

# The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 1: The Word of Life Made Manifest

### 1 John 1:1-4

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is at stake doctrinally in these opening verses is nothing less than the identity of Jesus Christ. John is writing against an early form of the error that would later be called Docetism and Gnosticism, the claim that Jesus only seemed to have a body, that the divine Christ could not truly take on flesh. John answers with his own hands. He heard, saw, and handled the Word of life. The teacher should help the class feel the weight of this: that the eternal life of God was made manifest in a real human being, fully God and truly man, and that this incarnation is the bedrock on which the gospel, the atonement, and our salvation all rest. Remove it and there is nothing left to believe.

But notice that John does not write a lecture on Christology. He writes as a witness who is bursting to share what he has seen, and he names his goal twice: fellowship and complete joy. So the lesson aims at the heart as well as the head. The same Jesus who was touched in Galilee can be known in living fellowship today, through the apostolic word now preserved for us in Scripture. The teacher's task is to move students from holding correct facts about Christ to actually sharing life with Him and with one another.

Aim, then, at both targets this week. Establish the class firmly in the truth that the Word truly became flesh, so they can spot and resist every teaching that thins Jesus down to a symbol. And stir in them a longing for the fellowship and joy John describes, the shared life with the Father and the Son that overflows into deep, honest fellowship with God's people.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*John opens by calling Jesus "the Word of life" who was "from the beginning" and who "was made manifest" (vv. 1-2). What does this passage teach us about who Jesus is, both His eternal existence with the Father and His coming in real flesh?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the class hear the echo of Genesis and of John's Gospel. "In the beginning" opens both, and here John reaches behind creation itself: Jesus was "from the beginning," existing eternally with the Father before anything was made. The title "the Word of life" gathers up John 1, where the Word is God and the Word is the agent of creation and life. So John is making the highest possible claim about Jesus before he says anything else.

Then watch the hinge in verse 2: this eternal life “was made manifest.” The verb means to be made visible, brought out into the open. The One who cannot be seen, who dwelt in unapproachable light, stepped into history where He could be looked at and touched. This is the miracle of the incarnation. Help students hold the two truths together without letting go of either. Jesus is not a created being who was promoted, and He is not a phantom who only appeared to be human. He is the eternal Son who became genuinely flesh.

Connect this to why John is writing. The false teachers wanted a Christ without a body, a spiritual being too pure to touch the physical world. John’s pile of sensory verbs is his answer. A Savior who did not really come in the flesh could not really die in the flesh, and a Savior who did not really die could not save. The doctrine of who Jesus is and the doctrine of how we are saved stand or fall together.

Land the point pastorally. Because the Word truly became flesh, God is not distant or merely theoretical. He has drawn near in a way we can know. The eternal life that was with the Father is offered to us in this same Jesus.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The eternal pre-existence and deity of Christ, the Word who was with the Father from the beginning (John 1:1–2)
- The incarnation: the eternal Son truly became flesh and was made manifest (John 1:14)
- The unity of Christ’s person, fully God and truly man, against any teaching that denies His real humanity or His full deity
- The link between the incarnation and the atonement: only a Savior who truly came in the flesh could truly die for us
- Jesus as the source of eternal life, which is found in a Person and not in a system of ideas

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why would a Jesus who only “seemed” to be human leave us with no real gospel?
- How does the truth of the incarnation change the way we picture God’s nearness to us?
- Where do people today still try to keep a “spiritual” Jesus while denying the demands of the living Lord?

## **Question 2**

### **Student Question:**

*John stacks up the words “heard,” “seen,” “looked upon,” and “touched” to describe his experience of Jesus. When it comes to your own walk with Christ, does He feel real and near to you, or more like a distant idea? Be honest, and name what has made the difference.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honesty, not a tidy answer. Many sincere believers carry a quiet sense that Jesus is real in theory but distant in practice. They can recite truths about Him while feeling little of His nearness. Give the class permission to admit that without shame.

Help them see that John's nearness to Jesus came through real encounter and continued through ongoing fellowship. We will not touch Jesus with our hands as John did, but we are not left with mere ideas either. We meet Him in His word, in prayer, in the Lord's Supper, in the fellowship of His body, and in obedience that proves real. Where these have grown thin, Christ tends to feel distant.

Gently press toward the constructive half of the question. What has made the difference, in seasons when Jesus felt near? Usually it is some combination of Scripture taken seriously, honest prayer, worship with God's people, and obedience in small things. Naming what once drew them close often shows the way back.

