

Session 03

The Living **WORD**

CENTRAL TRUTH | Jesus is God in the flesh, the Living Word.

It's hard to find someone that isn't drawn in by good storytelling. After all, that's why so many of us are entertained by shows, movies, books, and video games—we appreciate a good story! John, the author of this Gospel account is a remarkable storyteller. Rather than starting his account with the birth of Jesus, he starts from the beginning—like, the very beginning when God created all things. Masterfully linking to the creation account in Genesis, John communicates that Jesus is God, and all things have been created through Him. In this week's session, allow yourself to be engulfed in the beautiful truth that Jesus, the Living Word, put on flesh and walked among us.



EXPLORE OPTIONS

> WORD CONNECTION

Before your small group meets, choose ten words that students can easily make other word-connections with. (Examples: animals, cities, board games, sports teams, and so on.) Bring four sheets of paper and a couple of pens with you. After students arrive, assemble them into two teams and provide them with two sheets of paper and one pen per team. Ask the teams to nominate the player with the best handwriting to write for them. Each round will begin with you sharing one of the two words that you chose, and each team will do their best to create a list of words that clearly connect to the word you called aloud. So, if the word was “animal,” students will create a list of animals as quickly as they can. Setting a timer, give students fifteen seconds to complete this task each round. The team at the end of all the rounds with the most word-connections is the winning team. The game demonstrates in a fun way that words and connections are important. Similarly, in this week’s teaching we will see how John connects the beginning of his Gospel account to Genesis. Together, we will see that Jesus is God in the flesh, the living God.

> CONVERSATION STARTER

When you think of a good storyteller, who comes to mind? What makes him or her a good storyteller?

JOHN 1:1-5

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from

him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

JOHN 1:6-10

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. ⁹ The true light

that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him.

JOHN 1:11-14

¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the

will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Scripture COMMENTARY

JOHN 1:1-5

1:1. In the beginning was the Word echoes Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John located Jesus’s existence in eternity past with God. The Word was God: Not only did Jesus exist before creation, He is also the same God who created the heavens and the earth. “The Word” (Greek: *logos*) conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech (see Ps. 19:1-4). God’s Word is effective. He speaks, and things come into being (see Gen. 1:3, 9; Isa. 55:11-12).

1:2-3. Everything that exists owes its existence to Jesus.

1:4-5. The references to **life . . . light**, and **darkness** continue to draw on Genesis themes (compare with Gen. 1:3-5, 14-18, 20-31; 2:7; 3:20). Light symbolism is also found in later Old Testament messianic passages (see Isa. 9:2; 42:6-7; 49:6; 60:1-5; Mal. 4:2; compare with Luke 1:78-79).

JOHN 1:6-10

1:6. Unlike Jesus, John the Baptist was merely a man, but like Jesus he had a particular mission to perform.

1:9. As the rest of John’s Gospel makes clear, all did not in fact receive **the light**, though the light was available to all.

1:10-11. His own people did not receive him refers to the Jewish people, the recipients

of God’s covenants, the law, and promises of a Messiah (see Rom. 9:4). Messiah’s rejection by the Jews despite convincing proofs of His messiahship (esp. the “signs”) is a major subject in the first half of John’s Gospel (compare with 12:37).

JOHN 1:11-14

1:12-13. Reference to children of God builds on the Old Testament characterization of Israel as God’s children (see Deut. 14:1; compare with Ex. 4:22). Born, not of natural descent . . . but of God makes clear that true

children of God come into being through faith in Messiah, not physical birth or ethnic descent (see 8:41-47; compare with 3:16). This opens the way for Gentiles to become God’s children (see 11:51-52; compare with 10:16).

1:14. The Word continues the theme of 1:1. **Became flesh** does not mean the Word stopped being God; rather, the Word was made flesh. **Dwelt among us** literally means “pitched his tent,” an allusion to God’s dwelling among the Israelites in the tabernacle (see Ex. 25:8-9; 33:7). In the past God demonstrated His presence to His people in the tabernacle and the temple. Now God has taken up residence among His people in the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ (see John 1:17). The references to God’s glory hark back to Old Testament passages that describe the manifestation of God’s presence and glory in theophanies (appearances of God), the tabernacle, or the temple (see Ex. 33:22; Num. 14:10; Deut. 5:22). The Greek word *monogenēs* underlying one and only Son from the Father means “only child” (see Judg. 11:34;

Jer. 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech. 12:10). “Only” may mean “one of a kind,” as in the case of Isaac, who is called Abraham’s “one of a kind” son in Genesis 22:2,12,16 (in contrast to Ishmael, compare with Heb. 11:17). In the Old Testament, Israel and the Son of David are called God’s “firstborn” son (see Ps. 89:27). The reference to God’s “giving” of His “one and only Son” in John 3:16,18 may allude to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac (see Gen. 22).

