintings depicting the impact of rainwater in the Australian outback, which may be incorporated into an illuminated manuscript of the Gospel?

This essay describes and exegetes – that is, critically explains and interprets – the illuminated manuscript that I create in answer to my twofold research question above, and the process of its creation.

In 2011 and 2012 rain fell in a way not experienced for decades in the semi-arid regions of outback New South Wales. Water flowed in the permanent river systems and filled the ephemeral lakes. Dry watercourses overflowed and as quickly emptied, leaving deep oxidised banks and heaps of stones. The red ochre of the vast flat landscape was overlaid with random patterns of pale grey-green varieties of saltbush and hopbush, and the bright olive greens of mintbushes, acacias and eucalypts – mallees and mulgas and wilgas – like a huge Fred Williams canvas.

When I saw it in the winter of 2012, bird life flourished in and around the waters, and the surrounding country abounded with life. I saw families of emus, kangaroos and wallabies, sheep and wild goats, shingle-back lizards and echidnas – and dingos and foxes. They all abide and abound due to the renewing water.

How can I best illustrate this landscape to accompany the Gospel text to suggest Jesus’ offers of living water, life and light, and recontextualise them for an Australian audience?

The Gospel writer uses these images to convey the blessings that God pours on those who believe in Him through his Son. He states his purpose in writing in 20:31,

> these are written so that you may believe/continue to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
I see this verse as the organising principle, the programmatic quest, of the Gospel. Gardner elegantly expresses my view: ‘What did [Jesus] descend to heaven to say? Simply this – that God was offering life to those who were dead, and he was doing it through his Son…’ (Gardner 2011:50).

The writer’s purpose is executed by parading the blessings Jesus offers on the bases of who he is. Gardner perceptively explains how this is achieved:

John does not so much talk us into believing as set up spaces where the words and illustrations of Jesus address us, drawing us into the struggle to taste and see and understand… Even without seeing, John suggests in the way he structures [these resurrection] scenes, readers to come will, in their own ways, sense the ground shifting, hear their names called, rejoice at life restored, and marvel at their deepest wounds transformed. He has arranged this text, in fact, to make such recognitions possible [quoting 20:31] (Gardner 2011, 2; 191).

A brief background

Three of my great loves are experiencing the Australian landscape; observing it through seeking to capture it on paper, particularly in watercolour; and reading bible books holistically – both the texts themselves and my responses to them.

I have sought to channel these energies into producing a manuscript that I hope to publish, as one solution to the crisis I sense in our contemporary Australian culture, including the church – that of growing biblical illiteracy.

This project is one initiative to re-present one bible book acknowledging it as a literary piece, and through the illustrations, connecting it to my Australian context, but not in a way that confines or dates it. My project is based on my desire to see God as the early church fathers did: in terms of the divine truth, beauty and goodness, which are all evidenced in John, and which I seek to convey in my final manuscript – especially putting beauty back in the equation. I seek to showcase the Lord’s beauty by reflecting the elegance of the inspired text in my pictures of the beauty of the natural creation. And to those aspects of God’s character, I add joy. I hope that my readers join me in seeing both the text and the landscape.

Why John?

For a long time I have seen John as the ‘Gospel of Festivals’, structured around Jewish feasts. Thus I saw it as the natural sequel to my first manuscript series, The Scrolls illuminated, the book of Jewish Festival Scrolls read at five of the annual Jewish feasts. John’s Gospel is
pivotal in understanding Jesus’ coming, and the consequences of trusting or opposing him. And *John* is very figurative in its literary style. Many of its images are visual: light and dark, heaven and the world, life and death, bread and water, agricultural and natural fauna and flora.

*Why the Masters?*

Taking the Scriptures seriously, my concern is that my task of presenting one of them be ‘taken in hand reverently, and not unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly’ (to quote the 1662 Book of Common Prayer). I wished to undertake the manuscript under the guidance of respected theological scholars.

*This thesis*

My thesis comprises artworks in the forms of watercolour paintings and a digitally-produced illuminated manuscript of *John*, together with supporting essay. The latter reports the journey I undertook to produce the final manuscript: the layout of the Gospel text and the illustrations that accompany it.

Thus my thesis has two distinct parts, with two distinct audiences and intentions. The creative component is aimed at presenting *John* clearly to my Australian contemporaries, with my voice quite hidden, so that it not obtrude between the text and the audience. Presenting the Gospel in a way that engages readers analytically through the text and visually through the illustrations enables both cognitive and emotional responses: a thinking with the heart. My aim in publishing the manuscript is to let the text speak for itself, without the intrusions of other voices in chapter and verse notations, subheadings, or didactic commentary, or anything that may box it in. Rather, my presentation of *John* raises suggestions and evokes possibilities of its meanings and depth.

The second component is the research that undergirds it, the theological aspect of which was written principally to reassure myself that the manuscript is on firm biblical foundations. Thus I sought to let the scholars I read speak to me in their own voices as they provided me with their insights into the text; and that is how I report – both to myself and to my examiners – my growing understanding of *John* in the second chapter of this essay. It deliberately leaves open many aspects in the scholarship to allow the Gospel ‘to blow where it wishes’ (to misapply *John* 3:8).

The second aspect of the research is practice-based, which I define in chapter 3, and in which I reflect on the progress of my thinking and art practice from concept to finished manuscript.
In this essay I model Carson’s style in his 1981 paper, ‘what follows is more by way of personal progress report by a student seeking to deal fairly with the evidence and arrive at his own conclusions…’ (1981:100). This method is known as auto-ethnography, described as, … an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience… Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.

Layered accounts [a form of autoethnography] often focus on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. This form emphasizes the procedural nature of research. Similar to grounded theory, layered accounts illustrate how ‘data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously’ (CHARMAZ, 1983, p.110) and frame existing research as a ‘source of questions and comparisons’ rather than a ‘measure of truth’ (p.117). But unlike grounded theory, layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection (ELLIS, 1991) to ‘invoke’ readers to enter into the ‘emergent experience’ of doing and writing research (RONAI, 1992, p.123)…

Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional… [They] also value the need to write and represent research in evocative, aesthetic ways (e.g., ELLIS, 1995, 2004; PELIAS, 2000).

Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2010

This term and its definition, together with discussion of practice-based research, gives an academic, theoretical framework that enables me to write this essay as a formal record of the process I was already undertaking and describing in note form, and which informs and undergirds the creative component of my project. It takes me from first, nebulous research question through to its final answer in the Conclusion, in an evolving clarity of focus and direction.

As an illustrator, my skills are to observe closely, and describe carefully through line and colour wash. I translate these skills in both reading John and verbally describing my research into it and its translation into visual form. My theoretical research question therefore is, ‘How best can I describe my observation of John and this process?’ rather than arguing a theological case. The answer to this question is not so much heard in this essay as seen in the illuminated manuscript itself and the brushstrokes of the paintings.
A Few Parameters:

1. The illustrations, though including landscapes – both habitats and inhabitants – are not intended to resemble the country in which the Gospel is set, but to be visual metaphors of its motifs. And neither is the final body of artworks a full reflection of the semi-arid habitat of the Australian outback, as my primary consideration is to reflect the text rather than the habitat. Throughout this essay I reproduce images that inform the finished works, both my field sketches and others’ works that influenced mine.

2. In my research, my approach to reading the Gospel is literary reader-response, taking Brown’s advice, ‘one should deal with the Gospel of John as it now stands, for that is the only form that we are certain has ever existed’ (2003, 320). Like Stibbe, ‘venerating the gospel as both literature and history’ (1994, 135). Quoting Iser, he writes, ‘the text comes to life in the convergence of text and reader. In this convergence, there is an awakening of responses in the reader and it is then that the text lives…’ (1994, 7). I benefitted also from the insights of Moloney’s Excursis into Narrative Approaches in Brown 2003, 30-39, particularly his approach to the Gospel ‘as a whole literary utterance that must be read from start to finish, allowing the cumulative impact of the reading experience to determine interpretation (Moloney 2005, 91). Also Kysar, who ‘looks for the way in which the text is designed, what impact it has on readers, and what literary techniques are used to facilitate that impact (2002, 36); and Sheridan, who in her second chapter looks at contemporary literary critical approaches to narrative text including author (real and implied), reader (implied and real) that ‘demonstrate how narratives are intrinsically rhetorical, inviting real readers to take on ideological positions’ (2012, 67). She discusses ‘round’ and ‘flat’ characters, indicated by ‘direct definition and indirect presentation’ (2012,73); intertextuality and OT citations in the Gospel (2012, 90-92). Ostenstad calls for

   ‘a reading technique which may be referred to as spatial in contrast to the linear reading that for some considerable time has been the only option known to us in our Western civilisation. The authors of such texts, whether in prose or in verse, assume that readers will have the totality in view as they read, and that this reading technique applies equally to the parts that enter into the whole… This means that all who study literature of this type necessarily must learn all over again how to read from a spatial or panoramic perspective (1998, xxviii).

Informally I had been practising this approach for many years in adopting a Bible reading method called Manuscript Discovery. In this method, a bible book or portion is printed
as one sequence, uninterrupted by paragraphs, chapter or verse notations, or subheadings. Presented holistically, readers consider how it is written (overall shape, themes and motifs) in interpreting why it is written, and for whom. It is the method I adopt for this research.

3. This research is not entering the discussions regarding the Johannine community, sources or redaction or historicity, or delving into the vexed question of 'the Jews' in John – yet I acknowledge the hurdles they present in reading John.

4. I do not read New Testament Greek, and rely on scholars’ translations of the text. In particular I rely on the ESV translators, who seek ‘as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer [and…] to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original’ (ESV 2001, vii).

5. John and John: for clarity and simplicity – designating John as author, without entering the debate of author’s identity or gender; and John as abbreviation of the text’s title or description.

6. I develop my visuals against the backdrop of centuries of illuminated manuscript and illustrated Bible traditions which colour them; but that backdrop remains beyond the focus of my essay. Similarly beyond the scope of my paper is discussion of artists’ responses to the arid landscape, addressed in such books as Seeking the Centre: the Australian desert in literature, art and film (Haynes 1998) and The Artist and the Desert (McGrath and Olsen1981).
Field sketch: Mundi Mundi Plains 2
Chapter 1:

The Journey begins: exploring the text and graphic possibilities

The purpose of this project is to present John’s Gospel in an inviting and informative way to my Australian contemporaries, whether familiar with the Gospel or not. I have set out the text without editorial intrusions, and my illustrations complement concepts in the text rather than visually retell the story.

I began my research prior to my university candidature by reading and re-reading the Gospel both individually and with weekly discussion groups over many months. My first object was to consider John’s overall shape and forms, and the light they may shed on its purposes. I printed (without subheadings, paragraph breaks or chapter and verse numbers) a copy of the English Standard Version, which I had divided into Parts rather arbitrarily according to references to the Jewish feasts. This was both to create workable units for study, and to explore my suspicion that the book could be organized according to that principle.

These larger units revealed links I had not seen before. For example, at the first Passover (my draft Part 2) we are introduced to Jesus cleansing the Temple; Nicodemus; back to the issue of purification at the Jordan; the Samaritan woman at the well; and the father whose son Jesus restores to health. Is the woman a foil to Nicodemus? And the disciples? Is the issue of purification common to both the Temple cleansing and the later debate? Does the section centre on worshipping the Father in spirit and truth, progressing in stages from the place where truth should result in the right spirit, through to a proper synthesis in the father, who hears and responds in faith?

In my Part 1, I counted a week from the beginning of John’s testimony to the first of Jesus’ signs; and at the end of the Gospel, a week between the resurrection on the ‘first day of the week’ to the author’s declaration of purpose. Did I read too much into an overall structure of the fulfilment of Jewish expectations within a broader framework of a new Creation? Was there a major yet underlying theme of Jesus bringing about the new Creation – the first renewed, restored and completed, like wine from water – presented by subtle allusions in the shape and motifs of the text?

My initial concept was to illustrate flora from the Bible Garden in Canberra that suggested the feasts and changing seasons, and in fact I sketched in the Gardens on a number of occasions over several seasons. However, the drawings were pretty but not powerful, and the themes of the Gospel, though often beautiful, are intense and strong.

As I read and reread John, I listed recurring concepts and patterns. I printed and reprinted it as my understanding slowly grew, formatting paragraphs, and bolding and italicising words. For example, I noticed the pattern of Jesus speaking symbolically and his hearers taking him literally – and subsequently set out symbolic passages as poetry to emphasise this interplay. I set out in the same way his truly, truly and I am statements, which are both so prominent in the text. I noticed how many sets of seven there are, and how they each seem to be like a puzzle picture of seven pieces: seven signs (Do they together form a fulfilment of Isaiah’s visions of chapters 35 and 42?); seven I am statements; six Jewish festivals plus one lakeside barbecue...

I started recording words that had two meanings – the writer intending both – that I list later. I considered putting both meanings in the first occurrence in the text, with a footnote that the same applies throughout. I considered appending a glossary which explained social, political and geographical references, and somehow signalling nuances such as singular and plural forms of you (where relevant), and the term ‘the Jews’.

All the polar contrasts of life and death, light and dark vividly reflect the writer’s separation of those who believe and those who are unmoved by Jesus. I made a comprehensive table of recurring ideas, noting occurrences in each of the Parts of my tentative structure.

I had worked on a series of paintings based on the first Creation story, in which God orders the spaces of heaven, earth and water. I saw John adopt these spheres symbolically: water features in every Part; above and below; and earth and the world, which I thought John differentiated, and later read that Bultmann suggests that human sin – delusion about who we are – ‘perverts the creation into the “world”’ (Kysar 2002, 57).
All these ideas gave rise to visual concepts. I listed themes that could be visualised: the I am statements and the signs; the sky to represent above and day and night. I noted that Jesus (and John) used symbols taken from observing the world around them – so likewise I should draw the reality and let the readers link that to its symbolic meaning. I made detailed suggestions for each Part, but the concepts were messy and far too complex.

The Feast structure was too constricting and arbitrary, though providing an important backdrop to the various episodes. There are three Passovers; that is, the feast which celebrates the angel of death passing over the Israelite people leading to their freedom from slavery and exodus from Egypt. These occur at the beginning, middle and end of John. The first is in the context of Jesus’ introduction as the Lamb of God and his discussion with Nicodemus of Moses’ lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. The second is in the context of the sign of feeding and murmuring in the desert; and the third is of Jesus lifted up on the Day of Preparation. The structure highlights the passing over of the third Passover from the Day of Preparation to the first day of the week.