Be careful not to reduce nearness to a feeling. Feelings rise and fall. The aim is a settled, growing fellowship with a real Person, which often produces warmth but does not depend on it day to day.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The reality of fellowship with the living Christ, not merely intellectual assent to facts about Him
- The ordinary means through which we know Christ: the word, prayer, the assembly, the Lord's Supper, and obedience
- The difference between faith as a settled relationship and faith as a passing feeling
- The danger of a Christianity that is informed but not personal

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When in your life has Jesus felt most real and near? What were you doing in that season?
- What practices tend to make Christ feel distant when you neglect them?
- How can the church help one another move from knowing about Jesus to knowing Him?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*John says the eternal life "was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (v. 2). How does the truth that eternal life is found in a Person, and not in a philosophy or a religious system, shape the way we should think about salvation?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John defines eternal life in a strikingly personal way. It is not first a place or a length of days but a Person who “was with the Father.” Later he will say plainly, “whoever has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12). Salvation, then, is union with Christ, not the acceptance of a creed or the completion of a ritual checklist.

This guards us on two sides. On one side it warns against treating salvation as mere intellectual agreement, as though knowing the right facts saved us. On the other side it warns against treating it as bare ceremony, going through religious motions while the heart remains far from Christ. Eternal life is found in being joined to the living Lord.

At the same time, because this Person has spoken and acted in history, coming to Him is not vague or mystical. He has told us how to come. We hear the gospel, believe in Him, turn from sin, confess Him as Lord, and are baptized into Him (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3–4). These are not a substitute for a relationship with Christ; they are the God-appointed way we are joined to the Person who is our life.

Help students feel the warmth of this. The goal of the gospel is not a transaction but a Person. Salvation means having the Son, sharing His life now, and being kept with Him forever.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Eternal life as union with the person of Christ (1 John 5:11–12)
- Salvation as relationship with the living Lord, not mere assent or empty ritual
- The God-appointed response to the gospel: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26–27)
- The danger of reducing salvation to facts known or boxes checked

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between knowing facts about Jesus and having the Son?
- How do faith, repentance, confession, and baptism join us to the Person who is our life rather than replace Him?
- Why is it good news that salvation is found in a Person and not in our performance?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*John wrote because false teachers were denying that Jesus came in the flesh. Where do you see our own culture trying to keep Jesus as a nice idea while quietly removing the demands of the real, living Lord? Where are you tempted to do the same?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The ancient error tried to make Jesus too spiritual to touch. Our culture often makes the opposite-shaped error with the same result: it keeps a soft, agreeable Jesus, a wise teacher of

love and acceptance, while quietly erasing His lordship, His call to repent, and His authority to define right and wrong. In both cases the real Christ is replaced with a manageable one.

Invite the class to name where they see this. A Jesus who only affirms and never confronts. A Jesus enlisted for a political cause. A Jesus reduced to a personal life coach. Each version keeps the name while removing the Lord.

Then turn the question inward, which is where it must land. Every believer is tempted to trim Jesus to fit. We welcome His comfort but resist His commands. We love the Savior and edit the Lord. Help students name the specific place where they prefer a tame Jesus to the living One.

Close with hope. The real Jesus, the One John touched, is far better than any version we would invent. His demands are not the opposite of His love; they are the shape of it. Surrender to the living Lord is the doorway to the very fellowship and joy John promises.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The lordship of Christ, not merely His helpfulness or His example
- The danger of remaking Jesus into a manageable image (idolatry of a tamed Christ)
- The unity of Christ as Savior and Lord; we cannot receive one and refuse the other
- The call to repentance and submission as part of receiving the real Jesus

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What are some popular but distorted pictures of Jesus in our culture?
- Which command of Jesus are you most tempted to soften or set aside?
- Why is the demanding, living Lord actually better news than a tame, agreeable one?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*John says the purpose of his testimony is “that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (v. 3). What does this teach us about the nature and the source of true Christian fellowship?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The word translated fellowship is *koinonia*, a sharing or partnership in something held in common. John’s point is that Christian fellowship is not first a matter of shared interests or shared meals, though it includes warm community. It is a shared participation in the life of God Himself, with the Father and the Son.

Notice the order. Fellowship with the apostles (and so with one another) flows from a prior fellowship with God. We are bound together because we are each bound to Christ. This is why

the deepest fellowship is found among those who share the same Lord, the same gospel, and the same obedience, and why mere social connection, however pleasant, is not the same thing.

This also explains how fellowship is created: through the apostolic word. John says, in effect, I testify so that you may share what I share. The truth he proclaims is the doorway in. There is no fellowship with God that bypasses the truth about His Son, which is exactly why the false teachers, by denying that truth, had cut themselves off (see 1 John 2:19).

