



Community Group Discussion Guide

January 28, 2024

John 1:1-18: God the Son

MOTIVATE

Starter Questions:

- ⇒ *Think of someone you deeply love. Can you describe him or her using word pictures that will help others in your group understand this person on a deeper level?*
- ⇒ *What are some descriptive word pictures included in the gospels about Jesus?*

DISCUSS

In John 1:1-18, John doesn't begin his gospel with the nativity story as do Matthew and Mark or with the story of John the Baptist like Luke does. John begins with a poetic opening that captures the cosmic implications of Jesus' identity as the divine Word of God and the pre-existent Christ. These first 18 verses introduce themes which John will elaborate on in the rest of his gospel. (See *John Overview* for additional information.)

- ⇒ *What are some other things you know about John or his gospel?*

John 1:1-3 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

No other biblical book has a prologue as overtly theological as the Gospel of John. In verse 1, John used *Word* or *logos* to identify Jesus. In Hebrew Scripture, the Word was the agent of creation and the source of God's message to humankind. In Greek philosophy, the Word was the truth, the guiding principle of the universe. In John's gospel, the Word is God the Son who is the communicator and revealer of God the Father.

- ⇒ *How do these three verses in John relate to Genesis 1:1-3 and 1 John 1:1-4? Why is this repetition important to note?*

John elaborated:

1. Jesus, the Word, existed before creation. Jesus' life had no beginning and it will have no end. Although Jesus took upon Himself full humanity and lived as a man, He never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed.

- ⇒ *Why is this truth essential to Christian theology?*

2. Jesus, the Word, was with God at creation. Creation is one of the foundation stones of the gospel. When God created, He made something from nothing. As God's creative agent, all

things were made by and through Jesus (Psalm 33:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16). Without Him nothing was made that has been made.

⇒ ***Why is creation and Jesus' part in it a foundational gospel truth?***

3. Jesus, the Word, is fully God in human form. The doctrine at stake here is the deity of Christ. The term designates a Person, distinct from and yet co-eternal and identical in essence with God. Jesus' being, His very nature is one with God. The voice of Jesus is the voice of God. Whatever we can say about God, we can say about the Jesus.

⇒ ***Discuss this quote: Jesus is God-in-flesh—God stepping into the context of humanity. He was unlike anything the world had witnessed before Him. – Author Unknown***

John 1:4-5 *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

⇒ ***What are the characteristics and uses of physical light? (Examples: It's bright. It's source is known. It can shine in the dark from great distances. It dispels darkness and helps us to see.)***

⇒ ***How does this relate to spiritual light?***

In these verses, John used common first-century themes: the symbols of light and darkness representing good and evil. Satan represents darkness; Jesus represents light. In the Old Testament, light is linked with concepts like truth, good, salvation, life, peace, covenant, justice, righteousness, and God's glorious presence. John makes two points about Jesus:

1. Jesus is life: Life (*zoe*) is the central theme for John's gospel. It's used to describe an animating force. "Jesus the Creator provides physical life; Jesus the Redeemer provides spiritual life; and Jesus the Savior provides eternal life." – Author Unknown

⇒ ***How has Jesus been an animating force in your life?***

2. Jesus is light: Christ, the Word, brings life, a life that is the "light" for all people. The concept of "light" appears throughout the Bible. Light was the first evidence of God's creative work (Genesis 1:3). It is the source of life and energy in the universe. Just as light helps us to see, Jesus makes evident the person and character of God.

⇒ ***Can you describe a time when Jesus made God's person and character evident to you?***

Isaiah 9:2 reminds that in a time of great darkness, God promised to send a light that would shine on everyone living in the shadow of death. John is stating that this promise was fulfilled in Jesus. Salvation is available through Him to *all* people. In Jesus' light we see ourselves as we really are—sinners in need of a Savior. Only He can remove the darkness of sin from our lives.

⇒ ***How is verse 5 a strong reassurance for you?***

John 1:6-9 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*

⇒ ***How many times does John use the word "light" in these verses? Why is this repetition significant?***

In these verses, John the gospel writer focuses on why John the Baptist came and who sent him (see also Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist came as a witness to tell the truth about what was happening in the world through Jesus. His role was to identify Jesus and to awaken people to their need of God's revelation. A good witness does not attract attention to himself but to the person or facts he represents. John was not the true light—he was a reflection of the light.