An unnamed Sabbath (the weekly day of rest) is the context for a sign and discussion of Jesus and his Father working. At the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles), which was both a harvest festival and celebration of the giving of the law, with rituals involving light and water, Jesus proclaimed to be light and to give water for eternal life. The Feast of Dedication, remembering the Temple’s rededication after Hellenistic defilement, is the setting for the final rejection of Jesus by ‘the Jews’ and the introduction to Lazarus’s unbinding from death.

However, my attempts to clearly divide the text proved unhelpful. By too strong a division, for example, the juxtaposition of the first sign and the cleansing of the Temple was lost. Other paired pericopes are not necessarily side by side, but clearly are held in tension, such as the raising of Lazarus and Jesus; two charcoal fires. I noted the pairing of symbols; characters (such as Nicodemus and the woman at the well, and the once-paralysed and once-blind men); incidents; double entendres; paradox and irony; the intricate dance of narrative and discourse – ‘the dynamic unity of word and act’ as Dodd expresses it and quoted in Kysar (2002, 130); and Jesus speaking in figures and plainly, which O’Day also notes (1986, 105).

At a deeper level, I perceived that these doublets address life and death, salvation and judgement, love and rejection. John is both about Jesus, who is flesh and glory, to adopt Lee’s expression and title of her commentary (2002), whose death is not dishonour, as Moloney titles his 1998 commentary on John 12-21 (1998), but the ultimate revelation and
Worked manuscripts

Tables of themes and motifs
accomplishment of God’s love for his creation; and about people’s response to him, for which they will be called to account.

The Prologue (1:1-18) sets the agenda for the rest of the book: what is in it is explored throughout; what is not is omitted. On this basis the whole book takes on several overlaying forms, and too much emphasis on its parts is unhelpful. I resolved to consider the Prologue item by item, and trace each through the text. How could I set out the text to show these overlaying patterns, and its pattern of report and later reflection?

On each draft of my manuscript, I made marginal notes and linked words, colour coded themes and refined layout. One draft I read carefully with Dumbrell’s 2006 commentary, looking at John from an Old Testament scholar’s theological perspective. I was greatly enriched by his insights into the wider contexts of the Hebrew Scriptures, in particular John’s allusions to Isaiah 40-55 and Ezekiel 34-37; the Creation to new Creation theme; and the significance of ‘place’ in John 10 and 14. By this stage I had a box full of notated manuscripts and a book full of notes. However, immersion into the text is a prerequisite both to my understanding the commentaries and to allow the emergence of visual concepts that reflect my first-hand, holistic response to the Gospel. I was reassured that Moloney works likewise:

it is the interplay between the sacred text and myself as its reader, enriched by a serious sharing with other readers who regard the same text as Scripture, that has led me to this stunning conclusion (2005, 347).

I began my more systematic research by exploring John’s use of symbols in some depth. I drew up tables of symbols, researched scholarship, and wrote up my findings, thinking that visual images would flow from the exercise. However, much of the symbolism is not concrete: flesh and glory, and abiding (Lee 2002); Jesus as the image of the Father; the hour; the trial motif – and many others.

Still with no clear research question, I began reading a broad range of scholarship on John, from the literary/reader response, historical and theological approaches. I realised that designing a layout for the text and producing a series of artworks to accompany it is in fact an integrated reader-response, although exhibiting them may evoke a different but valid viewer response.

I was greatly enriched by this research, and found the holistic approaches of Moloney and Stibbe particularly helpful in contrast to the atomistic verse-by-verse approach. (Early in my
journal I wrote, ‘one of the greatest frustrations of my research – apart from feeling I never
fully grasped John – is the way that many commentaries dissect the text verse by verse, like
putting a fine grid over a painting and analysing each square’. Later, I read Kysar, ‘we might
think of John as one large and complex painting, filled with brilliant colours and images. If
we try to interpret the lower right-hand corner of the picture without understanding what
role it plays in the total theme of the painting, we do violence to both the part and the whole’

Reading the text as a literary whole, I was struck by its evident and elegant craftsmanship.
Ashton notes ‘the remarkable extent to which the reflections John makes upon his own
work... indicate his artistic self-awareness, his consciousness of genre. It is this, above all, I
believe, that justifies our comparing John with some of the very greatest artists, painters, and
composers as well as poets and novelists, in the history of Western civilization’ (2008, 357).
I realised I needed to reach a working model of John’s narrative shape before I could proceed.
I wondered whether chapters 13-17 were in fact the centre of the Gospel, and thus should be
the visual focus.

As I read the literature, I marked changes in my draft manuscript as I was persuaded by
scholars’ arguments on structure. In particular, I am indebted to Brown and Moloney (2003,
80, 300-315), in particular, ‘The first sentence of the Prologue summary [1:11] covers the
first half of the existing gospel (1:19–12:50)... The second sentence [1:12]... covers the
second half of the gospel (13:1–20:31)’ (p300). The first half they call ‘the Book of Signs’,
outlined carefully on pages 300-303, and the second ‘the book of Glory’ outlined on pages
307-310, a view supported by Carson (1991, 125). Kysar (2002, 36-40) notes the use of
closures or bookends ‘that, when taken together, provide a kind of packaging of what comes
between them’. For example, ‘Having named Christ as God at the Gospel’s beginning [1:1
and 18], the narrative proper then closes with Thomas’ confession that Christ is both “Lord
and God” (20:28)... The whole of the Gospel therefore is enclosed with affirmations of
Jesus’ identity, making it clear that this is the major theme of the story’ (p36-37). He speaks
of irony and characterisation that ‘asks us to identify with the struggles of faith’ (p39). I was
intrigued by Ostenstad’s proposal of the concentric pattern of the Gospel and sections within
it (1998 in particular pages 28-30,34, 147, 193, 212, 224), which I considered, but did not
specifically adopt.
After reaching a working conclusion on structure, and well into writing this essay, I read Gardner’s sensitive literary response to *John* (2011). His shape of the Gospel, as set out in his Contents listed below and illustrated by quotes from the relevant sections, resonated with me:

First, the Prologue (1:1-18).

Second, *Come and see* (1:19-51).

Third, *Life* (2:1–4:54), in which Jesus begins to describe himself. ‘Picture it in this way, he says. I am a new wine, replacing the water of ritual; a new temple, replacing the empty satisfactions of buying and selling. Turn to me and live, drink of me and never thirst again, trust in me and have your greatest treasure restored’ (2011:5).

Fourth, *Blinded* (5:1–10:42) ‘… faced with mounting opposition, Jesus continues to describe the life he has come to offer, but now asks people to visualise that life through visualising need’ (2011:6).


Sixth, *Looking forward* (13:1–17:26): ‘Once again, he is appealing to their imaginations, asking them to visualise his words internally: think of my death as washing you clean, preparing a place for you, making your joy full’ (2011:7).

Seventh, *Seen* (18:1–20:31): ‘What had been withheld or pictured or anticipated is now before us, and John powerfully steps forward and lets us see what he has seen… The reader is swept up into this, details suddenly falling into place, and when John steps back again and describes the resurrection in a series of simple recognition scenes… the sequence all but invites the reader to step into the struggle and use what he or she had visualised to see with and believe’ (2011:7-8).


For the structure of various units within the text, my understanding was clarified by a range of scholars, which resulted in amendments to the manuscript’s format.

Moloney’s observation that ‘the reader’s understanding and experience of a right relationship with Jesus emerge as the narrative [of the Cana cycle of chapters 2-4] unfolds (1993, 194) reinforced my own impression that these chapters formed one coherent unit.
Salier’s structure of chapter 5 (72-73) resulted in my changing the number of Jesus’ supporting witnesses from five to four, by amalgamating the two I saw in vv 36-38.

Sheridan discusses the translation of 7:37-39 ‘so that the Christological meaning of the narrative-rhetorical function of the OT citations is to “make sense” of Jesus… the eschatological torrents of water anticipated in the messianic age “now flow from Jesus, the new temple, the pierced rock” (2012, 183-184 quoting Grigsby).

Lee (2002, 199), Lincoln (2008, 232) and Thompson (2008, 238) saw chapter 11 as pivotal: the Gospel in miniature – an observation I had not made, and which led me to amend the layout and fonts of pages 34-37 to highlight its themes of resurrection and unbinding.

The concentric patterns of chapters 13-17, centring on the themes of abiding and command to love, proposed by Brouwer (2000, 9-10), Lee (2002, 92) and Moloney (2005, 282-3) led me to highlight these themes by placing the text of 15:1-11 and high-impact illustration on one double page, and enlarging the font size of 15:12-15 on the next.

Moloney’s chiastic structure of gardens and trials in chapters 18-19 (2005, 328), and Jesus’ proclamation and coronation as king in 18:28–19:16a (1998, 149) led to my decision to include botanical drawings on pages 36-37, 58-59, and 60-61; and to highlight Pilate’s words proclaiming Jesus king on page 57.

I was particularly struck by the trial and garden (Eden) motif, and the importance of the theme of abiding (emphasised by Lee 1994, 89) foreshadowed in the Prologue with the Word with the Father (1:1,18) and intertwining with gathering and woven throughout the story, centring in chapter 14. Trial, garden and abiding motifs are all represented in my final manuscript.

I baulked at presenting I am the way… no-one comes to the Father but by me (16:6). I wrote in my journal,

He is the way, not belief in him. Because the way is not on the basis of a person’s faith, we can never presume to judge others; it is between them and God.

He makes this statement the night before he actually opens the way – cf I am the door in chapter 10. He is both the means (by his death) and the decider (both door and shepherd). Because he is the means, he is given the authority to decide [which I later realised he does on the cross 12:31].

If he is the judge, then it is in readers’ interest to know on what basis he decides, and what his character is.
He is the way because he could both pay the penalty and sympathise with our weaknesses.

The backdrop is the common belief in the judgement of all after death: Ecclesiastes 13, Daniel 7.

If Jesus came as God’s Word to reveal that part of God that people could grasp, I can only wonder at the magnitude that remains hidden from us in this life.

I was later helped by Ball: ‘truth’ and ‘life’ should be understood as another explanation of how Jesus is the Way, relating back to 1:14 (1996, 126).

I found John’s Jesus elusive, and found it helpful that Stibbe felt likewise, even likening him to the Scarlet Pimpernel (1994, 6), and Moloney comments, ‘Jesus’ life and ministry do not make Jesus known, but reveal the design of God’ (2005, 98).

I found the confrontation between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus ugly, and that overwhelmingly impacted my response to the Gospel. Even though the writer presents it in the form of advocates presenting their cases to court, on occasions throughout the Gospel Jesus is formidable and uncompromising. There is nothing gentle in his manner, and John gives no report of his inner world. I wrote in my journal,

Seeing the Gospel as taking the form of a court hearing (apart from the interlude with the Twelve the night before he dies) explains:

- The formality of the presentation
- The reporting of Jesus’ actions, but rarely his inner emotions
- The contrast between the grace and truth Jesus brings and the harsh legalism with which the Jewish authorities of the time imposed the Law. In the Prologue, John says, ‘From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace…” The first (but incomplete) grace is the law given through Moses; the second is the fullness of grace and truth through Jesus.
- The abrasiveness of Jesus to the Jewish authorities. Much of the confrontational debate with the Jewish authorities throughout the book forms blocks of the trial between accuser and accused. Jesus is not pleasant to them. He is so angry with them (who had the Scriptures and the responsibility to teach them) for misrepresenting God. They had transformed the gift of a relationship with God based on trust and faithfulness to a burden of overwhelming rule-keeping. However, in these encounters, it is his kindness that graphically exposes their errors, giving them opportunity to change.

Perhaps to counter any tendency in the new Christian community to fall into the same trap as ‘the Jews’ of his time, John does not record any instructions for Christian living (apart from the call to love in the supper discourses) – and the only sin in John is unbelief.
Receiving Jesus is not a question of liking him or his assertions, but whether you think he has proved his case. And conversely, rejecting him or his teaching ought not to be decided by your sensitivity to the political correctness of the day.

Later I read Michaels, who had reached a similar conclusion: ‘the commentator’s job is not to ‘sell’ or market the Gospel of John – that is, to persuade people to like it… It is not a matter of liking or disliking. Believers and unbelievers alike need to be confronted with John’s Gospel in all its clarity, so they can make up their minds about the stark alternatives it presents’ (2010, 5). Elijah confronts unfaithfulness at Mt Carmel – but the fire from heaven strikes the sacrifice. My discomfort was also eased by Ruth Sheridan’s paralleling Jesus’ role to that of the Old Testament prophets’ stark warnings of the consequences of God’s people refusing to turn back to his ways (2012:171, 173). Stibbe parallels this approach to Hebrews 4-6, suggesting,

soon or later all readers of John’s Gospel have to confront an apparent paradox… there are, on the one hand, clear statements about the love of God for the world… On the other, the reader is also faced by the icy wind of a much sterner emotion in the gospel… Most unsettling of all are Jesus’ diatribes against ‘the Jews’ (1994, 92, 107).

To contextualise (and for me, partially diffuse) these confrontations, Stibbe encourages ‘an ethical reading’ looking at the narrative devices of structure, context, and the genres of satire and parody to see that they are addressed to ‘the Jews who had believed in him in order to satirise apostasy, quoting Ryken and George Sand (1994, 109, 115,124, 129-30).

Influenced by Stibbe, I reformatted the confronting section 8:31-59 to open with and highlight Jesus ‘word of liberation’ (1994, 130).

Contextualising these passages within the whole biblical revelation as did Michaels, Sheridan and Stibbe, helped me better understand them. Later, I read Gardner, in whom I saw the same reservations as I had, and who, like the others, seeks to explain Jesus’ attitude:

He is offering to lift them out of slavery and into freedom and the full rights of the household, but as he does so, as this light draws near, the truth of their estrangement from God must also be acknowledged. This explains, I think, why Jesus continues to push. Without their estrangement from God being brought to the light, they will never turn to make things right (2011, 90).

At a postgraduate student seminar, a fellow student asked, ‘Who in the story is the oppressed and who the oppressor?’, which gave further insight into the dynamic between the powerful ‘Jews’ and Jesus, although my dilemma in presenting them remained.
How could I, without omitting these sections, present this Gospel in today’s world of post-Holocaust, apprehensive distrust of religious zealotry? These passages need to be contained, and balanced by other facets of the Jesus John presents. And so I reread the Gospel with this in mind.

Firstly, I coloured the whole text in dark brown. Then, where the trial motif appeared, I rendered it in black, and where it formed discrete blocks, I justified the text.

Secondly, I looked specifically for the ‘softer’ side of Jesus. I recalled reading some years ago Paul Barnett’s The Two Faces of Jesus: the public face vs the private filial face of Jesus shown at the time only to the Twelve (1990, 16-17). Although not dealing with the issues I had with the Gospel, I found its premise helpful.

