

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**DO THIS  
DON'T DO THAT**

**BEYOND  
RELIGION**

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# Introduction

In a world saturated with religious systems, moral frameworks, and spiritual experiences, John's Gospel is radically exclusive in its claim: life—real, eternal, abundant life—is found only in Jesus Christ. The Gospel repeatedly contrasts mere religion—human effort, ritual, and outward forms—with a true, saving relationship with the living God. Nicodemus was a religious leader, yet still needed to be “born again.” The Samaritan woman had theological opinions and cultural traditions, yet still thirsted for living water. The crowds loved the miracles but turned away when the message demanded full surrender.

John wrote to help you discover who Jesus really is, and, in doing so, to find your truest purpose and direction in life. Religion may give you rules to follow; Jesus gives you a new birth. Tradition may keep you in step with others; Jesus brings you into fellowship with God Himself.

This is our opportunity to go beyond intellectual curiosity, beyond cultural Christianity, beyond religion—straight into the presence of the living God.

# Helpful Details

**Author:** The Apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20, 24). He was part of Jesus’ inner circle along with Peter and James.

**Date Written:** Between A.D. 80–95.

**Purpose:** As he clearly states in John 20:31: *“That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”*

**Distinctiveness:** Roughly 90% of John’s material is unique compared to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It emphasizes *theology* over *chronology*, focusing on meaning rather than merely recording events.

**The Seven “I Am” Statements:** Jesus reveals His divine identity through metaphors like “I am the Bread of Life” and “I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

**Key Themes:** Jesus as the eternal Son of God. Light vs. darkness. New birth and eternal life. Belief and unbelief. God’s sovereignty in salvation.

# Recommended Reading

[Free Commentary](#) (TGC)

[Articles on John](#) (Ligonier)

[Sermons + Studies](#) (Monergism)

Beginner Commentary: [Let's Study John](#) by Mark Johnston

Advanced Commentary: [The Gospel According to John](#) by D.A. Carson

# John 1:1-18

## MAIN POINT

Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, became flesh to reveal God's glory, bringing grace and truth to humanity, offering salvation and reconciliation through His life, death, and resurrection.

## GROUP INTRO

What part of your life story makes it easier for you to extend grace to others?

## TEXT

1. Read verses 1-3. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between Jesus and God?

*Leader help: The Word (Jesus) is both with God and is God. This underscores the eternal relationship between Jesus and the Father, highlighting the distinctiveness of the Word while affirming the oneness of the Word and the Father. Jesus is not the Father, and the Father is not Jesus, but both are eternal, divine, and intimately and eternally in union.*

## 2. Read verses 6-12. How was Jesus received?

*Leader help: While Jesus, the true Light, came into the world He created, the world did not recognize Him (v. 10). Even though He came to His own people, the Jewish nation, they did not receive Him (v. 11). This rejection contrasts with the invitation given in verses 12-13: those who receive Jesus and believe in His name are given the right to become children of God. This shows us that it is one's response to and relationship with Jesus that determines whether they are adopted or rejected by God, not their moral goodness, religious performance, or ethnic identity.*

## 3. How does this passage connect to the themes of creation and God's revelation in the Old Testament?

*Leader help: John intentionally connects Jesus with Genesis 1:1. Just as God spoke creation into being through His Word in Genesis, in John's prologue, we learn that all things were made through the Word, who is Jesus. This emphasizes that Jesus is not only God's ultimate revelation but also the One who was present at creation, bringing the world into existence. Additionally, the concept of God revealing Himself to His people through the Law in the Old Testament finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, who reveals God perfectly through His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is the final and complete revelation of God to mankind, fulfilling the longing of the Old Testament to receive and relate to God.*

## APPLICATION

1. Is there a specific area of your life where you have been trying to earn God's love through your own efforts, rather than receiving the grace He offers through Jesus? How can you take a step toward resting in His grace this week?
2. Who in your life needs to hear about the light and hope that Jesus offers, and what's one tangible step you can take this week to tell them about that light?
3. How does the reality that Jesus is both truly God and truly man shape the way you relate to Him? How does the doctrine of the incarnation help you?

