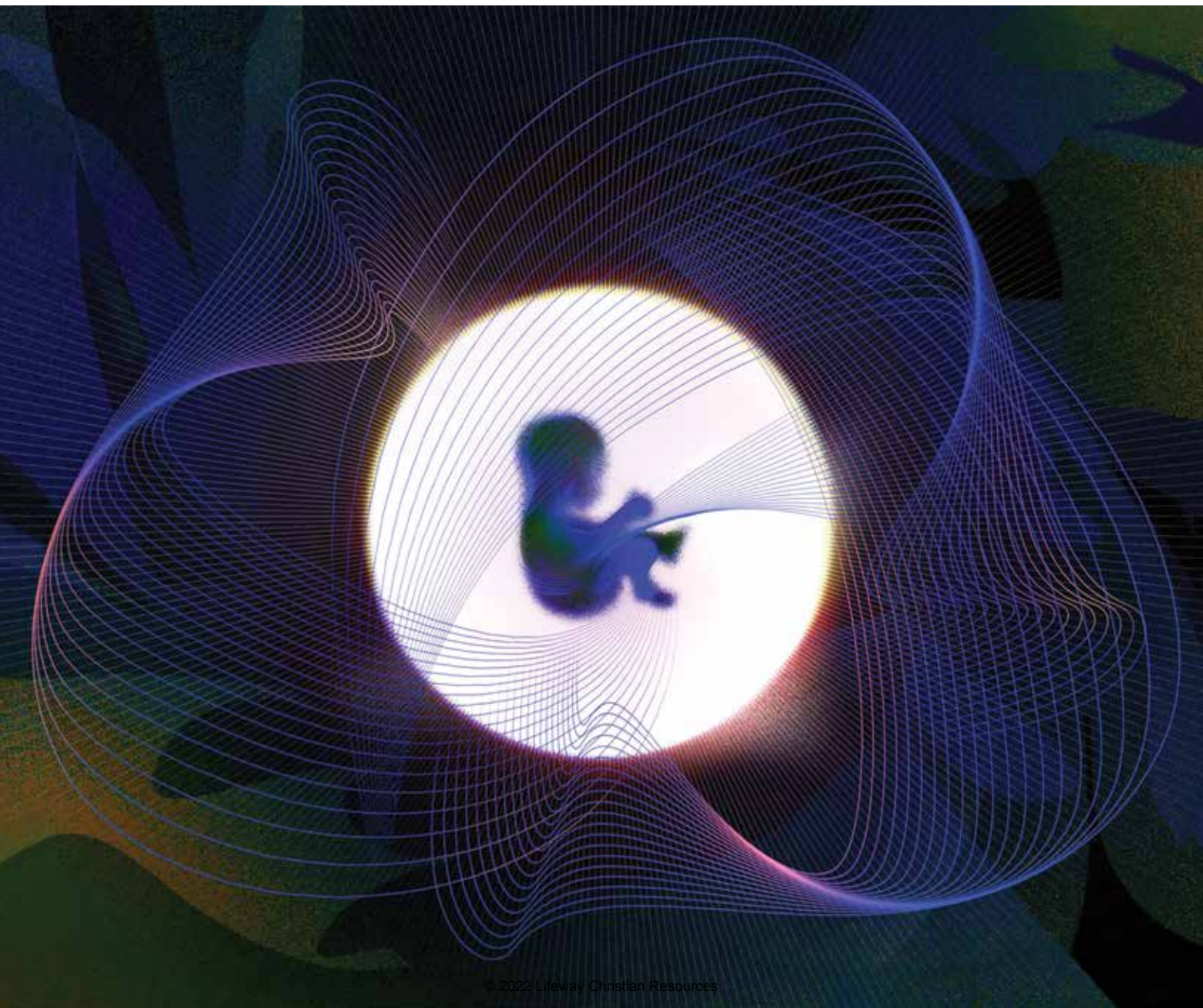




the**GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

ADULTS / LEADER GUIDE / SPRING 2023 / VOL. 7 / CSB



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SON WAS BORN FOR YOU

Isaiah 9:6: "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us."

A Son will be given—a gift, a present. Isaiah lived in days shadowed by gloom, but God granted a flicker of hope, a ray of light—a Son would be given, a descendant of King David would come, an eternal kingdom would be established, one marked by justice and righteousness.

