



# EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

## Leader Guide

Winter 2022-23 | CSB



...n  
...hout  
...madc.  
...was the

...arkness; and  
...it not.  
...om God, whose

...a witness, to bear  
...that all men through

...at Light, but *was sent* to  
...that Light.

...ne true Light, which lighteth  
...that cometh into the world.

...s in the world, and 'the world was  
...him, and the world knew him not.

...e came unto his own, and his own  
...ved him not.

But <sup>12</sup>as many as received him, to them  
...ave he power to become the sons of God,  
*even* to them that believe on his name:

<sup>13</sup>Which were born, not of blood, nor of  
...the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,  
...but of God.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word <sup>14</sup>was made <sup>14</sup>flesh, and  
...dwelt among us, (and <sup>14</sup>we beheld his glo-  
...ry, the glory as of the only begotten of the  
...Father,) <sup>14</sup>full of grace and truth.

**JOHN'S WITNESS OF CHRIST**

<sup>15</sup>John bare witness of him, and cried,  
...saying, This was he of whom I spake, <sup>15</sup>He  
...that cometh after me is preferred before  
...me: <sup>15</sup>for he was before me.

<sup>16</sup>And of his <sup>16</sup>fulness have all we received,  
...and grace for grace.

<sup>17</sup>For <sup>17</sup>the law was given by Moses, but  
...<sup>17</sup>grace and <sup>17</sup>truth came by Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup><sup>18</sup>ab No man hath seen God at any time;  
...<sup>18</sup>ac the only begotten Son, which is in the  
...bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

...cheme of 1:1.  
...e Word stopped  
... means "pitched  
... an allusion to God's  
...raellites In the taber-  
... 33:7). In the past God  
...presence to His people in  
... and the temple. Now God has  
...ence among His people in the  
...flesh, Jesus Christ (John 1:17).  
...nces to God's glory hark back to  
...ges that describe the manifestation  
...s presence and glory in theophanies  
...earances of God), the tabernacle, or the  
...mple (Exod. 33:22; Num. 14:10; Deut. 5:22).  
...he Greek word *monogenes* underlying only  
...begotten means "only child" (Judg. 11:34;

U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

# John 1-11

...  
...ΤΗ  
...ΑΒΕΖ  
...ΛΗΚ  
...ΙΖΙΝ ΚΑ  
...ΣΚΟΙΛΙΑ  
...ΔΕΛΒΗΗ  
...Υ ΓΑΡ ΩΣ  
...ΜΟΥ ΣΟΥΕΙΣ  
...ΜΕΝΑΓΑΛΛΙ  
...ΜΟΥ ΚΑΙ Μ  
...ΣΑ ΟΤΙ ΕΣΤΑΙ Τ  
...ΙΜΕΝΟΙΣ ΑΥΤΗ  
...ΡΙΑ ΜΕΓΑΛΥΝΕΙ  
...ΚΑΙ Η ΓΑΛΛΙΑ ΣΕΝ  
...ΘΩ Τ ΩΣ ΩΤ Η ΡΙ ΜΟΥ  
...Υ ΕΝ ΚΣ ΕΠΙ ΤΗ ΝΤΑ ΠΗ  
...ΑΥΤΟΥ ΙΔΟΥ ΓΑΡ ΑΠΟ ΤΟ



# WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

In the old westerns, the good guys wore the white hats, while the villains dressed in black. On one hand, that kept things pretty simple. But, on the other hand, the best stories have a way of keeping us guessing. All of us have found ourselves shocked when a character we trusted turned out to be the enemy. And we've been pleasantly surprised to discover someone we despised was secretly working behind the scenes on behalf of the hero.

Unfortunately, what works well in books, in movies, or on television isn't so clear in real life. Sometimes, it's hard to know who's really on our side. We struggle to recognize people's true motives. When we guess wrong, the betrayal can cause indescribable hurt. We just want to know who we can trust.

Maybe that's why the apostle John was upfront in his Gospel. In a sense, he was simply telling the story of Jesus, just like Matthew, Mark, and Luke had done before him. But he also made it clear that the snippets of Jesus's life that he shared weren't just unfolding an interesting tale. They told readers exactly who Jesus was and what He was about.

In the first eleven chapters of his Gospel, John shared a lot of Jesus's teachings and described several of His miracles. But everything he wrote pointed in one direction. Jesus was the Son of God, come to earth. He was God in flesh, sent by the Father to pay the price for our sins. When we were at our worst, He arrived to offer living water, spiritual sight, and abundant life. Jesus is the undisputed hero of John's Gospel, and He can be trusted. If you're ready to accept His offer of salvation, here is what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

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After you have received Jesus Christ, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

# MEET THE WRITERS

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## FROM THE TEAM

Most of us have experienced something that we wish we could put in print. Others may have shared about that event already, but they did so from their own perspective. What they said was correct, but we may feel a need to help people go deeper into that story or event or to get a fresh look at it.