## PRAYER

Praise Jesus for who He is and all He's done for you.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 1:15-20***

Ask God to draw you deeper into the reality of His grace.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Ephesians 2:8-9***

Ask God to help you be more gracious every day.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Philippians 2:15-16***



# John 1:19-51

## MAIN POINT

John the Baptist testifies that he is not the Messiah but the forerunner, pointing to Jesus as the Spirit-anointed, sacrificial Lamb. Then Jesus chooses His disciples.

## GROUP INTRO

What's a part of your story that keeps you grounded, no matter how much you grow or succeed?

## TEXT

1. Read John 1:19-28. Why's it significant that John the Baptist denies that he is the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet?

*Leader help: John's humility has him pointing away from himself and toward Jesus, opening the door for attention to be directed at the Lord. John knows his role is to prepare the way for Jesus (see verse 23, which cites a Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 40:3). John models the correct posture for all Christians: exalting Jesus and not self.*

2. Read John 1:29-31. How does John's description of Jesus (the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world) connect Jesus to the Bible's big story?

*Leader help: Since the events of Genesis 3, humanity has been at enmity with God because we love our sin and we reject our Creator. The title John gives Jesus draws from the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:3–13) and Isaiah's Suffering Servant (Isa. 53:7), revealing that it is Jesus alone who can stand as our substitute and take the wrath we deserve, once and for all (see Heb. 10:10–14). Not only this, but Jesus isn't the sacrifice that WE have provided; He is the sacrifice that GOD has provided for our benefit. Jesus is the long-awaited sacrifice who blots out the sins of His people.*

3. Read verses 32-34, where John says he saw the Spirit descend and remain upon Jesus. Explain why this matters and how this further clarifies the identity and mission of Jesus.

*Leader help: The Spirit's descent confirms that Jesus is the anointed Messiah from Isaiah 11. In that OT passage, this prophesied anointed one ushers in the new creation through His redemptive life and actions. Another passage that mentions the Spirit resting on God's anointed one is Isaiah 61. There, the prophet tells us that Jesus would come to bring good news and freedom. Jesus isn't just another prophet but the Son of God, empowered by the Spirit to accomplish God's long-promised redemption. This moment also highlights the role of the Triune God in salvation: the Father sends, the Son redeems, and the Spirit testifies and empowers.*

4. Read verses 35-51. As Jesus chooses His disciples, they refer to Him in various ways. What do these titles tell us about Jesus?

*Leader help: The titles "Rabbi," "Messiah," "Son of God," and "King of Israel" show that this is no ordinary teacher or leader, but is instead the One who fulfills all of the Old Testament's types, shadows, promises, and prophecies. Even Jesus's promise to Nathanael in verse 51 (that he'll see "heaven opened") points back to the story of Jacob's ladder (see Gen. 28), revealing that He is the one, true mediator between heaven (God) and earth (humanity). Salvation, knowledge of God, and access to heaven don't come through our religion and works, but through Jesus, who has come to us.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. Every day is an opportunity to live like John the Baptist, pointing people's attention away from us and toward Jesus. But, on a practical level, how do we do this? What are some ways we can help each other stop living self-focused lives?
2. In Galatians 2:20, the Apostle Paul makes the Lamb of God's redemption and salvation very personal. What might be different if you meditated on and truly believed that Jesus' loving sacrifice was for you?

3. The Lord doesn't just forgive our sins; He takes them away, like the "scapegoat" in Leviticus 16:7-10. This means we no longer have to bear our guilt and shame. Why, then, do you think some Christians have a hard time honestly confessing sin or seeking help for stubborn temptations? How can we change this in our group?

## **PRAYER**

Praise God for sending the Lamb who takes away sin.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Revelation 5:12***

Confess your self-centeredness, self-righteousness, or self-loathing to God and ask Him to help you rest in the Lamb of God instead.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Philippians 2:3-5***

Ask God to empower us to live as bold witnesses for Jesus, no matter what may happen to us.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 1:8***



# John 2:1-25

## MAIN POINT

Jesus reveals His glory through His first miracle and zealously removes barriers to God.

## GROUP INTRO

Tell us about a time when you saw someone's humility make a tense situation better.

## TEXT

1. Read John 2:1-11. In His first public miracle, Jesus turns water into wine. Why are the quality and quantity of the wine significant, and how does this miracle point to Christ's restoring power?

