

John Bible Studies for in-person Small Group Leaders 2022 GFM National Staff Conference

Dear Small Group Leader friends:

Hi! Thanks for being willing to lead a small group here at the GFM National Staff Conference! Here's what you can expect. There will be three one-hour small group times during the conference, each with a buffer of fifteen minutes before the next thing begins. Folks will probably not show up on time, so figure that you will have less than an hour to settle in, work through the passage, pray and then transition.

The studies themselves are composed of a series of questions rather than a manuscript format. You can invite folks to share general observations and ask their own questions but be aware that you won't have as much time to do this as you'd probably like.

All three passages are from the gospel of John. The [New Bible Dictionary \(NBD\)](#) comments that "John does not contradict the other [synoptic] gospels but interprets the Person who is depicted in them" (602). It also has this to say about John the Apostle:

- He was a cousin of Jesus on his mother's side.
- He was also a brother of James and is often connected with both Peter and James in the gospels.
- He was very probably "the disciple whom Jesus loved" but does not name himself in his gospel.
- The gospel of John, 1-3 John, and Revelation are all attributed to him. The gospel of John traditionally dates to the 90s AD and is thought to have been first published in Ephesus.

John's gospel can be broken into three parts:

- The revelation of Jesus to the world (1:1-12:50)
- The revelation of Jesus to his disciples (13:1-17:26)
- The glorification of Jesus (18:1-21:25)

John usually depicts scenes taking place in Jerusalem at the time of a Jewish feast. There are few Old Testament quotes in John but most key ideas are taken from the OT: **word, life, light, shepherd, Spirit, bread, vine, love, and witness**. Jesus is portrayed in John's gospel as the fulfillment of the OT.

Because John frequently circles back through themes and ideas, there will be some similarity between the ideas in each passage. One question we'd like you to keep in mind with each passage is, "How is this message **good news**, especially today?"

Laura Vellenga (and the GFM NSC planning team)

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John 3:1-21

This text has been provided for you as a handout.

1. Central truth: Eternal life comes only through belief in Jesus, no matter your background or credentials. The call is to look to Jesus and come into the light.
2. What do you think Nicodemus is looking for from Jesus? Where does Jesus go instead?
[Note: Pharisees were religious teachers who believed in an after-life. They preserved oral tradition and had significant religious and political influence. The Jewish ruling court, or Sanhedrin, was the highest Jewish court – the court of last resort. It legislated all aspects of Jewish religious and political life within the parameters laid down by biblical and rabbinic tradition. Gamaliel was the head of the Sanhedrin from 30AD-50AD. They were said to have maintained an unbroken chain of tradition since the time of Moses.]
3. How is the experience of being born of the Spirit like the experience of the blowing wind? What might this have sounded like to a high-ranking Jewish leader?
4. How would you characterize Nicodemus' response to Jesus' statement in v. 5? How much do you think he understands at this point?
5. Take a minute and read Numbers 21:4-9. How does Jesus want Nicodemus to understand this event?
6. How is belief described in this passage? To what extent do you think Nicodemus believes by the end of his exchange with Jesus? *[Note: It's unclear from this passage where Nicodemus lands but later passages in John (7:50-51 and 19:39-42) seem to indicate that he becomes a Jesus-follower.]*
7. Jesus' words (and John's commentary) are a shocking contrast to how Nicodemus and his contemporaries understood religious faith and political power. This is no less true today. How does this passage challenge or encourage you as you invite students and faculty to come into the light?

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John 15:18-16:15

This text has been provided for you as a handout.

Central truth: Bad times are coming, but Jesus will send an Advocate who will testify to the truth of the gospel. You must also testify and be guided by the Spirit of truth.

1. How does Jesus describe the world? What can the disciples expect from the world, and why?
[Cf. John 1:11.]
2. Why does Jesus say he is telling the disciples these things? How might knowing what's coming help prepare them? *[Note: The word for "world" here is "kosmos" in Gk.; NBD = synonym for inhabited world; "this world" that is set over against God.]*
3. What is significant about how the disciples are to respond? How might they be tempted to respond instead?
4. How have you experienced this sort of antagonistic relationship with the world in the last year? How have you experienced the guidance of the Spirit of truth in these moments?
5. What gives you the courage to testify to Jesus these days?

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John 20:19-31

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Central truth: Jesus was bodily resurrected and seen in the flesh by the disciples, who were sent out to call those who have not seen Jesus in the flesh to believe in him. You should believe in Jesus too because of their witness.

1. What do you notice about how Jesus appears to the disciples? Why does Jesus make a point of showing them his hands and his side?
2. What strikes you about Thomas? What's the sticking point for him in terms of belief? What is that he will not believe without proof? What sticking points (or objections) do you encounter in conversations about faith on campus?
3. A week passes and then Jesus shows up again. How are the two scenes similar/different?
4. What is significant about the repetition of the word "believe" in this passage? What does John think it means to believe? How are those who have not seen but yet believed blessed?
5. What does it mean to have life in the name of Jesus? How is this good news on campus? In your neighborhood? In your family?