

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 1:1–18 is the doctrinal foundation of the entire Gospel, and almost everything that is at stake in the Christian faith is packed into these eighteen verses. John deliberately echoes Genesis 1, “In the beginning,” and then makes three claims that the church has had to defend ever since: the Word existed eternally before creation, the Word was distinct from the Father (“with God”), and the Word was fully divine (“was God”). He then tells us that this eternal, divine Word “became flesh.” The teacher should be ready to handle this passage with real confidence, because it stands directly against every view that reduces Jesus to a created being, an exalted angel, an adopted man, or simply a great moral teacher. The deity, eternity, and incarnation of Christ are not negotiable footnotes. They are the ground we stand on.

At the same time, this prologue was never meant to be only a theological argument. John writes like a worshipper. He is overwhelmed that the One who made the stars came down to live in a body like ours, that we have “seen his glory,” that grace and truth have arrived in a Person we can know. The doctrine is meant to land in the heart as wonder and as welcome. The same passage that defends the deity of Christ also extends an invitation: to all who receive Him, He gives the right to become children of God. The teacher’s task is to let the height of the doctrine produce the depth of the worship.

So aim at both targets. Send students home able to say clearly who Jesus is and why it matters, and send them home with a larger, warmer love for the Christ who stepped into their world. The disciple we are forming should be both better defended against error and more captured by glory.

Question 1

Student Question:

John opens by telling us that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v. 1). What does each part of this verse teach us about who Jesus is, and why is it significant that He is both “with God” and “was God”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal anchor of the whole lesson, so take your time. John packs three distinct claims into verse 1, and each one matters. First, “in the beginning was the Word.” The verb is a continuous past tense: when the beginning began, the Word already was. He did not come into existence; He simply was. This rules out any notion that there was a time when the Son was not.

Second, “the Word was with God.” The Word is personally distinct from the Father, face to face with Him, in eternal relationship. The Son is not just a mode or a mask of the Father. Third, “the Word was God.” The Word shares fully in the divine nature.

Be ready for the most common objection, which usually concerns the grammar of the third clause. Some argue that because the Greek lacks the definite article before “God” in “the Word was God,” it should be watered down to “a god” or “divine in some lesser sense.” Help students see that this misreads the Greek. The word order places the predicate noun first for emphasis on the nature of the Word, and standard Greek grammar expects exactly this construction when the predicate precedes the verb. John is saying the Word is fully God by nature, while still being distinct from the Father he is “with.” Verse 18 and verse 14 confirm it.

Show how the rest of the prologue reinforces verse 1. Verse 3 says all things were made through Him, which means He Himself is not a thing that was made; the Creator stands outside the category of creation. Verse 14 says this Word “became flesh,” which a mere creature could not meaningfully do, and verse 18 calls Him “the only God, who is at the Father’s side.” The whole passage is woven together to say one thing about Jesus: truly God, truly distinct from the Father, truly come in the flesh.

Finally, help students feel why this is not abstract. If Jesus is less than God, then the cross is just the death of a good man and cannot save us, our worship of Him is idolatry, and our hope rests on a creature. But if the Word is God, then in Christ we are dealing with God Himself reaching down to us. The doctrine guards the gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The eternal pre-existence of the Son: there was never a time when He was not (John 1:1; 8:58; 17:5).
- The full deity of Christ, who is God by nature and not a created or lesser being (John 1:1; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:8).
- The personal distinction between the Father and the Son within the one God (“the Word was with God”).
- A scriptural answer to groups that translate verse 1 as “a god” and reduce Jesus to a creature.
- Christ as Creator, outside the category of created things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter for our salvation that Jesus is fully God and not merely the highest of created beings?
- How would you respond, kindly and from this passage, to someone who says Jesus never claimed to be God?
- What difference does it make to your worship to know that the One you pray to made the universe?

Question 2

Student Question:

John says that in the Word “was life, and the life was the light of men” (v. 4). Where in your own life are you most tempted to look for light, meaning, or life apart from Christ, and what does this passage say to that search?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and it turns the great claim of verse 4 toward the student’s own heart. “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John uses two of his favorite words, life and light, and insists that both have their source in Christ alone. There is no true life and no true light anywhere else in the universe, because both flow from the One through whom all things were made.

Help students name, honestly and without shame, the places they instinctively go looking for life and light apart from Christ. For one person it is career and the sense of significance it provides. For another it is a relationship, or the approval of others, or comfort, or control. These are often good things that have quietly been asked to do a God-sized job. The point is not to manufacture guilt but to expose the futility of looking for light in things that have no light of their own.

Connect this to the darkness John mentions in verse 5. The darkness has not overcome the light, but the darkness is real, and a heart that turns away from Christ does not stay neutral; it grows dim. When students notice anxiety, restlessness, or a low-grade emptiness even in good seasons, that is often the symptom of looking for life in the wrong place.