This exercise transformed the direction of my project.

I had read Koester’s insight into the I am statements, ‘The primary level of meaning concerns Christ; the secondary level concerns discipleship’ (2003, 13). But until this reading, I had read them as proof texts of who Jesus is as the focal point of the Gospel. Now, I saw the statements in reverse: the benefits Jesus offers on the bases of who he is. The Gospel was no longer a theological treatise on Jesus’ coming. Rather, the person, Jesus, is inviting people into a life-giving, life-affirming relationship. ‘I propose that the “I am” sayings with an image should be seen as emphasising Jesus’ identity in relation to his role (for others)… accompanied by a sub-clause which offers life’, writes Ball (1996, 174, 175), which I read as validation of my insight. Vividly setting out the consequences of rejecting his offer – as the trial motif highlights – is in fact motivated by the same love that invites reception. I recalled Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 30, ‘See, I have set before you life and good, death and evil… Therefore choose life…’ This connection was affirmed by Sheridan, ‘the wider allusive contexts of the [OT] citations show that a pattern is at work in the Gospel narrative: these contexts speak of hope and life, or alternatively judgement and death. This invites the template of the larger biblical narrative that presents Israel’s journey with YHWH in terms of promise and loss of promise’ (2012, 105).

Salier writes,

‘each [sign] narrative portrays Jesus as a life-giver in ways that would be intelligible to a variety of readers in the ancient world. While pointing to the identity of Jesus, these narratives also provide an opportunity for engagement at a more emotional level and allow the readers to see the practical consequences of the elevated Christology presented in the Gospel (17-18nd).’
Koester, Ball, Sheridan and Salier all support my view of the two levels in the signs and I Am sayings, though they do not reverse their order as I have. However, other scholars, by tying them more closely to the author’s stated purpose in 20:31, I felt more fully supported my view.

For Carter, the Gospel is ‘the good news according to John, namely, Jesus’ revelation of God’s life-giving purposes’ (2006, 218). Brown writes, ‘the Gospel was written to intensify people’s faith and make it more profound… in order to make them appreciate the life they had been given’ (2003, 152, 182). Moloney calls it ‘a rhetoric of persuasion’, written that readers of the story might believe (2005, 5,259). Carson sees its purpose as evangelising the diaspora Jews and proselytes, ‘directed towards the goal of personal, eschatological salvation: that by believing you may have life in his name’ (1991, 663).

From beginning to end, unity is provided to the gospel by the recurring theme of the life that is offered by and in Jesus, life that comes from the source of all life, the living God (6:57). The story of how this life is offered to the world, and is sometimes received and sometimes rejected, forms the plot of the gospel as a whole.

Thompson 1993, 410-411

Thirdly, in consequence, I reformatted the text by rendering in green (representing life) all the benefits Jesus offers those who believe in him as the Son sent into the world by the Father from above. I was amazed by how prominent the theme is, and how it informs the writer’s stated purpose in 20:31. These passages, together with the trial motif, support the primary purpose of persuading readers to believe the Gospel (Carson 1991, 663) – or to continue to believe it (Brown 2003, 152).

Reading the discourses in chapters 14-17, it struck me that embedded in the text are words associated with the Spirit – love, joy, peace, hope, reassurance, guidance, truth. As the tree of life was available in the presence of God in Eden, so life is offered in the presence of God – Father and Son (14:18,23) and Spirit (14:16; 15:26; 16:7). Typical of John, here in chapter 14, evidence for the theology of the Trinity is presented through action. Pivotal though this theme is to the Gospel, the Trinity’s elusive form is not portrayed in concrete pictures in my manuscript. I decided instead to reflect the image of abiding, which I now saw running throughout John and centred in the Last Supper discourses – and the abundant life that flows from that – as the major visual image of my manuscript.
Abiding is not done in isolation. Carter writes,

> The good news according to John is that Jesus is the definitive revealer of God’s life-giving purposes and that his mission continues in and through the alternative community, the church, an antisociety that is sustained by the Spirit, or Paraclete, in a hostile world until God’s purposes are established in full (2006, 197).

Thus I decided to make this theme – the benefits Jesus offers to those who abide in him – the primary focus of my exploration into the text. I put to one side all visual concepts to date, and began reconsidering the Gospel’s form and to explore possibilities of a visual theme that could convey this foundational aspect.

**And I saw water everywhere…**

In my initial readings of the Gospel, I perceived the motif of water pervading the text. I wrote in my journal:

> Water is both life-giving and purifying if living, that is, it flows from a spring or source – unconfined, accessible, abundant, and immeasurable – in contrast to the still (Siloam), contained (in jars) or difficult of access (Jacob’s well).

Water is lifeless if it is passive, static or stagnant; confined or bound – like the temporary tombs of Lazarus and Jesus; inaccessible or requiring effort to obtain; inadequate; or chaotic.

Jesus made wine from water for purification in heavy jars in chapter 2, and washes the disciples’ feet and declares them clean in chapter 13. John uses the water in the Jordan to baptise in chapter 1, which was plentiful in chapter 3. Jesus offers living water gushing up to eternal life to the woman at Jacob’s deep and inaccessible well in chapter 4, and at the Feast of Tabernacles where he heals the blind man by requiring him to wash in the Pool called Sent in chapters 7-9. Water in Bethesda Pool only heals when stirred – and then requires another’s help to enter (chapter 5). Mary anoints Jesus’ feet for burial in chapter 12. And he, who made wine from water for purification and offered living water, says on the Cross I thirst and receives sour wine before declaring It is accomplished, and giving up his spirit and pouring out both blood and water when his body is pierced in chapter 19.

Koester notes numerous allusions to water in the Old Testament: in the stories of Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha – its presence a blessing and its withholding indicating judgement (Deuteronomy 11:16-17); water as image of the law and the day when God would send his Spirit to enliven the people of Israel, such as Joel 2-3, Ezekiel 36, 47, Zechariah 14. ‘Living water’ is ‘flowing water, like that bubbling up from a stream or spring, in contrast to the water entombed in a cistern… living water was to be used when purifying people from
defilement’ (2003, 188). He expanded my observations on the key Gospel image of water noted above, in passages I feel should be comprehensively quoted:

If living water is the revelation Jesus offered during his ministry, this revelation is extended through the Spirit to readers living after Jesus’ departure to the Father... Through the revelation, God ‘cleanses’ by transforming sin into faith, and in so doing fulfils and replaces the system of Jewish ritual purification...

The image of living water is taken from the biblical tradition, but is presented in a form that would be accessible to a wide audience, encompassing in a single image the various dimensions of Jesus’ identity... Jesus is the source of divine wisdom, God’s prophet and Messiah, and the giver of God’s own Spirit... Jesus would be glorified in death, water would flow from his side... and the disciples would receive the Spirit from the one who displayed the scars from his execution... at the cross he said ‘I thirst,’ and put himself in the place of the thirsty... the spear that pierced Jesus’ side demonstrated that he was dead; yet the water that came forth revealed that in death he was the source of life...

In John’s Gospel water is offered to people who are characterized in two ways: unclean and thirsty... Those who are unclean may or may not want water for washing, but the thirsty do desire something to drink... who desire a relationship with God

Koester 2003, 176, 182, 199, 203, 204-5

Lee introduced me to further dimensions to the water image:

Water is employed in three main physical senses: for quenching physical thirst, for cleansing the body and as part of childbirth... In the end it becomes a sacramental symbol of new life, given through the purifying and life-giving Spirit. More than other symbols in this gospel, water reveals the multivalence of symbolism and its capacity to move freely across different fields of reference.

2002, 65

Of Jesus’ statement ‘I thirst’, Lee says,

The flow of water and blood from Jesus’ side signifies that life comes through his death. As JP Heil points out, this moment represents the climax of the theme of living water in the Gospel. The two elements... are symbols of eternal life... [and] reveal the divine glory radiant in the flesh... It is arguable that the water and blood are also symbols of birth at this point.

2002, 82-3

John writes in an agrarian society for whom water is crucial for crops and herds. I see the motif of water in much bigger terms than personal and individual and even rural contexts: in universal embrace. Water renews and revives; it is the basis of all life. It flows in the rivers
that watered Eden in Genesis 2, and flowed from the Temple in Ezekiel’s vision and from the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21.

And John itself is described as water: ‘like a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant may swim – in other words simple enough for a child to enjoy and profound enough to satisfy the most demanding philosophical mind (Wenham, 2003, quoting Morris 1971, 7). Early in 2012 I watched the television documentary that cost Paul Lockyer and his team their lives on the impact of the floodwaters that filled Lake Eyre. The images were both powerful and beautiful: aerial views of waterways and expanses; profuse flora and birdlife abiding in and around the waters; the colours of the landscape, particularly the juxtaposition of the desert reds and the green ribbon borders to the water.

It was the other ‘Eureka’ moment I needed to direct my project.

I enquired into tours of the Lake Eyre region, both on the ground and by air. They were prohibitively expensive. In June I was lent a reliable car ‘needing a good run’ by a friend going overseas. Emailing her ‘what about Canberra via Broken Hill?’ I set out on a field trip to sketch and photograph both the semi-arid regions of outback NSW, and its full ephemeral lakes.

The scenery was not as dramatic as the Lake Eyre documentary, but I felt it was an excellent fit for my manuscript. The immense flat landscape was ideal for running border illustrations along the base of the text, and not be in competition with it. I saw both the bare and the bountiful, dry watercourses and immense lakes. I experienced dawns and sunsets both on the land and lake, where the sky’s dramatic colours were reflected, and where the wind whipped it into waves. The landscape could convey all the images of the light and life that water brings and the Gospel celebrates.
The vast Lake Menindee
Chapter 2: Responding to the first question,

What is the essence of the gifts of light and life that the Jesus of John’s Gospel offers to those who abide – that is, remain or reside – in him?

In chapter 2, I discuss the Johannine themes of light and life. The illustrations on these themes in the final manuscript are not designed to narrowly define aspects of them; they are designed to suggest their importance and ubiquity, and the particular context of the Gospel story they decorate. It is therefore not possible for me to tie all aspects of my research to aspects of particular paintings.

There is thus little direct impact of this chapter’s research on the final illuminated manuscript. However, it is crucial to it. Having decided to focus on the visual themes of light, life, water and garden, I sought to reassure myself that to do so would not dishonour, reduce or distort the Gospel message. In studying John, was my narrowed focus to life and light and abiding authentic to the Gospel and within the best traditions of scholarship? Were the themes sufficiently significant, ubiquitous and all-embracing of other themes in the text?

As an artist observing a botanical specimen in conjunction with scientific research, so I dissected John, checked with the experts, and in this chapter describe my findings in words rather than drawing. Instrumental to the description was the analysis of the gifts of light and life. I undertook that analysis, not to argue a particular theological case with the experts, but to reassure myself that the subjects I was seeking to portray were in fact fundamental to the Gospel. In this chapter, I sandwich the two areas of my research, firstly organising my own observations of the text, then inserting other scholars’ that inform or confirm my view. Treated in that capacity, I keep my interactive comments on theirs to a minimum. At times I quote a scholar at length where I applaud the breadth of the insight expressed. The quoted material is presented both as corroboration and, in my view, a more elegant or insightful presentation of my own observations. My early legal training taught me to quote directly from witnesses, rather than allowing the possibility of misrepresenting them by hearsay or paraphrase. As, in fact, does the Gospel writer, as he assembles the testimonies to Jesus.

My process of reading and writing is inductive rather than didactic, the result being a piece of writing that is reflective meditation rather than a theological enquiry and presentation of an argument. This chapter, then, is a meditative study into these themes in the Gospel.

I began my more focussed study of John by highlighting passages that discussed the benefits Jesus offered, and tabled my findings under the headings of reference, benefit, basis, to whom
addressed and context (not dissimilar from Kostenberger 2009, 342-347). However, the scope of my study was too broad. I reduced it to the offers of light and life, noting the words of Schneiders, ‘the great trilogy of Johannine term – light, life, and love – captures the whole dynamic’ (1999, 53).

In this chapter I outline my understanding of light and life which undergirds the design of my manuscript. Although I refer to passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, in order to be concise and clear my focus is on the Gospel itself and the common meanings of life and light.

Schneiders, after describing the fruit of believing in Jesus, writes, ‘...when the evangelist says that the whole point of the Gospel is that its readers may have life in Jesus’ name, he is explicitly applying to future readers what Jesus asks of God in his final prayer before his glorification on the cross [17:20-24]’ (1993, 14-15). This affirmed my view that the Last Supper discourses are pivotal to the Gospel.

Kostenberger notes,

This bright realm of life in Jesus is contrasted by John with the dark sphere of death and sin. John’s depiction of the incompatibility of life and death, of light and darkness... is utterly compelling. Yet, again, it should be noted that the ‘dualism’ is modified rather than absolute: light calls out to darkness, ‘Embrace me!’ and life woos death to ‘choose life’...

The themes of ‘life’ and ‘light’ are inextricably wedded in John’s theology. Both attest to the blessing resulting from Jesus’ coming into the world: new, eternal life made available through his substitutionary death to ‘everyone who believes’, issuing in believers’ crossing over from death into life and from darkness into light. Jesus thus renews creation on both a cosmic and personal scale. He satisfies the psalmist’s longings, makes possible the prophets’ highest aspirations, and paves the way for the fulfilment of the apocalyptist’s vision of abundant, eternal life in God’s presence.

2009, 284, 348-349
Field studies Menindee flora

Copi Hollow dawn
1. The backdrop: the cosmic context

God's love and desire to bless encompasses *all the world* – the divinely wrought Creation that is marred and in rebellion since the Fall:

In him was life and the life was the light of humanity (Greek *anthropos*)... the true light that enlightens *everyone* (1:4,9)

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (1:18).

'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (1:29)

For God *so loved the world*, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn/judge the world, but in order that *the world* might be saved through him (3:16-17)

"This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (6:33-35)

'Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all people* to myself' (12:31)

'I have spoken openly to the world' (18:20 'the object of God's saving love' Moloney 2005, 320)

The breadth of John's vision is cosmic as Salier (nd13), Reinhartz, Kostenberger and Dumbrell affirm, spanning history from Creation in 1:1-3 to an arrest, death and resurrection in gardens reminiscent of Eden in which the false 'ruler of this world' is cast out, suggesting that the whole creation is renewed and restored. And God – Father, Son and Spirit – comes to make his home with his people (14:16-23).

'What the gospel presents is a historical tale – a story of Jesus – set within a cosmological meta-narrative: God's creation and love for the world' (Reinhartz 2005, 111, and see also Kostenberger 2009, 337,349-353 and Dumbrell 2006, 5-6,14)). Is John's ubiquitous use of seven a further hint of this theme?