Help students raise their estimate of what the church is. When the saints gather, this is not a club meeting. It is the shared life of people who together have fellowship with the living God. That dignifies the assembly, the Lord's Supper, and even ordinary conversations among believers.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Fellowship (koinonia) as shared participation in the life of God, Father and Son
- The vertical ground of horizontal fellowship: union with Christ creates union with one another
- The apostolic word as the doorway into fellowship with God (the authority of Scripture)
- The local church as the visible expression of this shared life
- Truth as essential to fellowship; there is no fellowship with God apart from the truth about His Son

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How is Christian fellowship different from ordinary friendship or social connection?
- Why can there be no true fellowship with God that ignores the truth about Jesus?
- How should this raise our view of the Lord's Day assembly and the Lord's Supper?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Fellowship here means a shared life, not just shared seats in a building on the Lord's Day. Where is your own fellowship with other believers thin or merely social, and what would it look like to share genuine life with them this week?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question presses the truth of verse 3 into daily practice. Many of us are present with the saints without truly sharing life with them. We exchange greetings, sit through the assembly, and leave without ever opening our actual lives to anyone. Help students name that gap without guilt-tripping them.

Draw out what genuine fellowship looks like in concrete terms: confessing struggles, praying together, bearing burdens, speaking truth in love, sharing meals and homes, showing up in

crisis. The New Testament knows nothing of a private Christianity lived at a polite distance from other believers.

Encourage one specific, attainable step. Inviting someone to a meal, joining a smaller group for prayer and study, reaching out to a member who has drifted, or simply telling one trusted brother or sister the truth about how their walk is going. Real fellowship usually begins with a single act of opening up.

Remind the class that this is not optional extra credit. The shared life John describes is part of how Christ keeps and grows us. We were never meant to walk with the Lord in isolation.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The believer's responsibility to pursue, not merely attend, fellowship
- Mutual confession, prayer, and burden-bearing as marks of biblical fellowship (Galatians 6:2; James 5:16)
- The error of a privatized, isolated Christianity
- The role of the body in keeping and growing each believer

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is your fellowship with other Christians more social than spiritual?
- What keeps us at a safe distance from one another, and how do we overcome it?
- What is one concrete step toward sharing real life with a brother or sister this week?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Notice that fellowship with one another flows out of fellowship "with the Father and with his Son" (v. 3). Why can there be no true unity among Christians that is not first grounded in a shared relationship with God through Jesus?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question opens the doctrinal logic of Christian unity. Our oneness is not manufactured by agreeing to be agreeable, nor by setting truth aside for the sake of peace. It is the natural result of each believer being joined to the same Lord. Spokes are united as they draw toward one hub.

This explains why unity and truth can never be played against each other. Some imagine that insisting on the truth about Christ damages unity. John says the opposite: the truth about the Son is the very ground on which fellowship stands. The false teachers had broken fellowship precisely by abandoning that truth.

It also explains the limits of fellowship. We can love all people and seek the good of all, but the deep, shared life of the church belongs to those who share its Lord and walk in His way. This is not arrogance; it is simply what fellowship is. You cannot share what is not held in common.

Point the class to Jesus' own prayer in John 17, that His people would be one as He and the Father are one, a unity rooted in the truth of the word the Father gave Him. Christian unity is a gift that flows downward from our shared life with God, not a project we generate from below.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Unity grounded in shared union with Christ, not in mere agreement or sentiment
- Truth and unity as allies, not rivals (John 17:17–21)
- The basis and the limits of fellowship in a shared Lord and gospel
- Christ's prayer for the oneness of His people

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is unity that ignores the truth about Christ a false unity?
- How does being joined to the same Lord make us one with very different people?
- Where are we tempted to seek unity on the wrong basis?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*John ties his joy directly to the spiritual health and fellowship of the people he is writing to (v. 4). Whose walk with Christ has God tied to your joy, and how faithfully are you investing in them?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John's joy is not self-contained. He says he writes "so that our joy may be complete," and his joy is wrapped up in their fellowship with God. This is the heart of a shepherd, a parent, a faithful friend. The spiritual lives of others are not a duty to him; they are a source of his deepest gladness.

Invite students to consider whose souls God has tied to their own. For parents it is children. For elders it is the flock. For all of us it is fellow members, friends, neighbors, those we are discipling or who are discipling us. The question gently exposes whether we view such people as obligations or as occasions for joy.