*Leader help: When Jesus graciously blesses His sinful people, it is often above and beyond what we would expect. Jesus's ministry is far above what we could ever ask or deserve from God. Additionally, it would have been a shameful experience if those hosting this feast ran out of wine, so in providing for them, Jesus highlights His merciful, restoring power, which He uses to cover shame. The revelation of God's glory is in His gracious blessing and covering.*

*It's also worth noting that the jars of water would have been used for ritual external washing. The Jewish people would have washed their hands before every meal. But Jesus shows that He's here to offer true, lasting cleansing, from the inside out.*

2. Read verses 13-17. What does Jesus's claim that the temple is His "Father's house" tell us about Him, and why is this a radical claim?

*Leader help: Jesus isn't claiming to be a "child of God" in the general sense, as some might say today; instead, He is claiming to be the unique Son of God. And, as the eternal, divine Son of God, He has a zeal and passion for true worship, along with ensuring there is access to God.*

3. Read verses 18-22. In what way is Jesus's body a "temple"?

*Leader help: Jesus Himself is the very presence of God, and He is the very "place" where sinners meet with the living God. See also Hebrews 1:1-4.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. Where have you felt "empty" or ashamed in your current season of life, and how do you need Jesus to step in with His grace?
2. Jesus rid the temple of barriers between God and His people. What areas of your life might be serving as barriers to God?
3. John tells us in verses 23-25 that Jesus sees the motivations, desires, and thoughts that we can hide from others. Why, then, does the Bible call us to confess our sins not just to the Lord but to one another (see James 5:16)?

## **PRAYER**

Confess the sins, idols, or everyday activities you've allowed to come between you and God.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Hebrews 12:1***

Praise God for His overflowing grace.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Ephesians 3:20***

Bring your needs or the needs of other group members to the Lord.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Matthew 11:28***

# John 3:1-21

## MAIN POINT

The Apostle John shows us that Jesus's mission originates from God's love for sinners who cannot save themselves.

## GROUP INTRO

When in your life have you been truly known, flaws and all, and still accepted and loved? How did this impact you?

## TEXT

1. Read John 3:1-8, where the famous phrase "born again" comes from. Why is it necessary for human beings to be "born again" by the Holy Spirit?

*Leader help: We are spiritually blinded (thus, Jesus says "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God") and dead in our sins, unable and unwilling to move toward God in saving faith (see Eph. 2:1-6). The Spirit must come to us and cause us to be born again (see 1 Peter 1:3-5, 23). See also Rom. 3:9-18; Matt. 11:25-27.*



2. Read verses 16-18. What does John tell us about the natural position of humanity before God? How does this verse give more context to the phrase *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world"*?

*Leader help: Verse 18 says that human beings are already condemned or guilty before the throne of God. Jesus didn't need to incarnate to condemn anyone because this was already the natural position of humanity before our holy God. What humanity needed was a Savior.*

3. Read verses 19-21. What's meant by the words, *"The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light"*? Why is this the case?

*Leader help: We naturally crave and move toward sin and evil because our hearts are naturally bent away from God, rather than toward Him. Yet we know, because we're made in the image of God and have a conscience, the difference between right and wrong, and we know deep down we are guilty. Therefore, we don't want to come to "the light," i.e., to Jesus, because we don't want our evil exposed. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we run from God's presence, expecting Him to crush us in our guilt. Instead, God had to move toward us.*

## APPLICATION

1. What are some events or actions in your life that have caused you to feel like God doesn't love you? How can verse 16 reshape our understanding of God's affections towards us?
2. How does the idea of new birth (i.e., "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God") affect how you approach evangelism? Do you find this frustrating or freeing?
3. If you're a Christian, what has changed since the Spirit gave you spiritual sight to "see the kingdom of God"?

## PRAYER

Thank God for His unfailing love for you.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Lamentations 3:22***

Pray for those who remain in the darkness of unbelief.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Romans 10:14-17***

Ask God to root you in His love.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Ephesians 3:14-18***

# John 3:22-36

## MAIN POINT

True joy can be found in leading others to behold Jesus for who He is and what He's doing in the world.

## GROUP INTRO

What's the difference between being faithful and being impressive, and which one do you naturally lean toward?

