

# The Apostle John



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 8:21, 22; Mark 10:35–45; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John.*

**Memory Text:** “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (*3 John 4, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** The apostle John is one of the most loved characters from the Bible. What can we learn from him?

A church tradition describes the apostle John as an old man living in Ephesus. Because of his feeble condition, his followers had to carry him to church. As they met together, his only spoken words were, “Little children, love one another.”

His followers tired of hearing John repeat the same thing all the time and asked, “Master, why do you always say this?”

“It is the Lord’s command,” he replied. “And if this alone be done, it is enough!”

Whether true or not, this story captures the essence of this “son of thunder” who was eventually transformed into a “son of love and grace.”

In John’s three epistles, or letters, we see the heart of a man whose life is motivated by love; we see also some of the most encouraging verses in the Bible. One of the most famous is “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (*1 John 2:1, NIV*).

This week we will explore further the life and mission of this pillar of the early Christian church.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.*

## A Special Calling

When Jesus called John and his brother James to follow Him, they were working in their boat fishing. “And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him” (*Mark 1:20*).

**Read** carefully **Mark 1:20** again. **What important principles can we take from there about what it means to follow Jesus?** *See also Matt. 8:21, 22; Luke 14:26; Phil. 3:8.*

John’s decision to follow Jesus and leave his father’s business would forever change his life. Luke gives the most detailed account of Jesus’ call (*Luke 5:1–11*).

**What** verse in **Luke 5:1–11** again conveys what it means to be a follower of Jesus? **What, again, is the point that is being made?**

No question, those who follow Jesus need to make a full and complete commitment. Jesus, as Lord of all, is owed all. Yet, He does not demand our hearts out of selfishness; no, not at all. Instead, He knows the reality of the battle that we are in, and if there is any opening, any area of self not surrendered, the evil one will take advantage and use it to try to destroy us. Thus, we need to surrender completely to the Lord.

Which John did. And thus, instead of catching fish, John spent the rest of his life catching people for the kingdom of heaven. From now on, John’s mission field was the world—to carry hope and healing and the good news to those who desperately needed it. Though he would have some hard lessons to learn, because he was dedicated to Jesus, he was in a position to learn them, no matter the pain that would come.

**How committed are you to Jesus? Have you forsaken all for Him? How can you know where your heart truly is? What changes might you need to make?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

▶ **Key Text:** 3 John 4

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** John is the connecting link, physically and spiritually, between the early church and the second generation.

**Feel:** A desire to see the class develop character traits molded by Jesus as were John's.

**Do:** Have the class members take a close look at themselves in the light of John's life and accomplishments.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. The Logos: Theology at Its Best** (*John 1:1–3*)

**A** Outline with the class the various applications of the Greek word *logos* (see Tuesday's lesson).

**B** How does John apply this *logos* concept to Jesus? Why do you think John used this particular word when he talked about Jesus some thirty years after His ministry on earth?

**II. Called** (*Luke 5:1–11*)

**Case Study:** Imagine yourself as the manager of this "Peter & John Fisheries, Inc." (*Luke 5:10*), trying to get along with Peter, the militant, armed nationalist matched with John, the hot-tempered, ambitious social climber. How would you handle that?

**III. Character Refinement** (*Mark 10:35–45, 1 John 2:10*)

**Case Study:** Have the class picture John some years later. How has he changed, what changed him, and how does he now react? Add some Bible texts to illustrate your analysis.

▶ **Summary:** John let his time with Jesus flow into all his words and actions. His later life and writings remind us of the primacy of love in the Christian life.

## Sons of Thunder

Jesus gave John and his brother James a special nickname—“the sons of thunder” (or *Boanerges* in Aramaic). Evidence suggests that this name referred to their disposition—a disposition that Jesus gently corrects.

**Read** Mark 10:35–45. What request do James and John make? How does Jesus respond to their request? What does this tell us about the character of both these men?

John and his brother also showed an unhealthy pride. In response to their request, Jesus asked if they could share His fate. “We can,” they boasted (*Mark 10:39*).

On another occasion Jesus and His disciples were traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. As appears to have been His normal habit, Jesus went directly through Samaria rather than circumnavigating in order to avoid the hated Samaritans. He sent James and John ahead to find lodging for the night. They approached one village, but when the people learned they were headed for Jerusalem, they showed no hospitality.

**What** does their response to this indignity also reveal about their character? How much does the beloved John have to learn? *Luke 9:54*.

What a contrast we can see in the John depicted here in these accounts and the one who writes the letters he does later. What a changed man; what a changed personality! No doubt, though, the change did not happen easily or overnight. John had some hard lessons to learn that enabled him to become the great missionary that he eventually became.

**Recount some of your most recent hard lessons. What did you learn? What other ways could you have learned what you did other than through suffering? What other lessons do you need to learn? What changes do you need to make in your life now that, perhaps, could spare you from having to learn them the hard way?**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—**Motivate**

Some people read the Bible as if they're cramming for an exam or preparing to play a game of Trivial Pursuit. They fill their heads with lots of details: names, places, chapters, and verses. But that kind of knowledge, while useful on a certain level, does not have the power to transform our lives. Jesus said to those who persecuted Him, “ ‘You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life’ ” (*John 5:39, 40, NIV*).