Move toward the hopeful turn. The light “shines in the darkness,” present tense. Christ is still shining, still offering Himself as the source of life, still able to flood a tired heart with light. Invite students to bring one specific area of misplaced searching into the light of Christ this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the exclusive source of true life and light (John 1:4; 14:6).
- The idolatry of good things asked to give us what only God can give.
- Spiritual darkness as a real condition, not merely an absence of information.
- The ongoing, present-tense shining of Christ into believers’ lives.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to look for life and meaning apart from Christ?
- What does it feel like when a good thing you have leaned on fails to satisfy?
- What is one practical way to bring a dim area of your life into the light of Christ this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Verse 3 says that “all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” What does it mean that Jesus is the Creator of everything, and how does that truth shape the way we think about Him and about the world we live in?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 is sweeping: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” John leaves no exceptions. Every star, every cell, every angel, every atom came into being through the Word. Help students sit with the scale of that claim before moving to its implications.

The first implication is for who Jesus is. As noted in Question 1, the Maker of all things cannot Himself be one of the things that were made. This is one of the strongest arguments in Scripture for the full deity of Christ, and it is worth pointing students to Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2, where Paul and the writer of Hebrews say exactly the same thing.

The second implication is for how we see the world. If Christ made everything, then the world is not an accident and not ours to use however we please. It is His handiwork, and it bears the fingerprints of its Maker. This grounds a Christian view of creation, of stewardship, and of the goodness of the physical world, the same physical world the Word would soon enter in the flesh.

The third implication is personal. The One who spoke galaxies into being is the same One who knows your name, who numbers your hairs, who entered your world to save you. The power that made everything is not distant; it came near. That truth steadies us when life feels chaotic, because the world is held together by the very One who loves us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as Creator of all things, and therefore not a created being (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2).
- Creation as purposeful and good, the work of the Word, not an accident.
- A Christian view of stewardship rooted in the world belonging to its Maker.
- The nearness of the Creator who entered His own creation to save us.

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing Jesus made all things change the way you see the natural world?
- Why is verse 3 such strong evidence that Jesus is more than a created being?
- When life feels out of control, how does it help to remember who holds it all together?

Question 4**Student Question:**

John the Baptist came as a witness “to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him” (v. 7), yet he was careful to say he was not the light himself. In what ways might you be tempted to point people to yourself rather than to Christ, and how can you live more like a witness who points beyond himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John the Baptist appears in verses 6 through 8 as a model witness. He “came to bear witness about the light,” and John the apostle is careful to add, “He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” The whole purpose of John’s ministry was to get people to look past him to Someone greater.

Turn this gently toward the student. The temptation to point people to ourselves is subtle and rarely obvious. It shows up in wanting credit, in steering conversations toward our own accomplishments, in serving in ways that quietly seek to be noticed, in the small disappointment we feel when someone else is praised. None of this is dramatic, but all of it competes with the call to be a witness who points beyond himself.

Hold up John’s humility as the pattern. Later in this Gospel he will say, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (3:30). That is the posture of every faithful witness. We are not the light; we have only seen the light, and our joy is to point others toward it. There is great freedom in this. We do not have to be impressive; we only have to be honest about Christ.

Invite students to consider their actual circles, family, work, neighborhood, and ask where the spotlight tends to swing back onto them. The goal is not self-contempt but a glad redirection: less of me, more of Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The nature of Christian witness: pointing beyond ourselves to Christ.
- Humility as the posture of every servant of God (John 3:30).
- The difference between drawing attention to ourselves and bearing witness to the light.
- Freedom in not having to be the source, only a witness to the Source.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to want the credit rather than to point people to Christ?
- What would “He must increase, but I must decrease” look like in your daily relationships?
- Who in your life are you positioned to point toward the light this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verse 14 says, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.” What does the incarnation, God taking on human flesh, tell us about the kind of God we serve, and

why could a merely created or adopted being never accomplish what the eternal Word came to do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 14 is the hinge of the whole prologue: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The word translated “dwelt” carries the idea of pitching a tent, an echo of the tabernacle where God’s glory came to live among Israel. Now the glory has come not in a tent of cloth but in a body of flesh.

Help students grasp the wonder and the necessity of the incarnation. It is wonderful because the infinite God did not remain at a safe distance; He took on our humanity, with all its limits and weakness, short of sin. It is necessary because of what He came to do. A merely created being could not reveal God fully, could not bear the infinite weight of sin, and could not reconcile us to God. Only God Himself, come in the flesh, could stand in our place. As Hebrews puts it, He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, yet He had to be the eternal Son to save them.