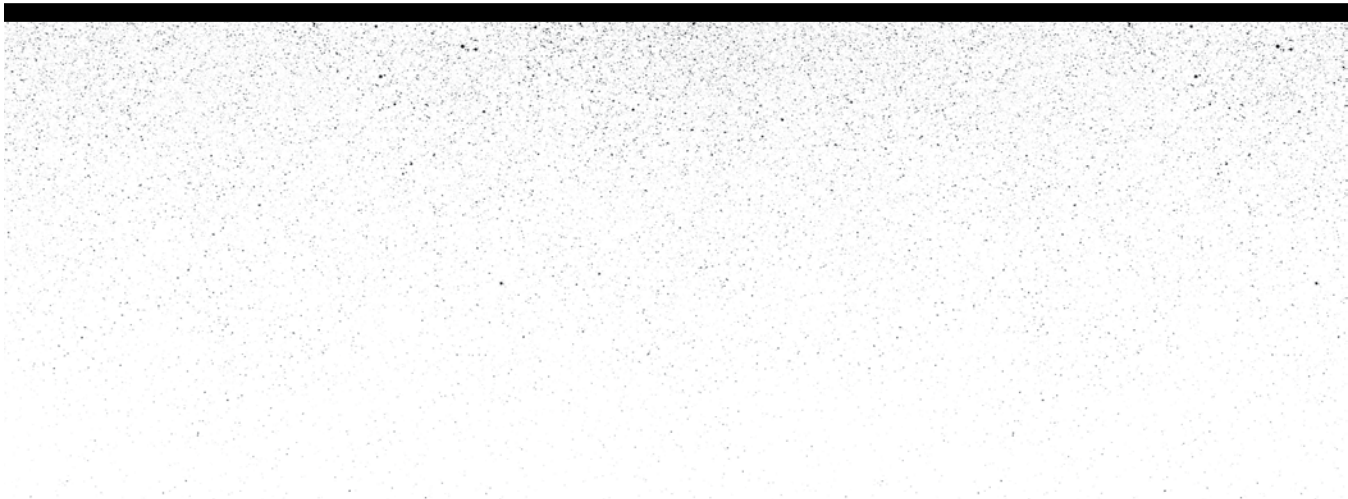
Yet God's people were shrouded in gloom for their lack of justice and righteousness. Their idolatry, their sin, brought God's judgment and their exile to the nations. They were meant to be a light to the nations; instead, they were nearly snuffed out. Still, a flicker of hope, a ray of light—a Child would be born. Through many dark days and years of God's silence, the flicker remained until the Son at last was given.

Matthew 1:21: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

God presents His gift, the Son. And this Son answers the question, He solves the problem of their gloom—He will save His people from their sins. Their lack of justice and righteousness will be made up in His fullness. Their idolatry and sin will be done away with in His sacrifice. The flicker rages; the ray bursts forth; the Light has come to His people—and more.

Luke 2:10-11: "But the angel said to them, 'Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'"

The present, the gift, is for all the people. The Savior from sins is for all the people; the Messiah-King is for all the people. Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus, who died for sins and rose from the dead that you may have life. "See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!" (2 Corinthians 6:2).



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THE EDITOR

The people of God in the time between the Old and New Testaments were waiting for something to change, for God to fulfill His promises in dwelling with them, in giving them an eternal king, and in lifting the weight of persecution and suffering. God promised a Savior, but He didn't say when. So the people of God continued waiting for that Messiah.

When Jesus came on the scene, it was like a breath of fresh air, a turning of the wind that some embraced and some rejected. The Jews had heard God's Word and prayed for the promises to be fulfilled, and yet, some were still skeptical.

Is He really the One promised? Could what He says be true? Is it all consistent with what God has written? Can He really save us? Does He really love us?

The questions some asked at that time are the same questions some are asking today.

But Jesus is real. And He is who He says He is and promises change in our lives—a new birth, a new perspective, a new way of interacting with this earthly world and the heavenly one. Jesus is the game changer that tears down the veil and opens the gate through the sacrifice and payment of Himself. No other seeming deity loves like this. And this is a love we can put our faith in.

So as we study God's Word, may we respond in faith to Jesus's invitation to come and know Him more and, with that knowledge, share that gospel with others. Because with Jesus, good news has truly arrived.

Y Bonesteele

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HERE IS

THE LAMB OF GOD

“We Have Found the Messiah!”

by Allyson M. Howell

+

One of the hardest things in life is waiting. Waiting for the doctor to call with the diagnosis; waiting to see if you'll ever get married; waiting for a baby, a job, a home, a friend. Sometimes it may even be a minor inconvenience, such as waiting in line at the grocery store, waiting for dinner to be ready, or waiting for the gas tank to fill up. At times it may get the best of us and we throw up our hands in exasperation, deciding the reward is not worth the inconvenience of the wait.