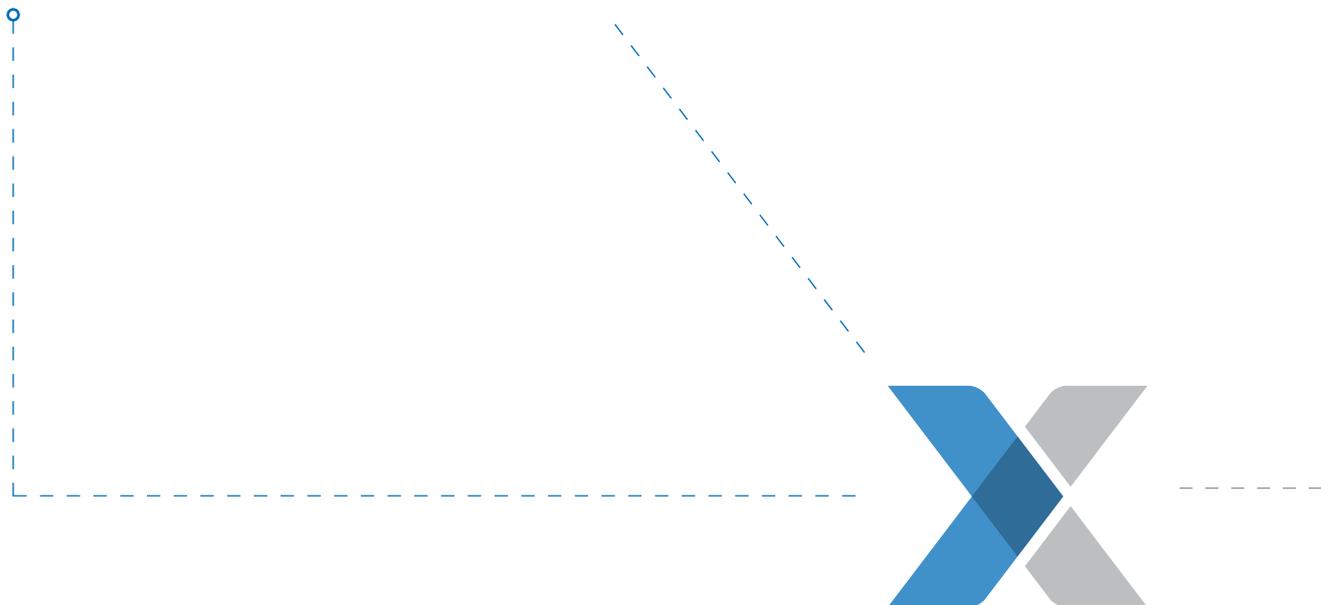
Mark recorded Peter's recollections about Jesus. Luke shared what he gleaned from interviews with eyewitnesses to the events surrounding Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection. Matthew, an eyewitness, shared what he knew and saw. It appears that John wrote his account after Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While the others wrote more of a chronological account, John focused his attention on stories that revealed Jesus as the Christ, the promised Messiah. John even let us know that there were more stories that he could have told but chose not to include (John 21:25). We can find some of those in the other Gospel accounts. John was writing to help his readers go deeper into the story so that they would believe in Jesus.

In the months ahead, we will be looking at the stories John did include in his Gospel. Some of these stories only appear in his account, helping us get a deeper understanding of the identity of Jesus. Our prayer is that we will get a fresh glimpse of Jesus during this study and gain confidence that He is the promised Messiah who came to offer us abundant life.

Onward,

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# WORD WISE

**Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).**

**Bethany**—a town two miles southeast of Jerusalem (John 11:18); home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1)

**Bethesda** [buh THEZ duh]—a pool in Jerusalem where Jesus healed a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years (John 5:2)

**Bethsaida** [beth-SAY ih duh]—a fishing village on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee; hometown of Andrew, Peter, and Philip (John 1:44)

**Cana**—city in Galilee near Nazareth, where Jesus changed water into wine (John 2:1), where a royal official asked Jesus to heal his son (John 4:46), and the home of Nathanael (John 21:2)

**Capernaum** [kuh PUHR nay uhm]—town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee; Jesus's home base after John the Baptist's imprisonment (Matt. 4:12-13)

**Cephas** [SEE fuhs]—Aramaic word meaning “rock,” translated *Petros* (Peter) in Greek; nickname given by Jesus to Simon (John 1:42)

**Galilee**—small region in northern Israel where Jesus grew up, chose His disciples, and did much of His ministry

**Gerizim** [GEHR uh zim]—a mountain which the Samaritans believed was the proper place of worship (John 4:20); the Samaritans had built a temple on Mount Gerizim four hundred years before Christ, but it was destroyed by the Jews in 128 BC.

**Nathanael** [nuh THAN ay uhl]—one of the twelve apostles and a native of Cana in Galilee; Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah (John 1:45); some equate Nathaniel with Bartholomew (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13)

**Nazareth** [NAZ uh reth]—Jesus's hometown (Luke 2:39-40; 4:16); a small, insignificant village (John 1:45-46) located in Galilee about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea

**Samaritans**—Israelites of the Northern Kingdom who stayed in the land after the Assyrian exile and intermarried with Gentiles; by the first century, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was greatly strained (John 4:9), Jews avoided contact with Samaritans whenever possible.