In the manuscript I suggest this cosmic context by the dawn sky-coloured wash behind the Prologue on pp2-3 and the dawn sky of the epilogue pp64-65; and the botanical illustrations
reminiscent of the Garden of Eden in the accounts of the crucifixion on pp58-59 and resurrection pp60-61, foreshadowed by the unbinding of Lazarus pp36-37.

As in Eden, the benefits flow from God’s presence: Jesus’ physical presence, followed by his ‘living and exalted’ presence through the Spirit in the ‘in-between time’ (Moloney 1998, 42-3), and finally with believers’ presence with him in his glory, ‘the glory he had with the Father before the foundation of the world’ (17:24).

John’s vision is of God’s love for all people, within the cosmic drama of the forces of darkness seeking and failing to grasp his light. In this context, he sets out both the blessings of believing and the stark warnings of rejecting the Father’s offer of new life through his Son.

2. The gift of life

‘Eternal life conquers death without abolishing it’, asserts Schneiders (1993, 160). The new birth generated by Jesus’ lifting up on the cross ‘marks a genuine change in how life is defined’ (O’Day 2002, 29). Lee notes,

Because physical life is symbolic of eternal life, what is needed is the transfiguration of the one to the other, not the letting go of one in order to seize upon the other… The risen Christ, in the flesh, remains the definitive Symbol of God, the true Icon sustaining all life, mortal and eternal. The life which he unites within himself, against all human expectation, is both natural life and resurrection life: the two are held together as one… In the end, all things are restored. Death itself… has already yielded to a greater power.

Lee 1994, 228

a. The universal context of the offer of life

The Prologue spans the whole of history, opening with the grand poetry of Creation (1:1-3). Next, it records, ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of humanity’ (1:4). I noted its past tense, referring, not to the distant Creation, but to recent events, that is, ‘the life’ is Jesus’ incarnate life given for the world (3:16). See also 1:9 was coming into the world; 9:5 ‘As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world’; 12:46; for as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself (5:26 note the aorist tense, ie an eternal grant Dumbrell 2006, 67).

The Prologue concludes in the present tense with ‘the only God who is at the Father’s side…’ (1:18) as the beloved disciple rested against Jesus in 13:25.

Thus the Son, to whom the Father has granted life in himself, creates all things in the beginning of Creation – the universe as we experience it (1:2-3). By coming into the world
(16:28) and becoming flesh (1:14), he brought the life of the new Creation – the age to come.

John speaks of two spheres of reality: heaven where God reigns unopposed, and the world, whose self-declared prince leads a rebellion against him.

There is a heavenly home waiting for the Christians... as if it is something that occurs after the death of individual Christians, and that this heavenly perfection is simultaneous with the continuance of world history... There are two realms in the cosmos – the world and heaven. In the heavenly realm Christians have a place, and there they are promised perfection.

Kysar 1993, 102

Of this heavenly realm, I would rather speak in terms of fullness, completeness, harmony and restoration to the intended Creation, including humanity’s creaturely image of God – the idea of shalom – than Kysar’s perfection, embracing a more fluid and dynamic quality, and reflecting Jesus’ abundance of 10:10.

God breathes life into Adam in Eden (Genesis 2:7); the Spirit breathes life into dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision (37:5-10); and Jesus breathes on the disciples after his resurrection (20:22).

John speaks of two kinds of life that result from these two realms. First, Jesus describes life in this Creation in three parallel images: it is subject to mortality in ‘this world’ (8:23) and to its prince (12:31); it is fleshly (3:6); and earthly (3:31).

The second kind of life is available in the heavenly realm. Carter clarified my understanding of this life of the new age:

The Greek adjective translated ‘eternal’ literally means ‘agely’, denoting ‘agely life’ or ‘life of the age’. The word ‘age’ refers to a way of understanding history that developed in some Jewish eschatological texts just before and around the time of Jesus... essentially this way of thinking divided history into two ages... The ‘age to come’ is the final age, or eschaton, in which, after God’s intervention and judgement, God’s life-giving and just purposes are established in a new world in which there is no rejection of God’s purposes... [It is] not just about quantity... it also concerns a particular quality of life.

Carter 2006, 100

Grayston envisages the contrasting quality of experience in these lives as appropriate to each realm: ‘In Greek aion means a long period of time, and aionios (translated as ‘eternal’) what is appropriate to such a period. Hence ‘eternal life’ means the kind of life appropriate to the period (or indeed the phase of experience) in which you are or will be living’ (Grayston 1990, 37).
The life of the new age is concurrent with the first life, and into the future, though only on Jesus’ return will it be fully experienced: ‘the food that endures to eternal life… Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day’ (6:27,54).

Those having it do so only because they are granted it through birth from above by the Spirit (chapter 3; 6:63); and will not taste death, ie not under God’s judgement (5:24) nor be separated from God (8:51). They ‘see’ the Kingdom of God and ‘enter’ it (3:3,5).

Moloney supports this view, and clarifies that this gift does not mean a trouble-free existence in our earthly experience. Brown and Thompson explain further.

The Son gives life (v24) and judges (v27) now as he frees people from their sin. But he will also give life and judge in the future, summoning people from their graves. Those who hear the voice of the Son and have life now are spared neither the need to endure the vicissitudes of life nor the reality of physical death, but they will be summoned from their graves… Jesus insists that faith in him produces a spiritual life both now and hereafter.

Moloney 1996, 18 re chapter 5, and 161 re chapter 11

Although Jesus insists that ‘eternal life’ is offered here below, he recognises that physical death will still intervene (11:25). This death cannot destroy eternal life, but there must be an aspect of completeness to eternal life after death that is lacking in those who have yet to pass through physical death.

Brown 2003, 240

There is a difference between ‘resurrection’ and ‘life’, which one can see in John 5… In 11:25-26, Jesus explains the meaning of ‘resurrection’ when he says, ‘Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.’ The one who experiences physical death will live again. Since, however, there is also a resurrection to judgement, the second part of the statement, ‘I am the life’ offers an additional note. For resurrection signifies what all will awake to; life signifies what those who awake to salvation awake to.

Thompson 2008, 240

Schneiders looks at the two lives from a different angle that I found intriguing. The Greek terms for soul, life, death, flesh, blood, spirit and body in English 'denote a component of the human being, in biblical usage they each denote the whole person from some perspective or some other aspect', writes Schneiders, describing them:

‘Eternal life’ refers to the whole person as divinely alive…

‘Flesh’ is the human being as natural and mortal…

‘Blood’ is the ‘livingness’ of one vulnerable to death…
'Body' is the person in symbolic self-presentation, i.e., numerically distinct, self-consistent, and continuous, a subject who can interact with other subjects, and who is present and active in the world... the body of the glorified Jesus is human and material but not physical. In other words, mortal flesh has become glorified body.

There are two deaths, the Gospel asserts. There is physical death, people being subject to mortality in this world. There is also 'spiritual' death: those under judgement are not reborn (3:36; 5:29) because they fail to see the kingdom or recognise the king; while they are physically alive, they are yet dead (5:25).

My initial findings on spiritual death ran counter to my church tradition and current teaching, which allude to a hell, where those without eternal life live in a state of cognitive death—separated from God and all he brings of life and community and wellbeing, and tormented by the awareness of being so. I had long questioned this, and quite unintentionally, my study of John presented this alternative case. I sought support for it by studying Revelation and the passages in all the gospels that mentioned 'hell' or 'Gehenna'. I read the blogs of contemporary Australian Baptist thinker Scott Higgins (www.scotthiggins.com), and David Powys' book, which was the outcome of his PhD in Theology. I was reassured that a valid case for my view on spiritual death could be made from John, supported by my further investigations. Powys writes:

Judgement is 'elective' condemnation: it is the lot of those who have shunned the Saviour and thus denied themselves eternal life... they are to be raised simply to be... brought to a recognition of God's sovereignty, even if it is the last thing they do... The fate of the unrighteous in John's Gospel is to forego eternal life, to be out of relationship with Christ, and to have no prospect of life beyond physical death (1997, 357,361-2)

Thus the believer has two lives and one death; those who reject God have one life and two deaths. All are raised like Lazarus: those already reborn retain their 'agely life'; others who face the judgement of 'the last day' (5:24,29; 6:40,44) retain their mortality (5:29). How this in fact will eventuate is not revealed to us, and we ought not to be more definite than Scripture is in relation to it.

In line with the Gospel, which describes the positive aspects of its dualities in far more detail and clarity than the negatives, my illustrations focus on life rather than death.
b. What is the nature of ‘the life of the age’?

The following two descriptions well express my answer to this question in general terms.

Kysar and Carter write,

Eternal life describes the life we live when we understand ourselves to be God’s children and when we live in relationship with God in Christ. That kind of life is ‘eternal’ in the sense that it feeds off the Eternal One and is harmonious with what the Eternal One wants for humanity.

Kysar 2002, 71

For John, this new life lived in relation to God, manifested in Jesus and yet to be completed, is ecclesial, ethical, societal, and cosmic… [God’s life-giving purposes] are not to be spiritualised. Encounter with God (eternal life in 17:3) means a new way of life including abundant fertility in wine and food (2:1-11; 6:1-14); physical wholeness (4:46-54; 5:1-18; 9:1-8; ch11), which Jesus interprets as utterly expressive of God’s will (7:23); the end of hierarchical and exploitative socioeconomic structures, replaced by communities of new power relations expressed in service and love (2:13-22; 13:12-20, 34-35; ch10); and the end of social structures secured by gender, ethnicity, cultural traditions, and social status (ch4).

Carter 2006, 83, 87 and see also pp203-4

The picture which I see John draws of life is metaphysical and conceptual (note Jesus’ phrase spirit and truth 4:24). In both realms of heaven and earth life always remains material and not disembodied, and ought not to be reduced by measuring it literally in terms of time and space. I do not want to fall into the same trap as ‘the Jews’ – to so delineate the gift that I may fail to recognise it when it comes; to so measure its forms as to lose its content.

Shifting focus from the general to specifics, what is the essence of this life? From my reading of John I see various aspects of this ‘life of the age’.

First, it is not so much endless life, but living as God lives, in a constant present. Believers live in this world with the foretaste of the new Creation; or rather, the new Creation of which they are part reaches back into their present experience of this world. ‘This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (17:3). ‘Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One’ (Carson 1991, 556). It is both ‘a present possibility’ (Brown 2003, 239), and our future hope to experience God forever (6:51,58).

Second, it bridges the gaps between the realms of heaven and the Creation, and between the two ages (2:51; 3:12-13; 14:2). It is not ‘of this world’ (ie not subject to the ruler of this
world), but under heavenly rule (3:3-5,31; 8:23; 14:3-6; 18:36). References to above and below are not literal, but metaphorical.

Gardner writes, 'the 'kingdom of God' is the world over which God reigns – his long-awaited rule over a rebellious earth, the gathering of his own into a single family. This is what Jesus is inviting people to enter – a world in which heaven and earth are joined again and God is known in his fullness' (2011, 43).

The imagery of this world and the heavenly world must not mislead the reader into thinking that a journey in space is required – not a journey in space but a journey from one frame of mind to another, from flesh to spirit, from competitive self-regard to a supportive network of love... 'I shall put my sanctuary in their midst for all time. They will live under the shelter of my dwelling; I shall be their God and they shall be my people' (Ezek 37:26-27)

Grayston 1990, 123

This quote from Ezekiel encapsulates the will of God for humanity, begun and lost in Eden and referred to throughout Scripture, restored, expanded and transformed in the new Creation of Revelation 21-22.

Because of this fusion of the two worlds, Jesus can say both that 'we (he and the Father) will come to those who love the Father' (14:23); and 'I desire that they... may be with me where I am [when he returns to the Father 1:18; 16:26-28] to see my glory' (17:24-26).

In the first Creation poem of Genesis 1, all things are created in six 'days'. On the seventh day, unconfined by time, God rested in a qualitatively different place. The Prologue of John 1 begins with the echo of this poem. Do its days six and seven overlap: 'My Father is working and I am working' (5:17)? In the same way, do believers' two lives overlap or coalesce?

Third, this life is abundant (10:10 'to the full' Carson 1991, 385; 'even superfluous' Barrett 1978, 373) – like the wine of the first sign (chapter 2) and the provision by the lake (6:8-13). Believers are recipients of that quality of life that Jesus gives – and is.

Fourth, it is good: that is, in accordance with God's character of grace and truth (1:14); and love (3:16; 13:34-35; 14:15-24; 15:12-17).

It is experienced with joy: the fullness of joy in abiding in Jesus (15:4-11); the fullness of joy in seeing Jesus (16:19-24) cf 'it is the Lord!' (21:7); and the fullness of joy in oneness with God and one another (17:11-13). 'Every sign that he performed ended in rejoicing' writes Grayston (1990, 131). As a result of discovering the extent of this joy, I have replaced glad
(20:20 ESV) with overjoyed as Carson suggests (1991, 647). May the trilogy of the characteristics of God be expanded to a quadrilateral of truth, beauty, goodness and joy?

References to God’s quality of peace in 20:19, 21,26, I take in conjunction with ‘Fear not’ in 12:15; ‘Let not your hearts be troubled’ in 14:27; and ‘take heart’ in 16:33.

The goodness of life lived in God’s presence is also clean/pure (13:10; 15:3) and free from sin (8:34). Believers undergo their ‘branches’ being pruned (‘trimmed clean’ Michaels 2010, 802), not to deal with their sin, which was done on the Cross, but to promote growth and fruitfulness. The reference to feet needing cleaning in 13:10 is not in some early manuscripts (footnote ESV 2001, 1085).

God’s goodness is holy (17:11; ‘made holy by a holy God’ Moloney 1998, 116); and in contrast to the evil of ‘this world’ (3:19) whose efforts at purity fail, and which is judged and its ruler (who lies and murders 8:44), is cast out (12:31; 16:33).

Fifth, this life is is relational and communal. Participants in this life are given the right to become children of God (1:12-13; cf ‘children’ 21:5); born of God (1:13) from above/anew by water and the Spirit, given without measure (3:3-8,34; Ezekiel 36-37). Thus members are made into the family of God (cf 19:25-27) as sons of God and brothers of Jesus (20:17) and each other, whose goal is loving commitment and unity.

Members of this life are gathered into one people of God (11:52). Grayston notes that you in chapter 14 is plural in 27 of 31 occurrences (1990, 124). Jesus prays for their oneness with each other and with God (17:11, 20-26). In one image, they are like a flock under the care of a shepherd (chapter 10; Psalm 23; Isaiah 40; Ezekiel 34) – which in the illustration on p33 I transpose to the outback setting as emu chicks under the care of their father. In another simile, they are like branches of the vine that is Jesus, under the husbandry of the Father (chapter 15). They are friends of Jesus (15:15) and thus of one another.