This week's lesson focuses on one of Christ's disciples who, perhaps more than any other, understood Jesus' character of unconditional love and unqualified acceptance of sinners.

Your task as teacher is to remind your class that knowledge about the Bible will take us only so far in securing our salvation. In the final analysis, only our relationship with Christ will save us and transform us—as it did for John—from being a “child of Thunder” to a “disciple whom Jesus loved.”

### ► **STEP 2**—**Explore**

## Bible Commentary

### I. **Startled by Grace** (*Have someone read Luke 5:1–11 out loud.*)

A few years ago the book *The Tipping Point* appeared on several best-seller lists. In it author Malcolm Gladwell described the process by which a person, idea, or product goes from being practically unknown to sweeping society like wildfire.

It's likely that John, James, Peter, and Andrew knew about Jesus some time before they laid down their nets to follow Him. It's unwise to drop everything to follow someone we know nothing about. (What parents would encourage their children to marry someone they met that afternoon on a flight from Chicago?)

**Consider This:** What was it about Jesus and His teachings that captured the attention of these first disciples? Remember, they hadn't yet

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## The Witness of John

As an eyewitness who had spent much time in Jesus' company, John had much to tell; more, in fact, than he could.

**Read John 21:25.** What message do you think John was seeking to convey by that statement? What hope can we find in that text?

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Though not able to tell us everything, John, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, does teach us one of the most important of all truths, that Jesus Christ came in human flesh. That truth is something that all the philosophy, science, and logic could never lead us to. Instead, God uses John to tell it to us.

In the first verse of his Gospel, John refers to the Word, or in Greek, the *logos*. To the Jewish reader, the Word referred to the Word of God that created the world, as well as to His teachings, or law, that guides the way we should live our lives (*see Deut. 32:45–47*).

For the Greek reader, *logos* had other meanings. The *logos* was a life force that kept the universe together. The symmetry of a leaf, the harmony of the seasons, the stars in the sky—all were kept in balance by the *logos*. The philosophers Heracleitus, Plutarch, Philo, and Plato, as well as various stoic philosophers, wrote about the *logos*.

For both Jewish and Greek readers, John makes a startling claim: This *Logos* is a person. The *Logos* became flesh and broke into human history in a specific place at a specific time with a specific purpose—to bring salvation to humanity.

**Read John 1:1–3, 14.** What does this mean? In your own words, write out your best understanding of what the Lord is revealing to us here.

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Jesus, our Creator, entered into humanity and became a human being. That alone is amazing; add to it the reason He came, to die for our sins, and we are given a revelation of the character of God that should bring us to our knees in gratefulness, faith, and humble obedience.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

seen some of His greatest miracles or heard some of His more popular teachings. What role did the miracle of the fish play in their decision?

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## II. Transformed by Degrees *(Have someone read Luke 9:51–56 and Mark 10:35–45 out loud.)*

In the Bible, the only person who lived a perfect life is Jesus. Everyone else had to grow in his or her spiritual development as he or she became more like Christ. The fact that we can read in a few verses both their failures and their triumphs may give some the false hope that transformation is effortless and instantaneous. In fact, spiritual growth requires discipline, patience, and perseverance practiced over a lifetime.

**Consider This:** Ellen G. White wrote, “The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 57, 58.

Are we more likely to notice spiritual growth in ourselves and others over days, months, or years? What does that say about spiritual growth?

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## III. Captivated by Love *(Have someone read 1 John 3:1–3 out loud.)*

In the Gospels, the names Peter, James, and John always head the lists of Jesus’ disciples. Yet, in John’s Gospel, his name doesn’t appear at all. Four times John is identified as “the one whom Jesus loved.” John leaned against Jesus at the Last Supper, he was at the foot of the cross when all the other disciples had fled, he was one of the first to visit the empty tomb, and he spent the rest of his life reminding Christ’s followers of the importance of love.

**Consider This:** What does love look like in your life? What form does it take in the life of your congregation?

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## Life-Giver

**“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”** (*John 20:31, NIV*).

In these words John summarizes the reason he wrote his Gospel, and the entire purpose of his life—to lead people to believe in Jesus in order that they might gain eternal life. A key theme, all through the New Testament, is that eternal life exists only in Jesus.

**Look up the following verses to see some of the things John says about this key theme, that of “life.” Also, as you read them, where can you see how the idea of “life” applies not only to eternal life but has immediate implications for life now?**

*John 3:15, 16, 36*

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*John 6:35*

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*John 6:63*

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*John 10:28*

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*John 12:25*

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*John 14:6*

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*John 17:3*

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What makes these promises of eternal life so important is that, although all creatures on earth die, human beings alone are capable of contemplating the idea of eternity. We alone can grasp the vast gap between our short existence and the prospect of eternity, and the cold reality of that gap hangs over us every instant of our lives—lives that are just a clogged artery, a drunken driver, or an AIDS virus away from ending.

What a wonderful hope we have, then, to know that death is not the end; on the contrary, it is just a sleep that to us will seem like a second, and the next thing we know we will be with Jesus, for eternity.