WAITING, WAITING, WAITING . . .

From Genesis to the beginning of the Gospels, God's people have been waiting. Day after day, they came to the temple with their firstborn animals, the first picks of their harvest, and their choicest oils. Every year they took a perfect lamb, slaughtered it, and painted its blood above their doorpost.

All of this was done in obedience to God while they waited for the Messiah to come. This was, of course, not done with perfect patience or steadfast obedience. Israel's history is full of failure and stories of those who took matters into their own hands. Many of the greatest men and women of the Bible decided that the perfect deliverer promised to

them was not worth the wait. They had to do something to speed up the process. So they struck the rock, gave over the handmaid, formed the golden calf, and trusted themselves over God.

Yet God was still patient with them. He still offered them a way to be in relationship with Him despite their disobedience. He provided them with a temple, with Passover, and with the offering of sacrifices to come and ask for forgiveness. But the cycle continued—make sacrifices, receive forgiveness, doubt God, disobey, repeat.

But finally, Jesus makes His arrival.

JESUS'S FIRST COMING

Imagine you were one of the disciples. Your entire life, you've heard stories of a Messiah who is to come. You listened to the prophecies; you listened to stories of your ancestors. Repeatedly in your family history, you hear rumblings of who the Messiah might be. Was it Moses? Elijah? David? No. The Messiah was still to come. When will God ever bring about the One who is to save them?

You follow a man named Jesus, and you wonder if He might be the one spoken about your whole life. Throughout your time with Him, Jesus demonstrates

that He is the Messiah. He performs miracles, heals the sick, forgives sins, and speaks of His Father and His kingdom. Jesus calls people into a relationship with God, pours out compassion and love on those who do not deserve it, and reveals that God's desire is to be restored to His people. Upon Jesus's death, burial, descent, resurrection, and ascension, you see that all of the promises of God were fulfilled. God's people were waiting for a deliverer, a savior, one who would make a way for them to be with God forever. Jesus was that Savior who sacrificed Himself to make a way!

Now you know for sure that all who believe that their sins are paid for by Jesus's sacrifice do not have to wait to be forgiven. They do not have to wait to know God or be in a relationship with Him. All of these gifts are available now! You know that no longer do we have to make sacrifices in the temple, no longer do we have to observe Passover. We simply see what Christ has done, trust Him fully, and recognize the payment for all of our sins has been paid.

Finally, this Messiah, this final sacrifice, was nothing you imagined but more than anything you could have hoped for. The disciples were certain that Jesus was worth the wait.

JESUS'S SECOND COMING

Here you are today. You know the final sacrifice has been made on your behalf. You believe that Jesus was the culmination of God's plan for His people. Yet you still walk through this life longing for so many things. The waiting is not over. Not only are you waiting to see how various life circumstances pan out, but you're also waiting, whether you think of it often or not, for death.

As morbid as that may seem, death is the inevitable end of your story here on earth. If you are a follower of Jesus, however, you know that death does not have the final say. You look forward to being united with Jesus in heaven. You know that eternity promises all the joy, peace, happiness, and love that comes with being in God's presence.

You understand that you are in what many call the "already but not yet." This means that Jesus already ushered in God's kingdom, but it is not fully completed or realized yet. You are on the other side of Jesus's fulfilling all that was promised in the Old Testament. You have already received new life in Christ. But you are not perfect yet, you are not fully healed yet, and you are not fully in the presence of God yet. Not yet, but one day.

Our lives were bought
with a price—the
perfect price of
Jesus's life.

Every day, you can make the decision to walk with your head down, despairing that you still sin and that the world is still broken. Or you can decide to remember that your fate is sealed, that your life is already paid for, and that you have been given all the promises of God in Jesus.

Sometimes this will mean sacrificing what you want or what is comfortable. Sometimes hope is exhausting and you wonder if it is all worth the pain you endure in this life. Our lives were bought with a price—the perfect price of Jesus's life. And Jesus will be our prize. One day, when we leave this earth and enter heaven, we will forget all the struggles of this world. We will see that every sacrifice we made was worth it because we are now with Jesus!

Remarkably, Jesus will look to us, embrace us in His loving arms, and tell us that His sacrifice on the cross was worth the wait, and as He delights in our presence, we will delight in His forevermore.



