

A group of people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are sitting in a circle on the floor. They are holding hands, suggesting a community or support group. The background is softly blurred, focusing attention on the group and the text overlaid on the image.

COME AND SEE *come and see*

F E A R L E S S T R U T H I N A N A G E O F D O U B T

COME AND SEE: STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTERS 1-3

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FEARLESS TRUTH IN AN AGE OF DOUBT

I don't know if you've noticed, but we live in a very polarized world right now. Culture seems to offer solutions, but are any of them working?

People scream for more love, but do we seem more loving? People cry for safety, but do we seem more secure? Are we working together or splitting apart into fragments? Are people more patient? More content? More tolerant? Happier? Do we care more for our neighbors — even when we disagree?

We are far from who we say we want to be.

The fabric of our society is stretched farther than it's been in a long time. What to believe, how to act, and where to place our allegiances are among the most important discourses of our day.

This makes our study of the book of John a timely one. This gospel was written in the latter part of the first century, in a time of similar cultural upheaval. Christians lived under persecution from the State, and new Jewish believers in Jesus fought over whether to stay with the synagogue or go with the new Church.

This gospel was John's answer to his century's problems of identity and allegiance. Andreas Kostenberger, a writer and theologian, borrows from Shakespeare to say "...we may sum up John's message as follows: 'To believe or not to believe — that's the question.'"

John says it this way: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

That you may believe and have life: these are the questions that create all the problems of our day. What should we believe in? And how can we have the good life?

What we believe does matter. The substance of what we believe is critical, as it shapes our entire identity. But our society often says the opposite: "It's not about what you believe, it's about how passionately you believe it." Level of commitment supersedes content.

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But John — and the rest of scripture — doesn't give us permission to believe anything we want. He says that we are to "believe that Jesus is the Christ."

He wants us to know that believing in Jesus as *Christ* will set all of our allegiances aright. But what does that mean?

The term *Christ* is a title which means *anointed one*. It's related and essentially synonymous to the word *messiah*.

Throughout the Old Testament, God called on His people to anoint public figures — prophets, priests, and kings. This anointing showed God's choice of a certain man and His blessing upon him for public service.

When the apostle John calls us to believe in Jesus the Christ — the ultimate Anointed One — he is telling us that Jesus fulfills the roles of prophet, priest, and king in the life of a believer today.

As Prophet, Jesus is God's mouthpiece who proclaims our need for repentance, our freedom from sin, and our hope of eternal life through Him alone: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the

gospel" (Mark 1:15) and "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus as Prophet proclaims that by believing in Him we will not be bound by chains of sin and can be sure of our eternity. We believe and have the good life because we are freed from fear and a constant scrambling for our safety and security.

Jesus is also a Priest on our behalf. In the Old Testament, the High Priest was a mediator between God and the people. He offered sacrifices in the temple to atone for their sins. Jesus became this Mediator for us for all time — our sacrifice and substitution to atone for God's wrath that we deserve because of our sin.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if

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the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:11-14).

The result of Jesus' death as our ultimate High Priest is that God's wrath against us is satisfied once and for all. This is incredible news! We no longer walk around guilty or ashamed because all of our sins have been paid for. No one else can say that! The bar has been met. The test has been passed. His righteousness is now our righteousness. We believe and find the good life in freedom from guilt and worry, and in the love and compassion we can show others because it is what we have been shown.

As our anointed King, Jesus is above all other kings and rulers. He sits upon his throne with all power and authority. As Christians, we recognize that He has the divine right to do what He wants in His world. He is unlike other kings in that He is perfectly good and just and pure.

Because we acknowledge His rule over us, we have no fear or undue trust in those who rule in this world temporarily. We believe and have the good life because our peace is not based on the transitory kingdoms and leaders of this world.

In this series, we invite you to *Come and See* Jesus — and to pray that you will long to invite others to come and see Him as well. People need the hope and freedom that comes from knowing Jesus as our Prophet, Priest and King. In a world of fragmented allegiances, He is our peace, and by believing in Him, we have life.

For “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Amen.

*Mike Adkins
Senior Pastor*



THE LAMB OF GOD

If you feel like the Bible is hard to understand, you are not alone. In fact, the Apostle Peter actually said this in one of his letters: “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand...” (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Did you hear what Peter, the guy who walked on water, the guy who saw Jesus transfigured, the guy who wrote some of the New Testament said? He said there are some things that Paul wrote — that are in the Bible — that are hard to understand!

I don’t know about you, but I find it comforting to know I’m not alone when I struggle to understand the Scriptures. One of our goals as pastors — through both our teaching and writing — is to make the Bible a little easier to understand.

One of the ways I have seen that occur in my life is through studying biblical theology. Biblical theology

is the study of a certain topic or theme as it develops throughout the course of the biblical narrative. Two things result from this: 1) It helps us make sense of the Old Testament, and 2) It helps us see the connectedness of the Bible through its overarching story.

