



# *The* GOSPEL of JOHN

LEADER'S EDITION



*The*  
G O S P E L  
*of*  
J O H N

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L E A D E R ' S   E D I T I O N

The Gospel of John: Leader's Edition

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INTRODUCTION

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WHY  
THIS  
STUDY?

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## INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY?

**TO BEGIN**, we would like to thank you, the students, congregants, church leaders, elders, pastors, and churches for supporting and using The Gospel of John. We hope it enriches your Christian life, challenges your heart, and builds up your faith to the glory of God.

This study was designed with several things in mind.

First, we designed this study to advance the gospel.

According to the Pew Research Center, theists, agnostics, Jews, and Mormons score higher in religious knowledge than Protestants, outperforming them on questions about the core teachings and history of Christianity. Almost 60 percent of our youth leave their churches as young adults, with many of them joining the growing numbers of the so-called nones: those who profess no adherence to any faith whatsoever.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this unsettling news, the core message of Christianity, the gospel, is still capable of renewing the church. Rather than worrying or acting out of fear and self-preservation, we believe that the best hope for Christians, the Church, and the people who feel the pressures to abandon the faith, is the historic Christian faith, the gospel announcement of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the world.

Second, we designed this study to speak to honest questions.

Many in our Evangelical, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches have honest questions about faith and life that they may even be afraid to ask. Thus, we have sought to shape the material in this study to be of use to the concerns of long-time, committed Christians, new Christians, Christians with wavering faith, and skeptics alike.

We want this study to challenge skeptics and the growing numbers of people leaving the church, providing them with answers of substance and beauty, answers that give hope to the hopeless. We want this study to build the faith of Christians who have doubts. We want this study to give new Christians a firm grasp of the Christian faith. And we want to renew the faith of long-time committed Christians and equip them to better share the faith with others.

Third, we designed this study to engage the drama of Scripture, teach the doctrine of historic Christianity, move to doxology, and enable healthy discipleship.

It was really important to us that we handled doctrine in a way that shows how it naturally arises out of the Bible's narrative of Jesus Christ and his saving work.

Fourth, we designed this study with an eye toward simplicity and a variety of settings.

We have thought of Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, informal gatherings among friends, and even individuals who want to learn more about the Christian faith. Thus, this study is arranged in a series of short sections, each of which could be done within an hour, with questions for personal reflection. The Leader's Edition of this study has group discussion questions so that Christians can come together to share insights, ask questions, pray for their churches and cities, and find hope to share what they are learning with friends and family.

In each lesson, there is a section to read followed by a set of questions for reflection. Questions for reflection are personal and not something you should feel obligated to share if meeting with a group. The Leader's Edition of this study includes questions for discussion at the end of every lesson. Questions for discussion are best discussed in a group where everyone can share their thoughts and questions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>

## INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY?

The best way to do this study is to work through one lesson a week. You can either read through all the sections and answer the reflection questions in one day or split up the sections and read one a day and answer the reflection questions until you finish the lesson. If meeting with a group, plan to meet once a week having read the lesson and answered the questions on your own first.

We have designed the questions for reflection and discussion with a practical emphasis to force you to engage the material in a prayerful way that should inspire worship and lead to a fuller understanding of how to live as a disciple of Christ. After each question, space has been provided for you to answer, but some people prefer to write their answers in a journal or notebook, and that is fine too!

### NOTE TO LEADERS

First, an easy way to do this study is for everyone to have a copy of the material printed out. Each week, they should read the study in advance and answer the questions so they are prepared to meet and share their thoughts with the group. During the study, you, the leader, should go through the study as it is in your edition. Your leader's edition has additional sections (highlighted with gray boxes) to help you easily find the material that is available only to you as the leader. Make sure to prepare in advance so that you are ready to lead the discussion.

Second, many of the questions in this study are aimed at being practical. The goal is that people would begin to connect what they are learning with experiences and ideas they already know. It's important to help them to think and talk about their experiences and facilitate discussion so that the content of each study meets with their experiences.