Participants in this eternal life abide in Jesus and are thus drawn into the oneness of the relationship between Father and Son. This unity is of will and operation, not of identity of person (Dumbrell 2006, 116); they are ‘at one’ (Grayston 1990, 87) with each other. Jesus prays that the believers’ community reflect that unity (chapter 17, in particular vv11, 20-26). Believers come to the Father through Jesus (14:6) who, by his return to the Father via the cross, prepares places for them in his Father’s house (Dumbrell 2006, 141), ‘the realm of God’ (Moloney 1998, 33). Jesus says, ‘I am in the Father and the Father in me’ (14:10,11) and ‘you in me and I in you’ (14:20); and that they will be loved by the Father (14:21).
In the ‘in-between time’ (Moloney 1998, 43) another Paraclete (the Spirit of truth, given by the Father 14:16; sent by Jesus 16:7) will come to dwell with believers (14:17; 15:26; 16:7-15).

This agely life restores and reconciles. The Samaritan word for the Messiah is ‘the Restorer’ of the world (4:25, Dumbrell 2006, 59). It gives life to the world (6:33), that is thereby transformed, like wine from water.

Restoring life and health is evidenced in the signs (4:50; 5:9, chapter 11, especially vv43-44). Jesus’ cry “Lazarus, come out!” proved to be an instance when the dead heard the voice of the Son of God (5:25,28-29) and sprang to life… had he not specified Lazarus, all the tombs would have given up their dead to resurrection life’ (Carson 1991, 418).

In this life, relationships are restored. After the resurrection, the disciples who had previously denied Jesus (Peter 13:38), or were sceptical (Thomas 20:25) or were absent, are brought back into relationship with Jesus and each other.

**Sixth**, God’s gift of eternal life rescues and unbinds: from death, the slavery of sin (8:34-6), and the ruler of this world (12:31, 16:33). ‘Unbind him and let him go’ Jesus instructs regarding the raised Lazarus (11:44). ‘Much as God liberated the Israelites from slavery by means of the first Passover, now God liberates humans from slavery to alienation and falsehood through Christ… a concrete expression of God’s love… [It] frees us from the oppression of lovelessness and isolation… [and] does not diminish the political and social dimensions of such liberation (Kysar 2002, 147).

**Seventh**, the gift is secure and unassailable (6:12,39; 17:12) – of invincible life and infinite security (10:7-9, 22; Dumbrell 2006, 116).

**Eighth**, it satisfies both hunger and thirst (6:35; 7:37; Isaiah 55). It is like living water welling up to eternal life, cleansing and thirst-quenching (4:10,14; cf Isaiah 58:11; Ezekiel 36,47; Zechariah 14), renewing and reviving. Because the motif of water permeates the Gospel story, and is able to convey many nuances of blessing, I use it as the primary image in my illustrations, and render in blue ‘blessing’ texts.

**Last**, it is the ability to see the king and his kingdom: see below under ‘light’.

However, as Moloney asks,

> Has the departure of Jesus initiated a utopia where life is made up of the abiding presence of the Spirit and the experience of the presence of the absent one, marked only by love, belief,
joy, and peace, where the believer is swept into the oneness that unites Jesus and the Father?

... The reader is caught in a tension between the revelation of God in the word of Jesus... and the ongoing presence of the prince of this world.

In the illustrations in my manuscript, I convey the thriving joy of the gift of this life through the serene colours of the water, the abundant bird life and expansive trees that live because of it, and the bright colours of the flora.
Emu family, Flinders (my sister Felicity Tipper’s photograph, used with permission)

Field sketch of Red river gum. Menindee

Mockup sketch for chapter 8
3. What does ‘Light’ encompass?

   a. Light brings life

   Light is the first of created things (Genesis 1:3), from which all others proceed. Thus it is instrumental in producing life: ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me… will have the light of life’ 8:12 (see also 12:46 and Isaiah 9 and 42). ‘It is only because there is life in the Logos that there is life in anything on earth at all. Life does not exist in its own right. It is not even spoken of as made ‘by’ or ‘through’ the word, but as existing in him’ (Morris quoted by Ball 1996, 283).

   b. Light exposes/reveals what is there:

   ‘For this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth’ (18:37)

Firstly, Jesus reveals the Father. ‘No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known’ (1:18). He is the nature of God made tangible: ‘We have seen his glory’ (his face? contra Exodus 33:20). ‘If you have seen me you have seen the Father’ (14:9); heard his voice (10:4, 20:16); felt his touch (9:6). In his earthly life, Jesus replaces in his bodily form the glory of God’s presence in the Temple (2:19-22); and from his ascension, in his exalted body (17:24).

As people relate to Jesus, they experience God. They encounter the Lord’s kindness and severity (see Romans 11:22). Jesus embraces those who seek him/ are open to him at whatever stage of their understanding (chapters 1 and 20); and rejects those who maintain an unyielding defence against him.

Jesus displays grace/kindness, humour and gentleness. His signs are not just evidence of raw power, but of God’s nature to generously renew, restore, and provide. He calls his followers affectionately ‘little children’ – and then ‘friends’ and ‘brothers’. But especially seen in his death/glorification: the ultimate expression of the depths of God’s love (3:16 ‘so loved’).

They encounter the God of truth (Isaiah 65:15), that is, his justice and uncompromising integrity. Jesus states, ‘I am… the truth’ (14:6). ‘Which of you’ he asks his opposition, ‘can convict me of sin?’ (8:46). His truthfulness loves guilelessness (1:47) and loathes the deceit that has greed and lust for power masquerading as religious observance.

Jesus mirrors the Lord of the Hebrew Scriptures in his deep grief and fierce revulsion at the destruction that evil brings (11:33 and, for example, Isaiah 5:13-15).

Second, light exposes people’s hearts (3:19-21).
Third, light illuminates one’s path, that is, provides moral guidance (11:9-10 cf Psalm 119:105).

Fourth, light enables one to see the king (1:14) and his kingdom (3:3).

The light is not so much to help us find our way in the dark, but is much bigger according to Grayston, ‘it is a light to banish the dark’ (1990, 75).

Seeing and blindness feature throughout John, and particularly in chapters 9, 14 and 20. Chapter 9 is the most highly developed presentation of evolving enlightenment, both physical and spiritual, in contrast to ever-darkening wilful misconstruction. Believers both see and are seen by Jesus (16:22; Moloney 1998, 94). Jesus’ figures of speech are very concrete and thus visual and imaginable. Reading the Gospel through as a whole, I felt that Jesus seems at times surprised by his own physicality – his ‘flesh’ which wearies him in Samaria— and this shows in his very physical imagery. I imagine him looking at his hands and saying, ‘Unless you eat my flesh…’ Thus, too, I illustrate not abstract thought but the physical world, celebrating his creation and incarnation. John, too, employs readers’ visual imagination. He tells of the plentiful water at Aenon (3:22) before relating Jesus’ offering living water welling up to eternal life (4:14). Chapters 7-10 juxtapose the stories of the physically and spiritually blind. In chapters 10-11 he tells you that the Feast is in winter, conjuring in my mind the bleak and the barren (cf Ostentad ‘It was winter’ ‘a veiled allusion to the nadir in the life of Jesus’ 1998, 129), followed a short time later by the raising of Lazarus – in a garden grave with the new buds of spring?

Through the illustrations, I seek to visually demonstrate my drawing together of the major theme of seeing and refusing to see, and Jesus’ and John’s use of visual imagery.
The barren Walls of China, Mungo, which I illustrate for chapter 10.

Field sketch Curly mallee, Living Desert, used in the illustration for chapter 11
Field sketch and photo calf and lambs on farm dam wall on the Menindee road

Sheep on farm dam wall outside Wagga Wagga
4. The means by which the gifts are given

Jesus came to bring grace and truth (1:14, 17), freeing people through his very person (Kysar 1993:37).

Jesus did not die to make God’s love known; Jesus lived to make God’s love known… John 3:16 is about God’s act of love in the incarnation, not singly about God giving Jesus up to death… the full gift of the incarnation as that which makes eternal life possible…

John’s focus on the incarnation nonetheless remains a crucial perspective for contemporary Christian theology and one that needs to be integrated as a full voice in conversations about the meaning of Jesus’ life and death. John envisions the possibility of grace and new life that comes from fullness, not emptiness and sacrifice, from an image of God that creates new possibilities out of the stuff of human flesh, from love that dwells incarnate.

O’Day 2005, 159, 160, 161, 167

Through his death as the Lamb of God, he takes away the sin of the world (1:29); like the serpent lifted up in the wilderness (3:14); the bread from heaven, which is his flesh (6:35,47,50), ‘hauling’ all people to himself (12:32, Dumbrell 2006, 129). ‘[I]t is the death of the shepherd for his sheep, the sacrifice of one man for his nation, the life that is given for the world, the victory of the Lamb of God, the triumph of the obedient son who in consequence of his obedience bequeaths his life, his peace, his joy, his Spirit… atoning and quickening’ (Carson 1991, 97, 253).

Moloney writes,

Jesus is ‘of God’. The former way of reconciliation with God was through the ritual of the sacrificed lamb. These rites… have been transcended. God now gives the fullness of pardon to Israel and to the whole world through the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is not a new cultic victim. Rather, he is the one through whom God enters the human story, offering perfect reconciliation with him.

1993, 65-6

The image of the Lamb of God undergirds the Gospel, with its roots in Genesis 22, the Exodus event/Passover, and Isaiah 53. The Passover motif is introduced by this image in 1:29, and the reader is never allowed to lose sight of it. The Passover commemorates the Israelites’ delivery from the last plague in Egypt, when the blood of an unblemished lamb daubed on the lintels of a house was the sign that God saw so that the angel of death passed over that household. It led to their freedom from Egyptian slavery to serve God in the Promised Land of rest.
Koester writes,

According to Exodus 12 the people of Israel observed the first Passover in Egypt by putting lamb’s blood on their doorposts and lintels, not to atone for sin, but to prevent the destroyer from entering their homes and slaying their firstborn. The annual Passover sacrifice of the lambs commemorated this deliverance. To account for the connection between the Lamb of God and sin, some interpreters plausibly suggest that the gospel combines Passover imagery with that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who is compared to a lamb that is led to the slaughter and who is said to bear the sin of many. By drawing on these and other backgrounds the Fourth Gospel develops a new type of imagery in which Jesus the Passover Lamb of God delivers people from death precisely by delivering them from sin... The gospel does not relate Jesus’ death to the need for divine justice but to the need for human faith.

Because of the pivotal significance of this image, a lamb features in two of my key watercolour illustrations: the first (p4-5), and of the crucifixion (pp58-59). The first also suggests ‘bread from heaven’ (bush tomato) and the second ‘lifted up’ (on the dam wall). The first seeks to convey the pastoral nature of the atonement; and the second of Jesus ‘high and lifted up’ (Isaiah 6:1) aims to show him glorified and triumphant, rather than as a victim.

Jesus is both the shepherd and the lamb of God; the door to the sheepfold and the way to the Father; the bread and the vine; life and light and truth/reality.

5. The bases of Jesus’ offers presented as a legal argument

In vivid contrast to the affirming and life-giving promises above, are the rancorous exchanges between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus. John employs these to build an argument supporting Jesus’ ability to fulfil them on the basis of who he is – the Son sent from heaven by his Father (see Lincoln 2000). Because of the starkness of the debates, I set out those texts in the form of a legal document, without decoration or softness.

The argument takes the form of two cases, built up throughout the book. Firstly, the prosecution case ‘the Jews’ vs Jesus (Moloney 2005, 151), in which ‘the Jews’ make submissions, and which Jesus defends by his claims to be sent from the Father and his I am statements. The latter can be seen as ‘miniature gospels’ (Ashton 2008, 127), which are, however, ‘not so much attempts to work out a persuasive Christology, as a sketch of what we can expect from God when we believe his Agent – namely: nourishment, illumination, protection, recovery from disaster, direction, and community’ (Grayston 1990, 62).
Jesus’ corroborative witnesses are John the Baptist, his own signs and works, the Father, the Scriptures and the Prophets, and the Gospel writer. I clarify these in my formatting of 5:31–6:3 on page 19. John vindicates Jesus through his presentation of the trial before Pilate (18:28–19:22), whose judgement is ‘I find no guilt in him (x3)... the King of ‘the Jews’ (x2 and in 3 languages). In pages 56-57 of my manuscript I emphasise this vindication through font choices.

The second case is Jesus vs 'the Jews'; Jesus representing the Father (cf Isaiah 41:21), and 'the Jews' representing 'the world' (those who unflinchingly reject him). Jesus comes as God’s emissary (Ashton 1991, 53) to claim back his own (1:11) from the hands of Satan (6:39, 8:34-6, 10:28-9, 12:30-2, 16:11,35 and inferred throughout). He is outraged and grief-stricken at sin and death (Carson 415-6). He is a formidable legal opponent. The sentence is pronounced in the clear warnings against unbelief; the cross is 'the judgement of the world' (12:31).

6. The nature of belief and abiding

Those who respond positively to Jesus and his offers receive, believe and abide in him.

Believing in John is always a verb. Different characters evidence the wide range of followers’ understanding, from very limited to very committed ('Let us die with him', said Thomas in 11:16) – but always an active process of engagement. I prefer the translation of the Greek word as entrusted (Carter 2006, 93-94, and see further p208) that implies a heartfelt relationship. It is in stark contrast to the attitude of fixed and wilful disengagement of his opponents. Kysar describes believing as

... a perspective that is open to the possibility of God’s active involvement in human history… a continuous process of reassessment and growth.

The understanding of faith is further expanded by the Evangelist’s use of three other terms: seeing, hearing and knowing...

In the Johannine sense of knowing there is no detachment but just the opposite – involvement...

Faith is something one does... a dynamic becoming... a continuing dynamic

1993, 84,93,94
Schneiders describes believing as ‘the fundamental openness of heart, the basic readiness to see and hear what is really there, the fidelity to one’s experience no matter how frightening or costly it appears to be, the devotion to being that refuses to tamper with reality in order to preserve the situation with which one is familiar’ (1993, 88).

Moloney cautions,

A reading of the Gospel of John should not divide characters in the story, and consequently, readers of the story, into individuals or groups who are either for the Johannine presentation of the gift of Jesus or against it. Although some of the characters in the text decide against Jesus, most of them fall somewhere between these two extremes, and all of them are used by the author to address the readers. The portrayal of the characters is not an end in itself. This is a significant example of the all-pervasive rhetoric of the Gospel of John. The original readers of this gospel were summoned to move on from where they were, into a deeper commitment of faith.

