

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

BE BETTER
DO MORE
RELIEVE,
RELAX,

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 8:12-30

MAIN POINT

Jesus confronts unbelief and sin while openly declaring His unique relationship with the Father and His own unique identity.

GROUP INTRO

When do you feel pressure to 'measure up,' and how does the gospel speak to that pressure?

TEXT

1. Read verse 12. Here, Jesus gives the second of His "I am" statements, which occur throughout John's Gospel. In your own words, what does Jesus mean when He says, "I am the light of the world"? What key Old Testament events or passages come to mind when you think about the concept of "light"?

Leader help: John already told us in Chapter 1 that Jesus is the light who brings life and defeats darkness. Here, Jesus is claiming to be the glorious presence of God made manifest in the flesh. In other words, people don't have to travel to the temple to encounter God's glory; they can encounter God's glory in Jesus. Connections to the OT include:

- A. *The glory of God's presence leading God's people to the Promised Land (Ex. 13:21-22).*
- B. *Jesus is the embodiment of Psalm 27:1.*

Leader help continued on the next page.

- C. Jesus is the final revelation of God, functioning like the Law of God in Psalm 119:105.
- D. Jesus is God's salvation from Isaiah 49:6.

2. In verses 13-30, Jesus confronts the unbelief of the religious leaders, arguing that He's been sent from above by the Father. Read verses 23-24. How is Jesus uniquely qualified to deal with sin?

Leader help: Only Jesus can free us from sin because He is not from the world or "of the world," but was sent down to us from God, who is the eternally existent authority and judge. All sin is ultimately against God and detrimental to us, so only God can forgive us and free us.

3. Read verses 13-20. Why do the Pharisees reject Jesus' testimony, and how does Jesus defend His authority and identity?

Leader help: The Pharisees judge Jesus according to purely human standards (according to the flesh) and challenge His credibility, claiming He's testifying about Himself. Jesus challenges this by saying that it's actually God Himself who bears witness to Jesus, thus emphasizing His unique relationship with the Father. Across the entire biblical story, God authenticates those whom He sends. This time, however, Jesus isn't just a prophet God has sent, He's the Son of God who perfectly and clearly reveals the Father. The Pharisees are aligning themselves with all those who, throughout biblical history, have opposed God and His messengers.

APPLICATION

1. Jesus is the light of the world, but even as Christians, we still give in to our sinful nature. How would you help someone who's resistant to bringing their sin or suffering out into the open? What kinds of words or actions can help us overcome shame and self-reliance?
2. Familiarity with the Bible or Christian concepts doesn't automatically lead us to genuine trust in Jesus. What does?
3. What would it practically look like this month to "walk in the light" instead of merely agreeing that Jesus is the Light?

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for rescuing you from eternal death and freeing you from your slavery to sin.

Passage to guide your prayers: Titus 3:3-7

Pray for those walking in darkness, asking God to free them from sin and shame.

Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 27:1

Ask God to help you submit to His Word, no matter how you feel.

Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 25:4-5

John 8:31-59

MAIN POINT

True Christianity means abiding in Christ's word, experiencing the freedom that comes only through the Son, and knowing that Jesus is the eternal "I AM" who stands at the center of God's redemptive plan.

GROUP INTRO

If you're a Christian, what are some areas of your life where Jesus brought true freedom? How did you feel when He did this?

TEXT

1. Read verses 31-32. What does Jesus mean by "abiding" in His word?

Leader help: To "abide" in Jesus' word means more than hearing or agreeing with Him; it means continuing, remaining, and persevering in His teaching and promises as the very meaning and authority in your life. It means continually returning to resting in His perfection, His atoning death, His powerful resurrection, and His promise to one day return to renew the entire universe. Without resting in Jesus' accomplished work of redemption, we'll be tempted to stray, either through sin or through lifeless religiosity that will harden us and fill us with pride.

2. Read verses 38-47. Why can Jesus rightly describe these leaders as children of the devil, even with all of their theological knowledge and religious obedience?

Leader help: These leaders hate Jesus, and therefore, hate God. They show their hatred for God in their outright rejection of Jesus and His claims. It doesn't matter how much biblical or religious education you have, how well you perform religious acts, or how pure you attempt to live; what matters is whether or not you trust Jesus.

3. Read verses 48-59. Why does Jesus's claim in verse 58 cause the reaction recorded in verse 59, and what does this reveal about the religious leaders who oppose Him?