John actually provides us with a number of different biblical themes in his Gospel that find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus: the word of God (John 1:1-14), the temple (2:18-22), the Messiah (John 10:22-30), and light (John 8:12).

But there is another symbol that John introduces here in this text, which finds its fulfillment in Christ: the Old Testament image of the sacrificial lamb (John 1:20; 1:36).

God first introduced this idea with Abraham and Isaac way back in Genesis 22, when God called Abraham to sacrifice his son. As they were walking up the mountain to where he would have to kill Isaac, his son turns to him and asks him an interesting question, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?”

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Isaac knew that a lamb was required to atone for the sins of people before a holy God, and realized they had brought everything needed for this sacrifice except for the lamb. Abraham's response shows his faith that God would provide a sacrifice to spare his son. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. When Abraham got to the spot for the sacrifice, "[He] lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son" (Genesis 22:13). In this story, we find the first explicit example of a substitutionary sacrifice: the ram instead of Isaac.

Throughout the Old Testament, God institutes practices and rituals to teach his people that they can only be forgiven for their sins through the death of something in their place, whether that's the Passover lamb or the bulls, goats, and rams killed annually on the Day of Atonement. God is teaching His people that sin will always lead to death, either your own or something in your place. But He is also teaching them that animal sacrifices aren't good enough to take away their sin

forever. That is why the Day of Atonement had to be repeated each year.

Enter John the Baptist. He brings news that the people of Israel had been waiting for: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Finally! A sacrifice that could take away our sin once and for all! We wouldn't have to re-atone for our sins each year, because this Lamb is different from any other. He is not just some animal; he is fully God and fully man, coming to save the people whom He loves.

The author of Hebrews picks up this same comparison, "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:11-14).

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This theme is complete in Christ. Our sins are forgiven. Our relationship with God is reconciled. We don't have to cross our fingers and hope God will accept us as His own. As God himself says for those who trust in Him, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). And as the author of Hebrews reminds us, "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18).

It is finished.

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HOW THE CHURCH GROWS

Several years ago, Lifeway Research asked 42,000 Christians “What or who was responsible for you coming to Christ and your church?” The response was surprising ... but shouldn’t have surprised anyone:

- 1% special need
- 2% walk-in
- 5% Pastor
- 1% visitation
- 5% Crusade/revival/tv show, etc...
- 2% Church program
- 88% Friend or relative*

It doesn’t take a sociologist or an expert in statistical analysis to see that the most effective strategy for bringing people to Christ and the church is personal relationships.

This shouldn’t surprise us. One of the central points of the gospel of John is that the church is built and the gospel spreads through personal relationships.

*Some respondents gave more than one answer.

Chapter 1:19-42 is a perfect illustration. It begins with the proclamation of the divinely-appointed witness, John the Baptist, then spreads through a network of family and friendships.

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ)...” (John 1:41).

Philip found Nathaniel and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’ (John 1:45).

Here is how it played out: John the Baptist bore witness about Jesus to Andrew. Andrew instantly went and to find his brother, Peter. (There is also a strong insinuation that John, the author, is also there and he goes to find his brother James.) Each man goes to his brother and says “We have found the Messiah,” and they bring them to Jesus. This is a ragtag, literal band of brothers who will change the world.

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From there, a friend from their hometown, Phillip, is called to follow Jesus. And he in turn finds his friend Nathaniel. And before you know it, you have six friends and family members following Jesus — three of whom will become a part of his inner circle, and one of whom is the author of the book we are currently studying.

This is the perfect paradigm for how the kingdom of God spreads. Each man encountered Jesus. Each simply shared what they had experienced.

They probably thought *I have been searching for this... I know someone who needs this*. And each was able to present Jesus to their friend or relative in a way they knew would pique their interest. For example, Phillip was well aware that Nathaniel's primary interest would be in the scriptures, so he addressed him there:

We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (John 1:44).

At first, they don't even get the details right. Phillip calls Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth, but Phillip will soon see that he is Jesus, the Son of God, who was born in Bethlehem but now lives in Nazareth. And Nathaniel is skeptical; he responds to Phillip with a slur about someone he has never met: Nazareth! Nothing good can come from Nazareth (John 1:46). No matter. This is a process. They were just beginning.

These men met Jesus and walked into an atmosphere of expectation, and they each invited their loved ones into a journey they were already on. But in every case, the ones who encountered Christ shared Christ.

This is the kind of witness that can transform a family, transform a street, transform a city.

But this type of evangelism is a mindset, not a program. It takes an encounter with Christ first, then courage, humility, and confidence. To follow their example, we must understand that evangelism is a process, not an

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event. People must be challenged to take their next step. The call is to *come and see*. Then come again. And again.