# BIBLE READING PLAN

## DECEMBER

- 1. John 1:1-5
- 2. John 1:6-8
- 3. John 1:9-13
- 4. John 1:14-18
- 5. John 1:19-23
- 6. John 1:24-28
- 7. John 1:29-34
- 8. John 1:35-42
- 9. John 1:43-51
- 10. John 2:1-12
- 11. John 2:13-17
- 12. John 2:18-22
- 13. John 2:23-25
- 14. John 3:1-8
- 15. John 3:9-15
- 16. John 3:16-21
- 17. John 3:22-30
- 18. John 3:31-36
- 19. John 4:1-10
- 20. John 4:11-14
- 21. John 4:15-19
- 22. John 4:20-26
- 23. John 4:27-33
- 24. John 4:34-38
- 25. John 4:39-45
- 26. John 4:46-54
- 27. John 5:1-9a
- 28. John 5:9b-16
- 29. John 5:17-23
- 30. John 5:24-30
- 31. John 5:31-35

## JANUARY

- 1. John 5:36-40
- 2. John 5:41-47
- 3. John 6:1-7
- 4. John 6:8-14
- 5. John 6:15-21
- 6. John 6:22-27
- 7. John 6:28-33
- 8. John 6:34-40
- 9. John 6:41-46
- 10. John 6:47-51
- 11. John 6:52-59
- 12. John 6:60-65
- 13. John 6:66-71
- 14. John 7:1-5
- 15. John 7:6-9
- 16. John 7:10-15
- 17. John 7:16-18
- 18. John 7:19-24
- 19. John 7:25-29
- 20. John 7:30-32
- 21. John 7:33-36
- 22. John 7:37-39
- 23. John 7:40-44
- 24. John 7:45-52
- 25. John 7:53-8:11
- 26. John 8:12-20
- 27. John 8:21-24
- 28. John 8:25-29
- 29. John 8:30-32
- 30. John 8:33-36
- 31. John 8:37-41

## FEBRUARY

- 1. John 8:42-47
- 2. John 8:48-53
- 3. John 8:54-59
- 4. John 9:1-5
- 5. John 9:6-12
- 6. John 9:13-17
- 7. John 9:18-23
- 8. John 9:24-27
- 9. John 9:28-34
- 10. John 9:35-41
- 11. John 10:1-6
- 12. John 10:7-10
- 13. John 10:11-15
- 14. John 10:16-21
- 15. John 10:22-30
- 16. John 10:31-38
- 17. John 10:39-42
- 18. John 11:1-7
- 19. John 11:8-16
- 20. John 11:17-22
- 21. John 11:23-27
- 22. John 11:28-32
- 23. John 11:33-37
- 24. John 11:38-40
- 25. John 11:41-44
- 26. John 11:45-48
- 27. John 11:49-54
- 28. John 11:55-57

# USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD

## BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

### **1. Study the core passage.**

Start preparing early. Read the passage, listing people, places, key words, key phrases, and actions taken. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary*, and the *Explore the Bible Leader Podcast* to discover information about the items you listed. Write a summary of the main idea you discovered using the statement printed under the session title of each session as a starting place.

### **2. Create a group time plan.**

Craft a group plan that helps the group discover and respond to the main idea. Consult the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (includes ideas for using the *Personal Study Guide*). Identify ways to focus the group's attention, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas, consult *Explore the Bible Extra* (identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson, found at [goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras](http://goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras)). Review the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* items. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

### **3. Gather and review.**

Use the list under Gather on the first page of each session. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for anticipated guests.

## DURING THE GROUP TIME

### **4. Arrive early.**

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet everyone as participants arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

### **5. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.**

Use the plan you created, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns; be flexible.

## AFTER THE GROUP TIME

### **6. Evaluate and Record.**

Review the Reinforce idea to encourage the group to put into practice the truths discovered. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you be a better teacher in the future.

### **7. Start preparing to lead the next group time.**

# MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

## CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide & Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.



### *Additional Leader Helps*

#### **Commentary**

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.



#### **Daily Discipleship Guide**

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group; daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time; and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in back.



#### **QuickSource**

Provides a quick-preparation guide for sessions found in the Explore the Bible series. Also great for leaders who prefer a more discussion-oriented approach or for new leaders and last-minute substitutes.



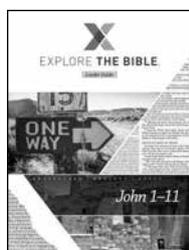
#### **Personal Study Guide**

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.



#### **Leader Pack**

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the Leader Guide commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



#### **Leader Guide**

Resource for leaders of groups using the Personal Study Guide. Includes commentary and teaching plans.

*Find out more or order at* [goExploreTheBible.com](http://goExploreTheBible.com)

# BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

When recommending a Bible book for non-Christians, most believers suggest John's Gospel. Perhaps the reason rests in the gospel in a sentence (John 3:16) that may be the first Scripture many believers memorize.

John's popularity as an evangelistic tool remains interesting since the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) present a more chronological approach to Jesus's life and ministry. For example, Luke specifically wrote that he wanted to give his correspondent, Theophilus, an orderly study so he could know the truth of Jesus's story. John is different.

Written passionately, John shared his heart. His language resonates with seekers who want more than mere facts. The narratives reveal who Jesus is, but also why He came and why He did what He did. In a postmodern culture that values emotional authenticity, John's Gospel touches readers viscerally. Throughout the book, Jesus's love is on display, as is appropriate for the disciple whom Jesus loved.

## WRITER

John never referred to himself by name, whether in the narratives or in his introduction. Only at the end of the Gospel are we given the identity of its author. In 21:24, the writer admitted that he was the one who had witnessed these things and was writing them down for others. The context of this confession was Peter's question to Jesus about the beloved disciple (John 21:20-23). John referred to himself in this fashion because he never got over the fact that Jesus loved him (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20).

The author was an eyewitness whose testimony could be regarded as accurate and authentic (John 19:35). In his first epistle, John repeated this claim to be a reliable

witness (1 John 1:1). He had walked with Jesus for more than three years. He had seen His miracles and heard His teaching. He had even touched Jesus's flesh and bones.