Address the errors this verse guards against. Some have said the Word only seemed to have a body, or that the divine Christ merely came upon the man Jesus for a time. John flatly denies both. The Word truly became flesh, and the glory they saw was the glory of the only Son. The deity and the humanity meet in one Person, fully God and fully man.

Then bring it home. This is the kind of God we serve: not one who shouts instructions from a distance, but One who moves into the neighborhood, who knows hunger and grief and weariness from the inside, who can be touched and known. The God of the universe has a human face, and that face is turned toward us in grace and truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The incarnation: the eternal Word truly became flesh, fully God and fully man (John 1:14; Philippians 2:6–8).
- The necessity of the incarnation for revelation and for atonement.
- A scriptural answer to the error that Jesus only seemed human or only seemed divine.
- The glory of God revealed in a human face we can know.
- Why a created or adopted being could never accomplish what the eternal Word accomplished.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the incarnation tell us about the heart of God toward us?
- Why could no created being do what the Word made flesh came to do?
- How does it comfort you that Jesus knows your weakness and weariness from the inside?

Question 6

Student Question:

John writes that “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v. 12). What is the difference between merely knowing about Jesus and actually receiving Him, and where do you see that difference in your own walk?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 12 makes the offer personal: “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John pairs “received” with “believed,” and the two illuminate each other. To receive Christ is not to add Him as one more item to a busy life; it is to welcome Him as Lord, to make room for Him at the center.

Draw out the difference between knowing about Jesus and receiving Him. A person can know the facts of the Gospel, attend services, even teach a class, and still hold Christ at arm’s length. Receiving Him is a wholehearted welcome that reorders a life. As the rest of the New Testament makes clear, this living faith is not bare mental agreement; it takes hold of Christ and acts, in repentance, confession, and baptism into Him, and then in a life of glad obedience. The believing John describes is the kind that surrenders.

Help students self-examine without spiraling into doubt. The question is not “Do I feel certain every moment?” but “Have I genuinely welcomed Christ as Lord, and am I living as one who has?” Look for the marks of a received Christ: a softening toward His word, a turning from sin, a growing love for His people.

Then point to the staggering result. To those who receive Him, He gives “the right to become children of God.” This is not earned status; it is a gift of adoption. The Creator becomes our Father. That is the dignity and security every believer can rest in, and it is meant to produce both humility and joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between knowing about Christ and receiving Him as Lord.
- Saving faith as a living, surrendering faith, not bare mental assent.
- Adoption: believers given the right to become children of God (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26).
- The reordering of a life around Christ as evidence of true reception.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between knowing about Jesus and actually receiving Him?
- Where in your life is Christ still being held at arm’s length?
- What does it mean to you that God has given you the right to be His child?

Question 7

Student Question:

Verse 17 says, “the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” How does this contrast help us understand the relationship between the Old Covenant given through Moses and the New Covenant that has come through Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 17 sets up a deliberate contrast: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John is not despising the law. The law was a true gift of God, given through Moses, holy and good. But the law could describe righteousness without producing it, and it pointed forward to Someone who could.

Help students understand the relationship between the covenants. The law given through Moses governed God’s people under the Old Covenant. It revealed sin, restrained it, and prepared the way for Christ. But it was never the final word. As Paul says, the law was a guardian until Christ came (Galatians 3:24). In Jesus, grace and truth have arrived in person, and with Him the New Covenant in His blood.

Be clear about what this does and does not mean. It does not mean the Old Testament is worthless or that grace was absent before Christ; God’s grace runs through the whole story. It means that what the law foreshadowed has now come in fullness. The shadows have given way to the substance (Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 8–10). Christians today live under the New Covenant in Christ, not under the Old Law.

This protects students from two opposite errors: treating the law of Moses as still binding on Christians, and treating grace as a license to live however we please. Grace and truth came together in Christ. He frees us from the old system precisely so that we can live the new life of obedient love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Old Law given through Moses, holy and good, but preparatory and temporary (Galatians 3:24).
- Grace and truth arriving in fullness in the person of Christ.
- The New Covenant in Christ replacing the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8–10; Colossians 2:14–17).
- Guarding against both legalism and a grace that excuses sin.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus fulfill, rather than simply abolish, what the law pointed toward?
- Why is it important to know that Christians live under the New Covenant, not the Old Law?
- How do grace and truth belong together in the way we follow Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

John says of his own generation, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (v. 11). What are the subtle ways people still refuse to receive Christ even while remaining religious, and how do you guard your own heart against that quiet kind of rejection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 11 carries a quiet grief: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” The Creator stepped into His own creation, came to the very people He had prepared for centuries, and was largely turned away. The tragedy is not that pagans rejected Him but that the religious did.

Turn this toward honest self-examination. People still refuse Christ in subtle, respectable ways. We can keep the outward forms of faith while quietly running our own lives. We can admire Jesus, quote Jesus, even serve in His name, and still decline to let Him be Lord of the rooms we have locked. The most dangerous unbelief often wears religious clothing.