THE SAVIOR IS BORN

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Word of God in Creation (John 1:1-5)
2. The Word of God in Redemption (John 1:6-13)
3. The Word of God in Glory (John 1:14-18)

Background Passage: John 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus is the Word, the Son of God who came into the world to bring salvation.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The Son of God put on flesh to become the sacrifice for the sins of the world. All who trust in Him are brought out from the darkness and are able to see the glory of God as His children.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because our spiritual blindness has been removed through Christ, we never cease sharing the gospel with grace and truth, praying that the eyes of others might be opened as well.

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

SETTING: At the start of the New Testament, the situation was bleak for God's people. Even after God's people returned to their land, they were still under the power of the Medo-Persians—after them, the Greeks, and after them, the Romans. The prophets were silent. The kingdom was broken. The future was dark. Greek and Roman culture had enveloped the whole area, and the elitist Pharisees and Sadducees had come into power to try to lead the Jews, but their only real hope was the coming of the Messiah. But when would that be? Into this, Jesus was born. Everything changed when Jesus showed up.

INSTRUCT: Reflect on a time when you experienced a situation that seemed hopeless.

DISCUSS: What made it difficult for you to imagine that anything might change? (there was no evidence that things were getting better; the issues were so complex; it had been happening for so long; there had already been plenty of time for change with no results)

TRANSITION: What must the Israelites have been feeling by the time the New Testament began? They had so many chances to honor God and follow Him, but they never did fully. The world was growing darker and darker in sin and rebellion. All of this silence from God certainly led the people to think that God could have given up on them. Would He truly send a Messiah? Would the darkness prevail? Against this backdrop, John introduced his Gospel by portraying Jesus as the light that gives life to all.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: How does Jesus give light, and specifically, how has He given light to your life? (He reveals what is wrong; He exposes; He lights the way; He helps us see what is good and right)



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POINT 1

THE WORD OF GOD IN CREATION (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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:1-5** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 5: THE WORD** and the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to highlight the key doctrine of the Trinity and the Son's role in creation (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

KEY DOCTRINE #10: *God Is One in Three Persons:* While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the **Trinity** is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is **distinct** from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect **unity** within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine; departing from it is to abandon orthodox Christianity.

DISCUSS: **What makes it hard for you to think about the Son of God existing as God when God created the world?** (we tend to think of the Son of God simply as Jesus who isn't present in the Bible's story until the New Testament; we have a hard time grasping what the Son of God was doing or where He was through all of the Old Testament; we don't have earthly concepts that make understanding the Trinity easy for us)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

In Jesus is **light** and **life**, and that being so, He came into the world to bring **salvation** to overcome the darkness.

TRANSITION: God the Son existed before the creation of the world. He was not created when He came into the world. Rather, Jesus is the eternal Son of God who did something specific when He came into this world—He took on human form and entered this sin-darkened world to save sinners and start the process of putting the world back together again from the terrors of sin. Jesus willingly laid aside His divine position and entered this world in the form of a servant who would lay down His life for His people.

NOTES



THE WORD

The Greek word *logos*, translated “Word,” had multiple meanings for varying people in John’s time: to the Jews, wisdom, to the philosophers, reason, and in the Old Testament, God in action—in creation and revelation. But John added more meaning in describing Jesus as “the Word”—a pre-existent, personal, powerful, and active deity. *Logos* doesn’t explain Jesus, but Jesus completes and fulfills all that *logos* is.¹

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Can we wonder that the Lord Jesus, in his preaching, should continually draw lessons from the book of nature? When he spoke of the sheep, the fish, the ravens, the corn, the lilies, the fig tree, the vine—he spoke of things which He Himself had made.”²

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / John's Gospel presents a change in form from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the other three writers God ordained to tell the story of Jesus's life and ministry. The other Gospels present generally overlapping stories written to different audiences, whereas John's Gospel captures scenes from Jesus's life and topics in His teaching not mentioned in the other Gospels. Also, John did this in a poetic fashion replete with visual images that fit an audience steeped in Greek philosophy. The Gospel of John does not contain a standard birth story or genealogy like the other Gospels but begins with eighteen verses, known as the Prologue to John's Gospel, that are meant to orient the reader to why Jesus came into this world.

One concept John used was **"the Word."** The Word existed with God from the foundation of the world and took on human form in the person of Jesus Christ. The concept of "the word" (or *logos*) would have been an oft-used image in philosophical discourse, used as a foundational concept for grappling with issues of ultimate truth. John's Gospel, however, doesn't present God as One who has given a word to people in the form of a philosophical discourse or a treatise on virtuous living. Instead, God sent a Person, who was the Word, to both embody and teach how a person could please God. Jesus's entire life and teaching was the Word of God in human form.