Leader help: By saying, "I am," Jesus is claiming to be the same pre-existent, eternal God revealed in Exodus 3:14. Jesus is the same I AM who freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, a point later made by His own brother Jude when he wrote, "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe" (Jude 5). If Jesus isn't God-in-the-flesh, then this is blasphemy and deserves the death penalty.

This entire time, Jesus has been speaking spiritual truths, but these leaders have hardened their hearts against God and chosen to reject Jesus. This shows that, despite all their so-called external spiritual experience, knowledge, and authority, they were inwardly far from God.

APPLICATION

1. If you only had John 8, how would you help someone understand their desperate status before God (enslaved sinner on their way to eternal death) and how Jesus is the only Savior?
2. In what ways might someone rely on spiritual heritage, church involvement, or morality rather than ongoing dependence on Christ for true freedom?
3. What does it practically look like for you to “abide” in Jesus’ word this week, and what competes for that place in your life?

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for rescuing you from slavery to sin.

Passage to guide your prayers: Gal. 5:1

Ask God to help you abide in the Son every day.

Passage to guide your prayers: Col. 1:21-23

Pray that God would make your Community Group and church a place where sinners can find freedom from sin, shame, and the devil.

Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 9:31

John 9

MAIN POINT

The healing of physical blindness becomes a signpost pointing to a deeper reality: the healing of humanity's spiritual blindness. To restore our spiritual sight and put the glory of God on display, Jesus must directly intervene in human history and in each of our lives.

GROUP INTRO

What's a characteristic of God that you didn't "see" before becoming a Christian, but now love since meeting the Lord?

TEXT

1. Read verses 1-5. How does Jesus reframe the disciples' perspective on suffering and God's purposes, and what does this reframing reveal about Him?

Leader help: Jesus rejects the assumption that suffering is always a result of personal sin. He reveals that the man's blindness exists so that "the works of God might be displayed," thus emphasizing that, with God, even suffering can be used for eternal good.

Leader help continued on the next page.

Leader help:

Essentially, Jesus uses this situation to identify Himself again as the One sent by God to do God's works, which are healing, redemptive, and illuminating (He's the "light of the world" who cuts through the darkness of unbelief, sin, and evil to reveal God's goodness). In other words, Jesus is God's "sent one" with a unique, redemptive mission that brings good things to sinners.

2. Despite knowing the prophetic predictions about the Messiah healing the blind¹, and having ample evidence that Jesus has done this very thing, the religious leaders reject Jesus. Read verses 6-17. What reason do the religious leaders give for rejecting Jesus? Is their accusation biblically legitimate?

Leader help: The leaders claim Jesus has violated the Sabbath by making mud on the Sabbath and healing. "Kneading" of any kind was on a known list of 39 forbidden Sabbath activities, but this list arose from the Pharisees' rules, which were added onto biblical Law, not given in the Law itself. Being the Law-Giver in the flesh, Jesus saw someone in need, desired to glorify God, and decided to heal. One of the core missteps of the Pharisees was their full-fledged allegiance to their own rules and the elevation of those rules above God's Word. Jesus' actions here confronted the leaders with the reality that God gave the Sabbath for the good of humanity; if Jesus does good on the Sabbath, He's fulfilling God's intention for the Sabbath.

¹ See Isaiah 35:1-5; 42:5-9.

3. Read verses 38-41. What does Jesus reveal about true sight, judgment, and saving faith in these verses?

Leader help: Jesus seeks out the healed man and reveals Himself as the Son of Man. This is what the Lord does: seeks sinners out, reveals Himself, and calls to repentance and faith. Jesus then says that His ministry brings judgment: those who know they are blind (i.e., those who know they need Christ) receive sight; those who claim to see (i.e., those who think they are good with God based on their own merit) are exposed as blind.

Jesus is both Savior and Judge. The gospel humbles us before it heals us by calling us to admit our neediness. Here, the neediness is pictured as blindness.

APPLICATION

1. Is there suffering in your life that you've viewed as only punishment or discipline from the Lord? If so, how might this passage challenge you to adopt a new perspective on your pain?
2. What are some ways we can help one another keep a posture of humility and simple trust in Jesus instead of religious arrogance and harshness?
3. How did Jesus move you from spiritual blindness to sight, and how does your testimony point others to Christ?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus for pursuing you, revealing Himself, and giving you spiritual sight.