2005, 237

However, I think John does divide those who choose darkness from those in the light. In the latter group, the issue for John is not the extent of their understanding, but their remaining or abiding with him, and Moloney’s comments on their range as types of understanding rings true to me. The theme of abiding is expounded in chapter 14, but foreshadowed from 1:1 and 38-39. Dorothy Lee writes,

In John’s understanding, the love of Father and Son ripples out from the divine being to embrace human beings and indeed all creation in a relationship of abiding…. Becoming children of God in this Gospel – being restored to the divine image – means returning to that primordial love and resting place which is the ground of creation… by the Farewell Discourse its symbolic centre unfolds in the symbol of the vine and images of friendship… The word ‘to abide’… is scattered throughout John’s Gospel, occurring some forty times, with a significant number of instances clustered around the Farewell Discourse…[It] often overlaps with other Johannine conceptions such as unity, oneness, love, and indwelling. The symbol of abiding is about the realization of discipleship as a present reality, yet also with a future dimension… So the symbolism of place is that of believers journeying on a pathway that is Jesus himself… the destination of which is the Father.

As a symbol of discipleship, abiding is most explicitly enunciated in the extended metaphor of the vine and branches (15:1-17). According to Wayne Brouwer, 15:1-17 forms the centre of a ‘macro-chiasm’ that embraces John 13-17. On this basis he argues that the centre and controlling theme of the Farewell discourse is ‘Abide in me!’ – a theme that is indicated in the footwashing and Great Prayer, which provide the outer frame for the chiasmus (13:1-35;
The imagery of the vine really ‘serves to articulate the importance of abiding’ [quoting Moloney].

Abiding encompasses commitment.

In the illustrations I portray the abundant life of the waterways to highlight the importance of abiding in Jesus, and not turning back (6:56,66). The blues of these scenes on pp46-47, 48-49, 52-53, while representing water and sky, also convey the sense of rest, wellbeing and peace. It is in clear contrast to the reds and ochres of the illustrations that reflect unbelief.

The scholars’ insights quoted in this chapter widened my vision of light and life as if my earlier study of the text was undertaken in blinkers. I was content with the organisation of my thoughts on these themes, and largely retained this chapter’s initial structure, but the breadth and depth and clarity of the scholars I want to honour by allowing them their own voices. I had intuitively responded to my reading of the literature by countless, often small, amendments to my evolving digital manuscript. There were many ‘yes, of course!’ moments, not clearly verbalised even to myself, let alone noted on paper, and impossible to trace later.

Having completed the preliminary research into both text and visual theme, in the next chapter I discuss developing the artwork – both manuscript and illustrations – on that foundation.
Draft sketch for the illustration for chapter 5
Chapter 3: Responding to the second question,

*How can I best visualise Jesus’ offers of life and light through a series of paintings depicting the impact of rainwater in the Australian outback, which may be incorporated into an illuminated manuscript of the Gospel?*

1. Defining practice-based research as a method to address this question

Practice-based Research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes... Claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes which may include artefacts such as images or other outcomes such as performances and exhibitions... creative outcomes from the research process may be included in the submission for examination and the claim for an original contribution to the field are held to be demonstrated through the original creative work.

Candy 2006,1,3

This chapter describes the *process* of practice-based research by which I developed the creative component, built on the foundations of my literary and theological research. As can be seen, this was not a straight, linear progression from reading *John* and then the scholars, laying out the text, and researching and producing the paintings. Rather, the process was both cyclical, as one aspect impacted another, and organic as those strands interwove.

My aim is that the manuscript reveal God’s truth, beauty, goodness and joy. Divine truth I seek to show in the format of the text that respects the author’s craftsmanship and thus his intent. God’s beauty I seek to honour in the elegance of the manuscript’s design, and both the natural subjects and execution of the artworks. The Lord’s goodness is evident in John’s portrayal of Jesus, and suggested by the illustrations of God’s provision in an arid landscape. I hope that the joy, highlighted in the Last Supper discourses text, is also evident in the fauna pictures and serene landscapes.

I begin by explaining both my intention and the final manuscript.
2. Formatting the text

I aim to assist readers to interact with the Gospel by using illustrations that are decorative and suggestive, and by formatting the text to highlight its form. However, John defies rigid structuring and demands to be treated as a whole. I therefore lay out the text in manageable sections in a way that seeks to avoid the implication that it comprises a series of unrelated parts. Having studied segments – either of episodes or themes – readers need to integrate them back into the whole story (cf Thompson 1993, 409). If we are to read John’s Gospel for all its worth, we have to learn to hold two strands side by side in our minds, and then, as we get used to that, three or four, or even more. Like someone learning to listen to music, we have to be able to hear the different parts as well as the glorious harmony that they produce when put together’ (Wright 2001, 13).

Next, I outline the steps I took from my intention to the finished layout of the text.

I went to great lengths looking for an overall pattern, such as symmetry, but concluded with the question, Is it more like a musical canon, a grandly simple opening, with ever-increasing complexities of interwoven melodies? I later read Schneiders, ‘It is probably true, and more useful, to say that there are several structures, overlapping and interrelated, holding this Gospel together and moving it forward, depending on how one looks at it... Each structure... allows the reader to see different aspects of the Gospel in clearer light’ (1999, 25). Concluding her outline of several suggested structures, she writes, ‘To choose one against all the others is actually an unnecessary impoverishment of one’s reading’ (1999, 25-6). On this note of dire warning, very aware that I could not possibly suggest all structures or themes in my manuscript, I proceeded in some trepidation to describe John’s contours.

The Prologue sounds the first foundational notes: glory and majesty, light and life, grace and adoption, witness accepted and spurned.

It does have episodes, bridged by references to changing geographical and festal contexts. But these boundary markers are in the nature of commas or semi-colons rather than fullstops (to adopt Salier’s comment nd 69). Episodes contain ‘hook words’ that span bridges. Even the opening of chapter 13, seen by many as beginning the second section of the Gospel, is bridged to the earlier part by chapter 12.

The pairing of concepts such as light and dark, truth and lies, above and below – and above all, the contrasting consequences of believing or rejecting Jesus – is mirrored in the pairing of episodes and the double meanings of words. Words which in Greek have two meanings are
used deliberately to mean both (Moloney 2005, 103), which I incorporate into the
manuscript and list in its Explanation.

John provides his own emphases: the seven solemn I am statements – the repetition of the
phrase an invitation to compare them with each other (Ball 1996, 89); the double Truly, truly
introductions to Jesus’ teaching (x24); the references to seven signs and to day and night and
hour, and the concluding statement of authorial purpose.

Stibbe ’underwent a profound turning point when [he] heard an actor reading the whole of
the Gospel’ (1994, 6). ‘We must appreciate its dramatic quality… attending to the Gospel as
a play, as a divinely authored drama’, write Kelly and Moloney (2003, 9); whereas Carson
sees it as ‘sermonic’ (1991, 46). ‘The narrative staple of plot conflict merges with the poet’s
impulse to embody truth in image in several great contrasting patterns’ (Ryken 1998, 455).

Throughout the text I suggest its literary forms in the following ways.
Firstly, in formatting the Prologue as symmetrical poetry and wordplay in my layout of the
words. Brown calls it a ‘hymn’ and ‘overture’ (2003, 286,298), in which Schneiders sees
cyclical repetition (1999, 28), and whose epic qualities ‘establish an ordered system of
relationships between God, his Word, his creation, and its history’ (Moloney1993, 24).

Secondly, in formatting the interplay of prose and poetic form, to highlight the ‘motif of
misunderstood statement’ (Ryken 1998, 456). Brown considers ‘how good a case can be
made for casting John in poetic format… we lack conclusive proof that a poetic format is
justified; but, when one has worked with the material for a while, searching to find a format,
one does get caught up into the pattern…’ (2003, 286).

Thirdly, in colouring the text to highlight the benefits offered (initially in green, then
changed to blue to represent life-giving water and integrate into the outback colour scheme)
and to differentiate the courtroom motif (in black and justified) from the body of the story
(in brown to reflect the outback landscape).

Fourthly, without wrestling passages from their contexts – without which they have no real
meaning (O’Day 1986, 103) – I emphasise phrases though variations of font and space
where I feel it will further assist readers.

Fifth, setting out text, on occasion, to reveal chiasm (cf Brown 2003, 287).

Sixth, indicating boundary markers spatially or by font change.
Seventh, italicising you to denote its plural form in the original Greek, to clarify ambiguities in some of the discussions.

Eighth, including two alternative terms translating the Greek word that means both, when it first occurs.

Ninth, placing ‘the Jews’ in quotation marks throughout the text to alert readers to its nuanced meaning, as do many scholars including Moloney, Schneiders and Lincoln.

And tenth, including an explanation of my presentation of John, which forms the Preface to the finished manuscript.
Field sketches: Umberumberka Reservoir

Field sketch: Living Desert hillside
3. Designing the manuscript

a. The trip to Broken Hill

Having immersed myself in *John*, and rehearsing it as I drove west from Newcastle to Broken Hill, it was at the forefront of my mind as I drove and walked around the countryside from there to Wentworth and Wagga Wagga. Everywhere I 'saw' landscapes that connected to the stories in the Gospel.

I drove into Broken Hill on a clear midwinter afternoon, and introduced myself to the local flora in the city’s arboretum. I had left Newcastle (some 1100 km east) the previous morning, driving through the Hunter Valley, and Dubbo in the western plains, to Nyngan. Early that morning I had continued driving the long, straight road, spotting wild goats, emus, and kangaroos, and stopping near the location of Pigeunit’s 19th century painting *Flood on the Darling* that is in the NSW Art Gallery.

I spent the following day sketching and photographing in the Living Desert, a nearby nature reserve of endemic flora and fauna. It is a hilly area overlooking the wide red-oxide plains, which, though its watercourses were dry, was alive with the salt- and mint-bush rejuvenated by the rains earlier in the year. I returned another day to continue my exploration and experience sunset in the wide arc of sky and distant horizon. I found the sense of space exhilarating.

I joined a day tour of Menindee and Kinchega, letting its 4WD cope with the corrugated dirt roads where I hesitated to drive my borrowed car, but neither of my cameras functioned. At one stop, a peewee sang in the ubiquitous saltbush.

Driving west, I sketched the landscape at the Mundi Mundi lookout, from which one can see the curvature of the earth (according to the tourist information), and on to the Umberumberka Reservoir. There I sketched the hills on the other side of the water, as I reflected on John 6. On the way I passed families of sheep and lambs near the dry watercourses, and stopped to photograph them and make thumbnail sketches, remembering all the Gospel’s allusions to Passover and the Lamb of God. I crossed dry creekbeds, where floodwaters had piled rocks that reminded me of the Jews’ response, both hardness of heart and attempt to stone Jesus in chapters 8 and 10.

I returned the 120km or so to Menindee. On the way, I saw lifted up and silhouetted on the red-soil wall of a farm dam, a calf and a few lambs. I explored the dry bed of Stephen’s Creek,
lined with ancient river gums, which I photographed and later sketched in the whirling dust. I took a river tour and many photographs. Over the next couple of days, I encountered countless birds that swam and waded and dived in the Darling and lakes and billabongs. Flocks soared in formation above. I heard birdsong, both raucous and melodic. I encountered at close range a pair of eagles who showed interest in my lunch as they circled above me; an emu curious of my presence at dusk; an echidna that didn’t notice me till snuffling my shoe; and a fox and a dingo, who both fled when I spoke to them. I photographed dawn and sunset across the water from the cabin in which I camped, and found tiny seashells on the levy bank. One far-too-blustery day I stayed inside and sketched flora specimens I had collected: various silver-grey saltbush in subtle flower or fruiting in colours ranging from green to magenta; acacia and eucalypts. Jesus’ arrest, death and resurrection (and Lazarus?) are in gardens – and I had plenty of subjects to suggest them.

I thought of the imagery of chapter 15: not of the vine and branches, but of the underlying concept of abiding, and the blessings it produces of life, love, joy and peace (and severe mercy). Illustrations of Menindee could convey that, and perhaps form the central focus of both the manuscript and the series of paintings. I thought of Siloam as I saw the light and the surrounding trees reflected in the small dam; the pool Sent in the billabongs; the sunset light on the lakewater and the Feast of Tabernacles; the red dawn of a resurrection breakfast.

I took a day tour to Mutawintji National Park, about 120 km north east of Broken Hill, where caves reminded me of the two resurrection settings, and a walk up a rocky hillside took me past a rockpool in the shape of a basin that evoked chapter 13.

From Broken Hill I drove 300km south to Wentworth, where the Darling River meets the Murray; the wide, dry isolation of the journey broken only by a roadhouse midway. The following morning I joined a day tour to Mungo National Park, about 120 km to the northeast. We paused at the edge of the flat plain which, according to our Aboriginal guide, had been an inland sea some 25,000 years ago, and now known as Willandra Lake. We drove across it to the barren, sculptured sand formations on the far side: a polar opposite to the flourishing life of Menindee. It was a vivid image of sterile unbelief.

From there I travelled to Mildura, where I explored the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens and identified various plants I’d sketched, and photographed a mulga estimated at 2,500 years old that later decorates chapter 20; and east through Hay to Narranderra; via Wagga Wagga to Canberra, and thence returned northeast to Newcastle.
It was an inspiring journey.

Field studies of eucalyptus branches Menindee
**b. Drafting the manuscript**

With a concept for the layout of the text, a habitat theme for the illustrations, and preparatory ideas aplenty, I turned to integrate them into a draft manuscript.

I perused *The Four Holy Gospels, English Standard Version*, with paintings by Makato Fujimura (2011), and *the St John’s Bible*, in the New Revised Version, handwritten and illuminated by Donald Jackson (2005-7). Both are lavishly beautiful productions, but, unlike mine, the text is formatted according to conventional chapters and verses. I viewed Colin McCahon’s *I AM* in the National Gallery, and *Hiatus*, Imants Tiller’s 1987 reworking of it, as both quote *John*. Online I viewed Nelson Young’s figurative meditation of the Gospel stories. Although interesting, none had a direct influence on my decision-making.

In my travels, it had occurred to me that the problems I was encountering in finding a pleasing layout I could overcome if I altered the page layout from portrait to landscape. It was another ‘Eureka!’ moment. On reaching home and computer, I experimented – and sensed I overcame – the difficulties of presentation. The text fitted snugly into column units; there was an immediate sense of liberation from formality and conventionality. Printing the text, I sketched illustrations.

However, there was a sharp disjunction between the spacious Prologue and the dense blocks of text in the remainder.

