

## The Whole Story:



## John

**Main Theme:** Jesus reveals that he is the one that grants eternal and abundant life, if we believe.

**Payoff:** By reading the Gospel of John you will see the life of Jesus in a way that reveals his identity as divine member of the Trinity and “God in the Flesh” who walked among us as a man..

**Overview:** The Gospel of John relates the life of Jesus to the reader in a very different way than the other three Gospels. He adds details and stories that Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not record. Sometimes, the same events in the life of Jesus are told in a much different order in the book of John. John retells these stories in a certain order as a teaching mechanism. John reveals to the reader that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. We see this truth in the “signs” Jesus uses to show his power and authority. The goal of these signs and the book of John is that the reader might see who Jesus really is and believe in him.

There are two main sections of the Gospel of John to consider as you read through.

**John 1-12** The book of signs

**John 13-21** The book of glory

As the plot unfolds, some key theological themes emerge:

1. **Identity:** More than any other Gospel, John focuses on Jesus’ identity and what that means for us. The first and most obvious way he reveals Jesus is by his account of the “signs.” The very fact that John refers to this displays as signs instead of miracles tells us something about his intent. They are not mere displays of power or compassion, but they are there to signify that Jesus is the divine messiah. Each of these signs show that Jesus has authority and power over all things both spiritually and physically. Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding in 2:1-11. Jesus heals the son of an official in 4:46-54. Jesus heals a lame man on the sabbath in 5:1-18. Jesus feeds 5,000 men (that’s not even counting women and children) in 6:1-14. He walks on water in 6:16-21. He restores the sight of a blind man in 9:1-41. Finally he raises Lazarus from the dead in 11:1-57. These signs show Jesus with a level of power and authority over the world that no one except God could have.

Jesus also directly explains the nature of his identity when he makes the “I AM” statements all through the book: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35) "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5) "I am the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7, 9) "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:14) "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25) "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6) "I am the true vine" (John 15:1, 5). Each of these statements reveals who Jesus is and tells us much of what he came to this world to do. The most pointed “I AM” statement however happens in John 8:58. At a quick gloss it appears as if Jesus simply has poor grammar when he says "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am," but the Pharisees reaction shows us the depth of the statement he was making. The religious leaders attempt to kill Jesus right then and there because he uses “I AM” as a proper name - the name of God. This reveals Jesus’ identity as an eternal member of the Trinity.

2. **Belief.** The reason that John reveals the nature of Jesus to the reader is so that Jesus’ purpose might be accomplished. Jesus came so that the world might believe in him. John 3:16 is perhaps one of the most well known Bible verses of all time. This verse tells us that God sent his son that we might believe in him and have eternal life. The Greek verb for “believe” is used 98 times in this

particular Gospel. John shows the reader many stages of belief throughout his Gospel by retelling Jesus' interactions with individuals. These individuals show different aspects of what it means to believe. We see the struggle of Nicodemus in chapter 3. We see the beginning of the Samaritan woman's belief and the official's need for a sign in chapter 4. In chapter 9, we see the formerly blind man who knows not how he was healed, but just that Jesus had healed him. We see the famous doubt and subsequent reassurance of Thomas in chapter 20. Finally in chapter 21 we see Jesus ask Peter to put action to his belief with his repeated command of "follow me."

John goes to great lengths to reveal Jesus and show how this revelation leads to belief. This connection between evidence and conclusion is cyclical. John reveals identity through Jesus' signs and statements, so that others might believe. Then he immediately shows us that it is our belief that changes our identity. These two themes of belief and identity are inseparable. The identity of Jesus gives us reason to believe which changes our identity. Yet because of our new identity we can believe Jesus in deeper and more active ways as he continues to reveal himself to us in our belief.

**Advice for Reading:** It is easy to run into quick confusion in the book of John because it is so different from the other three Gospels. When considering the different perspective in the four Gospels, it is helpful to know that John wrote his Gospel several years after the other Gospels were written and circulated. While many people were hearing an account of Jesus for the first time through the other Gospels, John was presenting events that most readers would have already been familiar with. The new presentation of events was purposeful and intended to strengthen the reader's belief by telling the stories in a different way or with more detail.

It is also very helpful to see that John was addressing contemporary issues of his day with his concepts, word choices, and careful arrangement. It was common in popular first century Greek philosophy to believe that all that was physical was evil and all that was spiritual, mental, or immaterial was good. The ultimate form of this good was referred to as "the Logos" meaning the divine and all encompassing reason for everything. When John says of Jesus "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" in the Greek he actually refers to Jesus as the Logos. The claim that the ultimate concept of immaterial good became physical would have challenged their worldview in a way we can scarcely imagine. John intentionally harmonizes the physical and spiritual worlds and shows the contemporary philosophies of his day that Jesus is the center of both.

Finally, pay attention to the role that the Holy Spirit plays throughout the book. The Holy Spirit empowered John and the other disciples to make Jesus known to the world. The Holy Spirit offers you deep intimacy with the Trinity. John, through the Holy Spirit, wants you to look closely to Jesus and have your belief strengthened by the revelations that John records here.

**Main Application:** Take hold of the abundant and eternal life offered to you right now, through your relationship to Jesus.