Wendell Berry, the wise old Kentucky farmer/author, beautifully described the ideal elementary school teacher: She loves books. She loves children. And she loves introducing the two.

I wonder if the Apostle John would similarly describe the ideal evangelist: She loves Jesus. She loves others. And she loves introducing the two.

May it be true of us all.

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ON BEING BORN AGAIN

It was the most important question in the history of time, and he didn't even know he was asking it.

In John chapter three, Nicodemus, a devoutly religious ruler — a Pharisee — has slunk away from his fellow teachers of the Law and crept through the cover of darkness to speak with Jesus.

His colleagues aren't fond of this new Rabbi, a plain carpenter from Nazareth who's been roaming and teaching without their consent, gathering the curious and the committed by the day. Sure, this Jesus says some remarkable things — even performs wondrous signs and miracles. They haven't been able to trip Him up with their conspiracies and questions, either.

Yet Jesus dares to claim He's from God, but speaks against *them* — the most devoted, the most knowledgeable, the most obedient to the tiniest slivers of the Law! This Man must be a trick, they say, sent from the devil instead (Matthew 9:34, Matthew 12:24).

By day, Nicodemus has mostly likely agreed. But by night, he's been wrestling with the power he's seen — the wonders he has witnessed. Perhaps he has even felt the conviction of Jesus' words — maybe known deep down that something is missing in his life of rules and rhetoric. He must go to this Rabbi and learn more.

Given his position and the Pharisees' reputation, Nicodemus opens this secret conversation with what he surely believes is a grand gesture of good will:

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (John 3:2).

But Jesus slashes this verbal olive branch with a sword.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

You do not know anything, Jesus says. You do not see at all. Unless you are born all over again, you will never be a part of God's kingdom.

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Nicodemus is taken aback — and confused. *“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”* (John 3:4).

How can a man be born again?

Nicodemus — like many who live by the rules but have no life — does not understand.

I was a preacher’s kid, raised in the Bible Belt of Tennessee. From the time I was born, I was in church, memorizing verses, singing songs, going to camps and prayer meetings and classes.

Like Nicodemus, however, I was good at behaving, but I did not understand what it meant to be born anew. I had committed my life to God’s word and God’s law without understanding God’s grace. I began all my conversations with God and others the same way this Pharisee did — with what I believed about Jesus instead of with my desperate need for Him and what He had done to rescue me.

It has taken a lifetime to even scratch the surface of this mercy. But Jesus shows Nicodemus — and you and me as well — the way to His Kingdom with a simple but profound concept: *born again*.

Born again is impossible. There’s a reason God had Nicodemus ask history’s most important question. He was the cream of the crop — the holiest, most rule-keeping member of society. If anyone was earning their way into God’s favor with obedience, it was him and others like him. But Jesus says *sorry, it’s not you, it’s Me:*

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:5-6).

Nicodemus, as a fastidious student of the Law, would probably be reminded of these words from Ezekiel 36:25-27:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your

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idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Just as it's impossible to shove ourselves back into our mother's womb to be reborn, it's impossible for us to "rebirth" ourselves spiritually through works. We produce a life of the flesh; only God can produce a life of the Spirit.

Born again is vital. Jesus says that without this work of God, it doesn't matter what we do or how good we are — *we will never be a part of God's kingdom* (John 3:3). Eternity makes this the world's most important question.

Born again is radical. New birth speaks to how dead we are without Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-7). We don't just need to be straightened up a bit — we aren't in need of a spiritual nip and tuck, or to lose a few pounds of sinful

baggage, or to update our Christian style here and there. We need to start all over from scratch — to be regenerated cell by spiritual cell into someone new. Born again doesn't just mean death to the bad things we've done, it means dying to the good things, too. We die to both guilt for our sins and a trust in our own works and righteousness for our salvation.

Born again is challenging. There's probably a good reason we don't remember the day we were born; pain and change come along with the miracle of new life. We are torn from warm, isolated comfort and ushered into a foreign community. We are pushed out of familiar darkness into blinding light. The cord tying us to everything we knew is cut, and we must begin to breathe and experience life on new terms. So it is with dying to our old life and stepping into new birth with Christ: our comforts, our relationships, and our ties will be tested, often with pain (Romans 8:16-18).

Born again is transformed. It's not a label or a box to check on a survey — I'm a "born-again Christian." New birth changes our desires, which will change our behavior. We aren't perfect, but we long to obey.

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When we do, we rejoice in God's goodness and strength for us, not our own willpower. When we don't, we don't bathe in self-pity or guilt or excuses, but confess and repent in sorrow (I John 2:29; I John 3:9). Above all, we are now motivated by love and mercy, since it is love and mercy that have given us new life (John 3:16, I John 4:7; I Peter 3:3).

