

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

STUDENT LESSON

WHO IS
THE WORD?

The Big Picture of the Gospel of John

In school, most people don't look forward to having to write a paper. But more than likely you've had to write at least one so far, and if you haven't yet, you will. One thing that teachers make a big deal about when you write a paper is the thesis statement. The thesis statement gives the purpose of the paper. It's the point of the paper—what you're arguing for or attempting to prove. Everything in the paper is supposed to support the thesis statement. The Gospel of John is no different. The Gospel writer gives us a clear and distinct thesis in John 20:30–31 (ESV):

*³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
³¹ 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.*

We can summarize John's thesis in one word: believe. He says, "I've written this book, including these particular accounts, so that you might believe." John witnessed nearly three years of stories, sermons, and conversations, but he didn't include them all. He selected certain ones—the ones that would help us believe.

The current religious culture in America loves to talk about belief and believing. Those spiritual buzzwords are often used generically and end up devoid of meaning. Contemporary spirituality trumpets not belief in an object or a person but rather a belief in belief. It goes something like this: "It doesn't matter who you believe or what you believe. All that matters is that you believe." There's a belief in belief.

John's Gospel doesn't call us to believe in belief or to put our faith in faith. His teaching on belief is much deeper and more robust and infinitely more life-giving than any modern, pop-culture philosophy. In the course of twenty-one chapters, the Gospel writer will answer three questions: What do we need to believe? What does it mean to believe? Why do we need to believe? ¹

¹Carter, Matt; Wredberg, Josh. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 14-15). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Open it

1. What is your favorite way to communicate with your friends and why?

Daily Devotions

Day 1 — Today's Theme: Explore It

Read John 1:1–18.

2. What titles or words does John use for Jesus in verse 1–5?
3. What was John the Baptist's role according to verses 6–8?
4. What responses were there to Jesus' coming into the world?
5. According to verses 12–18, what do we receive in Jesus?

Day 2 — Today's Theme: The Word

Read John 1:1–5, 14.

Words sometimes carry different meanings to different people. For example, if you were talking with someone from the U.K. and you told them that while you were at church one Sunday, someone complimented you because you were wearing nice pants, they might shudder at your statement. Why? Because in the U.K. when they use the word “pants” they aren’t referring to your jeans, khakis, or sweats; they’re referring to your underwear! What a shocking difference in understanding that word! While it might seem odd to us that other people might use or understand some of our ordinary words in totally different ways, this isn’t really a new phenomenon.

John starts his gospel off by referring to Jesus as “the Word,” which frankly might seem a bit vague and confusing. Why not just refer to Him as Jesus? I think the answer lies in how different people would have understood him when he referred to Jesus as “the Word.”

The Greeks or “Stoics” understood this word to mean “the rational principle by which everything exists.” Many people would have understood “word” simply to mean a message or communication. The Jews would understand “word” to be God’s “self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation” or, in other words, a fulfillment of the Old Testament teachings.²

Now, all those interpretations hold truth to who Jesus is, don’t they? Jesus is the ultimate truth and reality by which everything exists. He created it all and holds it all together by His power! Jesus does act as a prophet, or message bearer, for God (though He is much more than just a prophet)! Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament teachings!

John found the one word that would show to all kinds of people just who Jesus really was so that they might believe that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

6. How do each of those “interpretations” of the word “word” help you understand something about who Jesus is?

Ultimate Truth:

Message or Communication:

Fulfillment of Old Testament Teachings:

7. Which of those interpretations do you connect with the most and why? How would you communicate that interpretation to your friends who might know Jesus?

² Carson, D. A.. The Gospel according to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)) Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

Day 3 — Today's Theme: The Word is God

Read John 1:1–3, 18.

Sometimes the smallest words can drastically change the message of a sentence. For example, look at the beginning of John where John tells us that the Word was God. Some people mistranslate this passage, and when they do, they completely change the meaning of what John is teaching us. Look at the two statements below and notice how the small change in wording changes the meaning of the message in huge ways:

“The Word was God.”

“The Word was a god.”³

By adding one little letter — a — the whole message has changed from Jesus being God to Jesus being one of many “gods.” And suddenly John’s teaching is no longer monotheistic (mono — one; theistic — god ... one-god) and now has become polytheistic (poly — many; theistic — god ... many-gods). The Bible does not teach that there are many gods, but that there is one, true God and John is right away teaching us to understand that Jesus is God!

Not only does John teach us that Jesus is God, but he teaches us something about who God is. Four times in John 1:1–2, John uses a small, three-letter word: was. And John wrote that word in the imperfect tense, which is just a fancy way of saying an ongoing past tense. So, in other words, we could understand John to be saying it like this:

“In the beginning was continuing the Word, and the Word was continuing with God, and the Word was continually God.”⁴ Now that sounds funny to say, but it helps show us that Jesus was always God and was continually with God before the beginning of time.

So, though Jesus became a man much later in history, Jesus has always existed. He had no beginning and has no end. Jesus is God!

8. Can you think of a time when you misunderstood someone and got their message totally wrong? What happened as a result of your misunderstanding them?

9. What happens if we misunderstand who Jesus is? Why is it so important for us to believe it when the Bible says that Jesus is God?

10. Why do you think it can be hard for some people to believe that Jesus is really God?

³ Jehovah’s Witness religion fails to interpret the definite article “the” taking out the word “the” and replaces it with “a.”

⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. John: That You May Believe (Preaching the Word) . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Day 4 — Today's Theme: The Word Became Flesh

Read John 1:9–17, 5

We live in a world where there are lots of hoops and obstacles to meeting anyone truly famous. I mean, think of your favorite YouTuber, musician, actor, or athlete and how impossible it seems it would be for you to hang out with them for a few hours this weekend. It just doesn't happen that way.

But that's not the case with God! Because the great truth that John conveys for us in the opening verses of his gospel is that God actually came to us. Now, maybe the significance of this statement has lost its wonder in your heart over the years, but pause for a second and let that sink in. Imagine being the disciples and learning this all firsthand with Jesus standing right in front of them: "This person is God?! And He's standing right here?!"

John tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" and in Jesus we've seen the glory of God. He tells us that in Jesus we have received grace upon grace. This Word becoming flesh has changed the course of history and changed countless lives.

But not all people will receive Jesus. Some people are ignorant to who Jesus is. They just don't know that Jesus is God. Maybe some have never even heard of Jesus or only know that name as a curse word. Some people have flat out rejected Him because they either didn't want to believe what He teaches or just don't believe that Jesus truly is the Messiah, the Son of God. Yet others receive Him and it's to those that John says have been given the right to be called children of God.

That's why John has written this gospel. Later we'll see that the whole purpose for his writing all of these teachings and signs that Jesus performed was so that we might believe that Jesus truly is God. That we would believe that He is the Word who was and is and is to come, that He is Immanuel, God with us. That we might believe He is the Son of God and find life in Him.

And every person will give an account for their response to Jesus. Will you reject Him? Ignore Him? Or will you receive Him as your Savior and Lord?

11. What obstacles might prevent someone from receiving Jesus? If you haven't received Jesus, what is standing in your way of doing that?

12. Why is it such a big deal that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"?