



Community Group Discussion Guide

Gospel of John Overview

Community Group Leaders: This overview is designed to give you context for your study in the Gospel of John. Suggested uses:

1. Schedule time during the opening introduction to John to present this information in a shortened form.
2. Present this as it fits into your Community Group time. For example: When you introduce John as the author of the Gospel of John, give this additional information about him.

Author, Date, Recipient, Setting Context, and Purpose:

John belongs to the section of the New Testament categorized as the Gospels. These gospels also include Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means same view, to see together. Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain many of the same stories and have the same basic chronology of Jesus' life.

Why four Gospels?

- Each was written to communicate certain truths about the life and ministry of Jesus and His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.
- Each was written to a particular Christian community to meet the needs of that community.
- Each incorporates a variety of perspectives and together provide a more complete picture of Jesus.
- Each tells the story of Jesus in its own way and focuses on unique aspects of His identity, mission, and character.

Over 90 percent of John's material is unique to his gospel. Rather than focusing on the miracles, parables, and public speeches of Jesus, John emphasized the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how His followers should respond to His teaching. John's gospel does not contain a genealogy or any record of Jesus' birth, childhood, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, ascension, institution of the Lord's Supper, or the "traditional" Great Commission. The three Synoptic Gospels present a more linear view that could fit all of the events of Jesus' life into one year. However, John's gospel has Jesus attending at least three Passovers—which is where we get Jesus' three year ministry.

Martin Luther said this about the Gospel of John: If we should lose all the books of the Bible except two—John and Romans—Christianity could be saved.

Author of John: John: As with all the Gospels, the book is anonymous. Early Christian tradition affirmed that John wrote his gospel. The Gospel of John was the last gospel to be written.

One of the twelve disciples, John and his brother, James, were sons of Zebedee and were also dubbed "The Sons of Thunder" by Jesus. James was probably older than John since he is typically mentioned first. These brothers were fisherman on the Sea of Galilee and probably lived in Capernaum in Galilee. It is only in the Gospel of John that John has the designation of "the Beloved" or "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

John was among the first of the disciples Jesus called. He is always mentioned in the first four in the lists of the twelve disciples (Peter, Andrew, James, and John). He was included in the list of apostles. John was also among the "inner three" (Peter, James, and John) who were with Jesus on special occasions. Five books in the New Testament are attributed to John: his gospel, three letters, and Revelation.

Date: Traditional dating has usually settled on a range of 80-90 AD. John wrote his gospel and 1, 2, and 3 John after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and before he was banished to Patmos. When John wrote, he was an older man and probably the only surviving apostle. As an eyewitness of Christ, he wrote authoritatively to give this new generation of believers assurance and confidence in God and in their faith.

Recipients/Audience: John wrote for the world. He wrote to new Christians and searching non-Christians. He wrote to believers everywhere, both Jew and non-Jew. John used brief statements and featured sharp contrasts (like light vs darkness) to prove Jesus was the Son of God and that whoever believed in Him would have eternal life. John wanted his readers to understand not only the full deity of Christ but also His full humanity. He wrote in the midst of Gnostic teaching, which proposed that Jesus only seemed to be human, and that true spirituality would be found in greater intellect.

John's Gospel:

- Begins with a poetic opening that captures the cosmic implications of Jesus' identity as the divine Word of God.
- Includes seven miracles or signs of Jesus—six of which are unique to John.
- Includes seven "I AM" statements made by Jesus.
- Introduces much of the theological teaching on the Trinity still held today.
- Includes only one reference to the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-6), none of the parables, and very little of Jesus' public preaching.
- Features conversations between individuals and Jesus (i.e., Nicodemus, Samaritan woman)
- Presents what is called the "Upper Room Discourse" (John 14-17) and has numerous lengthy discourses of Jesus.
- Calls Jesus the "Lamb of God."

Purpose: John emphasized hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus because false teachers at this time were suggesting that Jesus' physical body was not a normal body; or that He was an angel, not a man; or that His physical body was an illusion. John battled this false teaching by saying he had first-hand experience with Jesus, and based on that experience, he shared what he knew about Jesus.

John wrote:

- To provide an account of Jesus' life and the signs He performed so that people will believe in Him and experience eternal life.
- To convince people that Jesus was God's Son and to challenge them to have faith in Him.
- To teach about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- To build up believers and to convert unbelievers.
- To emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus that is built on faith in Him and His sacrificial death.
- To affirm Jesus' identity and the nature of a proper response to Him.
- To assure fearful believers that they must believe Jesus and the words He spoke.

Resources used, compiled from, quoted:

- *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook, pages 345-353.*
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, pages 931-936.*
- *Holman New Testament Commentary, John, pages 1-4.*
- *The NIV Application Commentary, John, pages 21-45.*
- *Shepherd's Notes, John, pages 1-10.*