Born again is revolutionary. "Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith" (1 John 5:4). This verse in First John rings with hope: we overcome the world not through our bravery or our behavior, but through our faith. It is our hope in Christ and His Kingdom that wins the day, not our ability to be a good Christian. Victory over this world is ours the moment we live out of our belief that there is another one and that Christ is the Lord of it.

Born again is just the beginning. Just as it is with a newborn, our new life with Christ is destined for phases and stages. We begin in spiritual infancy, where we must be taught and fed with God's promises. We grow

through childhood, where we may know great joy, spiritual resilience, and an unbridled love for God, His Word, and His people. In our adolescence, there may be rebellion — thinking we can survive on our own without Christ or His Church as we've known them — wondering if what we've been told is true. Sometimes pain steps onto our path, and we wonder if God is really who He says He is.

But there is maturity to be found if we do not lose heart — an *impossible, vital, radical, challenging, transformed, revolutionary*, beautiful life that shouts the power of "born again" with every breath.

It is a life that knows *we have this treasure* — our new heart and new Spirit — *in jars of clay* — our fragile, up-and-down lives — *to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us* (2 Corinthians 4:7-16).

Kelly Adkins
Communications Director

RELIGION VS. THE GOSPEL

He sat across the table, telling me about his time in the Church. “I enjoyed it when I was a kid, but I’m not sure I would ever go back,” he confessed. “There just seems to be too many rules, too many expectations, too many times I’ve messed up.” And yet there we were, discussing how he was considering re-engaging, or at least attending a few times. I began to ask questions, hoping to understand his recent change in posture toward the Church.

He told me of encountering a group of friends who attended church, but who seemed to be having a different experience than the one he remembered. It wasn’t that their *behavior* was vastly different than the people he grew up with, but their *attitudes* were. “Despite my mistakes and failures, these people continue to offer me hope instead of condemnation,” he explained.

As I listened to his story, it became clear he had been observing gospel transformation, and he was intrigued. In his past, he had encountered religious duty — a set of rules, a code of morality, a list of behaviors — and

when he failed to live up to the standard, he felt his only option was to leave the Church and the rules behind. However, he took with him a disappointing sense of failure, and he was coming to terms with the fact that leaving didn’t make these feelings disappear.

In John chapter three, we find Nicodemus in a similar predicament — internally questioning the result of his religion. Though Nicodemus took a path of obedience and my friend a path of rebellion, they both arrived at a similar place of doubt and uncertainty with an intrinsic desire to experience something more. And John offers the solution to them both in v. 17: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Christianity is not meant to condemn, but to transform. If you find yourself weary of your obedience or your rebellion, it may be time to ask whether you are experiencing gospel transformation or are merely attempting to adhere to a set of religious rules. Pastor Tim Keller helps us determine the difference between the two:

RELIGION VS. THE GOSPEL

RELIGION

“I obey — therefore I’m accepted”

Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

I obey God in order to get things from God.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe, like Job’s friends, that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a ‘good person.’ Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

My prayer consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of my environment.

THE GOSPEL

“I’m accepted — therefore I obey”

Motivation is based on grateful joy.

I obey God to get God — to delight and resemble him.

When circumstances in my life go wrong I struggle, but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a ‘good person.’ My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God’s love for me in Christ. I can take criticism. That’s how I became a Christian.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.

RELIGION VS. THE GOSPEL

RELIGION

My self-view swings between two poles, if and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident — I feel like a failure.

My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am — and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to ‘the Other.’

Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, I have to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I say I believe about God

Chart from Gospel v. Religion: A Comparison, by: Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian, Manhattan, NY

THE GOSPEL

My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am at the same time sinful and lost — yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad He had to die for me, and I am so loved He was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time.

My identity and self-worth is centered on the one who died for his enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am. I've no inner need to win arguments.

I have many good things in my life — family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have more than Jesus, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.

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Executive Pastor*



YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

In 2005, the graduates of Kenyon College gave a warm welcome to David Foster Wallace as he stepped up to the podium, prepared to deliver the annual commencement speech. Wallace, a prolific writer, cleared his throat and began:

“There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says ‘Morning, boys, how’s the water?’ And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, ‘What’s water?’”

Often, the most obvious, vital realities are the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about. Deep down — subconsciously — humanity knows that love drives the individual. What one loves is synonymous with what one worships, and what one worships defines identity, fundamental allegiances, core convictions, passions, self-understanding, and an individual’s way of life (Smith, 22). The problem lies in the fact that explaining

this reality is often like trying to explain water to a fish.

In the most famous verse in all of Scripture, John explains that God loved the world so much that he sent his Son, and anyone that believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). True, eternal life is the result of believing. However, the question begs to be asked: If life is the result of belief, what is the reality for those who “live” in unbelief?

A few verses later, John explains: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:18-20).

YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

Every human being — from the moment of conception — loves darkness (Psalm 51:5). But like water to a fish, it's difficult to perceive and talk about.

The great Reformer Martin Luther once said, “Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your god” (Luther). John clearly reveals the fact that those without Christ love darkness, and as a result, their works are evil. Whether one acknowledges it or not, without Christ everyone worships darkness, which can take many different forms.

The truth is we become what we worship because what we worship is what we love. The question is not *whether* one will worship, but *what* one will worship. It's impossible for a person to not worship, because it's impossible for a person to not love something as ultimate (Smith, 23).

In Scripture, these items of ultimate worship are called *idols*. Contrary to popular belief, idols are less

intellectual and more affectual — emotional. They are the things where our identity, significance, and worth are derived. The human heart was designed to find its fulfillment in God. So what happens when — inevitably — our idols disappoint? As Pastor Tim Keller, alluding to Augustine, puts it in his book *Prayer*, “If you love anything at all in this world more than God, you will crush the object under the weight of your expectations, and it will eventually break your heart” (Keller, 193).

Everyone, including Christians, are surrounded, daily, with rival modes of worship. For those in darkness, the idols simply perpetuate the problem. For those who have trusted Christ (the Light), the idols that tempt strive to usurp God by promising fulfillment that only He can bring.

To be human is to be a creature whose loves are shaped by worship. And worship isn't optional. Even an author like David Foster Wallace, who wasn't a Christian and had no theological agenda, recognized that to

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be human is to worship. In the same commencement speech at Kenyon College, he goes on to say,

“In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship — be it Jesus Christ or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess, or the Four Noble Truths, or some intangible set of ethical principles — is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things — if they are where you tap real meaning in life — then you will never have enough... Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you... Worship your intellect, being seen as smart — you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. The insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful (remember, Wallace is not

operating from a Christian worldview); it is that they are unconscious. They are default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing” (Wallace, 2).

To be a follower of Christ, one transitions from darkness to light by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the life-giving transformation only the gospel can bring to bear. This transformation should alter what and individual loves. The darkness should give way to the Light. Ultimate worship and adoration should be given to God alone, not idols like money, beauty, intellect, or self. Although God sees us through the lens of His Son's finished work on the cross, Christians are tempted to regress, tempted to go back to the darkness when we have all we need in the Light.

To be changed most profoundly, one must change what he or she worships. Thinking, arguments, and beliefs are crucial as means of moving the heart, but they do not

YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

satisfy. Ultimately we are what we adore. We are what captures our imagination, what leads us to worship and to compel others to worship. Inordinate anger, anxiety and discouragement result from disordered loves. Relational problems result from disordered loves.

What can re-engineer our very inner being, the structure of our personality? What can create healthy human community? Worship and adoration of the One True God, the creator of all (Keller, 195). We must love God supremely, and that can be cultivated only through giving Him every part of our heart.

*Pastor Bobby Raulerson
Grace Oviedo*

BIBLIA



THE BOOK OF JOHN: A READING GUIDE

As we continue a year of in-depth teaching in the gospel of John at Grace, here are some questions, answers, and strategies for this study.

WHY STUDY JOHN?

John's gospel is one of the great masterpieces of world literature. By any measure, it is one of the greatest books ever written. Its style is simple yet sophisticated. It is spiritually rich, philosophically profound, emotionally satisfying, and life-transforming.

It provides us with the most famous verse in the Bible (3:16), and its prologue (1:1-18) has been hailed by the religious and non-religious alike as one of the greatest lyrical compositions ever written. It was the most popular gospel of the early Church, in which it was symbolically represented with the image of an eagle, graphically depicting the spiritual heights to which the gospel soars.

WHO WROTE THIS MASTERPIECE?

For the first one thousand eight hundred years of the church's existence, the almost unanimous opinion was that John was written by John the son of Zebedee, one of the three members of Jesus' inner circle of disciples (Peter and John's brother James being the other two.) The reason for this was two-fold:

First, the internal evidence of the book points to it. John, like many of the books of the Bible, is formally anonymous, yet John's gospel provides more direct indications of its author than nearly any other book. In 21:24 the author says that it is the "beloved disciple" who is bearing witness about these things.

Who is the "beloved disciple?" He was one of the twelve, because he was with them during the last supper (13:23), and he had been with the disciples since the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (1:35-40), which is a mark of authentic apostleship. Also, he was an individual that was close to Jesus' inner circle and yet, the disciple John is not directly named in this book,

JOHN: A READING GUIDE

even though Peter, Phillip, Judas, Thomas, etc...are. If John is not the author, this would be a most curious omission. And the “beloved disciple” is often in the company of Peter in similar situations as the disciple John in the other gospels.

Second, the external evidence from Church history claims John as the author. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna who died in AD 155, was personally discipled by the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Polycarp personally discipled Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, who wrote in AD 180 that the “beloved disciple” was John, the son of Zebedee.