External evidence of John's authorship includes testimony by Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp. Early in his life, Polycarp had been taught directly by John and later passed John's teachings to Irenaeus. Other early church fathers also referenced John as the author of this Gospel. Accordingly, most commentators confidently identify this disciple as John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James.

## RECIPIENTS

While some commentators point to the gospel's encouragement of early Christians, others focus on its evangelical intent (John 20:31). So, while the immediate recipients were believers in the early church, the Gospel's ultimate audience was unbelievers. John wanted the lost to understand who Jesus was so they could believe in Him and be saved.

## DATE

Early church fathers referred to John's narrative as the last of the four Gospels. Most conservative commentators place the writing between AD 80-90. Some testimony exists that John wrote the story of Jesus while living in Ephesus. This would have been a few years before he wrote the book of Revelation in exile from the island of Patmos.

While he did not include information about the early church, growing persecution, or the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, readers should not be surprised. John's focus and purpose did not include these matters. Instead, he focused on Jesus.

## PURPOSE

Much of what we read in other Gospel accounts is missing from John's Gospel. He felt no need to describe Jesus's birth or His early life. The apostle's simple testimony about the Word becoming flesh and residing among His creation was immediately followed by a confession that he had personally experienced God's glory revealed through Christ, the Son of God (John 1:14).

John could have written in detail about Jesus's life as he acknowledged at the end of the book (John 20:30; 21:24-25). Perhaps the existence of other Gospels made such a historical approach unnecessary. More important, many of those details fell outside his purpose. Commentators point out that John stated his intention near the end of his narrative (John 20:31). He wrote this Gospel to affirm Jesus as the Messiah so people would accept Him and experience eternal life through Him.

As noted, this Gospel was written so people would feel Christ's love as John knew it—an overwhelming, unrelenting, sacrificial love—and believe in Him. He wanted readers to not merely know theological truth. He wanted to know and embrace Jesus, the Subject of that truth, so they could experience eternal life.

## KEY THEMES

The following themes appear consistently throughout John 1–11:

***Jesus's Relationship to God.*** John did not begin with Mary and Joseph as did Luke; nor did he trace Jesus's human lineage to Abraham as Matthew had done. Instead, John began in the beginning, where the Word was with God and was God (John 1:1). Throughout his Gospel, John wanted readers to understand Jesus was God the

Son. Jesus declared that He and the Father are one (John 10:30; 17:11,22).

***Attesting Signs.*** While not including many of the miracles found in the Synoptics, John described specific signs that supported Jesus's claim to be the Son of God. By turning water into wine, feeding the multitude, and walking on water, Jesus revealed His power over creation (John 2:1-10; 6:1-14,15-21). By healing a nobleman's son, He showed power over illness (John 4:46-54). When He healed on the Sabbath, Jesus incurred the wrath of religious elites (John 5:1-9; 9:1-41). When He raised Lazarus from the dead, those leaders began plotting His death.

***Jesus's Relationship to Humans.*** Jesus used numerous metaphors to describe His relationship to people. He is the Gate to the sheepfold and the Good Shepherd (John 10:7,11). As such, Jesus consistently demonstrated compassion for people, both collectively as in the mass feeding (John 6) and individually (John 4:46-54). He wanted people to believe in Him so they could have life that was eternal and abundant (John 3:15-36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40; 10:10).

***Persecution by religious leaders.*** Many of incidents of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (particularly the Pharisees) involved debates over the Sabbath. Jesus consistently placed His concern for people over His practice of rituals, which sparked animosity from the spiritual elites.

Opposition to Jesus also solidified into a murderous conspiracy over His identity as the Son of God. Jesus consistently claimed that He not only was sent by the Father, but that He was also one with the Father. Despite the testimony of the Father through His words and works, the Jewish leaders only heard blasphemy. What's more, they saw Jesus as a threat to their authority.

# OUTLINE

## I. PRELUDE: CHRIST AS THE ETERNAL WORD (1:1-18)

- A. The Word (1:1)
- B. The Word and creation (1:2-5)
- C. The Word and the world (1:6-18)

## II. PRESENTATION: CHRIST AS THE SON OF GOD (1:19-12:50)

- A. By John the Baptizer (1:19-34)
- B. To His disciples (1:35-51)
- C. Through miraculous signs (2:1-12:50)

## III. PREPARATION: INSTRUCTION OF THE TWELVE BY THE SON OF GOD (13:1-17:26)

## IV. PASSION: SUFFERING OF CHRIST AS THE SON OF GOD (18:1-20:31)

## V. POSTLUDE: THE CONTINUING WORK OF THE SON OF GOD (21:1-25)



### ON THE COVER

The Door of Humility—the small entrance to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. John's Gospel affirms that Jesus, the baby born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7), is the eternal Son of God who took on human flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1,14). (See Session 1.)

# *In the Beginning*

Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh.

## JOHN 1:1-14

**MEMORY VERSE:** JOHN 1:14

**STUDY** John 1:1-14, noting the poetic language John used to describe Jesus. Use Explore the Text on pages 15-19 to gain insight into the importance of Jesus being fully God. Reflect on how Jesus's deity should transform the life of each believer.

**CREATE** a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 20-22. Focus on helping the group recognize and understand the deity of Jesus. Consider ways to use the Music Idea on page 22 to reinforce this understanding.

