

GOSPEL OF JOHN OVERVIEW

JOHN'S MAIN THING



TEACH IT COLLEGE AGE SESSION 1

ONE WEEK OUT

You may want to send out reminder notes to those who will be in your group. Let them know the date and time of the first session, and encourage them to be a part of every session. You may also want to challenge them to read the Gospel of John on their own, just to get a feel for it. (The students will be able to read each chapter in 15 minutes or less.)

As you prepare for the first session, remember to allow time for reproducing Scripture sheets and journal pages and for gathering the materials needed (see the *Materials* step below).

Most importantly, recruit a prayer team to pray specifically for your group. Supply the team with helpful specifics, such as names of students, when you're meeting, and the subject matter you're covering.

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the Session 1 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 1
- a notebook in which to keep his or her Scripture sheets and journal pages over the course of the study
- his or her own Bible and a pen

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- a pack of colored pencils (at least two colors per student)

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 1

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover John's purpose in writing his Gospel.
- be introduced to the connection between *true belief* and a changed life.
- be challenged to become a "sign" that will point others to belief in Jesus.

PRAYER

After your students have gathered, congratulate them on deciding to be a part of this study. Share that whenever you set out to dig deeper into God's Word, you can expect to grow closer to God. But you can also expect the enemy to try to knock you off course. Spend some time praying with the group, that students will stand firm in the Lord's will throughout this study and experience personal change through the power of his Word.

OPEN

Book Background

Begin the session by asking students to talk about a favorite book they've read. Use these points as a guide to draw out information about experiences with their books. Have them—

- describe when they read it and why they liked it so much.
- explain the purpose of the book. (Why did the author write it?)
- make a connection between the author's purpose and why the book was meaningful to them.
- share about any ways (big or little) the book changed them.

Transition by saying something like this:

The Bible is made up of 66 individual books, each having a specific purpose and making a unique contribution to the big picture of God. The Gospel of John, which we're going to unpack over the next few weeks, is one of these books—and it has a very specific purpose.

Lead your group in a brainstorm discussion about the Gospel of John. Use these questions to get things rolling:

What are a few things you know about John and his Gospel?

What makes this Gospel unique from the other three?

What do you think is the value in studying this book?

How could this ancient book possibly speak to the complex issues we face today?

Let the discussion be free-flowing, but share a few of these points:

-John wrote his Gospel within a hundred years of Jesus' ministry. Compared with all of history, this time span is about the equivalent of a live play-by-play!

-All of Jesus' exclusive "I am" statements (such as "I am the way and the truth and the life" in John 14:6) come from the Gospel of John. Apparently, John was encountering moral relativism in his culture (the belief that individuals or the culture can determine truth), much as we encounter it today.

-John actually walked with Jesus! His writings have the reliability of an eyewitness.

You could use this opportunity to point out the following info:

-Of the Bible's 66 books, only four cover the life of Jesus. These books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are called "Gospels."

-Matthew, Mark, and Luke include similar material and for the most part cover events in chronological order. The Gospel of John stands alone in that it contains events and teachings not found in the other accounts.

3. Digging In

Purpose Statement

Explain that the best way to understand a book of the Bible is to find out why the author wrote it. Why did God put this book in the Bible? Why did the Holy Spirit move someone to write these particular things for us today? Some authors of Bible books tell you right up front why they wrote them; others make you dig for it. John just lays it out there for us.

Ask students to read the following passages silently from their Bibles. Have them note *who* did *what* in the chart on their journal pages. After a few minutes, briefly discuss each passage, asking, "Who did what?" and recording this info on the whiteboard (similar to below).

	Who...	did what?
John 2:22	<i>Disciples...</i>	<i>recalled what Jesus said, believed the Scripture and words of Jesus.</i>
John 4:39	<i>Many Samaritans...</i>	<i>believed in Jesus.</i>
John 9:35-38	<i>A man thrown out...</i>	<i>believed in Jesus and worshiped him.</i>
John 11:23-27	<i>Martha...</i>	<i>believed Jesus to be the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God.</i>

Ask any volunteers to share what these passages have in common. Focus the discussion on the common action of believing.