Therefore, the best explanation for all of the evidence is that the “beloved disciple” is John, the son of Zebedee.

DOES IT MATTER WHO WROTE IT?

Yes and no. “No,” in the sense that the ultimate authority for the book does not rest in your identification of the human author but in the Spirit-

induced encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ that the book is meant to facilitate.

But “yes” in the sense that the book’s potency and power are founded upon the reality of historically-accurate, theologically-authoritative, eye-witness testimony.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THE BOOK?

John does not leave us to guess or pontificate. He tells us directly why he wrote his gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (20:30-31)

This is the key to understanding and encountering Jesus through John’s gospel. As you read it remember that this is not a “life” of Jesus in the modern sense.

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This is not a “biography.” John’s gospel only covers 21 days of Jesus’ life! The point of the book is to confront you with Jesus in such a way that you believe in Him and find life in His name. The point is theological and transformational — theological in that it tells you who Jesus is; transformational in that as you encounter Him you are changed by Him. The book is filled with the extraordinary claims of Christ and great conversations with Him — all of which are meant to inform and transform you.

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

The first thing you have to do — if you are going to encounter the risen Christ in the Word by the Spirit through the Gospel of John — is read it. A lot. In chunks. From start to finish. Over and over. The gospel was not designed to be nibbled on, one or two verses at a time. It was meant to be consumed in large blocks. It was meant to be encountered as a whole.

So set this as a goal during our year-long study through John: try to read through this whole gospel in one sitting, at least 20 times this year. It will take you roughly 2 hours. If that is too daunting, stop at the natural breaks: read 1-12 and then 13-21.

For the first several times through, keep in mind John’s purpose. Let that shape your reading. John’s goal is to present you with evidence that Jesus is the Christ, so that you believe in Him and have life in His name. So let these three things shape your reading: evidence, belief, life.

Evidence: As you read remember that John is presenting you with honest testimonies from honest men and women—testimonies about what they saw, heard, and experienced. Faith is no leap in the dark, it is a leap into the light. Examine the evidence.

Belief/Faith: Let John’s most famous verse be a lens through which you read the entire Gospel: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have*

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everlasting life. As you read, ask yourself “What must I believe about Jesus?” John is presenting you with very clear, compelling, and controversial things that you have to believe about Jesus. Make a note of them as you read. For example, read chapter 1:19-51 and mark all of the different names or titles that people call Jesus: Son of man, Lamb of God, etc...You should have about twelve of them. And then trace how John develops each name throughout the book.

Also, make a note of how each section and conversation brings out a different aspect of who Jesus is. You will notice that belief in Jesus is not some vague, indiscriminate, undefinable thing, but you are called to believe that He is the Giver of Living Water (4). He is the Life-Giver and Judge of all the earth (5). He is the Bread of Life (6), and the Water of Life (7). He is the Light of the World (8) the Good Shepherd (10) and the Resurrection and the Life (11). Another good reading exercise is to read the whole book and mark every time you see the word “believe” (or a cognate, i.e., belief, believed, etc...). Count them all. You should have over

100. Finally, go back and ask yourself “Exactly what am I being asked to believe?”

Life: Ask yourself how believing in these things brings life. The goal is transformation. John’s offer is that, through the Spirit, you can experience eternal life in the here and now.

So, as you read, always ask yourself at least two main questions that will lead you to the very heart of the gospel: 1) Who is Jesus? [Or what does this text tell me about Jesus? His person? His work?] 2) How does believing this about Him bring life?

As you continue to read you will want to begin to try and understand the internal logic and order of the book. You will notice that John has organized his gospel in a simple way:

1:1-19: This is the prologue, where all of the essential themes are introduced.

JOHN: A READING GUIDE

1:19-12:50: This section has classically been described as the book of “signs.” Here John gives you Jesus’ public ministry.

13-20:31: This section has been called the book of the “passion” or the book of “glory.” Here the focus is on the last week of Jesus’ life. His private ministry to his disciples in the upper room (13-17) and then his public execution and resurrection.

21: This is the epilogue.

The more you read through these sections, the more you will notice connections and curiosities. For example:

You will notice that John structures the beginning of Jesus’ ministry around “the next day.” It would seem as if there are 7 days, beginning with the light dawning through John the Baptist’s testimony and climaxing in the wedding feast at Cana. Is this foreshadowing the new creation?

And the final week of Jesus’ life is structured around 7 days, climaxing in the empty tomb. Is this the accomplishing of the new creation?

You will notice that much of the action in the first half of the book revolves around central festivals in Israel: Passover, Sabbath, Tabernacles, and Hanukkah. It is almost as if John is saying: Jesus is the Lamb of God, transforming the Passover; He is our rest, transforming the Sabbath; He is the new Moses accomplishing the new exodus by providing true manna in the desert and living water; He is the embodiment of the Tabernacle feast as the light of the world.