**GATHER** the following items:

- Extra *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs)
- Blank nametags and pens
- Whiteboard or poster board with marker
- Any materials needed for the options on page 22.

**Prepare to display:**

- Pack Item 2** (*Outline of John*)

**Make copies of:**

- Pack Item 7** (*Handout: John Time Line*)
- Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Jesus's Humanity and Deity*)
- Pack Item 13** (*Handout: John's Use of Logos*)

**CONSULT** the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at [goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training](http://goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training).

**REINFORCE** the session by contacting any group members who need to be encouraged. Let them know a new study is beginning on the Gospel of John, making sure to deliver a copy of the PSG to every member.

# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *God the Son*

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See Matthew 16:16; Philippians 2:5-22.)

Many people think of Bethlehem as the beginning place for Jesus. The babe in a manger tugs at our hearts. But to appreciate what happened in Bethlehem, we must travel back through time eternal. Then, we may understand Jesus was God the Son—co-eternal, co-equal, and co-existent with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The baby of Bethlehem was the eternal God who took on human flesh to save human beings.

(In PSG, p. 10) **How does knowing a person's beginnings impact how you view them?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## BIBLE SKILL

*Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Review additional passages in John's Gospel about Christ's deity. Read John 4:26; 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; and 17:5-11. Why is it important that we understand Jesus as God the Son and not merely the Son of God? How does John consistently point to the deity of Jesus?

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## JOHN 1:1-18

John, the beloved disciple, did not begin his Gospel with a birth narrative but by declaring Jesus to be God. In beautiful language, John offered evidence that Jesus was and is God. He did not focus on Jesus's deity as a mere theological exercise. He wrote from the overwhelming awareness that God condescended to become a human being and that the Eternal King loved him and died for him.

John's prologue contains four evidences for Jesus's deity. First, Jesus is God because He is eternal. While Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us, He existed as God before time began. Human comprehension limits our ability to understand how God can be one God, yet three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Still, God's Word declares it to be true. So that's where John began his Gospel. He didn't try to explain it. He merely proclaimed it.

Second, Jesus is God because He is the Creator. Genesis began with the pre-existent God creating all things. John started there, as well. As the Word, Jesus was *with* God at creation, but He also *was* God the Creator. John declared that everything came into being through Him.

A third argument for the deity of Christ can be found in His incarnation. The Word (Jesus) assumed human flesh and dwelt among the people for whom He would die. As one of the Twelve, John had seen Him, touched Him, heard Him, and walked with Him (1 John 1:1-4). He knew from firsthand experience that Jesus was the only begotten of the Father, the One who lived among His people, full of grace and truth.

Fourth, God sent a special witness to prepare the way for Jesus and to point others toward Him. John the Baptist refused to accept the favor of people who wondered if he was the Christ. He simply witnessed to the Life that was the Light of the world.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## WAS THE WORD (JOHN 1:1-5)

### Verses 1-2

The opening lines of a book should grab the reader's attention and set the tone for the rest of the work. Writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John probably was not thinking of this basic writing principle, but he accomplished that goal nonetheless. John never got over Jesus's love for him. Consequently, his Gospel contains more than a historical account of Christ's life. In it, John pours out his heart so readers can understand the wonder of God becoming flesh and dying for our sins.

Using the term **Word** (*Logos* in the Greek), John focused on Jesus's divine nature. Some scholars argue that *logos* was a general term for God's wisdom and word. The Hellenistic world used it to represent idealized rationality. But John employed *logos* in a specialized sense to reference Christ. In his prologue, *logos* described the eternal Christ who became a man.

John described three aspects of Jesus's divinity. First, He was **in the beginning**. Following the example of Genesis, John set the scene before time began. The tense of the verb **was** can indicate an ongoing presence—past, present, and future. Prior to Bethlehem, Christ already was present and always had been.

Second, Jesus did not come into being subsequent to God but was **with God in the beginning**. John did not suggest Christ was somehow separate from God. Rather, he wanted readers to understand that the Son has been eternally present just as the Father has existed forever in eternity. The term translated *with* infers "toward." It emphasized Christ's total communion with the Father as God Himself.

Third, lest anyone misunderstand him, John declared **the Word was God**. Some cults misrepresent this statement to further their argument that Jesus was a son of God but not God the Son. They point out that the word *God* has no definite article in the Greek. Therefore, they say Jesus was "a god," not "the God." Such an understanding would be polytheistic, implying Christ was merely one god among many. This convoluted contention can be easily refuted by studying the normal use of language.

A literal translation following the specific word order of the Greek manuscript reads "and God was the Word." Greek scholars point out that this word order eliminates the possibility of "God" being indefinite. When we refer to God in normal conversation, we do not say "the God" but merely refer to "God." John did the same. His opening proclamation about the divinity of Christ left no doubt that Jesus always has been God.

One aspect of Hebrew parallelism employs repetition of an idea for emphasis. John used this device by summarizing his previous statement in verse 2: **He was with God in the beginning**. The term **He** can also be rendered "the same." John wanted readers to make no mistake. This same *Word*, described in verse 1, was present in the beginning and (as he would explain later) had come to earth in human form.

### VERSES 1-2

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.

## VERSES 3-5

<sup>3</sup> All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

## Verses 3-5

Christ was not only God because He existed eternally, but also because He was the Creator. **All things were created through him.** The phrase *all things* leaves nothing out. Every aspect of existence came into being as a result of Christ's deliberate action.