Then press the second half: how faithfully are you investing? John gave his life, and finally his pen, to the spiritual welfare of others. Help students consider concrete investment: prayer, encouragement, teaching, time, presence. Joy in others' growth comes to those who actually pour themselves into it.



Encourage them that this is one of God's great gifts. To have your joy bound up with someone's walk with Christ is to taste the very love God has for us. It is costly, but it is the path to a fuller joy than self-focused living can ever give.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Christian joy as bound up in the spiritual welfare of others
- The shepherding and discipling responsibility shared, in measure, by all believers
- Love that invests sacrificially in another's walk with Christ
- The completion of joy through fellowship rather than through self-focus

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Whose growth in Christ would genuinely gladden your heart? Whose would you grieve over?
- What does faithful investment in another person's faith actually require of you?
- How does tying our joy to others' walk with Christ free us from self-centered living?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*John presents Jesus as the eternal Word who became flesh, was handled by human hands, and reveals the Father (vv. 1–2; compare John 1:1–14). Why is a right understanding of who Jesus is, fully God and truly man, the foundation that holds up everything else we believe and how we are saved?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and rightly so, because everything in John's letters rests here. Walk the class carefully through the two truths that must be held together. Jesus is fully God: He was "from the beginning," the eternal life that "was with the Father." And Jesus is truly man: He was heard, seen, looked upon, and touched. To deny either is to lose the real Christ.

Show why His deity matters. Only God can reveal God, only God can give eternal life, and only an offering of infinite worth could atone for the sin of the world. If Jesus were merely a great man, His death would be a tragedy, not a salvation. Because He is God the Son, His blood is sufficient for the sins of the whole world.

Then show why His humanity matters just as much. The wages of sin is death for human beings, so our Savior had to be one of us to die in our place. He had to take real flesh and blood to offer it on the cross and to rise bodily for our hope. A phantom Christ cannot bleed, cannot die, and cannot save. This is exactly the truth the false teachers attacked, and exactly why John leads with his hands.

Tie it to the doctrine of revelation as well. Because Jesus is the Word who became flesh, He makes the unseen Father known (John 1:18). When we want to know what God is like, we look at Christ. This guards us from inventing a God to our liking and anchors all our knowledge of God in the Son.

Land it where John lands it: this is not abstract theology. Because the Word became flesh and we know who He is, we can have real fellowship with the real God and a joy that is complete. Get Jesus wrong and everything unravels. Get Jesus right and the whole gospel opens before us.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The full deity of Christ as necessary for revelation, atonement, and the gift of life
- The true humanity of Christ as necessary for a real death and bodily resurrection in our place
- The error of denying either the deity or the humanity of Jesus (the heresy John confronts)
- Christ as the revelation of the Father; we know God by knowing the Son (John 1:18; 14:9)
- The incarnation as the foundation of the gospel, the atonement, and Christian hope
- The sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, grounded in who He is

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does our salvation require a Savior who is both fully God and truly man?
- What is lost if we deny Christ's deity? What is lost if we deny His humanity?
- How does looking at Jesus correct our wrong ideas about what God is like?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back across these four verses. John moves from what he touched, to the fellowship it creates, to the joy that is made complete. Name one specific way you sense Jesus inviting you, through this passage, to move from knowing about Him to sharing real life with Him.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone question asks students to gather the whole passage into one personal response. Resist the urge to answer it for them. The aim is that each person names a specific, Spirit-prompted next step, not a general resolution to do better.

Help them trace John's movement once more: a real Christ who can be known, a fellowship that flows from Him, a joy that is completed in that shared life. The invitation in this passage is to leave the sidelines of secondhand religion and enter the firsthand fellowship John describes.

Listen for honesty. For one person the step may be returning to Scripture and prayer as a real meeting with a real Person. For another it may be opening their life to the fellowship of the church. For another it may be surrendering some area where they have kept Jesus as an idea

rather than Lord. For someone not yet in Christ, it may be responding to the gospel in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism.

Close the lesson by pointing back to the source. The same eternal life John touched is offered still. Christ has come near. The invitation is not to try harder in our own strength but to share His life, and to find in Him the joy that is complete.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The movement from knowledge about Christ to fellowship with Christ
- Personal application of the incarnation, fellowship, and joy of this passage
- The ongoing nature of fellowship with God as a shared life, not a one-time decision
- The gospel invitation for any who do not yet have the Son

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the one step this passage is pressing on you personally?
- What keeps you on the sidelines of secondhand religion, and how will you step in?
- How can this class help hold one another to the steps we name today?