**How should the hope of eternal life impact how we live now? In what ways do you live this life differently, knowing that you have the promise of eternal life?**



*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Questions:**

- 1 Can you remember when you realized that salvation is a gift that cannot be earned? Describe in one word how you felt when you came to that realization. Why is this such an important truth to remember? How can you help others understand the reality of salvation by faith alone?
- 2 Some transformations seem instantaneous: drunk to sober, addicted to liberated, guilty to guilt-free. But other less dramatic transformations seem to take forever: impatience, quick temper, procrastination, etc. Should we be satisfied with degrees of transformation? If so, how should we measure progress? What are the potential dangers in measuring our progress in these things? At the same time, how can we know if we need to make improvements?

**Application Questions:**

- 1 How did John become known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”? What would have to happen in our lives for that to be said about us?
- 2 “This is love:” wrote John, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (*1 John 4:10, NIV*). Selfless love (Greek: *agape*) gives without expecting anything in return. List at least five examples of selfless love that do not have anything to do with family relationships (i.e., husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters).

**Witnessing**

As a class, select an individual, family, or group to whom you can demonstrate God’s love. Designate a specific amount of time (a week, a month, a quarter) during which you can do something tangible to meet their material or spiritual needs. Outline a comprehensive, step-by-step plan, along with names, actions, and expected results.

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## Spending Time With Jesus

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 11).

**What** does John mean about those who had not seen God? What is his point? How does one see God?

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John had much to learn from Jesus. Even after spending time in His compassionate presence, John was still protective of his own turf and intolerant of others. On one occasion he stopped someone from casting out demons in Jesus’ name because he was not an official disciple (*Mark 9:38*). Jesus gently taught him that “ ‘whoever is not against us is for us’ ” (*vs. 40, NIV*).

John grew in strength of character at the Master’s side. At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, when other disciples had fled, John alone remained at the foot of the cross. The regard Jesus held for John is shown in the way He entrusted His mother into John’s care (*John 19:26, 27*).

**Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.** What important principle is found there? What practical ways can we apply this principle to our own lives?

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If you read the epistles of John, you cannot help noting the kindness, the gentleness, the compassion found all through them. What a profound difference from the John presented in the Gospels. Truly something utterly remarkable happened to that man. We, of course, know what it was: He had been with Jesus, and his life and character had been radically altered from the experience.

**Skim through the three epistles of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. Look at the character revealed there. How did Jesus change John’s life? What aspects of your own life could use change, as well? What practical steps are you taking in order to allow God to bring those changes?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED► **STEP 4—Apply**

When John laid down his fishing nets by Galilee’s shores, he never could have imagined where his journey with Jesus would take him. That’s how it is when we decide to follow Jesus. We may not leave everything to follow Him, as John and some of the other disciples did. But our lives will be changed; how can they not be?

There are two ways to experience Christ’s presence in our lives: One is as His agents, reflecting His love in acts of devotion and service to others. The other is by serving Him in the person of the less fortunate, the discouraged, the oppressed. Either way, our path of discipleship will draw us closer to Him.

**Consider This:** Ask your class members:

- What habits do you have to cultivate to stay in step with Christ? What works for you?
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- What’s your preferred method of Bible study? Do you study by topic? By book? By memorizing? By reading or consulting different versions?
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- What, for you, is the most meaningful way to pray? On your knees in a quiet place? At certain times? In certain places? By keeping a prayer list and recording God’s answers?
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- In what settings are you most comfortable reflecting God’s love, and to whom? How are you known for demonstrating God’s love outside the setting of your church?
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Close with prayer, asking God to open your eyes, as individuals and as a class, to better reflect Christ’s love to others.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “John the Beloved,” pp. 539–545, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In the terrible persecution that followed, the apostle John did much to confirm and strengthen the faith of the believers. He bore a testimony which his adversaries could not controvert and which helped his brethren to meet with courage and loyalty the trials that came upon them. When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under the fierce opposition they were forced to meet, the old, tried servant of Jesus would repeat with power and eloquence the story of the crucified and risen Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 568.

“John lived to be very old. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the stately temple. The last survivor of the disciples who had been intimately connected with the Saviour, his message had great influence in setting forth the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. No one could doubt his sincerity, and through his teachings many were led to turn from unbelief.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 569.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go through the three epistles of John again. What other elements of John’s character can be found there? What strong words can you find there for those who are not following truth? How does this help us understand what love is all about?
- 2 What is your understanding of the idea of character development? How does it work? How does Jesus change our characters? Though the Bible does relate many supernatural events, is there any event in which a person’s character is changed immediately, supernaturally, in the same way the blind were given sight or the lepers cured? If not, why not? What does the answer tell us about the process of character development?
- 3 As a class, talk about the answers to these questions: How loving and accepting is your local church? What things can you do to help your church become more loving and accepting of others?

**Summary:** Having experienced firsthand the life-giving love of his Savior, the apostle John let that experience flow into all his words and actions. His life and writings remind us of the primacy of love in the Christian life and how it must be the basis of all our mission activity.