## TEXT

1. Read verses 22-30. Why are John's disciples worried about people going to Jesus, and how does John respond?

*Leader help: John's disciples fear that Jesus is taking away their followers, which reflects a selfish concern for status. John, however, rejoices that his role as a friend of the Bridegroom is fulfilled when people go to Jesus, showing that true Christian ministry isn't about personal platform building, but is instead about gladly pointing others to Jesus.*

2. Looking at the same verses again, in what sense is Jesus the “bridegroom” and how does this connect Jesus to the Old Testament?

*Leader help: Jesus, being the Bridegroom, fulfills the Old Testament promises in which God reveals Himself as the Bridegroom of His people (see Hosea 2:19–20; Isaiah 62:5). This reveals Jesus’ divine identity and covenant love for His people. John sees himself not as the center, but as the “friend of the Bridegroom” (like a best man) whose joy is fulfilled by Christ’s coming. This underscores the gospel truth that our salvation is secured by God’s loving initiative, not ours.*

3. Read verses 31–36. Here, we have two basic responses to Jesus. What are these responses, and what are the results of each response?

*Leader help: The two responses are trusting in Jesus (“believes in the Son”) and rejecting Jesus (“whoever does not obey the Son”). Belief in the Son results in eternal life, but rejecting Him leaves one under God’s abiding wrath. God’s Word reveals His wrath against sin, and the gospel freely offers life through faith in Christ alone. The verse emphasizes both the exclusivity of Christ as Savior and the urgency of responding to Him, as God’s wrath is not merely a future possibility, but a present reality for the unbeliever.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. Where in your life and ministry do you find it hardest to decrease so that Christ might increase? Influence you have, credit you feel you should receive, people you’ve disciplined?



2. In verse 36, we read, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life." How has the Holy Spirit changed your view of Jesus's commands?
3. Some people don't outright reject Jesus; they're indifferent or apathetic toward Him. What are some loving and humble ways we can overcome this barrier when interacting with unbelievers in our lives?

## **PRAYER**

Confess the ways you've tried to make your ministry, service, or giving about yourself instead of Jesus.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Philippians 2:3-4***

Ask God to help you rest in the testimony of Jesus, who has brought grace and truth to us.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Hebrews 1:1-2***

Praise God for freely giving you eternal life, and pray for those who don't currently trust Jesus.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Romans 1:16***

# John 4:1-42

## MAIN POINT

Immediately after reading that “God so loved the world,” Jesus shows us what that looks like by stepping outside the borders of Judea to bring a Samaritan woman into the faith. Jesus shows us a pattern of truth leading to grace.

## GROUP INTRO

What has helped you see others through with mercy instead of judgment?

## TEXT

1. Read John 4:1-10. How does the phrase “gift of God” in verse 10 challenge conventional understandings about how someone receives God’s favor?

*Leader help: Historical and conventional understandings of receiving God's favor always go back to some form of “God responds to human actions.” Grace, on the other hand, is God’s goodness toward us despite man’s actions.*

2. Read verses 11-19. How is Jesus fleshing out His role as “the light of the world” in this interaction? Why does He highlight this woman’s sin?

*Leader help: It would be callous and unloving of Jesus to leave this woman in her sin and unbelief. To meet this woman where she’s at and show her the grace of God, He reveals her sin so that she might recognize her need and her deep-down desires that only Jesus can satisfy. In confronting her sin, Jesus has the opportunity to reveal Himself so that she might trust Him and be reconciled to God. The fact that Jesus “had to” come to Samaria for this one sinful woman magnifies the grace and mercy of God.*

3. Read verses 27-42. Jesus is okay with breaking customary cultural barriers to spread the gospel amongst unbelievers.<sup>1</sup> In these verses, we see the payoff of Jesus’ actions. Based on the woman’s testimony and the Samaritans’ response, how does God spread His truth, and how do people come to faith in Christ?

*Leader help: Her testimony led others to seek Jesus themselves, but ultimately they believed because of His Word. God uses our witness, but faith rests on hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17). The progression from “borrowed faith” (“because of her testimony”) to personal conviction (“we have heard for ourselves”) highlights that salvation comes only through encountering Jesus for oneself.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jews avoided Samaritans, and rabbis typically did not engage in public dialogue with women. Jesus will not allow the gospel to be confined by social conventions that aren’t aligned with Scripture.