Studying *Lines for Birds*, a book of poems by Barry Hill and paintings by John Wolseley (2011), I was struck by its integration and balance of text, breathing space and illustrations; the sparsity of text on many pages; the variation between pages, yet forming a harmonious whole. Accordingly, I reformatted the text, with far less text per page, and introduced a second more elegantly spacious (yet readable) font for emphases, and larger – though not more – illustrations.

Though far more attractive visually, it stretched the manuscript from around twenty to sixty pages. Of necessity placing smaller units in double-page spreads, I sacrificed delineating through layout any larger structural patterns, and risked rendering piecemeal a literary whole (cf Ryken 1992, 382). I have sought to overcome this through a harmony of visual subject matter, and a holistic approach to design. I aim that in the manuscript, double-page units nonetheless flow into one another, and variation of sizes and shapes of illustrations maintain fluidity and reader interest.
Of concern also was the reduction of visual theme to that of water and abiding, and the suggestion of a new creation in the botanical drawings, at the cost of so many other motifs. However, it is impossible for me to display the depths of John in one cohesive manuscript, and I trust that focussing on limited themes will arouse in the reader the desire to explore others, some of which I suggest in the manuscript’s preface. The chosen motifs are universal, broader than the Old Testament symbols that enrich them.

I was concerned that the manuscript avoid cliché where short text and image are joined. I am mindful of this in the composition, and of John Dillenberger’s criteria for a work of ‘art’: that it ‘be a significant work which creatively engages the viewer, avoiding formulae and clichés. It must invoke a shared reception across different classes, ages, and/or cultures. Otherwise it functions as an historical object which elicits remembrance or recognition, but not transformation’, quoted by Anne Kearney (1998, 24).

I drafted the manuscript by formatting sections of text in double page units that both balance each other and suggest John’s shape. I rendered it in a clear, attractive font (with long uppers and downers that assist readability) in 11 on 13 point which gives breathing space between lines, with margins that avoid crowding the text. This set the boundaries of text and space for every page, and enabled me, in turn, to consider my use of white space: what I wanted to be stark, breathing space, or for illustration.

In the spaces for illustrations, I considered whether to use most of the space for large drawings for major themes or impact; smaller for the less important or intimate, or to focus attention or match the text shape on the opposite page.
I then drafted my design in three-way conversation with the digital design of the text layout, field sketches and photographs, and my notes discussing the issues and motifs I wished to portray. I produced a mock-up of the manuscript, firstly by drawing watercolour sketches of illustrations in their chosen sizes, then printing the text over them (as the inks would bleed if done in reverse order).

So as not to overload readers, I chose to limit the number of pages with illustrations. The confrontational drama of some passages was brought into strong relief by their starkness; the flow of passages is presented simply through text layout.

The dawn light of Creation and re-creation bookends the story. The Gospel illumination begins with a broad impression of light and river; and ends with two, one of sunrise and expansive water; the other of dawn and flowers reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, and light that streams – into? from? – an empty cave.

‘The lamb of God’ appears next, at beginning and end of the Gospel. Firstly, the lamb in a thicket introduces John’s overarching Passover motif; and secondly, Jesus lifted up on the Cross. Water in both paintings is both elusive and allusive: a dry creekbed and a dam wall.

The river runs through the first few chapters, before opposition fragments it. It is represented in various ways, but progresses to the final double page of river gums growing from seedlings to established trees.

Nothing I had encountered in the region properly illustrated ‘living water welling up to eternal life’, reflecting 4:14. Some months later, I joined a day tour in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, after a four-hour drive north from Adelaide. It is about six hours from Broken Hill, with similar climate and vegetation, but ancient hills and gorges replace Broken Hill’s flat landscape. In the Brachina Gorge, water had seeped to the surface from an underground creek. It looked muddy and inconsequential, but it was flanked by reeds and nourished nearby river red gums, and no doubt supported a range of shy creatures. Thus the illustration on page 13 is of a setting alien to the remainder – not inappropriate to the story’s Samaritan context – and a fitting image for believers’ hearts.

On checking with the commercial printer whom I hope will do the final production, I resized the manuscript by trimming 17mm to allow binding in landscape format.

I was now ready to produce the final paintings.
Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was laid against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The man who had dead came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them,
4. Undertaking the artworks

My background is in Natural History Illustration, and both my skills and inclination are to illustrate naturalistically to be easily comprehensible to a wide audience. Readers are already being challenged and stretched by the text itself and finding connections between it and the drawings. Although hoping that the images are universal, my primary audience is Australian, for whom the landscape may sound deep resonances.

In the body of paintings, I have sought to acknowledge the grand overarching themes of John, through washes of atmospheric light; colour palette contrasting the peaceful and joyful blues and yellows with earthy red ochres; and the changing moods of life-giving water.

In the field, I took photographs, and on my sketches made notes of the colours I used to best match the landscape. I experimented to choose a limited palette from which all the paintings are executed to assist the tenor and unity of the series, and immediately convey a sense of the contrast between the arid and the ‘blessed’.

For the details of the bird illustrations, some I drew in captivity or in local reserves; for others I sketched specimens in the Australian Museum. I obtained permission from Bruce Ramsay to use his internet photograph of a fairy martin in flight for my painting Unbound.

To identify the flora, I consulted The Living Desert (Cowling and Las Gourgues 1995) and Moore’s Plants of Inland Australia 2005.

Tracing my sketches and referring to photographs, I arranged and composed my final works – with some artistic license – on tracing paper. The sizes of the works are in proportion to the manuscript measurements, mostly larger and of varying multiples, governed by factors such as the nature of watercolour washes and effects, the range of styles from sketchy to highly detailed, and my preference to render botanical illustrations life-size. These I then traced onto watercolour paper, and stretched ready for painting.

Watercolour as a medium has a translucency and organic quality, as water, paper and natural pigments interact in their own – and sometimes unexpected – ways. As artist, I am, like John the Baptist, the lesser partner to the text and the medium. Robert Hughes writes,

‘Watercolour is tricky stuff... It is the most light-filled of all ways of painting, but its luminosity depends on the white of the paper shining through thin washes of pigment. One has to work from light to dark, not (as with oils) from dark to light. It is hospitable to accident... but disaster-prone as well. One slip, and the veil of atmosphere turns into a mud puddle, a garish swamp. The stuff favours broad effects... It can be violated... but it also
demands and exacting precision of the hand – and an eye that can translate solid into fluid in a wink (Hughes, 1990, 109).

I used a range of watercolour techniques, from the wet-in-wet soft blends and edges; blending by layering colours or prior mixing; impressionistic rivers and accurate botanical renderings; creating textures through line, spattering or salt, or dry-brush. Light is best captured by reserving the white of the paper, or applying thin washes to allow it to shine through. This is done by either managing the water flow or taking out patches with absorbent paper, both of which leave soft, inexact edges; or by masking, which leaves hard, dominating edges. White pigment applied over other colours is flat and dull, and kept for a minimum of fine detail.

Usually I work by applying thin washes of a limited range of pigments to build up depth and colour. However, I had never before worked with a range of granulating ochres – light red, Indian red, yellow ochre light and gold ochre – along with French ultramarine, also a granulating and non-staining pigment. The results were disastrous. Granules dissolved on being rewet; shifted; pooled on edges or obliterated them; or even lifted off earlier colour layers. And the ochres are all semi-opaque rather than transparent, so they disguise or muddy rather than meld with underneath layers to form subtle new hues. The colours I chose in the field of light red and Indian red were the exact colours of the soil. They are red oxides, the substance that the land is mined for, and so I felt committed to using them. Hans Heysen, painting his iconic series of the Flinders in the early-mid 1900s, remarked he needed to use Prussian blue and French ultramarine to make the sky colour, ‘something more powerful than cobalt [the usual pigment] altogether. And of course the red and yellow ochres are the dominant warm colours. And the bronzes, you have to get the bronzes by mixing…’ (McGrath & Olsen 1981:28). And so I persevered, one painting in three managing to achieve results with which I was content.

The clear, dry air produced hard edges to the forms of the landscape, even in the distance. Heysen wrote, ‘by clear, I mean there is no thickness of atmosphere between you and the objects’ (McGrath & Olsen 1981, 28). And I needed to reflect this in my paintings, with no misty backgrounds to give a sense of distance.
Choosing a limited palette
Occasionally I include animate life as a further representation of life, with no other meaning—the birds in the first resurrection painting; the tiny emu at Mungo to indicate scale. The echidna at the edge of the pool representing Bethesda is a sly allusion to the invalid’s prickly character. But I did not want creatures in all pictures, like a Where’s Wally? puzzle. I wanted the elements of the paintings to focus on light, life and water that allow contemplation on what Jesus offers—and is.

Elements in some paintings are happy happenstances. As I worked on the illustration of the pool for the footwashing, I noticed the cracks in the rock formed a cross. The muddy creek in the Brachina Gorge looked inconsequential and undramatic—like most of our Christian lives, but it is life-giving. The red-capped robin in the final illustration provided a visual link between the Holy Spirit and believers, continuing the black and red theme of the Red-tailed black cockatoo on pages 5, 50 and 59.

I vary the forms of the illustrations as they will appear in the book. Some are small and contained to suggest isolated incidents of blessing in a hostile environment (eg pages 17 and 31). Some are expansive, both in the landscape they depict and their situation on the page, to suggest the wide-ranging impact of the text they accompany (eg pages 48-49 and 61). Viewpoints are also varied to shift reader perspectives (eg page 37).

As I undertook paintings, I adapted my design concepts. For several, I added fauna—animate life—as I realised that more than flora was needed to reflect life. Having noted creatures I saw on my field trips, I researched and sketched them from the Internet, Australian Museum and local reserves. I modified Abiding in Abundance to emphasise animate life, by including portraits of a range of birds I had seen at Menindee. I was concerned that my sketch of lambs to illustrate ‘I am the good shepherd’ was trite, and so I decided to replace it with a picture of an emu with his young. Choosing the emus meant I didn’t confuse the visual theme of the lamb of God in the two other paintings. In the Flinders I had taken photographs of a father emu with his young chicks, but they were not very clear. However, my sister, on an earlier visit, had taken good photographs, and gave me her permission to use them, and the Red-capped robin.

I didn’t ever see the red-tailed black cockatoo out west, though it is in its National Parks’ fauna lists. To me it represents the Lord—in its graceful and majestic flight movement, its outspread wings cruciform; its colours of black and red (and yellow in the female) symbolising death and glory. I drew them in the local reserve’s aviary, and its feather given by
a friend. It appears in the far distance of the illustration on page 5. I had intended it to appear in the illustration of the crucifixion on page 59; however, two factors prevented it. Firstly, despite many visits to its aviary, the cockatoo did not fly in my presence; the only specimens I found were perched; and I was not able to obtain copyright permission to use others’ photographs on the Web. Secondly, in any case, I decided that to include it would detract from the focus on the lamb. Thus, I only allude to it by its feather. If I had been able, in the time frame, to draw the bird in flight, it would have replaced the illustration on page 50. I regret this, but this highlights the difficulties of a natural history illustrator.

My voice expressing my response to the Gospel and my theological research into it may be summarised in the expanded version of the Contents prefacing the manuscript, set out below, in which titles of the paintings link their subjects to those of the text.

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<td>Illustration <em>The wider context: view from the Mundi Mundi lookout after the rains</em></td>
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<td>The Prologue</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>(1:1-18) laid out to highlight its wordplay and symmetry, with a background wash to set its cosmic context and span of the whole of history, <em>The dawn of Creation and the River of Life</em></td>
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<td>The Preface</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>The testimony of John, concluding with disciples following Jesus (1:19-34). Illustration <em>Lamb in a thicket: sheep and lambs grazing near a creekbed on the Silverton road, and red-tailed black cockatoo alluding to 'the Lamb of God' (vv29, 36)</em>, the Spirit descending in the form of a bird, and foreshadowing the crucifixion by the subject of the lamb. The dry watercourse alludes to the River Jordan and the possibility of the blessing of water to come. References to ‘days’ here and overleaf highlight John’s hint of the 7 days of Creation to its recreation in Jesus’ first sign. <em>The River</em> border continues to link pages 4-15 in which Jesus, unhindered by opposition, introduces himself and what he has to offer.</td>
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<td>The first Passover</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>Introduction to Jesus (1:38–2:22) up to the wedding at Cana and the cleansing of the Temple of its false worship. The two incidents are deliberately set in conversation with each other. Illustration <em>Suggesting the Darling River and Menindee Lakes: brimming vessels</em>, which refers both to the geographic context of the illustrations and the transformed Jewish jars of purification</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Opening of the discussion with Nicodemus (2:23–3:8). Illustration <em>the Spirit moves: eucalyptus branches overhanging water, driven by the wind</em>, alluding to vv7-8</td>
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Jesus’ role: continuation of discussion with Nicodemus, and John’s reflection (3:9-36), with further references to water and purification

Opening of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at Joseph’s well (4:1-14). Illustration *Underground creek surfaces in the Brachina Gorge, Flinders Ranges: living water welling up to eternal life*

Stories of two believers (4:15-54), highlighting true worship and noting the first I am. Illustrations *Seedlings in the Brachina Gorge and Established trees in the Darling* culminate the development of the theme of worshipping in spirit and truth begun with the Temple cleansing.

An unnamed Sabbath

Healing of the paralytic at Bethesda pool (5:1-15). Illustration *Moving water: ripples on the dam at Copi Hollow*, with five reflected tree trunks and ‘prickly’ echidna on its edge, designed to pair with that on p31

Confrontation between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus arising out of the healing (5:16–6:3), set out to present the flow of the arguments according to the trial motif, and concluding with Jesus’ consequent withdrawal. Note this pattern of Jesus’ strategic journeys throughout.

