

SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centered
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *John 1–12 For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **gray** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary toward the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

FOREWORD

Someone once said that John's Gospel is "deep enough for an elephant to swim and shallow enough for a child not to drown." I've never been able to conclusively verify the source of the saying (though many attribute it to Augustine), but there's a reason why this quote is so popular: it captures a profound truth about John's Gospel.

On the one hand, learned commentaries and **theological treatises** have been written over the centuries, grappling with the sublime theological insights embedded in John's deceptively simple language. On the other hand, every child knows (or at least used to know) passages such as John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And when a new Christian asks me where he should start reading the Bible, I generally recommend that he or she start with the Gospel of John.

John's Gospel is a **literary*** and theological masterpiece. As the final Gospel to be written and included in the **canon** of Scripture, it climaxes the New Testament's account of the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus and the salvation he came to bring. The ending of the Gospel—"This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (21:24–25)—concludes not only John's Gospel but the fourfold Gospel with which the New Testament begins.

From the **Prologue** to the **Epilogue**, John's Gospel reveals careful literary composition and theological **exposition**. In the Prologue, the author—John the **apostle**, the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve and Jesus' closest follower during his earthly ministry—sets the stage for his magnificent drama of the Word become flesh, who

* Words in **gray** are defined in the Glossary (page 209).

took up temporary residence among us and revealed the Father definitively in both word and deed, and supremely in his cross-death and subsequent resurrection. In this Word—the Lord Jesus Christ—God effected a new creation of which Jesus’ disciples served as the first representatives.

Then, John casts the drama of God’s sent Son in the form of two major acts: The Book of Signs (chapters 1 – 12) and The Book of Exaltation, or Glory (chapters 13 – 21). In the first act, Jesus is shown to reveal himself to God’s people, Israel, during the course of two major ministry cycles—the Cana Cycle (chapters 2 – 4) and the Festival Cycle (chapters 5 – 10). John’s account of Jesus’ seven **messianic signs** culminates in the narrative of the matchless raising of Lazarus (chapters 11 – 12), by which Jesus reveals himself as “the resurrection and the life,” and signals that he himself will soon rise from the dead.

The second act, remarkably, adopts the vantage point of Jesus’ exaltation with God in heaven. From John’s vantage point, Jesus’ finished cross-work is a **fait accompli**: “It is finished” (19:30). Thus, Jesus shows his disciples the full extent of his love, **incipiently** at the footwashing and climactically at the foot of the cross. Three days later, Jesus appears to his followers a total of three times, and **commissions** them as his representatives to take the gospel of salvation to the unbelieving world: “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (20:21).

Indeed, even the feet of an elephant swimming in John’s Gospel wouldn’t touch the bottom, so deep and rich is its theology. And yet, every child can read the story of, say, Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, and learn that he or she must be born again. To be sure, a child may not understand exactly what being “born again” means, but he or she will be able to relate to the illustration of the wind, whose origins are unknown but whose effects can be observed, and catch a glimpse of the spiritual transformation that is required for anyone to be able to enter the presence of the holy and righteous God when they die.

Now, because John’s Gospel is so deep and yet so simple, there’s

a need not only for academic commentaries but also for accessible, spiritually sensitive treatments and reflections. Josh Moody has given us a stimulating and edifying exemplar of the latter. He hasn't merely reported or repeated what John's Gospel says; rather, he has creatively processed John's teaching and relates it consistently and faithfully to people living in the real world today. As a **Johannine scholar**, I greatly welcome this because when writing academic works on the Gospel, there's often little room for the much-needed application.

My invitation for you, therefore, is simple, echoing another (more easily verifiable!) quote by Augustine: "*Tolle, lege!*"—take up and read! Read this volume, and yet, as you do so, don't forget to read also the Gospel which is so capably elucidated in the pages of the book you're about to enjoy.

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Bible translations used:

- NIV: New International Version, 2011 translation (This is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated.)
- NIV84: New International Version, 1984 translation
- ESV: English Standard Version
- NLT: New Living Translation

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 1 - 12

John's Gospel is an invitation to you to find life.

The standard structure of John's Gospel, which Andreas Köstenberger so ably and excellently outlines for us in his foreword on page 9, is one that I follow throughout this and the next volume. Within that framework, it is typical to regard John 20:30-31 as the apostle John's definitive statement as to the purpose of his writing his book:

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the **Messiah***, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

I will leave the explanation of these crucial verses to the appropriate place in that second volume of this guide. But it is important here, in the introduction to this first volume, to indicate our general trajectory, so that the various details that will be explained in this volume can begin to fit coherently into a whole in our minds.

First of all, the “signs” that John describes (which are covered in the first volume) are for a particular purpose; namely, that we may “believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name.” That statement, while on the surface fairly clear, does raise multiple other related questions of interpretation, and therefore also of application. For instance, what does it mean to “believe”? What sort of “life” is it that we have through belief in Jesus and in his name? And is this “belief” in Jesus meant to indicate to us that John's Gospel is primarily evangelistic in orientation?