While Jesus is not named in the first few verses, the passage crescendos to verse 17, where Jesus Christ is the One to whom all the vivid descriptions of verses 1-16 point: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John traced Jesus's origin far earlier than His birth and, in verses 1-2, made three claims about the Word:

1. The Word was in the beginning.
2. The Word was with God.
3. The Word was God.

Each point is of massive importance: The Son of God, the Word of God, existed from

before the foundation of the world with God—and He was God. This passage takes full aim at any heresy that would portray Jesus as second-class or as some type of cosmic afterthought that God the Father created after He ran out of other options. Jesus is God, and He's always been God.

John then made one final point—this Word created all things. The mechanism that God used to create all things was His spoken word. "Let there be . . ." is the most often repeated command in Genesis 1. John affirmed that this Word is the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, who was the means for creation.

VERSES 4-5 / John then added two more word pictures. He said that Jesus brought **"life"** and **"light."** Again, these concepts would have been familiar to an audience who read and interacted with the philosophical discourse of the day. Light and life were concepts that the pagan philosophers sought after. They aspired to a healthy, whole, virtuous life and sought to pursue the true *logos* in order to build that type of life. Light, they felt, was a clear image for those who understood truth and were truly enlightened.

Jesus, the true Word, brings both. He didn't bring light and life through moral discourse or modern philosophy but through sacrifice. Light comes through knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ and through salvation by faith in Him. The eternal Son of God graciously laid aside His eternal standing and position at the right hand of God to enter the world and bring this salvation.

Only through Jesus, then, can people experience light and life. They cannot find this hope any other way. Through this introduction, John was claiming that Jesus is our only hope! Since Jesus is God and since He willingly entered the world to bring salvation, no matter how dark the world gets, no matter how overwhelming sin becomes, the light will ultimately prevail.

POINT 2

THE WORD OF GOD IN REDEMPTION (JOHN 1:6-13)

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. **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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:6-13** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-9** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Like John the Baptist, God calls all believers to be **witnesses** to share the truth of Jesus Christ with others so they might **believe** in Him.

DISCUSS: Why might it be difficult to share the truth of Jesus Christ? (we think too much of ourselves and what others think of us and so we are afraid; we might not feel equipped to share; we take for granted all Jesus has done for us; our gratefulness has waned; we don't love others enough)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 10-13** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

All who **trust** in Jesus, who **receive** and believe in Him, are brought out from the darkness and are able to see the glory of God as His children.

DISCUSS: How does this passage say people are saved from sin and darkness? (it says through faith, receiving and believing; it is not something that we earn through our moral effort or figure out from our own wisdom or insight; in our flesh, we do not possess the ability to figure God out on our own; we are born again through the work of God)

TRANSITION: It would be easy to miss the deity of Jesus amid all the details of His earthly life. The facts surrounding His birth may seem too familiar, even with the knowledge of a virgin birth and cosmic guides. Sometimes we can get caught up in the birth of Jesus as a baby born to Mary. John didn't want us to miss, however, that this One who lived among the people, though He was birthed, is fully God, had always existed, and will always exist, full of glory.

NOTES

CHILDREN OF GOD

In one sense, all human beings are children of God in that God created us in His image and likeness. But in another sense, as in John 1 and its normal usage in Scripture, the children of God are all those who in faith receive Jesus as Savior and Lord (see also Matt. 5:9; Gal. 3:26,29; Rom. 8:14; 9:8; 1 John 3:1).

COMMENTARY

VERSES 6-9 / After John tells his readers that Jesus is the light, he introduces them to John the Baptist, who **“came as a witness”** to tell others about the light. John the Baptist leveraged his voice to cry out to others to turn to Jesus, the light, for salvation.

John, the author of this Gospel (not to be confused with John the Baptist), shows the humility on display in John the Baptist’s faithful witness. John the Baptist was not the light and did not try to portray himself as such. He understood that his role was merely to point to Jesus. He was sent by God to testify that Jesus is the Messiah, **“the true light,”** and that He gives light **“to everyone”**—not just some but to all. And John the Baptist was proclaiming that the Messiah was coming into the world so that all who would listen could get ready. John the Baptist was a precursor for all faithful Christians who use their lives to declare and demonstrate that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

VERSES 10-13 / Verse 10 picks up on the preceding point that Jesus was coming into the world and begins the focus on Jesus’s mission and people’s response. John, the author, made it clear that though Jesus was coming into the world, He was already in the world and the world was made through Him. Again, John was clarifying the pre-existence of Christ.