Full of grace and truth recalls “faithful love (Hebrew: *chesed*) and truth (Hebrew: *emet*)” in Exodus 34:6 (compare with Exodus 33:18-19), where the expression refers to God’s covenant faithfulness to his people Israel. According to John, God’s covenant faithfulness found ultimate expression in His sending of his “one and only Son,” Jesus.

Conversation QUESTIONS



Refer to page # for a description of the 7 Arrows of Bible Reading.

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EXPLORE JOHN 1:1-5

“In the beginning” should be a familiar phrase to us. Unlike Matthew and Luke’s Gospel accounts, which begin by documenting the birth of Jesus, John opens his Gospel account by echoing the creation story (see Gen. 1:1). In many ways, the Gospel according to John serves as the new Genesis—marking that something new has happened.¹ This newness came through “the Word.” Now, this is an interesting title given to Jesus. As you’ve likely experienced, words matter—both for the good and the bad. In Scripture, we see that God’s words matter infinitely more. “God reveals His power and will through His word.”² Through John’s teaching we see that Jesus, the Word, was not only “with God” but “was God” (v. 1). As a reminder, God is triune, meaning that there is one God who exists in three equal persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And as God, Jesus was present before creation and the One through whom all things have been created.

01. ↑ Re-read John 1:1. Why does John refer to Jesus as the Word?

📍 EXPLORATION TIP

As we’ve mentioned in this session, there are many similarities between the beginning of John’s Gospel account and the creation story found in Genesis. Invite students to use a highlighter or pen and return to Genesis 1, noting any words or themes present in both books.

¹ Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2012), 19.

² Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, *Exalting Jesus in John* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), Logos Bible Software, 10.

In verse 4, John continues to thread themes found in Genesis into his own gospel account—life, light, and darkness. We're told that life is found in Jesus, and that life provided light to a world covered in darkness. However, the darkness did not overcome (or accept/understand³) Jesus's light. In our sin-corrupted world, we were empty, lifeless, and trapped in the dark without God's light; but Jesus is the true Light who has brought life and light to those who trust in Him. Yet, as we'll see in John's Gospel account, there will be many people who reject Him.

02.



What is the significance of John beginning his Gospel account in this way (hint: see Exploration Tip)?

Leader **PACK**

Item # | Leader Pack Item

📍 HISTORY | WHAT WAS JOHN'S PURPOSE IN WRITING THIS GOSPEL ACCOUNT?

Written sometime between AD 70 and AD 100, John's gospel teaches about the person and work of Jesus, with an emphasis on His deity and preexistence.⁴ John 20:30-31 can help us understand the purpose for John's writing as well. The passage suggests that there is an evangelistic component to John's writing, meaning that he is calling his readers to know and believe the good news of Jesus. His desire is for people not to merely absorb information but respond to what God has done through faith and repentance. John probably wrote this Gospel account to convince unbelievers—through his Christian readers—of Jesus's true identity as the Son of God and call them to turn from their rebellion and trust in Christ.⁵ As modern-day readers, we can embrace the same task at hand! Followers of Jesus are called to share the gospel and reflect His goodness to those around us in an effort to see them trust in Him and receive eternal life.

EXPLORE JOHN 1:6-10.

03.



What was John the Baptist sent to do? Why do you think this was significant?

In verse 6, the author introduces us to another John—referred to as John the Baptist (since baptizing others was a key feature of his ministry; see John 1:31-33). He was a prophet sent by God to share the

³ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), Logos Bible Software, 109.