Third, don't feel that you have to follow the lesson exactly as it is written. The written materials are designed to aid you, not lock you into a certain mode. For some, it is easiest to go through the study and read each section. For others, spontaneity and reordering may work better. Feel free to change things to fit your context and level of experience in teaching.

Fourth, the opening section of this study is designed to provide a helpful context for study. It's good to begin with prayer and open with questions to get people talking. As a study leader, it may be hard for you to make people comfortable enough to engage in discussion and share their thoughts or experiences. Don't worry about it. It takes practice. As you continue to invite people into discussion, people will begin to share more. Be patient.

Fifth, sometimes people will not have done any of the study questions or reading before showing up. Don't worry about it. If they have a good experience during the study, then they are more likely to read and do the study questions in advance next time.

Sixth, invite people to participate. Call on people to read a passage of Scripture or a section of the study. Invite someone to close in prayer at the end of the study. Welcome people's thoughts and reflection. Invite questions. The more people participate in the study, the more they will enjoy their time and the more they will learn. Seventh, be realistic about time commitments. A good study should last between thirty minutes and one hour, with some time before and after to socialize. Adjust the study to fit your time restraints.

HE WHO SAW IT HAS BORNE WITNESS—  
HIS TESTIMONY IS TRUE, AND HE KNOWS  
THAT HE IS TELLING THE TRUTH—  
THAT YOU ALSO MAY BELIEVE.

—

JOHN 19:35

HISTORY,  
*Not*  
MYTHOLOGY

## PRAY (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

**HEAVENLY FATHER**, your Word is sweeter than honey and sharper than a double-edged sword (Psalm 119:103; Hebrews 4:12). Thank you for the gift of four different Gospel writers, with four different perspectives on the same Truth—that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that we may have eternal life in His name (John 20:31). Open the eyes of our hearts as we study the Gospel of John. Give us ears to hear your voice and hearts to respond to your leading, that we may learn more, grow deeper, and love bigger. In Jesus's name, Amen.

## READ FROM THE BIBLE: JOHN 20:30-31 AND 21:20-24

### JOHN 20:30-31

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.

### JOHN 21:20-24

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

## OPENING REFLECTION QUESTIONS (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

1. Explain the gospel message in your own words.
2. Explain the purpose of the Bible in your own words.
3. Describe who Jesus is in your own words.

# READ

## WHAT MAKES JOHN UNIQUE

The book of John is one of the most unique and beautiful books of the New Testament. John is very different from the other three Gospels in his storytelling, his style, and even his perspective. So much so that scholars call the other three the “Synoptic Gospels” coming from a Greek word that means “able to be seen together.” They have many of the same stories in the same order, sometimes even using the same wording, while John’s Gospel is in a world all its own. Over 90% of John’s Gospel is original material not found in the other three.

In John, there is no Messianic secret, no driving out of demons, no parables. Many of the stories that are in all of the other three are missing from John. Rather than short pithy statements, the teaching comes in long discourses. John shares seven miracles of Jesus and seven “I Am” statements about Jesus. John uses lots of poetic language, metaphor, and symbolism to emphasize his theological points, weaving theology and history together.

Perhaps most distinctly, rather than placing the emphasis on the kingdom of God, John puts his emphasis on the person of Jesus. Beginning with a theological discussion of the Incarnation, John testifies that though Jesus was 100% divine, He was also a real person, in the flesh, who actually lived in human history. He came not only as the Messiah of the Jews, but the Savior of the world. In the Synoptics, salvation is primarily described as entrance into the kingdom, but in John it is described as knowing God and eternal life with Him through Jesus.

When John was writing this book, about 60 years after Christ’s death and resurrection, false prophets were denying the Incarnation and the saving significance of Christ’s death and resurrection. People were already starting to say it never happened. So the Gospel of John was written as a persuasive essay, to encourage believers that what they trusted in was true. John was not just writing a story; he was making a case, like a skilled lawyer in a courtroom. And we are the jury. We decide. Did John present enough evidence? Do we believe his story?

