



# Community Group Discussion Guide:

## Gospel of John Overview

### Author, Date, Recipient, Setting Context, and Purpose:

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*"If we should lose all the books of the Bible except two—John and Romans—Christianity could be saved." --  
Martin Luther*

One of the twelve disciples, John and his brother, James, were sons of Zebedee and were also dubbed "The Sons of Thunder" by Jesus. James was probably older than John since he is typically mentioned first. These brothers were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee and probably lived in Capernaum in Galilee. It is only in the Gospel of John that John has the designation of "the Beloved" or "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

John was among the first of the disciples Jesus called. He is always mentioned in the first four in the lists of the twelve disciples (Peter, Andrew, James, and John). He was included in the list of apostles. John was also among the "inner three" (Peter, James, and John) who were with Jesus on special occasions. Five books in the New Testament are attributed to John: his Gospel, three letters, and Revelation.

When John wrote, he was an older man and probably the only surviving apostle. His first four books were written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and before he was banished to Patmos. As an eyewitness of Christ, he wrote authoritatively to give this new generation of believers assurance and confidence in God and in their faith.

John wrote to new Christians and searching non-Christians. He wrote to believers everywhere, both Jew and non-Jew. John used brief statements and featured sharp contrasts (like light vs darkness) to prove Jesus was the Son of God and that whoever believed in Him would have eternal life. John wanted his readers to understand not only the full deity of Christ but also His full humanity. He wrote in the midst of Gnostic teaching, which proposed that Jesus only seemed to be human, and that true spirituality would be found in greater intellect.

John emphasized hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus because false teachers at this time were suggesting that Jesus' physical body was not a normal body; or that He was an angel, not a man; or that His physical body was an illusion. John battled this false teaching by saying he had first-hand experience with Jesus, and based on that experience, he shared what he knew about Jesus.

Over 90 percent of John's material is unique to his Gospel. Rather than focusing on the miracles, parables, and public speeches of Jesus, John emphasized the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how His followers should respond to His teaching. John's Gospel does not contain a genealogy or any record of Jesus' birth, childhood, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, ascension, institution of the Lord's Supper, or the "traditional" Great Commission. It is from John's Gospel that we discover Jesus' ministry lasted three years—due to his report of Jesus' attendance at three Passovers.

### John's Gospel:

- Begins with a poetic opening that captures the cosmic implications of Jesus' identity as the divine Word of God.
- Includes seven miracles or signs of Jesus—six of which are unique to John.
- Includes seven "I AM" statements made by Jesus.
- Introduces much of the theological teaching on the Trinity still held today.
- Includes only one reference to the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-6), none of the parables, and very little of Jesus' public preaching.
- Features conversations between individuals and Jesus (i.e., Nicodemus, Samaritan woman)
- Presents what is called the "Upper Room Discourse" (John 14-17) and has numerous lengthy discourses of Jesus.
- Calls Jesus the "Lamb of God."