



Gospel of John
Study Guide

Week 1: The Word Became Flesh (John 1)

Watch the Video

Suggested Prayer: *Shed upon your Church, O Lord, the brightness of your light, that we, being illumined by the teaching of your apostle and evangelist John, may so walk in the light of your truth, that at length we may attain to the fullness of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, 238)*

Opening questions:

1. Are there any passages from John that have stuck with you and made an impact? What are they and why?
2. John's Gospel skips over the Christmas story, but instead opens with a prologue about the deeper meaning of the Incarnation: that the eternal Word of God "became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14). How does this help us understand Christmas?

Read John 1:1-5

3. Look up Genesis 1:1-5. What parallels do you see? How does John give additional depth to what God did "in the beginning"?
4. According to this passage from John, who is the Word? What does the Word do?

5. As John Barclay writes, this passage tells us that “*God was always like Jesus*. Sometimes we tend to think of God as stern and avenging; and we tend to think that something Jesus did turned God’s anger into love... [but] the New Testament knows nothing of that idea.” Have you ever, perhaps unconsciously, thought that God was not always like Jesus? What difference does it make to say that God is always like Jesus?
6. Read v. 4-5 again slowly. What does it mean to say that in this Word was the life that is the light of men? What does it mean to say that this light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it?
7. Notice that this passage doesn’t say there is no darkness in the world. Rather, it says that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. What does this tell us about the Christian hope? For our lives, when we feel like there’s darkness all around?

Read John 1:6-18

8. Who is the John referred to in v. 6-8? (Hint: it’s not the author of this Gospel, and it’s not one of the twelve disciples!) What does this verse tell us about his mission? What does this tell us about our mission?
9. Can you think of any Christians who seem like they carry around Christ’s light within them? Someone who “lights up a room,” as they say, with their joy,

love, and faith? In your experience, where did their light come from? What impact did it make?

10. Read v. 14 again slowly. If we have beheld the glory of the Father in the incarnate Son, what does this show us about the eternal Father?
11. What does it mean to say that Jesus is “full of grace and truth” at the same time? What if Jesus was full of only grace, but no truth? Or only truth, and no grace? Surely, we often struggle to be full of both at the same time! What does it look like for Jesus to manifest both grace and truth? What does it mean for us?

Read John 1:19-23, 29-34

12. John the Baptist addresses Jesus as “the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Take a look at the Passover story (Exodus 12:1-7) and the regulations for sin offerings in Leviticus (4:32-35). What light does this shed on what John means here?

Read John 1:35-42

13. According to this passage, John the Baptist is not “the Christ,” but the first disciples say that Jesus is. “Christ” is not his last name, but a title meaning “anointed,” which implies “anointed king.” Many OT passages looked ahead to the coming of a promised Anointed One who would deliver Israel (Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:2-5). What does this tell us about Jesus?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 2: You Must Be Born Again: John 3

Watch the Video

Prayer: *Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, 252-3)*

Read John 3:1-8

14. Nicodemus came to Jesus as an earnest seeker, and the first thing Jesus tells him is that unless one is born *again* (or *from above*: the Greek word can mean either), he cannot see the kingdom of God. Why might it be that unless you are born again from above, you can't see the light (remember 1:9-10) of the kingdom?
15. Read ahead to 3:19-21. Jesus says here even though the light has come into the world, some people "loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." In other words, some people don't see the light because they choose not to see it—they would rather stay in the dark than change what they're doing! Do you recognize this pattern? If we are caught up in it to some extent, what can we do?
16. Back to Nicodemus: his misunderstanding is a kind of play on words, as he thinks that "born again" can only mean in a literal sense. But Jesus is talking about

being born again from above, “of water and the Spirit.”
What is he referring to?

17. Jesus says clearly that unless we are born a second time “of water and the Spirit,” we cannot enter the kingdom of God. Why? How?

Read John 3:9-15

18. What does it mean for Jesus to say that the Son of Man must be lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness? Look it up: Num. 21:4-9.
19. Look at the other instances where John speaks of the Son of Man being lifted up: 8:28 and 12:32-33. How does that help us understand the connection in v. 14 between the Son of Man being lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness, and believing in Him to have eternal life?
20. What light is shed on the atoning work of the cross by this passage? That is, through the cross we are not only forgiven, but also... what?

