

John 1-3

MATT CHANDLER

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATT CHANDLER serves as the lead pastor of teaching at The Village Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. He came to The Village in December 2002 and describes his tenure as a replanting effort to change the theological and philosophical culture of the congregation.

Alongside his current role as lead pastor, Matt is involved in church-planting efforts both locally and internationally through The Village, as well as in various strategic partnerships. Prior to accepting the pastorate at The Village, Matt had a vibrant itinerant ministry for more than ten years that gave him the opportunity to speak to thousands of people in America and abroad about the glory of God and the beauty of Jesus.

Matt is the author of *Take Heart; To Live Is Christ, to Die Is Gain; Mingling of Souls; The Explicit Gospel* Bible study, *The Apostles' Creed* Bible study, and the *James* Bible study. He's also a coauthor of *Creature of the Word*.

Other than knowing Jesus, Matt's greatest joy is being married to Lauren and being the dad to their three children: Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John is different from the other Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speaking that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to His teachings.

Of all the Gospels and any of the New Testament books, the Gospel of John most clearly teaches that Jesus is God and has always been (1:1–2, 18; 8:58; 17:5, 24; 20:28). John portrays Jesus as the eternal Word of God who became flesh to redeem people from their sins.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

John 1-3: The Word Became Flesh provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to walk through the Gospel of John. This Bible study book includes twelve weeks of content, each divided into two major sections: “Group Study” and “Personal Study.” A leader guide is also provided to prepare those who are leading students through this journey.

GROUP STUDY

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with a group session. This group session is designed to include video teaching and group discussion.

Each group study uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among students, with God’s Word, and with the video teaching.

START

This section includes questions to get the conversation started, a review of the previous week’s study to reinforce the content, and an introduction to the new content for the current week.

WATCH

This section includes key points from the video teaching, along with space for taking notes as students watch the video.

DISCUSS

This section includes discussion questions that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

PERSONAL STUDY

Two personal studies are provided each week to take students deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in the group study. With biblical teaching and interactive questions, these sections challenge individuals to grow in their understanding of God’s Word and to make practical application to their lives.

LEADER GUIDE

On pages 128-141 at the back of this book, you’ll find a leader guide that will help you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain a broad understanding of the content for each week and to learn ways you can engage with students at different levels of life-changing discussion.

Under the “Start” portion of the Leader Guide, you’ll find an optional ice-breaker question/activity. Feel free to use or adapt in such a way that works well for your group of students.

SESSION 1

*Through
the Word*

GROUP STUDY

Start

Welcome everyone to session 1.

Today we begin our study of the Gospel of John. John's Gospel differs from Matthew, Mark, and Luke (known as the Synoptic Gospels) in a variety of ways. The other three Gospels share similar language, structure, and stories. John approaches Jesus' life from a different perspective and includes accounts not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Only John's Gospel includes Jesus' "I Am" statements, the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, and Jesus' Farewell Discourse (John 14–17).

What do you hope to learn during these next 12 weeks?

John's Gospel has been described as simple enough for a child to understand and deep enough to drown an elephant. John's Gospel gives us a beautiful portrait of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

To prepare for video session 1, pray that God will help each student understand and apply this truth:

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and
you find life in His name.

Watch

*Use the space below to take notes while
you watch video session 1.*

Discuss

Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the video.

1. How does John 20:30-31 eliminate the possibility that Jesus was merely a philosopher, moral teacher, or prophet? Why is an accurate understanding of Jesus' identity crucial to our faith?
2. Jesus is the maker of all things. How does this change how you treat others?
3. John 1:1 describes Jesus as the Word. Pastor Matt taught, "The Word of God is described several times in the Old Testament as one sent forth by God to accomplish the purposes of God and then returns to God." Read Isaiah 55:11. Describe the similarities you see between this passage and how Pastor Matt described Jesus as the Word.
4. Share about a time you've been convicted, guided, comforted, or encouraged by God's Word.

Personal Study 1

THE WORD WAS GOD

If you haven't already, you soon will have to write a research paper for school. One of the keys to a good research paper is a solid thesis statement. A thesis statement declares your purpose for writing and guides the reader's expectations. Generally speaking, thesis statements usually come early in a research paper, but John revealed the purpose for his writing near the end of his Gospel.

Read John 20:30-31. Why did John write his Gospel?

John wrote his Gospel to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in Him, we may have life in His name. Understanding this thesis gives us insight as we read John's Gospel. Although his thesis comes late in the book, John addresses who Jesus is from the opening verses:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:1-5

Spend a few minutes reviewing the passage above. List every fact that John revealed to us about Jesus.