Though the Son, as God, created the world, the world did not know Him. Here the word **“world”** is used to describe the entire creation that is broken due to Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden. The entire cosmos has fallen, and God sent Jesus to save it (John 3:16), ultimately to put the world back together again from the effects of sin and Satan. John noted the stark contrast: Jesus came to save the world, but the world did not recognize Him. John drew attention to the irony: Jesus spoke the world into creation, yet creation did not recognize its Creator. This would be akin to a child not even recognizing his or her parents. The

language isn’t merely that the world did not believe but that the world did not even recognize the Messiah.

Then John wrote that Jesus came to **“his own.”** Here, “his own” is clearly a reference to the Jewish nation, the covenant people of God. Since Genesis 12 and the great call of Abram (later Abraham), God’s saving intentions in the world came to pass through these people. They were given the covenant promises, they had the law, they had the sacrificial system, they had the temple, they had the priesthood, they had the land, they had the kings and the prophets. If anyone should have recognized Jesus, it was this group. Their entire national identity hinged on the coming of the Messiah. John lamented that they did not believe. This note at the beginning of John’s Gospel is a foreshadowing of what was to come for Jesus. John was crafting a theological treatise on Jesus’s ministry, not simply attempting to sketch a chronological map of His life. John said from the very beginning that those most prepared to recognize and respond to the good news of Jesus would not.

In contrast to those who do not believe, there is a group who will believe. They will believe the testimony of John the Baptist and John, the Gospel writer, that Jesus is the Messiah. They will come to understand who Jesus is and, through faith, submit their lives to Him. Those who do so are given the privilege to be called **“children of God.”** John then used a familial image to make his point. Those who believe are **“born . . . of God,”** not physically but spiritually. John used this imagery in other places such as John 3, where Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” to be a part of God’s kingdom (John 3:3). God’s children are born again into His family. Believers are no longer in the family of their first parent, Adam, through their inherited sin nature; rather, believers are born again into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

POINT 3

THE WORD OF GOD IN GLORY (JOHN 1:14-18)

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.

15 (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, “This was the one of whom I said, ‘The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’”) **16** Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, **17** for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:14-18** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 6: JESUS IS GOD**; use the handout and the **VERSES 14-15** commentary to highlight the following point and set up the following question (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The Son of God put on **flesh** to become the **sacrifice** for the sins of the world that we may see His **glory**.

DISCUSS: What attributes of God are revealed through Jesus’s incarnation for our salvation, for which we should praise and imitate Him? (He is humble, gracious, generous, loving, kind, and forgiving)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 16-18** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus brought **grace** and **truth** to the world, revealing the Father and revealing Himself as God.

DISCUSS: Why might we find it difficult to speak and act in grace and truth? (they seem like opposites on the surface; sometimes we are seemingly hard-wired to be a person who gives grace or who speaks truth, and most people don’t do both well; sometimes it seems that people need grace in the moment or that they need truth and not necessarily both)

NOTES



COMMENTARY

VERSES 14-15 / Verse 14 concisely summarizes Jesus's incarnation. The word incarnation refers to Jesus taking on flesh ("carne") to enter the world. This is another way to speak of the conception and birth of Jesus or the process described by Paul to the Philippians, where he says Jesus "did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity" (Phil. 2:6-7).

John was trying to help us understand that the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed as God from the foundation of the world. He was the means by which all things were created, and He is the One who sustains "all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). Yet this eternal Son of God came to earth as Jesus, who was truly God and truly man, One who was born of a virgin, lived, ministered, taught, and ultimately was crucified and resurrected for the salvation of God's people.

Verse 14 plays on the image of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, using the corresponding Greek word translated "**dwelt**" to describe what Jesus did in coming to earth—He "tabernacled" among His people. Even greater than the tabernacle of old, God's glory dwelt fully in Jesus, and He is the means by which people can worship God rightly. And finally, this tabernacling was the full revelation of God's glory, as Jesus embodied both the grace and truth of God. The text says that He was "**full**" of grace and truth. Such fullness of grace and truth is only possible for God. This truly makes Him glorious. John, the author, then pointed to John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus's glory and pre-existence that uniquely qualifies Him as God.

VERSES 16-18 / We receive the grace of God from Jesus's fullness as God. John's phrase "**grace upon grace**" denotes the overflowing, overwhelming nature of the grace of God. Through Jesus, God has given fallen sinners grace they do not deserve. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection made a way

possible for sinners to be made right with God. They could experience this "grace upon grace" through faith and repentance.