You will be drawn into a much bigger story, as Jesus is presented as the culmination and the fulfillment of the long history of Israel. Try to trace the connections.

And as you keep reading ask the Lord to help you enter into the beauty and the glory of Christ.

JOHN: A READING GUIDE

John's gospel is designed to offer you the same invitation that Jesus offered to Phillip when Phillip was curious to know more about Christ: Come and See.

(1:39)

You are invited to come and see. Come and see the King who is also the Creator, Ruler, and Lord of heaven and earth. Come and see the Word made flesh. Come and see the Bringer of Light and the Destroyer of Death. Come and see the glory, the wonder, and the beauty of the One who is worthy of worship and obedience. Come and see the Light of the World who dispels the darkness that is both in the world and in our hearts. Come and see the One who was willing to leave heaven and His Father's side to bring us to eternal life.

Come and see.

*Pastor Dr. Ben Bailie
Grace Lake Nona*

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A man is shown from the chest up, wearing a light blue, long-sleeved button-down shirt with a fine, woven texture. The shirt is buttoned up and has a chest pocket on the left side. He is also wearing a dark-colored backpack, with the straps visible over his shoulders. The background is bright and out of focus, showing a clear sky and some greenery, suggesting an outdoor setting. The lighting is natural, highlighting the texture of the shirt.

WEEKLY MESSAGE
NOTES AND
QUESTIONS

WEEK 1: FEBRUARY 12
JOHN 1:19-28

Message Notes:

WEEK 1: JOHN 1:19-28
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

What can we learn about Christ through this passage, and how does that call us to worship and love him more?

As John is answering the questions of the priest and Levites, he seems to be very clear about who he is and what his role is on earth. How would you answer the question - "who are you?"

What obstacles can we remove in our lives, or the lives of friends, to make straight the way of the Lord?

John is humbling fulfilling God's calling in his life. Instead of pointing to himself, he always points toward Christ. How does humility bring God more glory? How can we grow in our humility?

Do you think more people would believe in Jesus if a man like John the Baptist were to visit Orlando tomorrow? Why or why not?

WEEK 2: FEBRUARY 19

JOHN 1:29-34

Message Notes:

WEEK 2: JOHN 1:29-34
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

What can we learn about Jesus from this passage, and how can that help us point others to Him?

What does it mean for Jesus to be called the Lamb of God?

As John see Jesus approaching, he immediately identifies the person and purpose of Jesus in the world. He calls everyone around him to see what he's seen. Without Jesus being physically present next to us, how can we do the same for our friends and family?

Do you think that it was easier or harder for the people of the first century to see themselves as sinners in need of a savior?

John's job according to 1:7 is to enable all men to believe. How has his ministry impacted your life? Is there a connection between you and John the Baptist?

WEEK 3: FEBRUARY 26
JOHN 1:35-42

Message Notes:

WEEK 3: JOHN 1:35-42
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

Why do you think John includes the accounts of the first disciples following Jesus? What are we supposed to learn from it?

Do you think that the disciples knew what they were getting into when they followed Jesus? Did you?

Peter is brought to Christ through his brother, Andrew's, testimony; later Peter brings thousands to know and love Jesus, but Andrew never preached to large crowds. In what ways has God used your life to impact others around you?

At face value, it may seem strange that Jesus abruptly changes Simon Peter's name. What does this highlight about Jesus' character, and how can that cause us to love Him more?

WEEK 4: MARCH 5
JOHN 1:43-51

Message Notes:

WEEK 4: JOHN 1:43-51
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

Make a list of the 8-10 people you come in contact with regularly who don't know Jesus as their savior. Make it a priority to pray for them every day through the rest of this series.

It's often difficult to turn ordinary conversation into spiritual ones. What are some effective ways to do that?

What can we learn about evangelism through this passage? Is there a rule of thumb to follow on how aggressive we should be in sharing our faith?

What is the biggest obstacle you face when it comes to sharing your faith with others? What steps can you take to overcome these obstacles? How can your Grace Community help?

WEEK 5: MARCH 12
JOHN 2:1-11

Message Notes:

WEEK 5: JOHN 2:1-11
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

Have you ever asked Jesus to perform a miracle in your life? How did your request compare and contrast Mary's request to Jesus?

After the miracle, it says that the disciples believed in Him. Does this mean they didn't believe before? How does this action produce faith?

List out some of the significant images we see in Jesus' first public miracle. Is there any foreshadowing?

How does the first sign of Jesus' ministry impact the study we've done through chapter one of the gospel?

The Christian faith is not one of intellect and study alone; it's one of action. What do you feel God is calling you to do through this lesson?