Read John 3:16-21

21. This is perhaps the best known of all Bible verses, for good reason. But its meaning is deeper than we might see at first. Look up Matthew 15:21-28. Here, we see that some expected the Messiah to deliver only the lost sheep of Israel. Many world religions don't see themselves as being for the whole world (for example,

Shintoism). What does it mean for us that God so loved *the world* that He gave his only Son?

22. Sometimes in John, “the world” is defined as that which opposes and rejects Christ (look up 15:18-19; 16:33). Yet we are also told that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin “of the world,” and that “God so loved the world” that he gave His only Son. Put together, what does this tell us?
23. Many world religions focus more on *belonging* or *behaving* than they do on *believing*. But here, the emphasis seems to be on belief in Christ. This verse could have said “that whoever *follows* him” has eternal life, instead of “whoever *believes* in him.” But it doesn’t. What difference does that make?
24. Look up Romans 4:1-8, 18-25. Does this shed light on what Jesus is saying about belief in Christ?
25. Now look up James 2:14-24. What light does this shed? How can we put all of this together?
26. Back to John: what kind of *believing* is described in 3:15? What kind of belief did the snakebit Israelites have in the serpent lifted up in the wilderness? What kind of belief then should we have?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 3: “I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”

Watch the Video

Prayer: *O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. (BCP, 252)*

Read John 6:29-35

27. This is the first of the seven “I am” statements in John’s Gospel: “I am the bread of life,” greater than the manna from heaven that God gave through Moses. Consider the Lord’s prayer: “give us this day our daily bread.” What does it mean that Jesus is the bread of life in a deeper sense?

Read John 8:12

28. “I am the light of the world,” Jesus says. Can you think of examples from the Gospels where Jesus shines a light to show things the way they really are? Alternatively, can you think of examples of Jesus walking in the light, rather than darkness?
29. What should this look like for us as his followers?

Read John 10:1-16

30. In this passage, Jesus first says that “I am the door of the sheep... if anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” What is Jesus the door into? What does this tell us about Him?

31. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus says, who “lays down his life for the sheep” when the wolves come to attack, unlike a hired hand. Consider: when we say Jesus is our savior, how does this passage help us understand His saving work?

Read John 11:17-27

32. “I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus says. He doesn’t say that he’s an example of what happens to us all when we die; he says he *is* the resurrection! What does this mean for us?

Read John 14:1-6

33. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus says. Let’s look at each of these. What does it mean to say Jesus is the *way*? The way of life that God wants for us? The way to the Father, or eternal life? All of the above? Something else?
34. How is Jesus *the* truth? We might think of “truth” as something abstract, like the truths of math, physics, and biology. But in Jesus, truth is a *person*. How might that change how we think about truth?
35. How is Jesus *the* life? Reflect on this famous passage from Vatican 2: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the

Father and His love, *fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.*"

Read John 15:1-5

36. "I am the vine; you are the branches," Jesus says. What does this say about what it means to abide in Christ?
37. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser," Jesus says, pruning us so that we will bear fruit. What does this metaphor show us about the Christian life? How does it feel to be pruned? How does it help to know what the pruning is for?

Read John 8:53-59

38. "Before Abraham was, I am," Jesus said. When you consider what Jesus was claiming, this is an astonishing thing to say! Reflect on C.S. Lewis's famous "trilemma": that for Jesus to claim this, he must be either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. What do you make of this? What should it prompt us to do?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Week 4: "Love One Another As I Have Loved You"

Watch the Video

Prayer: *Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, 255)*

Read John 13:1-9

39. “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” John summarizes the crucifixion with these words. What light is shed on everything that follows in John by this sentence?
40. Have you ever witnessed someone humbling themselves in this way, becoming a servant when their position of power did not require them to? What impact did it make? How does this help us understand the astonishment of Peter?
41. Have there ever been times in your life when you did not understand what God was doing, but afterwards, you did? What does this passage tell us about how God works in our lives?