## WHY JOHN WROTE HIS GOSPEL

In our introduction to John, we are actually starting at the end of the book. Because the end is where John explicitly stated why he has written this book and what he wants us to do with it. It’s the closing argument of his court case, the conclusion of his persuasive paper. When you write an academic persuasive paper, the basic structure is:

- an introduction, where you state your hypothesis
- the body, where you prove your hypothesis
- the conclusion, where you restate your hypothesis, now that you have proven it

The three passages we will read today are that conclusion. John is declaring that he has proven his hypothesis. It’s not just a statement of conclusion, then; it is a statement of confidence. He knows this to be true. He just spent a whole book proving it.

## READ JOHN 19:35 AND 21:24

John assures us twice, at the ends of chapters 19 and 21, that he is an eyewitness to these events and that his testimony is true. He has shown us this throughout the book in the way it was written, sharing details and perspectives only an eyewitness could have known. But now he states it definitively. “I am an eyewitness to these things and my testimony is true.” The stories about Jesus aren’t fables or fairy tales. They are really true. They actually happened. They are history, not mythology.

Why does that matter? Why can’t we just read the stories and glean the moral teaching out of it and let that be that? Why must the stories be true? Why can’t we just say, “I think Jesus was a great moral teacher, but I don’t know about this rising from the dead thing”?

Because if the resurrection didn't actually happen, then our faith is meaningless. In the book and subsequent film *The Case for Christ*, journalist Lee Strobel set out to disprove his wife's new faith in Christianity with what he saw as his greatest weapon—facts. One of his coworkers at the newspaper, a Christian with whom Lee had a contentious relationship, suggested if he really wanted to debunk Christianity, he should “go for the jugular” and focus on the question of Jesus's resurrection. He said, “The entire Christian faith hinges on the resurrection of Jesus. If it didn't happen, it's a house of cards.”

Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ was not raised, we have no hope in eternal life and “we are of all people most to be pitied” (v. 19). But also, we have no hope in this life. “Your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (v. 17). The resurrection changes everything. If it didn't happen, our faith is nothing. If it did, our faith is everything. If Christ has not been raised, then nothing we do matters. This life doesn't matter. “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’” (v. 32). But if He was raised, He defeated death for us. Which means both that we have hope in a future eternal life and that we have a purpose in this present life.

It is absolutely crucial to John that his readers know that the resurrection is fact. That it really happened. So, he makes these two very clear concluding statements. “This is true. I know it is true.” I saw it with my own eyes. Then, sandwiched in the chapter in between these two statements, John shares his reason for writing it all down. We don't have to guess at his motivation, or what he wants us to know. Like a solid persuasive paper or closing argument to a court case, he tells us plainly.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you have any friends who struggle with believing the stories in the Bible, particularly the miracles, the supernatural? If they asked you why you believed them, what would you say?

### READ JOHN 20:30-31

So that we may believe and have eternal life. That's it. That's his whole purpose. Which is really the whole purpose of the Church too. Everything we do, everything we say, everything we donate money toward, everything we study, our whole mission. It is all so that the world may believe and have eternal life. That's it. This is the gospel, the good news of our faith. It's so simple, and yet so pivotal. Much like the book of John itself.

Theologian Leon Morris wrote that many theologians have said that John's Gospel is like a pool in which a child may wade or an elephant can swim.<sup>2</sup> It is both simple and profound. On one level, a child can understand such simple concepts as the Light of the World or the Living Water. Yet even the most mature disciple can dig deep and mine riches from John's words. If you are a seeker or a new Christian, John is a great place to start to get to know Jesus. If you've been a Christian for decades, there are deep pools for you to dive into. So, as we read the book of John, as we study these ten theological truths that can be found here, dig deep. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your reading of His Word.

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What appeals to you about Jesus? Why were you drawn to Him?
2. What questions do you still have about Him? About the Christian faith or life?
3. What expectations or hopes do you have for this study? Why did you decide to join this study?