John again employed parallelism to emphasize the universality of Christ's creative action: **Apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.** Some attempts have been made to reconcile biblical evidence with theories of evolution. However, John indicated that all things were created directly by God and that nothing was made without Christ. Any theory that diminishes God's creative work and the active role of Christ in creation should be rejected.

The phrase *through Him* does not reduce Christ to mere a instrument used by the Father to create the universe. Instead, John claimed that the Word caused everything to appear. In Genesis, God spoke the heavens and earth into being. The theological term *logos* does not mean that Christ was the spoken word used by God as an instrument to create. Rather, He was God Himself and took an active role in creating everything.

A third aspect of divinity is self-existence: **In him was life.** As God, the Son possessed life in Himself (John 5:26), and Christ claimed to be "the life" (John 11:25; 14:6). The word for *life* can be used to describe the totality of existence—physical as well as spiritual. All living creation has derivative life, but life was inherently in Christ. He needed no external source.

**That life,** the life found in Christ, not only existed but also served as **the light of men.** The concept of *light* can encompass several ideas. It may mean physical light. When God said "Let there be light," Christ created light even before the making of the sun, moon, or stars. But John primarily meant spiritual light. Christ is the only source of true spiritual illumination.

Light can also refer to that which reveals. As such, Jesus reveals truth about God and about ourselves. His light shows the reality of the human condition and the path to reconciliation with God.

The demonstrative adjective **that** connects *light* to the previous phrase—the life found in Christ alone. This light **shines in the darkness.** Darkness symbolizes moral evil that opposes God's righteousness but is never equal to it. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah who said those living in darkness would see a great light in the Messiah (Isa. 9:1-2).

In a spiritual sense, *darkness* actively opposes the light. However, whenever light appears, darkness vanishes. Spiritual darkness can never **overcome** the light of Christ. Evil may appear to advance temporarily, but Christ always prevails in the end (1 John 1:7).

(In PSG, p. 14) **What was the significance of pointing out Jesus's role in creation? How does that reinforce John's argument?**

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## MADE KNOWN (JOHN 1:6-8)

### Verse 6

In addition to His eternality and creative power, Jesus's deity was attested by **a man**. This particular man was prophetically prepared to be the forerunner of the Messiah. Note several important aspects of this witness. First, he was a person. God sometimes used angels to herald Christ, but to prepare the way among human beings, God employed another human.

Second, this man was **sent from God**. God commissioned him in the manner and purpose of Elijah to make Christ known (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:14). Third, his **name was John**. This name was somewhat common but the man was not. He became known as John the Baptist, and he provided a powerful witness to Christ and His purposes in the world.

### Verses 7-8

John's preaching and baptizing were not ends in themselves, but they served as a **witness**. This term comes from the Greek word for "martyr," which seems appropriate since John died for his fearless testimony against wickedness (Matt. 14:3-10). Prior to his death, John preached for two purposes. First, he wanted **to testify about the light**. This phrase refers to Christ personally and to His spiritual righteousness, which, by its existence, condemned wickedness. Second, He preached so **all might believe through him**. The final pronoun *him* does not refer to John but to Jesus. John's goal was the salvation of human beings through faith in Christ.

John repeatedly affirmed that he was **not the light**. Rather, he **came to testify about the light**. John's powerful preaching attracted crowds of all types from throughout Israel. But he emphasized that he was not the Christ and pointed people to Jesus instead (Luke 3:15-17; John 1:24-36).

Like John, believers are messengers sent to tell others about the Light. We may not have the same prophetic calling as the Baptizer, but we do have the same commission. Being a witness for Jesus is not complicated. We merely tell others what we have discovered about Jesus, how He brought life and light into our lives, and how He can do the same for them.

(In PSG, p. 15) **How might believers help others believe in Jesus?**

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## IN THE FLESH (JOHN 1:9-14)

### Verse 9

Continuing the thought of verse 8, John transitioned from addressing the eternal nature of Christ to considering His entrance into the world. Christ was the **true light**. The *true light* contrasts all false religions and philosophies that claim to illuminate humanity. John used this phrase to describe the spiritual and moral *light* that can only be found in Christ.

### VERSE 6

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

### VERSES 7-8

<sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

### VERSE 9

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

This true light came **into the world**. In a quick shift, John portrayed the infinite Light taking up residence in a finite world. In doing so, the true Light **gives light**. Christ dispels the darkness of spiritual wickedness and provides spiritual illumination to **everyone**.

Scholars debate the meaning of *everyone*. This inclusive statement does not mean that every person will accept the light and be saved. In fact, the following verses testify that many rejected the Light. But, by entering human community, Christ made His light available to each person.

## VERSE 10

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him.

### Verse 10

The eternal Christ became incarnate Jesus, coming into **the world** that was **created through him**. Harkening back to verse 3, a tragic irony is noted. The Creator walked among His creation, yet His creation **did not recognize him**. *World* translates the word from which we get “cosmos,” but in this verse it refers to the earth and its inhabitants. In His incarnation, Jesus entered the physical world and interacted with its population.

Instead of receiving Him, humanity rejected His light because of the darkness of their minds and hearts (Rom. 1:21). Some scholars lean toward the idea of not “knowing” Him as opposed to “recognizing” Him. Both concepts end at the same point. People failed to identify Him properly. In general, humanity saw Jesus merely as a man. Many believed Him to be gifted and good, but He was still only a man to them.