WEEK 6: MARCH 19
JOHN 2:12-22

Message Notes:

WEEK 6: JOHN 2:12-22
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

Why do you think John records this story?

Does this image of Jesus swinging a whip contradict your image of Jesus? Why is it important to base our view of Jesus in all of scripture and not just our favorite parts?

How does this story relate to the miracle at the wedding?

In what ways does this image of a zealous Jesus cause you to believe and trust in Jesus more?

Your friend, an unbeliever hears this story for the first time. How do you explain Jesus' reaction in the temple in a way he/she can understand?

WEEK 7: MARCH 26
JOHN 2:23-25

Message Notes:

WEEK 7: JOHN 2:23-25
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

It seems that Jesus is responding to a superficial faith in this section. How can we define a faith that is superficial?

In week 5, we discussed whether or not you've asked Jesus for a miracle. When you asked Him for one, was it so that you could believe? What does this passage teach us about such a request?

In order for saving faith to occur, we need to both see Christ as the Lord and Savior truly is, and us as the sinners we truly are. Which view do you think is harder to see clearly? Why?

Jesus Christ knows the hearts of men. Does this make you feel uncomfortable in any way? How can you change your feeling on this?

Where are you in your walk with God? Is yours one of superficial faith? How can you grow beyond that?

WEEK 8: APRIL 2
JOHN 3:1-8

Message Notes:

WEEK 8: JOHN 3:1-8
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

Is there a difference between “making a decision to follow Christ” and being “born again?” If so, what is it?

Imagine you have a friend who was raised in the church but doesn't believe they've been born again. How would you respond to that person?

Imagine you're talking to a friend who's never been part of the church. How would you explain being born again to that friend?

Look back at the list you made in week 4. 8-10 people you interact with regularly that don't know Jesus. Who are you going to invite to hear the gospel on Easter in two weeks? Pray for them together in your Grace Community.

WEEK 9: APRIL 9
JOHN 3:9-15

Message Notes:

WEEK 9: JOHN 3:9-15
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND
DISCUSSION

Nicodemus is a very trusted scholar and teacher in Israel. His whole life has been devoted to study, but he doesn't understand what Jesus is saying. In what way does this give you comfort and in what way do you find this unsettling?

How can a person know if he/she has been born again?

Can a person have a saving faith if there is no conviction of sin? Can the conviction come after knowing Jesus?

If God gives us a new nature when we're born again, why do we sin? Why is sin such an ongoing battle for Christians?

How has this passage challenged you in your faith?

ABOUT GRACE

Grace is one large church in many smaller communities, with a mission to help people take their next step toward Christ.

Our local, neighborhood campuses worship in Orlando, Oviedo, Winter Garden, Clermont, Lake Nona, and at Edgewood Children's Ranch. Each of our campuses shares a central vision and organizational structure under the leadership of Senior Pastor Mike Adkins, but each campus also has its own pastor-teacher and leadership team. We believe this is the best way we can keep church feeling like family and also reach the vastly diverse neighborhoods of Central Florida.

Our teaching pastors and our worship pastors work together week by week, bringing many voices into unity to plan our ministry and our worship services. They take common scriptures and ideas for each weekend and bring them to life around songs, challenges and themes that reach our unique communities.

Our teaching and worship pastors also trade campuses every so often, too, allowing our people to hear from a plurality of elders and keeping Grace from being built up around one central person.

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

Expository, gospel-centered teaching, both in Sunday worship and in regular classes and workshops.

Modern worship woven with liturgy and creedal confession, focusing on the work of Christ and not ourselves.

Corporate communion, personal confession and prayer every week.

Spiritual friendship and connection through sacrificial service and Grace Communities.

Gospel-focused family ministry that centers around what God has done for your kids through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Celebration of ancient seasons like Advent and Lent to prepare for holy days.

CAMPUS LOCATIONS

GRACE ORLANDO

Meets at Edgewater High School
3100 Edgewater Drive, Orlando
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a
Senior Pastor Mike Adkins

GRACE OVIEDO

Meets at Indian Trails Middle School
415 Tuskawilla Road, Winter Springs
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a
Pastor Bobby Raulerson

GRACE WINTER GARDEN

Meets at Whispering Oak Elementary
15300 Stoneybrook W Winter Garden
Services Sundays at 10a
Pastor Brian Allen

GRACE CLERMONT

Meets at Grassy Lake Elementary School
1100 Fosgate Drive, Minneola
Service Sundays at 10a
Pastor Caleb Brasher

GRACE LAKE NONA

Meets at Eagle Creek Elementary
10025 Eagle Creek Sanctuary Blvd, Orlando
Service Sundays at 5p
Pastor Dr. Ben Bailie

GRACE EDGEWOOD

Serves Edgewood Children's Ranch
1451 Edgewood Ranch Road, Orlando
Service Sundays at 3p



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