Passage to guide your prayers: Luke 19:10

Ask God to help you continually know and see your own need for His grace and to help you live in humility.

Passage to guide your prayers: 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

Ask God for boldness and opportunities to speak about Him and His works, and ask God to give sight to the spiritually blind in your life.

Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 4:19-20

John 10:1-21

MAIN POINT

Jesus is the one and only way to salvation, and He is the authoritative, sovereign, good shepherd who will see to it that all of His sheep are preserved and protected forever.

GROUP INTRO

If you're willing, tell us about a period of your life when you spiritually wandered or tried to lead yourself, and Jesus gently brought you back.

TEXT

1. Originally, John 9-10 were connected and meant to be read as one long discourse. With this in mind, read John 9:35-41, then read John 10:1-6. Who's present as Jesus says these things?

Leader help: It's the same audience as the end of John 9, consisting of the healed blind man and Pharisees. This is important to notice because Jesus is about to condemn the Pharisees (who were the spiritual leaders of the time) as thieves, robbers, and hired hands. His disciples and others may have also been present (see John 9:2, 8).

Leader help continued on the next page.

Another helpful note is to notice the *inclusio*² present in John 9 - 10. See the next page for the *inclusio*.

John 9 - 10 *inclusio*. Notice the similar themes and words that John uses to show that this entire section belongs together.

John 9:15-17

15 So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

[Text of John 9:18-41 - 10:1-18]

John 10:19-21

19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Notice that the accusations against Jesus worsen as the blind man's trust in Jesus grows; Jesus is labeled as a sinner, then a man possessed by a demon.

² An *inclusio* is a literary device that repeats a keyword, phrase, similar groups of words, or themes at the beginning and end of a section of the Bible, which, when used, acts like a set of brackets or bookends showing that the entire section is meant to be understood together.

2. Several key ideas in John 10 have important Old Testament roots. Read Ezekiel 34:1-10, then read John 10:1-6. With the Old Testament context in mind, identify the following characters in Jesus' figure of speech:

- A. The thief and robber
- B. The shepherd
- C. The sheep
- D. The stranger

Leader help:

A & D = The spiritual leaders who oppose Jesus; in this context, it's the Pharisees, since they make up the audience currently listening to Jesus. In the OT context, the failed shepherds of Israel, aka the kings, failed God's people, prompting God to promise that He Himself would step in and rescue His people, something He does through His Son, Jesus.

B = Jesus, who is exactly unlike the self-serving shepherds and leaders of both Ezekiel's time and His own time. Jesus goes on to foreshadow His atoning death for His sheep, which is the ultimate act of sacrificial love for His people.

C = God's people. They are those who hear "the voice of the shepherd" (i.e., hear/respond in faith to the Word of God, which is the voice of the shepherd) and are called and led by Jesus (i.e., called out of spiritual death by the preaching of the gospel and then led and loved by God and joined to His people, the church).

3. Read John 10:7-18. How does Jesus present Himself in these verses?

Leader help: Jesus compares and contrasts Himself with the spiritually-blind leaders of His time, and the faithless kings of Israel's past, claiming that He's the legitimate, good shepherd that they failed to be. He identifies Himself as the door of the sheep, i.e., the very way to salvation and flourishing (His language is a nod to Numbers 27:15-18). Jesus also emphasizes His personal³, intimate, attentive, pursuing, ongoing love for His people, who will not only stay near and protect His sheep in the presence of danger, but will ultimately die for their sins, rescuing them from the much worse wrath of God. Jesus also makes it clear that the cross wasn't forced upon Him, but something He willingly did for those whom He loves, and for the glory of the Father, in perfect fulfillment of His mission (i.e., the "charge" He received from the Father was to die for sinners, something He willingly did).

4. Explain why knowing Jesus as both the door and the good shepherd is crucial for a thriving faith in our fallen world.

Leader help: Knowing and trusting that Jesus is the only way to salvation and flourishing is a necessary first step in our faith, but it can also help us rest assured that Jesus is sufficient for both. We don't need to add any other spiritualities or religious works to be good with God. Knowing Jesus as our good shepherd anchors us in pain and chaos, reminding us He's with us and leading us.

³ Remember that in Scripture, the word "know" has various connotations; here, it means something like an "intimate relationship that involves deep feelings of love" (William Mounce, Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, page 383).