## VERSES 11-13

<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

### Verses 11-13

Unlike previous couplets in John’s prologue, verse 11 does not mirror verse 10. Instead, it offers a more narrow perspective. The phrase **his own** moves attention from the broad expanse of humanity to a specific focus on the Jews. The Israelites were His own. They were God’s chosen people, created to be a missionary nation for Him. Through His incarnation, Jesus was not only born into the human race, but He also entered the Hebrew family. While embracing Samaritans and Gentiles, Jesus’s ministry primarily happened among the Jews. Sadly, **his own people did not receive him**.

The term *receive* connotes more than mere acceptance. It involves a glad welcome. While many people accepted Jesus as a teacher or healer, they did not welcome Him as Messiah and Lord. Certainly, crowds were attracted to someone who made the lame to walk and the blind to see. However, the Jewish rulers were not the only ones who rejected Him. Thousands followed the miracle worker who fed them with loaves and fish, but they abandoned Him when He turned their attention to faith and called them to repentance (John 6:28-60).

While many people walked the broad way toward destruction, some **did receive him**. The text does point to a group who chose to **believe in his name**. To *believe* in Jesus’s name involves more than intellectual assent. Saving faith requires complete acceptance of Jesus for who He was and is—God the Son, who is Savior and Lord.

Jesus promised never to reject anyone who came to Him (John 6:37). Instead, Jesus gave believers the **right to be children of God**. The word *right* can mean “power” or “authority.” Such a right is neither inherent nor

inherited. It is not a matter of entitlement, and it can only be imparted by the One possessing all power in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). Christ does not discriminate. All who receive Him—all who believe in Him—are treated the same. They receive eternal life from God as a free gift that is found only in Jesus (John 10:28; Eph. 2:8).

Becoming a child of God means having a relationship with God as Father. The Jews thought they were God's unique children because of their ethnic and religious heritage. John quickly dispelled that notion by describing a different way of entering God's family. God's true children are not born **of natural descent**, a term that could literally be interpreted "bloods" or "bloodlines." Jesus denounced those who appealed to ancestors like Abraham or Moses for some level of spiritual merit (Matt. 3:9).

Another insufficient means of becoming a child of God was the **will of the flesh**, a reference to normal human conception. Likewise, **the will of man** implies human choice or determination, which is powerless to bring anyone into relationship with God. In contrast, God's children are born **of God**. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus gave Nicodemus an in-depth lesson on the necessity of being born again through God's Spirit (John 3:5-8).

### Verse 14

John summarized Christ's incarnation with three grand statements. First, the **Word became flesh**. Though Christ was eternal God, He took on the form of humanity in the person of Jesus. Second, He **dwelt among us**. God was not distant and unknowable. In human form, Jesus lived among the people He came to save.

Third, **we observed his glory**. John and other followers of Jesus witnessed His life and ministry firsthand. The term *glory* refers to the revelation of God's person, purity, and power. It is the manifestation of God that evokes worship and praise. John and the other apostles could speak to this with authority because they had seen it with their own eyes.

Fourth, His glory could only be attributed to **the one and only Son from the Father**. Instead of self-aggrandizement, Christ's glory was **full of grace and truth** that honored the Father (John 12:28).

Faith in Jesus secures a person's place in God's family. It cannot come through human effort or intellectual assent. It is only available through the power and gift of Christ. And it requires complete acceptance of Jesus as God the Son, who died for us and rose again (Rom. 10:9).

(In PSG, p. 17) **How does Jesus becoming human demonstrate the glory of God?**

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### VERSE 14

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

# LEAD **GROUP BIBLE STUDY**

## FOCUS ATTENTION

**BEGIN:** Before the session, write “Where did your story begin?” on a whiteboard or poster. As the group arrives, pass out nametags and pens. Invite everyone to write their answer on their tag. Invite a few volunteers to briefly share something about their answer.

**TRANSITION:** Propose that if asked “Where did Jesus’s story begin?” many people might answer, “Bethlehem.” Allow a volunteer to read the session introduction on page 10 of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG). Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: John Time Line*) and discuss the chronology of Jesus’s ministry and John’s Gospel. Emphasize that John understood the importance of beginning Jesus’s story “in the beginning.”

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**INTRODUCE:** Point out the prelude on **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of John*) and on page 9 of the PSG. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Jesus’s Humanity and Deity*). Challenge the group to look for evidences of Jesus’s deity as they study John’s prelude. Call on a volunteer to note these evidences on a whiteboard as they are discovered throughout the group time.

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**READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud John 1:1-5.** Invite the group to scan Genesis 1:1-5 and share any similarities they notice between the two passages. Emphasize that Jewish readers commonly referred to books of the Bible by their first few words, thus calling Genesis, “In the beginning.”

**DISCUSS:** Direct the group to focus on verses 1-2. Point out that John used “the

Word” to describe Jesus. ***Where do you see evidence of Jesus’s deity in these verses?*** Remind the designated member to record answers.

**ASK: Why was it important for John to emphasize that Jesus existed before time?** (PSG, p. 13) Emphasize that Jesus, God’s Son, is equal to the other members of the Trinity and was active during creation.

**SUMMARIZE:** Point out that John did not identify Jesus directly until verse 14, and even then he did not do so by name. Emphasize the power of God’s Word, as explained on page 12 of the PSG. Briefly explain the Greek use of *logos* (Greek for “word”) as abstract and impersonal. Offer copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: John’s Use of Logos*) for anyone who would like to study this term further on their own.