As I say, I will leave the precise **exegesis** of that passage to the appropriate place in the second volume, but at this point I need to say the following. It seems to me clear that John does not only have in mind “evangelism” (that is, verbal outreach to those who are not yet saved), nor does he only have in mind “discipleship” (encouraging

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those who are already Christians to grow in their relationship with God and their obedience to him). Instead, because John is both at one level so simple—so appropriate for those just beginning to explore the Christian faith—and also at another level so profound, John’s Gospel seems to me to be intended to operate at both levels throughout. It is written both for the “seeker” and for the “disciple.”

The key in some ways is not so much the word “believe” or the concept of faith (which John will explain throughout his book, both by monologue and by narrative), but that word “life.” The great twentieth-century preacher D. Martyn

The key is not so much the word “believe” but that word “life.”

Lloyd-Jones thought that the key to understanding and appreciating John’s Gospel was not John 20, but (surprisingly for many modern scholars) the beginning of John’s Gospel—what we call his Prologue (1:1-18). Lloyd-Jones thought that in his letters (1, 2, and 3 John), the

apostle John typically indicated his purpose and point at the beginning of his writing, and that he did the same in John’s Gospel. For him, John’s Gospel was about showing us how to have this “life” (1:4)—“life to the full” in Jesus’ name (10:10). The discourse with the woman at the well in John chapter 4 was particularly important for Lloyd-Jones as an illustration of that theme in John; for instance:

“Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14)

So it is my prayer, as you read this first volume of this guide to John, that you would not simply have a deeper understanding of the text (though I certainly hope that is the case), nor simply have a list of practical “to-dos” for how to apply the text in a somewhat mechanical fashion (though I certainly hope that such practical application will result), but that you will be drawn to read more and more of John’s

Gospel itself, and encounter more and more deeply Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. It is as you do so that you will find “life” in and with him, with all the wonderful consequences—not least, forgiveness, fulfillment, and freedom—that John’s Gospel lays out.

That way, this guide will avoid the trap of dryness that the philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard highlighted when he advised that the first step to church and personal renewal was, “first of all to kill all the **commentators**.” In other words, I hope and pray that this book will be a mere lens through which you can examine the Bible itself more closely, and enjoy and magnify the Christ that John’s Gospel reveals.

1. THE WORD AND THE WITNESS

Today it is often assumed that the Christian understanding of ultimate matters—the origin of life, the meaning of life, the basic framework that gives explanations to science and reason—is substantially weakened by the discoveries of the scientific consensus over the last hundreds of years. You will often come across someone who says, “I can’t believe that, because of science.” Or they will say, “That old-fashioned myth about Christianity is simply not credible anymore.” If you ever find yourself wondering about the basic truth structure of Christianity, or if you have conversations with people who do, then John, and especially John chapter 1, is for you! Here we discover that the underpinning *logos*, or structure and order of the universe, is all centered on a person. John’s logic is persuasive, and his foundational commitment to the truth of God as revealed in Christ is no small superficiality; it is deeper than the ocean.

The fourth-century bishop and theologian Augustine is said to have commented that the Gospel of John is “deep enough for an elephant to swim and shallow enough for a child not to drown.” John’s “Prologue” is one of the most profound parts of John, but at the same time its message is quite simple. Probably the easiest way to understand its main theme is by comparing the beginning and end of this introduction to John’s Gospel. (Note, though, that the division of the first eighteen verses from the rest of John was probably not technically formalized until sometime after 1777, with Griesbach’s edition of the Greek New Testament. It is arguable that

the **archetype** contained no division at **verse 18**, though it did have one at **verse 5**. This guide maintains the (now) traditional view of John's "Prologue" (meaning the first 18 verses), but examines those verses for the way they also introduce the role of John the Baptist, which is otherwise likely to be viewed as a digression in the argument; his role is further developed after **verse 19***. (For more detail on this point, see P. J. Williams, "Not the Prologue of John," in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*.)

In the Beginning

Verse 1 reads, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." **Verse 14a** reads, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

John's Prologue, then, at its most simple, is a description of how the Word, which was in the beginning, became flesh. This subject of "the Word" runs throughout the first 18 verses. The scholar D. A. Carson puts it this way:

"The emphasis of the Prologue ... is on the revelation of the Word as the ultimate disclosure of God himself." (*John*, page 135)

There is one other major aspect of the theme in these verses: the witness. You can see this in the second half of **verse 14** and the beginning of **verse 15**: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son ... full of **grace** and truth. John testified concerning him..."

Throughout the early verses of John's Gospel, then, you will find two interlocking and interweaving themes that intertwine like two pieces of string: the Word and the witness.

- The Word: **verses 1-5**
- The witness: **verses 6-9**
- The Word: **verses 10-14a**
- The witness: **verses 14b-18**

* All John verse references being looked at in each chapter part are in **bold**.