Then process the nature of each person's belief, asking—

How did his or her belief come about?

How does his or her belief differ from the others we looked at?

Feel free to add these insights to the discussion:

-The disciples: They finally put it all together—how Jesus' teachings about the Resurrection meshed with Scripture. They combined experience with study.

-Many Samaritans: They believed because of someone's testimony.

-The man thrown out of the synagogue: He believed because of a direct encounter with Jesus.

-Martha: She was reaffirming her belief in the midst of hard circumstances.

Which of these people do you most identify with in your faith journey?

Do you feel that one of these scenes best describes most people's faith journeys?

Now call their attention to John 20:30-31 on their Scripture sheets. As they read the verses, ask them to find the following items in the passage and, using their colored pencils, mark each of these things uniquely:

1. The reason *why* "these" things are written.

These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ (v. 31).

2. To *whom* "these" things are written.

They are written to John's readers, "you" (v. 31).

3. What John wants us to believe.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (v. 31).

4. What happens *when* we believe.

We have life in his name (v. 31).

After discussing what the group found and marked, ask a few questions:

Going by this verse and the others we've looked at, what seems to be a key word in John's Gospel?

The key word seems to be "believe".

Who is the "you" referring to in John 20:31?

"You" refers to readers of this book, then and now (i.e., us!).

What's John's main thing?

Elicit these points:

-John believed that by reading about Jesus—by experiencing what he did and said—people would put their belief in him.

-John believed that this belief would give people life in Jesus' name.

-We're going to see how this works as we study this Gospel.

4. Digging Deeper

True Belief

Share with the group the Insight from Prep It regarding the Greek word for *believe*. Point out the connection between true belief and a person's behavior. You may want to illustrate this connection through the following questions:

How do we demonstrate our belief in aerodynamics?

We fly in an airplane.

How do we demonstrate our belief in a substance such as rubber?

We bungee jump or ride in a car (rubber tires).

How do we demonstrate our belief that exercise will keep us healthy?

We play sports.

How do we demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah? What do you do on a daily basis that is a direct result of your belief in Jesus?

It might be easy for students to give a simple answer to this question, such as "read my Bible." Hover on this question and press students to get beyond obvious answers. Help them see belief in Jesus in the context of their lives—how it should affect things such as their reactions to challenges, their decision-making, their interactions with people, their frustrations, their temptations.

If believing in Jesus hasn't changed your behavior, how would anyone actually know you believe?

Choose a side and state your case on this question: A person says he believes, but his behavior shows no outward sign of belief. Does he actually believe?


Let the group chew on that for a minute. Then say something like—

Now that we're armed with a little background on the word *believe*, let's dig deeper into the theme of John's Gospel.

Ask students to read on their own Jesus' words in John 3:11-18, printed on their Scripture sheets. As they read, ask them to look for the following:

1. Draw a light bulb  over the word *believe* and any other forms of this word.

2. Mark any benefits of believing with a "smiley" face  .

3. Mark any consequences for not believing with a "frowny" face  .

After a few minutes, use these questions to prompt a discussion about the benefits and consequences of believing or not believing.

Based on Jesus' words in John 3, what's the main benefit of believing?

The main benefit is salvation/eternal life (v. 16).

What's the main consequence of not believing?

The main consequence is condemnation/death (v. 18).

So what? Does the concept of eternal life mean anything to us right now?

Let this be an open-ended discussion on whether or not the prospect of living forever (spiritually, of course) is actually enough motivation to follow Jesus.

5. Taking It Inward



Eternal Life. So What?

After discussing that last question, allow some solitude time for students to journal—stream-of-consciousness style—about the thought-starters under Taking It Inward on their journal pages.

6. Wrapping It Up

Sharing and Prayer

If it fits the dynamics of your group, get into smaller groups of two or three for some honest sharing about the Taking It Inward questions and for prayer. Or ask for a volunteer to simply close in prayer on behalf of the entire group, praying that their belief in Jesus as the Christ will affect their lifestyle every day.