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John the Baptist: A Faith that Challenges Others

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WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED TO KNOW THE BEST WAY TO SOLVE A PROBLEM OR ACHIEVE A GOAL?

## The POINT >

Faith stands unwaveringly on the truth.

### > MATTHEW 3:1-12

<sup>1</sup>In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” <sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup>Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup>and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and

Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup>And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup>Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup>“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”



# THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

## FACT:

“There’s more than one way to skin a cat” is a common way of saying there’s more than one way to accomplish a goal. As it turns out, the original phrase from the seventeenth century may have been about dogs, not cats.<sup>1</sup>



## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // BIBLE

The Bible is God’s truth, is internally consistent and without error, is totally trustworthy, and will last forever.

During a recent storm, a tree fell into the road near my house. An SUV driver didn’t see the tree and hit it, sliding off the road and into some trees. Once the tow truck arrived, the workers struggled to decide on the best way to retrieve the car. One worker thought the SUV needed to come out the way it went in—back end first. The other worker insisted (rather loudly!) this wouldn’t work and the SUV needed to be maneuvered through the trees and back onto the road with the front coming out first. I left the scene with the workers still arguing about the best way to free the vehicle, so I’m not sure who was right in the end.

There are often multiple ways to achieve the same result. However, this isn’t the case for every situation. Today, many people believe that truth is relative and we can all take different paths to heaven. We must understand that faith, forgiveness, and eternity aren’t these kinds of instances. Jesus said that He is THE way to God (John 14:6). Although this is a truth that many in our world aren’t open to hearing, we are still called to tell the people in our lives the truth about Jesus.

John the Baptist was bold in declaring the gospel truth, and God used him powerfully to prepare the way for Jesus.

## MATTHEW 3:1-6

**1** Why do you think people mistakenly believe they’re in good standing with God?

**2** What is required for us to be reconciled to God?



*Faith must be found before it can be shared. Of course, it must also be shared before it can be found.*  
*#BSFLRisk-Takers*

## MATTHEW 3:7-10

**3** When have you been given exceptional treatment?

**4** Why are there no exceptions to God's plan for repentance and salvation?

**5** What do you risk when you share the gospel?

## MATTHEW 3:11-12

**6** In what ways are you tempted to soften (or not share) the message of Jesus for fear of how people might respond?

**7** How specifically do we see discipline and humility in John's life?

**8** How will you commit to sharing the gospel this week?



# LIVE IT OUT

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // BIBLE

*The Bible is God's truth, is internally consistent and without error, is totally trustworthy, and will last forever.*

God's Word reveals the truth about God, including His purposes for His people and His promises to us. Because God's Word is true, and because it reveals that God is victorious, we can stand confidently on the Word of God at all times.

## > CHRIST

We are reconciled to God through faith in Jesus. Faith involves believing the truth about Jesus, trusting in Jesus and totally relying on Him for forgiveness of sin, and experiencing transformation both inside and out.

**9** Today, take time to evaluate your faith in Jesus. Are all these points above characteristic of your faith in Him?

GOD

JESUS

HOLY SPIRIT

**BIBLE**

SALVATION

CREATION

CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY

COMMUNITY  
& WORLD

**10** What steps do you think God is calling you to take to grow in faith?

## > COMMUNITY

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Saving faith is rooted in and stands on the truth. At times, we might be called to stand alone for our faith. However, more commonly, we grow in and stand for our faith within a community of believers.

**11** How has your church family helped you to grow in faith?



**12** How are you putting yourself in the position to grow in faith? What is God calling you to do to grow your faith?

## > CULTURE

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John the Baptist proclaimed the good news of Jesus to anyone who would listen. When the religious leaders caught wind of John's message, they didn't appreciate it. Even though John faced serious consequences, he never wavered in boldly proclaiming the truth about Jesus. Our culture doesn't necessarily appreciate when we talk about Jesus either. Still, faith and obedience require that we share the gospel with the people around us.

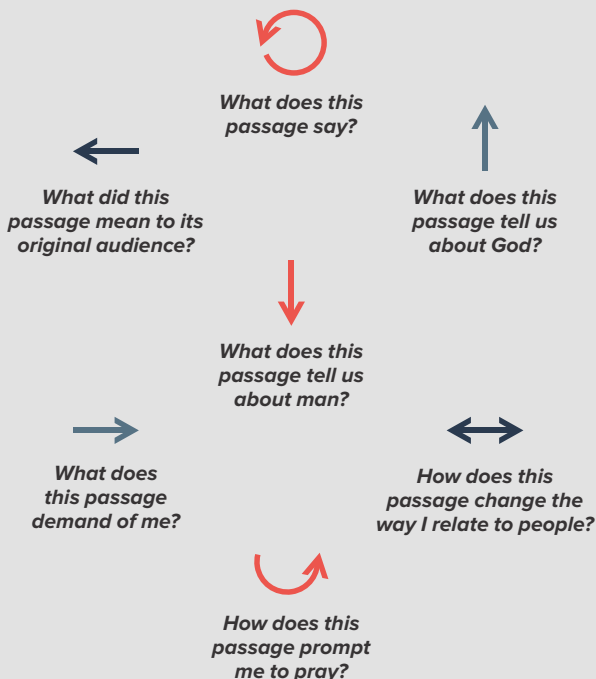
**13** How will you commit to sharing the gospel with boldness like John?



