

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

John 1:1-18

Opening Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving us the privilege and freedom to study Your Word. May Your Spirit unify our hearts and minds and guide us into all truth. Help us to get to know You more today as we study Your Word together. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Leader: It is always a good spiritual discipline to begin Bible study by inviting the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. Through prayer we communicate our dependence on God and ask Him to open the eyes of our heart so we can get to know Him and His ways. We need the Holy Spirit's help to understand the Bible and to know how God wants us to apply it to our lives.

Background Check: Any time you get serious about pursuing a relationship or about hiring someone for an important position, you explore their background to see what they are really like. When we come to the process of studying the Bible, the more we can know and understand about the times when the Bible was written, the more we can understand its meaning.

So here are some helpful things to know before we begin to read John's gospel.

(Leader: This section may be read by someone in your group who likes history, facts, details, or putting pieces of a puzzle together.)

- The gospel of John was written by John, Jesus' beloved disciple, (see John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2) around the middle or late part of the first century (NIV).
- John's purpose in writing this gospel was recorded in John 20:31 ***“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the***

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Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

- Two significant cultural developments helped make it possible for the good news of Jesus’ life and story to make it out of Palestine: (1) Alexander the Great exported the Greek culture, giving the world its first common language. (2) The Romans developed an amazing road system.
- People were searching for personal salvation as traditional religion had collapsed. (McNeal 52-54)

Leader: Let’s begin exploring John’s gospel as we read the first 18 verses from the New International Version. In this passage we are introduced to four characters from the Bible: The Word, God the Father, John the Baptist, and Moses. Let’s begin to take a look at each of these characters.

The Word eternally existed in fellowship with God and was God. ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** And if we did not get it the first time, the author repeats this for emphasis. ***“He was with God in the beginning.”***

Now if your NIV Bible has cross reference notes, look in the margin of your Bible. You will find in small print some verses you can look up to explore more about “In the beginning” and “The Word.”

(Leader: This section may be led by someone in your group who likes mysteries and likes the work of a detective, searching for clues).

Detective: Turn to Genesis, the first book of the Bible, to chapter one. This book was written by another one of the characters introduced in John 1:1-18...Moses. In Genesis 1:1 we read, ***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*** This same God who John wrote about in his gospel was eternally existent and actively involved in creating new life.

Now we're going to do some more detective work and explore how John opens the first of his letters towards the end of the New Testament. Let's turn to 1 John 1 and read the first four verses.

(Leader: You may want to ask someone new from the group to read this.)

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”

Not only has John heard about the Word, he and the disciples experienced and touched Him. John is testifying of His own personal experience so we can also share in this relationship with God the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Nothing would please John more than for us to enter into the story and have a personal relationship with God who revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

Now let's turn back to John 1:3 where John writes,

“Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

The author is telling us that through Jesus Christ, everything was made. Then he states it in the negative for emphasis. Without him, nothing would be made. So here is where we enter the story. When John writes, ***“through Him all things were made,”*** that means you and I. We were created by God, and, without His divine involvement, none of us would be here today. Jesus gave us life, and He lights up our life.

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Most people do not know that they have been created by God. They do not know their spiritual family of origin. They do not know that God, the Father and the Word, worked together to create them and all that is around them.

You will have a wonderful opportunity to shed His light on them as you share this first passage of John 1 with them.

Facilitator: We're going to spend some time reflecting on the statement, **“through him all things were made.”**

- What are some of the things that Jesus Christ has made?
- What differences will it make in your life knowing that you are a creation of Jesus Christ?

Leader: In John 1:6-9, we are introduced to another Biblical character.

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”

Facilitator:

- What do we learn about John from these verses?

Reader: John continues to teach us about Jesus as we continue reading in verse 10.

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”

Leader: (*Leaders: Give your group some time to reflect on the following question. Potential answers are provided below if needed*)

What do we learn from these verses?

- Jesus Christ was in the world.
- He made the world.
- The people He created did not recognize Him.
- His own kin, the Jews, rejected Him.
- He opened His invitation to all who would believe in Him and receive Him to receive the right to become “children born of God.” (Yes, that includes each of us.)

We will jump back into this discussion when we move into an interesting conversation in John chapter 3.

(Leaders: This next part may be read by someone who loves to live life on the edge.)

Here comes the climax:

Climax: Now we come to the most exciting part of our story today. The Jews had waited forever for their Messiah. They missed Him because they thought He would be their strong and mighty political or military leader. The Gnostics believed all “flesh” was evil and God could only be spirit. The other religious authorities thought that being “spiritual” was all about keeping the laws that God made. There have been at least 400 years of history where it seemed that God was silent. John the Baptist had prepared people for His entrance. And...

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

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Leader: Here we find God choosing to reveal who He is in the flesh, in human form. This Word becomes alive and present in the here and now. This fully-divine God was now also becoming fully-human. Now how human was Jesus? John says,

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

In the original Greek language, we would understand this to say, “Jesus Christ became a man who temporarily camped or pitched His tent among us.” Imagine that for one awesome camping tale. The fish you caught was that (fully extend your arms out) long. Well, when we went camping, the very Son of God, Jesus Christ, pitched His tent next to ours and He spent the weekend with us. Wow, was that ever cool! We experienced the fullness of the invisible God right before our eyes!

Then John goes on to use some powerful words to describe Jesus Christ:

- The One and Only who came from the Father
- Full of grace and truth

Then in verses 15 and 16, John comes back to the testimony and witness of John the Baptist saying, “Yes, He is the one I was telling you about. And from His awesome, unending grace, He has blessed our socks off with one blessing after the next!”

What a story John the Baptist had to tell. What a story John the beloved had to tell of his experiences with Jesus. Up to this point, people had heard all about Moses and the laws that God gave His people through Moses. Now God the Father, who up to this point in history was unrevealed and unseen, is being made known through Jesus Christ. What a story!

PROCESS AND PRACTICE

*Making time and room in our lives to process
and to practice the truth of God's Word*

Facilitator: As we make some time to process what we are learning,

- What are some observations you made during our Bible study?
- What is something God may be trying to say to you as you are beginning your exploration of the gospel of John?
- What questions came to your mind as we took a historical, detective, and personal perspective on Jesus' life?

Go ahead and journal your observations--what God may be revealing to you or who you would like to share this with...

TAKING THE NTD CHALLENGE

Leader: Real Biblical teaching and learning occurs as we make time and room in our lives to study and practice the truths we are learning. Therefore, at various places throughout NTD 1, you will be challenged on varying levels to choose practical ways to reinforce what you are learning through your study of the book of John. Please prayerfully choose one or more of the following ways to apply what you have just learned.

NTD level 1 challenge: Spend some time this week reflecting on the fact that God made you and everyone and everything around you. Watch what you begin to notice as your awareness grows.

NTD level 2 challenge: Pray this week for an opportunity to tell someone how God has blessed your life. What will you say?

NTD level 3 challenge: Identify one person you would like to walk through this passage with and begin to teach them about how the invisible, unseen God of creation chose to reveal Himself to all of humankind? Who is the first person that comes to your mind that you would like to share this with? _____ Will you make time this week to spend an hour with this person and begin to teach them what you are learning about God? (It could be a family member, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, a schoolmate, or just someone else God has put on your heart.)