## APPLICATION

1. There's a simple invitation ("Come and see" ) given by the Samaritan woman (v. 29). What is she inviting others to come and see? What *must* be included in our evangelism, and what is optional?
2. Jesus says that believers worship God in "spirit and truth." How would someone know if they're actually doing this? What mindset, actions, or words does this include?
3. In light of Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman and our core value of "Unity in Diversity," how do we invite people to "Come and see Jesus"? How are we tempted to slip into "Come and be like us"?

## PRAYER

Take time to praise Jesus for the ways He has satisfied your deepest longings.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 42:1***

Ask God for courage, wisdom, and a genuine love for others that will empower evangelism.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 2 Corinthians 5:14***

Bring sin to the light and ask for God's forgiveness.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 1:13-14***

# John 4:43-54

## MAIN POINT

John's shown Jesus bringing the gospel to a Jewish leader, an outsider, and now a Roman government official, revealing the missionary heart of God for all kinds of sinners. Here, for His "second sign," Jesus demonstrates His willingness to use His unfathomable power for our good.

## GROUP INTRO

Who's helped you trust Christ when your hope was worn thin by hard experiences, and what did they do or say that helped?

## TEXT

1. Read verses 43-45. John tells us that Jesus essentially proclaimed that He wasn't trusted and followed in His own hometown.<sup>2</sup> How do these verses reinforce the biblical teaching about humanity's natural posture toward Christ?

*Leader help: It seems reasonable to assume that those closest to Jesus were the first to trust Him, but the opposite is actually true; Jesus's own family rejected Him, as did those who knew Him before He officially began His ministry. This shows us that our natural disposition is to oppose and distrust Jesus, even if we're very familiar with Him, the Bible, or Christianity in general. God must give us new hearts.*

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<sup>2</sup> See also Matthew 13:53-58.



2. Read verses 46-54. John tells us that this is a record of Jesus's second sign. What do we learn about the Lord and His heart for sinners in these verses?

*Leader help: Among other things, we learn:*

1. *Jesus's love extends beyond the ethnic and national boundaries of Israel. He graciously heals a Gentile's son.*
2. *Jesus has authoritative power over the effects of sin, including physical illness.*
3. *Jesus isn't interested in miracle-seeking fans; He challenges the mentality of those seeking miracles without actually trusting Him.*
4. *Jesus is incredibly merciful. He did not owe healing to this man's son, but gave it as a gift.*
5. *Jesus is Lord. No matter a person's social status, they must come to Him in humility and faith.*

3. In the midst of His interaction with the official, Jesus announces, "Unless you [plural] see signs and wonders you will not believe." Read verses 50 and 53. How does this Gentile demonstrate genuine trust in Christ, and what results from his faith?

*Leader help: The official comes in desperation, seeking a miracle. Jesus challenges superficial miracle-seeking (v. 48), yet the man responds by taking Jesus at His word and leaving. Genuine faith is not grounded in visible proof but in trusting the Word of God. This man's entire family is transformed because of his faith.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> It's reasonable to assume that this man shared what he knew about Jesus with his family, and they believed in Jesus based on this report, along with the miracle.

## APPLICATION

1. In this passage, Jesus challenges the crowd because of their discipleship, which is driven by a desire for miracles. However, later in the Gospel, Jesus warmly welcomes Thomas and invites him to touch His wounded, resurrected body to dispel his doubts. How do you disciple someone who has crossed from needing Christ's reassuring presence into fickle miracle-seeking?
2. This Gentile took Jesus at His word. Which biblical truths are easy for you to hold, and which are challenging for you to accept?
3. Being vocal about Christ's merciful displays of power can open doors for the gospel to be proclaimed. Let's discuss practical ways to transition from sharing Christ's miracles in our lives to gospel proclamation. What stands in the way of you doing this? What concerns come up in your mind?

## PRAYER

Pray for grace to honor Christ rightly as Lord, not just to admire His power.

***Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 1:15-18***

Praise Jesus for His mercy toward you.

***Passage to guide your prayers: 1 Timothy 1:15-16***