What stands out to you in this passage?

Matthew and Luke begin with a list of Jesus' relatives and telling the story of His birth, but John took a different approach. He began by offering proof for His thesis. In the first sentence, John revealed the main point of his book, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in Him is life. And this Jesus that John wrote about came to Earth, became a person just like us, and lived among us.

Spend a moment thinking about the fact that Jesus has always been, will always be, but He became a person and lived among us. Why is it significant that Jesus came to earth and lived among us?

What all did Jesus leave to come to us? Why does this matter?

God Made Visible

John was very concerned that we understand who Jesus is. The primary way we come to know God is through studying the Scriptures. When we want to know what God is like—His character, attributes, and how He responds in specific situations—we need to take a close look at how He revealed Himself in the Bible.

Read Colossians 1:15-17. How do these verses reinforce what we learned in John 1:1-5?

What does it mean for Jesus to be made in the image of the invisible God?

When we think about what God is like, often our first reaction—because of our humanity—is to believe God is disappointed, angry, frustrated, and regrets saving us. But Jesus, who is God in the flesh, shows us a very different picture. If we want to understand what God is like, we need to pay special attention to how Jesus acted in the Gospels. How did He treat sinners? The sick? The lost? What made Him angry? What made Him sad? How did outsiders respond to Him? If we want to have

a thriving relationship with God, we'll have to throw out any preconceived notions about Him if they don't align with how He presented Himself in the Scriptures.

Spend a couple of minutes thinking about God. How would you describe Him? What is He like?

What do you believe God thinks about you?

What informs how you think God sees you: Your past sins or what God says about you in Scripture?

Do you have ideas about who God is that can't be confirmed by Scripture? If so, what are they?

It's hard for some of us to wrap our minds around the truth that there is a loving God who wants to have a relationship with us—despite our sinful nature and the ways we've failed Him. But Jesus is proof of that reality. Jesus is fully aware of our sins and shortcomings—it's the reason He took on flesh and came to live here on Earth—so we could be reconciled to God.

Conclude this part of this week's study by praying through the following questions.

Am I as close to Jesus as I would like to be? If not, what is holding me back?

Ask God to reveal any errors in your understanding of Him. Pray that as you explore His Word, you will learn new things about His character.

Personal Study 2

LIFE AND LIGHT

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:4-5

A close look at John's Gospel reveals two words that appear over and over: "life" and "light." The Bible often uses the opposite of these words to describe this world's fallen nature when it speaks of "death" and "darkness." John speaks of light and life as they relate to salvation: the "light" is revelation which can lead to salvation and "life" is the spiritual life that results from salvation in Christ.

According to John, how are life and light connected to Jesus?

How does the light of Christ shine in dark places today?

Remember, John's purpose in writing was so that we might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that life is found in Him. Why? Because you have been made by Him and for Him. We have an invitation from Jesus to come into the life and light that He offers.

Theologian, Frederick Bruner wrote:

We long to know who God is and what God thinks and does. In Jesus, his most personal Word, God has 'spoken' to us in the most human way possible, giving us his innermost thoughts and heart, in deeds that are as profound as his words, and the believing human race has experienced deep help ever since.¹

Bruner wrote that “In Jesus, God has given his innermost thoughts and heart.” What does Jesus’ personality reveal about God?

What does Jesus’ coming to Earth reveal to us about the heart of God?

Echoes of Genesis

In the first verse of John’s Gospel, he declared that “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” These words echo all the way back to Genesis 1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

GENESIS 1:1

The life and light we read about in John have been around since before time began. Jesus is and always has been one with God. He was with God creating and sustaining the world. These passages help form our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity—the belief that God is one in three persons.

Re-read Genesis 1:1-3 and John 1:1-5. What similarities do you see? What words and ideas appear in both places?

One of the most exciting things about the Bible is how the story unfolds over thousands of years and is conveyed through various authors. How does seeing the theme of Genesis echoed in John’s Gospel help you see the big picture of Scripture more clearly?

The Light Shines On

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:5

In the verse above the word “shines” explains that Jesus shone during His time on earth and His light continues to shine just as brightly today. At times, the darkness in today’s world seems overwhelming but we can rest assured that the light of Christ has not dimmed. But if we want to live in the light of Christ, we must follow Him:

Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

JOHN 8:12

What did Jesus promise to those who follow Him?

In what areas of your life do you need Jesus to shine light into darkness?

What is your response to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him?

Close your time in prayer by asking God to shine light in areas of darkness, confusion, and uncertainty. Give thanks to Jesus because He continues even now shining light in dark places.

1. Frederick D. Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).