### THE GOSPEL IN JOHN

These verses are the culmination, the conclusion, the “this is what the story has all been about.” But this same gospel message was actually written over and over again throughout the whole story—the body of the persuasive paper. Most of us, when we think about the Gospel of John, just think of that classic verse, John 3:16. But John proves his hypothesis over and over in every chapter of the book.

- “The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:14
- “Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life” John 5:24
- “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.” John 6:40

And on and on and on. Eternal life, eternal life, eternal life. These are just three examples, but John proclaims the gospel at least forty times in his book, in slightly different ways (see Appendix A for a list of forty proclamations of the Gospel of John). When we look at these verses all together, it is next to impossible not to see that this is what this book is all about. Really, what all of the Gospels are about.

These four books aren’t just called “The Stories of Jesus’s Life.” They’re called the Gospels because through every story, through every teaching, through every miracle, they proclaim the gospel message. You cannot read the book of John without seeing it, crystal clear. This is why this book was written. This is what John wants us to believe.

Too many people read the Gospels, and really the whole Bible, primarily as a how-to book of morality. They focus on Jesus as a teacher and example of how to live. How to pray like Jesus, love like Jesus, forgive like Jesus, obey like Jesus. But John shows us that the purpose of the Bible is to point to Jesus as our Savior, not just our example. John doesn’t portray Jesus as a moral teacher, but as the Resurrection and the Life.

We don’t need a list of rules to follow. We need new hearts. We don’t need behavior modification. We need to be made new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). All the behavior modification in the world will never change our hearts. But God can change us from the inside out. We can follow Jesus’s moral teachings only after we have been made new. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. Without Christ, we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Dead people can’t follow moral laws. They need to be made alive.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

This is the message of the book of John. If we believe in Jesus, we will have eternal life. Without Jesus, we are dead in our sins. With Jesus, we have life. Do we really believe that? Do we live like we really believe it? Do we tell others about it like we really believe it? As we study the book of John, let's read it with the gospel in mind. That we might ourselves be more confident in our belief, that we might live in a way that reflects it, and that we might persuade others to believe as well. It is truly a matter of life and death. Eternally.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

1. Why is it hard for people to believe the stories of the Gospels?
2. If someone asked you why the Gospels are credible, what would you say?
3. How can we share our testimonies with others in a way that doesn't push people away, but draws them in? How can we, like John, focus on the person of Jesus when we share our faith?
4. If you had to make "a case for Christ" in a courtroom, what would you say?
5. If we really believed the gospel, how would it change the way we lived on a practical level? How would it change our behaviors and attitudes? How would it change the way we treat other people?

### END IN PRAYER (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

Pray for the needs of the group, for the good of the church, for the salvation of people, and any other needs that may arise.



APPENDIX A

## FORTY PROCLAMATIONS OF THE GOSPEL IN JOHN

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“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! . . . The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. . . . I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.” 1:29-34

Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.” 1:49

“No one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.” 3:3

“The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.” 3:15

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” 3:16

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” 3:36

“Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” 4:14

“I, the one speaking to you—I am [the Messiah].” 4:25

“We know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” 4:42

“Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” 5:24

“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.” 5:39-40

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him, God the Father has placed His seal of approval.” 6:27

“The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.” 6:29

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” 6:35

“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” 6:40

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” 6:51

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” 6:54

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” 6:68-69

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” 7:37

## LESSON I: HISTORY, NOT MYTHOLOGY

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." *8:12*

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." *8:31-32*

"Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." *8:51*

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" *8:58*

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." *9:5*

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. *9:35-38*

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved." *10:9*

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." *10:9-10*

"I lay down my life for the sheep." *10:15*

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." *10:27-28*

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" *11:25-26*

"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. *12:32-33*

"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." *12:46*

"I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world." *12:47*

"[The Father's] command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." *12:50*

"Whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." *13:20*

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." *14:3*

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." *14:6*

"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe." *14:28-29*

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." *17:3*

Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." *20:29*