**DISCUSS:** Direct the group to read verses 3-5 silently. ***What indications do you see of Jesus’s divinity in these verses? What was the significance of pointing out Jesus’s role in creation?*** (PSG, p. 14)

**GUIDE:** Direct a volunteer to read verses 4-5 aloud. Lead the group to recognize Jesus as the Source of both physical light and life and spiritual light and life. Emphasize that Jesus’s light overcame spiritual darkness and the darkness of death.

**TRANSITION:** *Jesus’s deity is an ongoing theme in John’s Gospel. It’s a key piece to his argument that Jesus is the Messiah. Another vital element is what others said about Him.*

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**READ: As you read John 1:6-8 aloud,** encourage the group to listen for John the Baptist’s purpose.

**ASK: What other titles might be appropriate for John the Baptist to use?** Lead the group in considering John the

Baptist's role as witness, messenger, and testifier. Suggest that "John the sent" might be a good name based on John 1:6. Note that John wasn't sent by just anyone; he was sent by God the Father. Guide the group in reviewing the Old Testament connections to John and his ministry outlined in the second paragraph of page 14 in the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** *What did John emphasize through repetition in this passage?* Help the group understand the importance of keeping the focus on Jesus and not ourselves as we tell others about Jesus.

**TRANSITION:** *Often, we hesitate to share because we worry about how our testimony will reflect on us. In reality, God simply wants us to point others to Jesus. If we reflect Him well, people will notice and respond.*

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**READ:** **Invite a volunteer to read John 1:9-14 aloud.** As the reader goes through the verses, encourage the group to listen for the difference between the world's response to Jesus and the responses of individuals to Jesus.

**PROBE:** *What might we miss if we only focus on an individual's response to Jesus? What if we only focus on the world as a whole?* Guide the group to consider what it means that Jesus's light was given to everyone only to be rejected by most people. Emphasize God's love for every person, but also note the role of individual responsibility in accepting the invitation to join God's family.

**ASK:** *Why is Jesus the only one who can give us the gift of salvation?* Emphasize that nothing we do can bring us into God's family. Share that Jesus's deity gives Him the authority to bring us back to God.

**STUDY:** Direct group members to scan the paragraphs under verse 14 (PSG, pp. 16-17) to better understand the meaning of "incarnation" and "tabernacle."

**ASK:** *How does Jesus becoming human demonstrate the glory of God?* (PSG, p. 17)

Create several teams and encourage them to work together to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 17 of the PSG. Allow each team to share what they learned from their study.

## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

**COMPARE:** Guide the group to review the four pieces of evidence that validate Jesus's deity described in Understand the Context. (PSG, p. 11) Compare these with the group's responses. *How would you use these points, and other truths drawn from John 1:1-14, to explain Jesus's deity to a friend or family member?*

**REVIEW:** Call attention to the application statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 18). *Where do you see Jesus's divinity in each statement? How is each statement impacted by Jesus's incarnation?*

**RESPOND:** Prior to group time, select one of the question sets under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 18). Lead the group to respond to the selected questions. You may choose to let them respond silently, challenging them to revisit this section later in the day or week. Encourage them to look for opportunities to tell someone else about Jesus and about how God came in human flesh to save us from sin.

**PRAY:** Conclude the group time with prayer, praising God for the eternal work of Jesus from the beginning to the end and for all time.

## OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

### MUSIC

Secure a copy of the “What a Beautiful Name/Agnus Dei” medley by Travis and Lily Cottrell. After playing the song, use it to facilitate a discussion about Jesus’s role in creation, His role in redemption, and His glory as the living Word of God.

### COMPARISON

Divide the group into four teams and assign each team one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. (For larger classes, create several groups and assign each Gospel to more than one group.) Direct each group to read the introductory verses for their assigned Gospel and discuss what those verses reveal about Jesus. Encourage them to consider how the author’s purpose and the intended audience influence those verses. After a few minutes of work, call for each group to share what they discussed. Highlight similarities and differences in each introduction.

### PRESENTATION

Pre-enlist a volunteer to present a short explanation of John’s use of the Greek word *logos* in today’s passage. Provide the volunteer with a copy of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: John’s Use of Logos*). After the presentation, discuss the historical Greek use of *logos* and how John countered this concept.

### DRAMA

Enlist two volunteers to prepare a short drama with a lawyer examining a witness on the stand. The witness should be John the Baptist giving testimony about Jesus. Point out that John the Baptist was the first of many witnesses in John’s Gospel.

### STORY

**Gather index cards, pens, a whiteboard or poster board, and markers.**

As the group arrives, pass out index cards and invite them to write a one or two sentence description of the origin story for a well-known character from popular culture. (*Examples: Spiderman, Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, and so forth*) Instruct them to not include any specific names or places in their description. Direct them to write their character’s name on the whiteboard and hand in their index card. Once everyone is settled, pass the index cards out randomly. Go around the room directing each person to read a description while the group tries to identify the matching character. Ask: **How does knowing a person’s beginnings impact how you view them?** (PSG, p. 10).

### TESTIMONY

Pre-enlist a volunteer to prepare answers to the following questions that you will ask him or her as part of an interview during the group time: **What is the most significant thing you’ve discovered about Jesus in your walk with Him? How has He brought life and light into your life?** After the interview, allow one or two others to share their thoughts on the questions. Emphasize that being a witness for Jesus is simple and that you do not need an elaborate testimony to tell others about Him. Say: **You just have to be willing and able to share what you know about Him and what He has done in your life.**