The Second Passover

The sign of food in the wilderness and calming the sea (6:4-21). Illustration *Provision in the desert: the other side of Umberumberka Reservoir, and the bush food ‘bush tomato’ (ruby saltbush)* that suggests the manna in the Exodus wilderness, in order to parallel the two events

Discussion arising from the sign (6:22–7:1), and the ever-decreasing circle of Jesus’ followers

The Feast of Booths

Introducing this long section, beginning in Galilee before the Feast; mentioning Jesus’ teaching – but giving no content of it; and highlighting the division of responses to Jesus (7:2-36)

Jesus’ double declaration at the Great Day of the Feast (7:37–8:12, omitting 7:53–8:15 that is included at the end of the manuscript). Illustration: *Light and water: sunset at Copi Hollow* that refers to Jesus’ gifts, eclipsing the symbols of light and water that are conspicuous in the Jewish liturgy of the Feast

Confrontation between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus (8:13-59), set out to show its progression, and its juxtaposition with Jesus’ words of liberation

Healing of the man born blind (9:1-7). Illustration *the pool Sent to heal: reflected light, Copi Hollow billabong*, paralleling and contrasting the story of the healing of the paralysed man on page 17; the reflected sun to suggest sight
Discussion arising from the sign (9:8–10:21). Illustration In the Father’s care: emu and his chicks, Flinders Ranges, an Australian take on sheep and shepherd

The Feast of Dedication
(10:22–11:16) Illustrations On stony ground: dry creekbed Mundi Mundi Plains, referring to both ‘the Jews’ attempt to stone Jesus, and their hearts hardened against him; and Rocky hillside, Living Desert, to suggest Jesus’ retreat to the wilderness

The Day of Preparation of the third Passover
A. Jesus prepares his disciples pp42-53
Since the Hebrews calculated the day beginning at sunset, I include the evening before the crucifixion in this ritual day.
Note the use of you (the eleven) and whoever (all believers)

I 42- The foot-washing (13:1-15) Illustration a basin of water: Mutawintji rockpool
43

II 44- Betrayal (p44) and denial (p45) foreshadowed in parallel (13:16-38)
45

III 46- Comfort in four parts (14:1-31). Illustration Comfort in many places: Menindee inhabitants
47

IV 48- Abiding (15:1-11). Illustration Abiding in abundance: Menindee landscape, translates Jesus’ image of vine and branches to one of the abundant water he offers to those who inhabit it. The drawings on the previous double page anticipate this translation
49

V 50- Comfort and command (15:12–16:33). Together with the previous double page, the command to love is the centre of the Last Supper discourses Illustration Another Paraclete: Red-tailed black cockatoo, which was in the distance in the illustration on page 4
51

VI 52- Jesus prays (17:1-26), each column setting out a section of the prayer.
53 Illustration Life through abiding: river redgums with wet feet, thriving in the water
B. Jesus the lamb for the slaughter pp54-59

VII 54- Confrontation, betrayal and denial (18:1-27). Small illustration On barren ground: Mungo landscape, suggesting the lowest point for Jesus in the narrative, the emu in the sketch indicating scale

VIII 56- Climaxing the trial motif in the book, Jesus is vindicated yet sentenced at the trial before Pilate (18:28-22). The author uses Pilate, the character with the greatest authority in the story, to declare Jesus both innocent at the trial, and 'King of the Jews' (that is, their representative) at the carrying out of his sentence, at the time the sacrificial lambs of the Passover are slaughtered on the Day of Preparation.

IX 58- Jesus died and buried in a garden, with the reminder that it is the Day of Preparation (19:23-42). Illustration In a garden, lifted up: lamb on a dam wall out of Broken Hill; and specimen drawings Colours of blood and glory: feathers of the red-tailed black cockatoo, Sturt desert pea, emu bush, quandong, native hibiscus, hardenbergia and saltbush matching the illustration on p5 and suggesting Eden restored; the feather suggesting Jesus' spirit returning to the Father

(Note the omission of Passover itself)

From the first day of the new Creation

I 60- First day of the week: resurrection dawn (20:1-18). Illustration New Creation dawn in the garden: Mutawintji cave and red-rumped parrots matching the illustration on p37. Specimen drawings Colours of royalty and light: mistletoe, wattles, cassias, native apricot, emu bush, rock sida and quandong

II 62- First evenings of the first two weeks: the blessings of believing in the resurrection (20:19-31) Illustrations In the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens, Mildura: mulga parrots, and ancient mallee nicknamed 'the Wow tree' (Mallee store water in their lignotuberous roots, and this one is estimated at 2,500 years old)

Epilogue

I 64- (21:1-14) Illustration Fiery dawn: Copi Hollow, continuing the theme of the new Creation dawn, and alluding to the charcoal fire, significant in the report of Peter's denial

II 66- (21:15-25) Illustration Blue sky and Red-capped robin, Flinders Ranges, through colour scheme and subject visually connecting the Holy Spirit to the experience of believers.

A floating story

69 The woman caught in adultery (8:1-11)
My field sketches ‘caught the moment’; but their reworking in the final illustrations were more studied, more formal and ‘pared back’. However, this tone reflects the ‘pared back’ and self-consciously crafted style of John.

The week after I completed the paintings, I read Jim Cregan’s thesis Water as Blessing. I felt that he affirms my thesis. He writes,

The Eden myth is central… to the representations of Christ by the gospel writers. In particular, the notion of water as blessing, derived from the Eden myth and expressed in John 4:4-42 (2012:15).

... it is the symbol of water as blessing that dominates… to express a multitude of additional positive values and attach to a range of life-enhancing human experiences and exchanges including those of reconciliation and forgiveness; fertility and healing; the lifting of God’s curse; the restoration of the Eternal Covenant; the presence of Wisdom; the presence of the Holy Spirit; the reparation of the world; the expansion of the Church’ (2012, 59)

... water is, of itself, structureless – it fills the spaces of whatever contains it… It wishes everything to come into completeness, and as such, is the perfect emblem of the Spirit (2012, 60)

In addition, Cregan notes Simon Schama’s description of a ‘vegetative theology’ that has Eden at its centre, and where the Cross and Tree of Life are synonymous (Schama quoted by Cregan 2012, 11).

Another significant feature linking the temple to the garden of Eden was the presence of the menorah, or Tree of Light, the great lampstand which stood before the altar, and which was recognised as a symbol of the Tree of Life (2012:24-25)

He concludes, ‘No one metaphor can adequately accommodate the divine plan, even a metaphor as rich and abundant as Eden’ (2012, 61).
Museum sketches

Sketch of specimen, University of Newcastle
5. Describing the exhibition

The exhibition contains my illuminated manuscript of John, including a preface that explains its layout and illustrations, variations to the ESV text, and some background material. The manuscript for publication will also contain an appendix containing Artist’s comment and The artist’s journey: Visualising blessing in John, a ‘chatty’ summary of this exegesis.

Original paintings will be mounted, and framed as follows:

Frames 1 and 2: Cover The wider context: view from the Mundari Mundi lookout after the rains

Frame 3: for pages 2-3 and 6-7 River I in 2 panels:
   For the Prologue The dawn of Creation and the River of Life
   For chapter 2 Suggesting the Darling River and Menindee Lakes: brimming vessels

Frame 4: pages 4-5: Lamb in a thicket: sheep and lambs grazing near a creekbed on the Silverton road, and red-tailed black cockatoo

Frame 5: pages 8-9 the Spirit moves: eucalyptus branches overhanging water, driven by the wind

Frame 6: pages 12-13 Underground creek surfaces in Brachina Gorge, Flinders Ranges: living water welling up to eternal life

Frame 7: for pages 10-11 and 14-15 River II in 3 panels
   Middle Seedlings in the Brachina Gorge
   Bottom Established trees in the Darling

Frame 8: pages 16-17 and 30-31
   Left Moving water: ripples on the dam at Copi Hollow
   Right the pool Sent to heal: reflected light (Copi Hollow billabong)

Frame 9: pages 20-21 Provision in the desert: the other side of Umberumberka Reservoir, and the bush food ‘bush tomato’ (ruby saltbush)

Frame 10: page 27 Light and water: sunset at Copi Hollow

Frame 11: pages 32-33 In the Father’s care: emu and his chicks

Frame 12: pages 34-35 and 54-55
   Left On stony ground: dry creekbed Mundari Mundi Plains,
   Middle Rocky hillside, Living Desert
   Right On barren ground: Mungo landscape
Frame 13: pages 36-37 and 42-43
   Top left Out of the dark: Mutawintji cave, Fairy martin and wilga;
   Bottom Unbinding: flora releasing seeds including curly mallee, bakea, water bush, quandong, flowering gum, cassia and bakea; and fairy martin
   Top right A basin of water: Mutawintji rockpool

Frame 14: pages 46-47 and 52-53
   Top Comfort in many places: Menindee inhabitants
   Bottom Life through abiding: river redgums with wet feet

Frame 15: Pages 48-49 and 50-51:
   Top Another Paraclete: Red-tailed black cockatoo
   Bottom Abiding in abundance: Menindee landscape

Frame 16: pages 58-59
   Top In a garden, lifted up: lamb on a dam wall out of Broken Hill
   Lower Colours of blood and glory: feathers of the red-tailed black cockatoo, Sturt desert pea, emu bush, quandong, native hibiscus, hardenbergia and saltbush

Frame 17: pages 60-61
   Top New Creation dawn in the garden: Mutawintji and red-rumped parrots
   Bottom: Specimen drawings Colours of royalty and light: mistletoe, wattles, cassias, native apricot, emu bush, rock sida and quandong

Frame 18: pages 64-65 Fiery dawn: Copi Hollow

Frame 19: pages 62-63 and 66-67
   Top In the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens, Mildura: mulga parrots, and ancient mallee nicknamed ‘the Wow tree’
   Bottom Blue sky and Red-capped robin, Flinders Ranges
Conclusion

Have I described sufficiently clearly and fully the gifts of light and life that the Jesus of John’s Gospel offers for the purpose of undertaking the creative component of my research? My literary and theological research satisfied me that focussing on these two gifts could embrace all that Jesus offers those who abide in him. It reassured me that limiting myself to them did not dishonour, reduce or distort the Gospel’s message or purpose.

Have I fulfilled my brief to visualise Jesus’ offers of life and light through this series of paintings depicting the impact of rainwater in the Australian outback? To the best of my ability, I have done so, as a reader responding to the text. The paintings themselves are my answer to this, as I portray the thriving joy of the gifts of life and light through the serene colours of the inland waterways, the abundant bird life and expansive trees that live because of it; and to evoke the Garden of Eden and a new Creation through the bright colours of the inland flora. In contrast, I portray scepticism and rejection through the arid and hard-edged red and ochre landscape. However, the viewer response is beyond my control, and in fact, I hope that it may be free to bring unintended illumination.

And may these paintings be incorporated into an illuminated manuscript of the Gospel in a manner that renders it more accessible to my contemporaries? Is it more accessible than its traditional presentation within a picture-less ‘Holy Bible’? In answer, my voice is seen rather than heard in the manuscript itself, as I have sought to honour the text and its purpose of encouraging trust in Jesus, through the layout of the text, and through the subject matter, composition and palette of its accompanying illustrations. In the process of producing the manuscript, I took many considerations into account, both consciously and intuitively, and without clearly articulated parameters. Late in the project, I was directed to David Shaw’s article in Themelios online. In it, Shaw reviews children’s paraphrased and illustrated story bibles. My work is neither a paraphrase nor for children. However, I see his criteria for assessing books as a formalisation of my considerations, and helpful in equipping viewers to answer this question.

Shaw’s model highlights the significance of four relationships, which I quote from his article:

1. The text of a story bible and Scripture
2. The images of a story bible and Scripture
3. Word and image within a story bible
4. The story bible and the child…
[Images’] theological and aesthetic evaluation is crucial. To that end we will adapt the Visual Narrative Analysis Model (VNAM) that Vasiliki Labitsi developed... and offers a framework by which to answer three crucial questions: (1) How do pictures tell stories? (2) How do images relate to text in a picture book? (3) How do images engage their viewers?

... Labitsi has two main headings for analyzing a visual narrative: representation (broadly speaking, what it depicts) and composition (how it depicts it).

(Shaw 2012)

In discussing point 2 above, Shaw notes that representation includes setting, narrative structures, circumstantial details, characters, time and decisive moments (the aspect of the story that the illustrator chooses to depict), style and media. Composition includes positioning of characters; salience (“the degree to which an object draws attention to itself, due to its size, placement in an image foreground, overlapping with other elements, colour, tone, and sharpness” quoting Labinski p62); and book design (balance of text to image; merging them or framing images). He continues,

Biblical scholarship is increasingly sensitive to how typology and intertextual references suffuse Scripture, whereby events and texts relate to what has gone before in ways that illuminate and steer interpretation. What often goes unnoticed is how well-suited illustration is to this task: it can achieve inter-visually what Scripture achieves inter-textually, and it can do so with the same subtlety...

[Discussing point 3 above] Labitsi’s model... describes three kinds of relationship between text and image within picture books: enhancement, counterpoint, and contradiction. It is best to view these categories as points on a spectrum rather than as distinct categories...

(Shaw 2012)

Under point 4, Shaw discusses how the artist addresses the viewer, including point of view (how the artist positions the viewer within the visual narrative); framing (how the artist frames the images); and modality (how realistic and therefore how relevant a picture appears).

A strong frame implies distance, and “Bleed’ illustrations, where images extend to the edges of the paper, require active and personal involvement from readers because they symbolically invite them to enter into the book” (quoting Labitsi p61).

In concluding, Shaw advises (amongst other things):

- Consider the setting of the illustrations, the landscape, and the use of animals and other visual metaphors. Will they help or hinder comprehension and concentration?
• Is the style of illustration fitting? Does it vary?
• What does the artist draw your attention to by foregrounding, enlarging, or highlighting in some other way?
• Does the artist make connections to the wider story of salvation? If so, is it by using visual motifs or metaphors? Are they well-chosen?
• Do the images enhance a biblical detail?
• Do they counterpoint the text by supplying some additional information? What is the impact of seeing but not hearing about that detail?
• How does the artist engage the viewer?
• Whose point of view does the artist give you? God’s? Jesus’s? The disciples’? The crowds’? Does the point of view shift within individual narratives? To what effect?
• How, if at all, does the artist use close-up or distance you from the action?

(Shaw 2012)

Looking at Shaw’s checklists, I feel that I have met his criteria for a biblically sensitive and inviting presentation of John’s Gospel. I have rendered the text readable and sensitive to its nuances and forms. The illustrations are naturalistic, both grounding the story in reality, and straightforward for viewers to comprehend their subjects, and thus their surface meanings. This enables readers, unhindered, to consider their underlying truths. The illustrations can make inter-textual allusions without words or heavy-handedness. Thus I have linked passages such as John’s testimony to ‘the lamb of God’ to the crucifixion; the healings of the one-paralysed and once-blind men; and the raisings of Lazarus and Jesus. I have suggested the intimate foot-washing by a small rockpool; the nurturing Good Shepherd by a cameo of an emu family; and the expansive nature of the abundant life abiding in Jesus by a panoramic and dynamic painting. I have included botanic specimen drawings to suggest both the Garden of Eden and Paradise. Close-up scenes fit like puzzle pieces into larger ones: the pools suggesting Bethesda and Siloam are like microcosms of the lake on page 27; the river connecting chapters 1-4 moves in focus from nearby branch to areal map. The whole illuminated manuscript is designed to draw readers into a meditative study and reflection of the text, to enter its embrace, and I hope thereby encouraged to trust Jesus and receive his blessings.
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