# DAILY DEVOTIONS



## The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



## Day One

## 1 JOHN 3:13

For some reason or another, we commonly expect that life will go smoothly. But because we live in a broken world, things will go wrong. And when they do, we're often caught off guard. One of the biggest reasons people stumble or fall when things go wrong is that they had unrealistic expectations. This is a big reason John told the church not to be surprised—having healthy expectations is key to enduring well. And the potential surprise the church should anticipate was the hatred of the world. Wow, this seems harsh! But the reality is not only that worldly people don't know God, but they have no interest or desire to know God. Paul taught that even though God has revealed His existence, sinful people actively refuse to acknowledge Him, suppressing the truth and persisting in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-20). The gospel calls people to change, and this is a message most people aren't willing to accept. And when we love the gospel of Jesus, we shouldn't be surprised when the world hates us.

➤ **Why are healthy expectations so important to faithful living?**

➤ **Why do worldly people hate the gospel of Jesus as well as Christians who follow the gospel?**

## Day Two

# 1 JOHN 3:14



Scripture has provided several ways for us to know we belong to the family of God, and one of the clearest ones is that we love our fellow Christians. In this passage, John describes those who remain in death as people who do not love. This doesn't mean that non-Christians aren't capable of loving. They are! All people, having been created in God's image, are capable of expressing certain characteristics of God Himself, including the capacity to love. However, whereas the lives of those who remain "in death" will be characterized more by selfishness and pride, followers of Jesus will be characterized by selfless and sacrificial love for others and ultimately for Jesus. If we want to know that we're truly alive in Christ, we need only to examine our hearts and ask this question: Are we growing more and more to love others as Jesus did?

- **According to this verse, how can we know we've passed from death to life?**
- **Why is selfless and sacrificial love so important for followers of Jesus?**

## Day Three

# 1 JOHN 3:15

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed out that His listeners were familiar with the command not to murder. However, though they knew the law, they had not understood the spirit of this command. It wasn't simply enough not to murder. Instead, Jesus said that "everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:22, CSB). At times, we might be tempted to think that unhealthy emotions, like selfish anger or hate, aren't really a big deal. However, murder is simply the fullest expression of these emotions. John pointed to this principle as central in the lives of all Christians, who are to be characterized by kindness, grace, generosity, compassion, patience, and love. Hate is the opposite of these things. Therefore, we must root out any seed of hate from our lives.

- **What is the connection between hate and murder?**
- **Why is it so important that we work to rid our hearts of hate?**

## Day Four

# 1 JOHN 3:16

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Having just told the church that those who hate do not belong to the family of God, John now points to love as the standard we're to live by. Further, he lifts up the love of Jesus as the example to follow. Jesus proved His love for us by going to the cross in our place, and if we've truly experienced the love of Jesus, our response is to lay down our lives for others in turn. In Luke 9:23, Jesus said that anyone who wants to follow Him must take up his or her cross every day in following Jesus's example. This doesn't mean that we must literally be crucified. It does mean that we're to love others in a way that is selfless and sacrificial. We must crucify the old sinful, selfish person, and having been raised as a new person in Christ, we live to bless others and to glorify God. When we experience the love of Jesus, this is the only appropriate response.

- **What does it mean to love others by laying down our lives?**
- **How does your life demonstrate that you've experienced the love of Jesus?**

## Day Five

# 1 JOHN 3:17-18

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When someone shares a struggle they're facing, we've likely to respond by saying something like, "I'll pray for you." In James 2:15-16, James presents the following scenario: If we encounter someone who is cold and hungry and say, "Be warm and be filled," but don't offer a coat or food, what good have we done? The implied answer is we've done no good at all. It's one thing to say we'd die for those we love. It's another thing to continually show small and real expressions of love. It's good to say we'll pray for others and to wish them well—but that's not enough. We're called to reflect the love of Christ every day in the ways we interact with the people around us, receiving God's good gifts with gratitude and sharing with others so that they too would experience the kindness of God. This is what it means for us to love in action and truth.

- **When have you wished someone well but didn't do anything to meet the person's need?**
- **What does it mean to love in action and truth?**