^{4,5} Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax, eds. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), Logos Bible Software version, 1662.

good news of Jesus. In other words, his mission was to point people to the true Light who had entered the darkness of our world. John specifically notes that John the Baptist was not the true Light but was called to share the truth about the Light. John's own ministry revealed that he was humbly aware of this reality too (see John 1:27). Verse 10 tells us that though the Creator entered His creation, the world did not recognize Him (or know Him in a relational way⁶). Jesus came into the world to redeem the world and bring us into a relationship with God and His family. The devastating reality of sin is that it blinds people from embracing the truth of Jesus and seeing Him for who He truly is.

04.



Why did the world not recognize Jesus, the true Light?

05.



What can we learn about humility from John's example? How can we model humility among others?

Those who have turned from their rebellion and trusted in Jesus have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son, the true Light (see Col. 1:13). By God's grace, we have become people of the Light and have received new life! And like John the Baptist, we've been called to share this life-transforming news of Jesus in a world blanketed by darkness. Through Christ, the light of God invaded our world. Therefore, just as John notes, we too must be reminded that we are *not* the true Light, but merely reflecting the light of Jesus into a dark world. Jesus is the hero; not us!

Leader**PACK**

Item # | *Leader Pack Item*

📍 BE VULNERABLE

John the Baptist was sent to share the light and hope of Jesus in a dark and hopeless world. As you reflect on your own story, who was bold enough to share the good news of Jesus with you? Ask students to think about someone in their life who does not know Jesus. You may even want to pause the discussion time to pray for these people.

⁶Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, 114.

EXPLORE JOHN 1:11-14.

John shares that Jesus was not only rejected by the world but was not recognized or accepted by His own people—the Jewish people. It was from the Jews—God’s covenant people—that God promised a Messiah (meaning “anointed one”⁷) would come to deliver His people and rule over them with peace and justice. Tragically, many of the very people who were awaiting the promised Messiah, rejected Jesus. Sin is truly blinding.

John then shifts his attention to those who did not reject Jesus but believed in Him. He highlights that those who have received Jesus were given “the right to be children of God” (v. 12). Because Israel is characterized as God’s children in the Old Testament,⁸ it’s important not to miss what’s happening here. Adoption into God’s family is through faith alone in Jesus, the promised Messiah. All who believe in Him are accepted into His family.

In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In other words, Jesus is not one of many ways to find salvation; Jesus is the one and only way. While His claim excludes the possibility of any other means to salvation, it is also *inclusive*. All people are invited to turn from their rebellion to enjoy a relationship with God and become a child in His family.

06.



How should John’s words in this passage shape the way we pray?

As those who have put their trust in Jesus, allow this good news to wash over you. Through Jesus, we are beloved children in God’s eternal family. In a world where people fight and claw for identities that promise belonging and purpose, those who belong to God’s family have been given a new identity—one that has been secured by His effort. Whether a son or a daughter in God’s family, we must remind ourselves that, in Christ, God truly cherishes us.

07.



What does it look like for us to live out our identity as children of God?

Returning to the reference of Jesus as the Word, verse 14 teaches us that the Word “became flesh” and “dwelt among us.” In other words, God became truly human—while remaining fully God—and stepped into human history! The Creator entered His own creation and dwelt, or “tabernacled” or “pitched his tent,”⁹ among us. Throughout Scripture, we see that God longs to be with His people. The tabernacle, and

⁷ Holman Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Messiah” (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), Logos Bible Software, 1111.

⁸ Köstenberger, “John”, 1664.

⁹ Borchert, *John 1–11*, 114.

eventually the temple, were places of worship and physical locations for God's presence to dwell with His people. In the person of Jesus, God chose to dwell with His people in a new way—a personal way. Jesus is the peak of God's revelation of Himself, and through Him we see the greatest visible display of God's goodness, holiness, faithfulness, and grace.

Leader **PACK**

Item # | Review the verse poster for John 1:14 as you respond to the following question.

KEY QUESTION

08.



What does John mean when he says that the Word “dwelt among us”?

📍 FOR THE ROAD

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KEY QUESTION

09.



Like John the Baptist, how can we share about the true Light in a dark world?

Daily READING

BEYOND SMALL GROUP

Do you know the birthdays of the students in your small group? Make a list of their birthdays and plan to celebrate them in some way throughout the year!

MEMORY VERSE

John 1:14

DAY 1

John 1:1-5

DAY 2

John 1:6-10

DAY 3

John 1:11-14

DAY 4

Colossians 1:15-20

DAY 5

Hebrews 1:1-4