⇒ ***Does Jesus still choose to reflect His light through His followers to an unbelieving world? Explain your answer.***

⇒

John 1:10-13 *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

John used the word *kosmos* for world. This refers to the earth and its inhabitants—the sinful society, alien to God's truth, that lives in rebellion to Him. It's where we get the concept of worldliness. Understanding "the world" this way gives testimony to the character of God and His merciful love.

Among the Israelites where there should have been readiness and receptivity for God's Messiah, there was only rejection. Jesus came to the world as the only One who could redeem the human condition, yet He was not welcomed or accepted by His own people. Rejection is true to the dark character of the world and how it reacts when penetrated by light.

God sent the light of Jesus into the entire world to force a distinction: some reject God's revelation of His Son; some believe it and become children of God. The words *believe* and *receive* are used synonymously here. Those who follow the Word, who embrace the Light of the World, will share in divine birth which will result in divine transformation. When we welcome Jesus as Lord of our lives we are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God—which puts us in His family.

⇒ ***Why is no one exempt from making this choice?***

⇒ ***How is this teaching about Jesus a reflection of His inclusive grace for all people—including the Gentiles?***

John 1:14-16 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

⇒ ***Why is John 1:14 one of the most profound verses in the Bible?***

John presented two deeply theological tenants of the Christian faith:

1. The Word (deity) became flesh (humanity) = God became human. The agent of creation became the revealer of God's message. Jesus was God-become-flesh—unlike anything the world had ever witnessed before—and He wants to light the world with His Father's glory.

⇒ ***Why is this significant?***

⇒ ***How does Galatians 4:4-5 relate to this?***

2. The Word (deity) made His dwelling among us (humanity) = God took up residence among us. Another way of saying this is "God pitched His tent" or "God 'tabernacled' among us" (Leviticus 26:1-2). This refers to the tabernacle in the center of the Israelite camp during their period of wilderness wandering. The tabernacle represented the place where God lived, the source of revelation, the site of sacrifice, and the focus of worship. The glory of God once restricted to the tabernacle became tangible, visible, and touchable in Christ. Through His new covenant, Jesus lives among us, in us, and through us.

⇒ ***Why is it vital we understand that Jesus was both completely human and completely divine?***

⇒ ***How can Jesus be all God is and at the same time be all we humans are (except for our sin)?***

As a result of Jesus coming to our world, we have seen God's glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. The word for God's glory is *shekinah*. It means "that which dwells" and refers to God's nearness and His presence. Through Jesus, God entered into our world in order to transform whoever will receive Him. Jesus perfectly blended two of the most important qualities of the divine nature--grace and truth—and then displayed them in human form.

⇒ ***How do you explain God's divine grace? His divine truth?***

In verse 15, before writing more about God's grace, John reminds us again of the mission of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus' first coming. In ancient times the older person was regarded as greater than the younger. People would have customarily ranked Jesus as lower in terms of respect than John, who was older. John the Baptist explained that this age relationship was different because Jesus existed before He was born on earth.

⇒ ***How is our mission for Jesus' second coming similar to John the Baptist's?***

⇒ ***Using a phrase from John 1:16, can you describe how you have received "grace upon grace" from God the Father and God the Son?***

John 1:17-18 *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

⇒ ***What is the contrast between the law given through Moses and the grace and truth that come through Jesus?***

The Law was a standard of righteousness no one could meet. Grace is a standard of righteousness centered in God's loving-kindness and truth. It's not that the law was bad, but rather both the giving of the law and the coming of Jesus mark stages of God's reaching out to humanity. Jesus marks the final, definitive revelation of God's grace and truth and His new way of dealing with mankind. Jesus' purpose in coming was to fully reveal the character of God.

⇒ ***Discuss this quote: A new approach was needed; one that would not emphasize the vast gulf between God and humanity but instead would span it. – Author Unknown***

⇒ ***How did God's covenant faithfulness find ultimate expression in the sending of His One and Only Son?***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: John wrote about The Message that is our only hope. Life is something only Jesus (as God) can give and something only He can sustain. The life Jesus brings is eternal and redemptive. Jesus positioned Himself as the dividing point of life—our lives. According to Jesus, how we respond to Him will determine our eternal destiny.

⇒ ***What does John's emphasis on the pre-existent, creative Christ mean to you?***

⇒ ***What is your response to Jesus?***

2. Pray: Praise God for making Himself known through Jesus. Praise Jesus for His willingness to take on human flesh and dwell among us. Pray by name for those who have not yet received the light and life of Jesus. Ask God for the boldness to bear witness of Him to a dark world.

STUDY: Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, John*, pages 6-14.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, John*, pages 51-67.
- *Shepherd's Notes, John*, pages 11-13.