APPLICATION

1. Jesus makes it clear that your eternal relationship with God was initiated and secured by Him, not by you, and He did this willingly, without your permission. How can this fact secure us when we're anxious, strengthen us when we're weak, and motivate us when we're apathetic?
2. Crucially, Jesus mentions that the result of His mission will be “one flock,” aka, the church. If someone examined how you use your time, money, and home, would they conclude that you prioritize the flock of Christ? Why or why not?
3. Throughout the Bible, the word “hear” often means both receiving God’s Word and obeying it (see Deuteronomy 6:1-5). Review how you’re doing with hearing the following words of Jesus. Remember that, in Christ, there is no condemnation for you, and this is an opportunity to follow your Shepherd more closely:
 - A. Matthew 6:19-24
 - B. Romans 6:11
 - C. John 6:29
 - D. Colossians 4:5-6

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for specific ways He's lovingly shepherded you.

Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 23

Pray for those who have yet to become a part of Jesus' fold, asking Him to pursue and save them this week.

Passage to guide your prayers: Ephesians 2:11-13

Ask Jesus to protect His sheep from thieves, robbers, and strangers who use social media, political platforms, and podcasts to harm God's people and distort God's Word.

Passage to guide your prayers: 1 John 4:1

John 10:22-42

MAIN POINT

Jesus again reveals Himself as the divine Messiah and Shepherd-King who gives eternal life to His sheep.

GROUP INTRO

What does life look like for someone who knows they *belong* to Jesus versus someone who's *performing* for Him?

TEXT

1. Read verses 22-26. How does the crowd's demand ("tell us plainly") reveal the core spiritual problem for all people, and what does Jesus say is the reason this problem exists?

Leader help: The gospel isn't just information about Jesus; it's transforming grace, which we all need, because our core problem is that we naturally exist in a state of sin, spiritual blindness, and unbelief. Those asking Jesus to tell them plainly who He is have clearly witnessed things and received enough information to submit to Him as God's chosen one, but they have rejected Him anyway.

The reason we don't trust Jesus in and of ourselves isn't that we don't have enough information, but because we aren't born His sheep. God must cause us to be born again.

2. Read verses 25-30. What does Jesus teach about salvation, assurance of salvation, and the perseverance or preservation of all who trust in Him? Why does this matter for Christians today?

Leader help: Jesus teaches that salvation is His initiative (i.e., He comes to us/pursues us first); He has a specific group of people who belong to Him (His sheep); He draws His people to Himself and gives them the ability to respond to this drawing (His sheep hear His voice); He promises that not one of His sheep can be snatched from Him, meaning that He will preserve His people through all of their trials, doubts, sin, and suffering.

This matters because it reveals the ongoing care, attention, and giving of Christ for sinners like us. It's not about how strong our faith is or how committed we are, but about how committed Jesus is to us for the glory of God.

3. Read verses 29-39. Why does Jesus respond to the charge of blasphemy by appealing both to Scripture (Psalm 82) and to His own miraculous works?

Leader help: Jesus is revealing the authority of God's Word and how He is the fulfillment of God's Word, and He's also showing that biblical faith isn't superstitious or a "leap" without information and facts; biblical faith is based upon the Word and Jesus' real acts in real history, wherein He really accomplished redemption. Christianity isn't about speculation, a leap of faith, or tradition; it's founded upon and founded by the Word of God and the Lord Jesus.

APPLICATION

1. In this passage, Jesus provides us with clear promises that should secure us and help us navigate difficulties, challenges, and changes. But think back over your last three weeks. What, other than Christ, have you been clinging to, and why?
2. Because so many voices today (social media, news, influencers, entertainment, etc.) shape what we believe and fear, what are some practical ways we can learn to recognize and prioritize the “voice” of Christ this week, and what habits make it harder to hear Him?
3. Describe the beauty and personal implications of Jesus’ promises in verses 27-30 as if you’re talking to someone who has never read the Bible.

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for being an amazing Shepherd.

Passage to guide your prayers: Ezekiel 34:11-16

Confess the fears you carry and act upon despite Jesus’ promises to you.

Passage to guide your prayers: Mark 9:24

Pray for those struggling to trust Jesus, asking Him to gently and graciously strengthen their faith.

Passage to guide your prayers: Jude 1:24-25