John then noted that this is something that Jesus alone could do. The law of Moses brought truth to the world. In the law, sinners could see their rebellion clearly and their need for God's forgiveness. The standard was established. But the law could not bring grace. There was no means by which sinners could be permanently and perfectly forgiven. They could merely be brought to the point of conviction and need and subsequently offer a sacrifice as the law prescribed so that their sins could be forgiven for a time. Ultimately, full forgiveness was impossible apart from the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (see the book of Hebrews). Jesus did not relax this standard of truth—in fact, in many places He seemed to up the magnitude of God's law (see Matt. 5–7). He brought truth, but He also brought grace. In Him, as the fulfillment of the law, sin could be forgiven forever. He was the means by which sinners could both see their sin and be forgiven of that very sin. This was something the law of Moses could never do.

In verse 18, John concluded by highlighting that Jesus is the way humans see God. Jesus literally is God in the flesh, so the best means of understanding the nature and character of the triune God is to look at Jesus. John noted that this pleased God. God wants to be known and He loves His creation. This love compelled Him to reveal Himself to the world in a form that humans could see, with teaching they could understand, and through a life that would give evidence to the full grace and truth of God.

God revealed Himself to the world in Jesus and continues to do the same today. Though Jesus is not physically present now, God continues to reveal Jesus through His Spirit and His Word. John's Gospel is meant to put Jesus on display so that God can continue to open the eyes of those blinded in sin so that they may see His glory.

MY RESPONSE

Because our spiritual blindness has been removed through Christ, we never cease sharing the gospel with grace and truth, praying that the eyes of others might be opened as well.

HEAD:

The Son of God has always existed, and He entered the world as Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life that put on display the glory of God. The incarnation of Jesus was an act of the triune God's love whereby He did for people what they could not do for themselves—namely, revealing both the reality and horror of sin but also demonstrating the grace of God by making a way possible for sin to be forgiven.

How does Jesus's incarnation reveal God's love for human beings?

HEART:

We should be people who long to see Jesus rightly. Evidence of spiritual life is the ability to see Jesus for who He is, to acknowledge our sin and come to Him in humble worship. We should be those who do experience the joyful privilege of being God's children. We enter His family by faith, and then we begin to long to honor Him with our lives. We see His grace and truth in Jesus and we want to be people of grace and truth as well. We see Jesus's service in entering the world and we are compelled to stoop and serve others as well. Jesus becomes not only a means of forgiveness but also a model for our ongoing life of worship and obedience.

How will you respond to the glory of God seen in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ?

HANDS:

John the Baptist provides a case study in how we should respond to Jesus. He was compelled by the greatness of the glory of God. His overflowing worship was evident in his clear praise of Jesus. He directed attention away from himself—a sign of humility—and pointed that attention to Jesus Christ through his words and actions. This is what we do when we worship God through song, it's what we do when we worship God through our deeds of love and compassion, and it's what we do when we share the gospel with others.

How will you be like John the Baptist in pointing someone to Christ this week by your words and deeds?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God's own Son became the Son of Man that he might make the children of human beings into children of God. For when that which is exalted associates with that which is lowly, its own glory is diminished in no way. Instead, it elevates the other from its great lowliness, and this is what happened with Christ."³

—John Chrysostom
(347-407)

POINT 1: THE WORD OF GOD IN CREATION (JOHN 1:1-5)

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COMMENTARY

“In short, God’s ‘Word’ in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that ‘Word’ makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God’s ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son. But if the expression would prove richest for Jewish readers, it would also resonate in the minds of some readers with entirely pagan backgrounds. In their case, however, they would soon discover that whatever they had understood the term to mean in the past, the author whose work they were then reading was forcing them into fresh thought . . . One must go farther. The wealth of possible backgrounds to the term *logos* in John’s Prologue suggests that the determining factor is not this or that background but the church’s experience of Jesus Christ. This is not to say the background is irrelevant. It is to say, rather, that when Christians looked around for suitable categories to express what they had come to know of Jesus Christ, many that they applied to him necessarily enjoyed a plethora of antecedent associations. The terms had to be semantically related to what the Christians wanted to say, or they could not have communicated with their own age. Nevertheless, many of the terms they chose, including this one, had semantic ranges so broad that they could shape the term by their own usage to make it convey, in the context of their own work, what they knew to be true of Jesus Christ . . . In that sense, as helpful as the background study may be, it cannot by itself determine exactly what John means by *logos*. For that information, while thinking through the background uses, we must above all listen to the Evangelist himself.”⁴

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ILLUSTRATION

A common and helpful teaching illustration invites the group to consider true darkness. Most of us have never been in true darkness. The closest we might come is hiking into a cave or underground cavern where the farther you go the darker and darker that space becomes. Try as you might, in such an environment, it is hard to avoid panic. In this space, even the smallest light changes everything. If someone taps their phone and the light illuminates, the experience changes in a moment. All of a sudden you are able to see, your pulse slows, and you can make sense of your surroundings.