Read John 13:12-15

42. “Do you understand what I have done to you?” Jesus asks. Do we understand?

43. “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” What shape might this take in our daily lives? In this church?

Read John 13:31-35

44. Referring to the crucifixion that is to come, Jesus said that “now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” Yet that humiliating, excruciating kind of death is the furthest thing one might imagine when thinking of “glory.” What does this show us about the glory of God? About what the world imagines to be glorious?

45. What makes this a “new commandment”? Look up Mark 12:28-33, where Jesus summarizes the law of Moses: clearly, Jesus taught that love of God and neighbor was at the heart of the Law all along! So, what makes this *new*?

46. Jesus clearly ties our love for one another to our witness to Him. In fact, he seems to say that it is of first importance in our witness! “By *this* all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Why does he say this?

47. What then should our common life as Christians look like?

48. Can you think of examples where someone—maybe you!—was attracted first to the kind of person that a Christian was, or the kind of community that Christians had, and then came to know Jesus?

Read John 15:12-17

49. What kind of love is Jesus talking about, when he commands us to love another as He has loved us?

50. “I have called you friends,” Jesus says, no longer servants. Reflect on this: how do we interact with our friends? Who do we call friends? What then does it mean for us that Jesus calls us His friends?

51. What kind of fruit is Jesus calling us to bear, and how do we do it? Think of the fruits you have seen in your life from abiding in love and friendship. What impact does this tend to have in someone’s life? What does this show us about the fruitful life Jesus wants for us?

Read John 17:20-21

52. This passage is part of Jesus’s “high priestly prayer,” directly before his crucifixion. What is Jesus’s prayer for us? How is this prayer answered?

Prayer requests: pray for and with one another

Small Group Resources

Videos: Each lesson includes a video that should be watched before the group meets or at the beginning of each gathering. This will set the context of the passage that is read. You can

either search “Just For” on the church website or find it here:
www.stmartinsepiscopal.org/just-for/.

Gathering Expectations: Building relationships and growing in faith are the two main goals of this small group series. Weekly gatherings could be roughly 20-30 minutes for socializing, 30-40 minutes for Bible study, and 10 minutes for prayer. But there is no one size that fits all!

Small Group Covenant: We are committed to maintaining a welcoming atmosphere in which each person can be open and honest in the pursuit of the knowledge of how God loves us and cares for us. We will establish this atmosphere by doing the following:

- We will always maintain the confidentiality of what is said in the group.
- We will pray for each other regularly and seek to support each other spiritually both inside and outside of our meetings.
- We will seek to be open and honest with each other and be our true selves. We will, however, not overshare or treat the group as a therapy session.
- We will not frog, hog, or bog. Meaning, we do not jump quickly from one subject to another, hog the conversation, or perpetually get stuck on one subject.
- We will open and close our meetings with prayer, calling on God's promise to be with us when two or more gather in His name, through the presence of His Holy Spirit. We will be open to the mystery and surprise of God's presence in our group and in our lives.

- We accept that God will speak to all of us through each one's thoughts, and we will listen deeply with our hearts to new perspectives, seeking always to determine God's truth in them.
- We will avoid divisive topics, such as politics, which are not directly relevant to our spiritual journey. We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling among us, and we will treat each other with the utmost dignity and respect at all times. Should conflicts arise, we will respectfully resolve them. We will give advice only when requested.
- We will seek to have all others know us by our love of God and our neighbors. We will seek to become closer to God by listening and sharing within the group and by serving others outside of the group.

Further Reading: There are many great resources on John for those who wish to carry this study further. Out of a long list, I recommend:

The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary, by David Ford

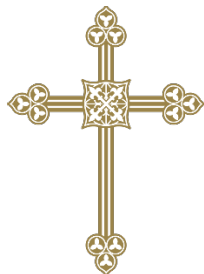
The Gospel of John (Daily Study Bible Series), by John Barclay

John: A 12-Week Study, by Justin Buzzard

John For Everyone, by N.T. Wright

This study was written by the Rev. Dr. Jordan Hylden

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