Our world is a bit like an underground cave. The further we go and the longer we live, the more overwhelming the darkness becomes. We experience personal pain that reveals the suffering

that is littered throughout our world. We engage in intentional sin that reveals how sinfully broken our hearts really are. And thanks in part to modern technology, we get to witness the scope of the disaster of the world around us with stories of oppression, trauma, death, and destruction lurking around every turn. The darkness can be overwhelming.

Jesus is a light in that darkness. He came to bring light. And His is not a little bit of light, akin to the screen on a cell phone. His is a blazing flame of light, capable of illuminating the entire world. His presence and activity is the singular factor that gives hope and help in the face of such a dark world.

POINT 2: THE WORD OF GOD IN REDEMPTION (JOHN 1:6-13)

+ COMMENTARY

“John 1:10 joins with 1:9 to stand against the idea that Jesus by his coming wrought some kind of prevenient-grace change on all people. John puts into words the shocking irony that the Light of the World, the true light that gives light to all (v. 9), the light that is the life of men (v. 4), the light that the darkness cannot overcome (v. 5), ‘was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him’ (v. 10). The world here has not been lifted out of deadness in trespasses and sins to perceive reality. Rather, the world is so darkened within itself that it does not recognize the light, even though the world was made by that very light!”⁵

+ COMMENTARY

“The focus of John’s testimony was to bear witness to Jesus. In the Prologue this witness is given in terms of the Logos as the true Light (1:9). In the Fourth Gospel light is a very important theme, and Jesus refers to himself as the ‘light of the world’ (8:12; 9:5). The goal of John’s witness here is that ‘all might believe.’ The Johannine theme of believing introduced here is without doubt one of the most central concerns of the Gospel. It is crucial to the evangelist’s purpose statement for writing the Gospel (20:31).”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Option 1: Use the story of Ruth in the Old Testament to point out a situation in which a woman’s own people did not recognize her. Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, left Bethlehem with her husband due to a famine and lived in Moab for a decade. During that time, her husband and her two sons all died, and she was left destitute with a Moabite daughter-in-law. When she reentered Bethlehem after a decade away, the people looked at her and asked, “Can this be Naomi?” Her situation and circumstances were not what they expected for the lady they once knew. In a similar way, Jesus was not what His own people expected the Messiah to look like. His own people did not recognize Him as God—the glorious Creator God who is full of grace and truth.

Option 2: Tell a personal story of a time when you walked back into a context that was once familiar to you and either you did not recognize other people or other people did not recognize you. A good illustration of this could be a twenty-year high school reunion. You spent years among these people, yet you didn’t recognize the people who were once so familiar.

POINT 3: THE WORD OF GOD IN GLORY (JOHN 1:14-18)

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COMMENTARY

“In the first chapter of his Gospel, the apostle John is talking about the amazing sufficiency of God’s grace. No one is beyond the power of God’s grace, even if he or she thinks he or she is. The Scriptures proclaim that Christ died for the ungodly. ‘Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Rom 5:20). The Greek word used is the same used for ‘fullness’ in John 1. God’s grace is adequate for anyone.”⁷

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ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever had a conversation with someone in which you tried to balance grace and truth? We all have. If you are a parent, you have certainly done this with your child on more than one occasion. The child has done something that is clearly wrong. They have sinned against God and against you. You want them to know what they have done and why it is wrong, so you bring the “truth hammer.” You make it clear that the action is out of bounds and that they need to repent and change.

But you also want to bring grace. You love your child, and you don’t want him or her to be crushed under the weight of sin. You want your children to know that they are loved, regardless of the wrong they have done. You want them to experience the tenderness and warmth of a reconciled relationship. So you try to fill the conversation with reassurances of love and not give full vent to your frustration. You may soften the punishment that they are due for their wrongdoing in an effort to allow them to sense your grace.

This is a tough balance. You emerge from these conversations feeling unsettled most of the time. Either you led with too much grace and too little truth or you were too stern and need to up your grace game the next time around. Humans have difficulty balancing grace and truth. Even more, humans can’t be full of grace and truth. We can’t do both fully and completely, perfectly, every time. But Jesus can. And did. And does.

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