Help students name where this shows up: a sin we have made peace with, an area where we have decided in advance not to obey, a corner of life we treat as off-limits to Christ. These are the modern equivalents of “his own people did not receive him,” a polite refusal from inside the household of faith.

Then offer the remedy, which is not more religious effort but a deeper welcome. Verse 12 follows verse 11 on purpose. The same Christ who was rejected still gives the right to become children of God to all who truly receive Him. The invitation stands open, even to those who have been holding back. The call is to throw open the locked rooms.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of religious unbelief, refusing Christ while keeping the forms of faith.
- Receiving Christ as a matter of lordship over the whole life, not partial admiration.
- Self-examination as an ongoing discipline of discipleship.
- The open invitation of verse 12 even to those who have been holding back.

Discussion Prompts

- What are the respectable, religious ways people today still refuse to receive Christ?
- Is there a locked room in your life that you have quietly kept off-limits to Jesus?
- What would it look like this week to receive Christ more fully as Lord?

Question 9

Student Question:

John says “no one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (v. 18). Putting verses 1, 14, and 18 together, how would you explain and defend from this passage the full deity, eternal existence, and incarnation of Jesus against the claim that He was only a created being or simply a good man?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and it gathers the whole prologue into one defense of who Jesus is. Verse 18 says, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” Read alongside verses 1 and 14, it gives us a complete picture: the Word is God (v. 1), the Word became flesh (v. 14), and the Word is the only God at the Father’s side who reveals Him (v. 18).

Equip the teacher to defend three truths from the text itself. First, the eternal existence of Christ: verse 1 places Him before the beginning, and verse 3 makes Him the Maker of all created things, so He cannot be among them. Second, His full deity: verse 1 says “the Word was God,” and the best manuscripts of verse 18 call Him “the only God.” Third, the incarnation: verse 14 says the Word “became flesh.” These are not isolated proof texts; they are the deliberate structure of the passage.

Address the main alternatives directly and kindly. To the claim that Jesus was merely a good man or great teacher, point out that good teachers do not get created through them “all things,” nor are they “the only God.” To the claim that He was a created being or an exalted angel, point to verse 3 (the Creator is not a creature) and verse 1 (He was God, with God, in the beginning). To the claim that He only seemed divine or only seemed human, point to verse 1 and verse 14 held together. The text will not let us shrink Him.

Then make sure the doctrine breathes. We do not defend the deity of Christ to win arguments but because everything depends on it. If the One at the Father’s side has made God known by becoming flesh, then in Jesus we are not guessing about God; we are looking at Him. To see Jesus is to see the Father (14:9). That is why John spends eighteen verses making sure we know exactly who has come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The eternal existence of the Son, before and outside creation (John 1:1–3; 17:5).
- The full deity of Christ, “the Word was God,” “the only God” (John 1:1, 18).
- The incarnation, the eternal Word truly becoming flesh (John 1:14).
- A reasoned, text-based answer to the claim that Jesus was only a creature or only a man.
- Christ as the full and final revelation of the Father (John 1:18; 14:9; Hebrews 1:1–3).
- Why the gospel itself collapses if Jesus is anything less than God in the flesh.

Discussion Prompts

- Using only John 1, how would you show that Jesus is eternal, divine, and truly incarnate?

- Why is the deity of Christ not an optional doctrine but the foundation of the gospel?
- How does seeing Jesus clearly change the way you see God the Father?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over these eighteen verses as a whole. John moves from eternity past, to creation, to the coming of the light, to the Word made flesh, to the gift of becoming children of God. Which part of this opening hymn most enlarges your view of Jesus, and what is one specific way you sense Him calling you to a bigger trust in Him this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to step back and take in the whole movement of the prologue: from eternity past (vv. 1–2), to creation (v. 3), to the light shining in darkness (vv. 4–9), to the Word made flesh (v. 14), to the gift of adoption (v. 12), to the fullness of grace upon grace (v. 16). It is one of the grandest passages in all of Scripture, and it is meant to enlarge our vision of Jesus.

Encourage students to be specific about which part most stretched their view of Christ. For some it will be His eternity, the realization that He never began. For others it will be the incarnation, the shock that God took on flesh. For others it will be the tender word in verse 12, the right to become children of God. There is no wrong answer; the goal is a genuine encounter with a bigger Christ.

Then press toward transformation, which is the aim of the whole study. A bigger view of Jesus is not meant to stay in the head. Ask each student to name one concrete way they sense Christ calling them to a larger trust this week, in a decision they are facing, a fear they are carrying, a relationship they are guarding, or a sin they have excused. The God who made all things and entered our world can be trusted with the very thing we are clutching.

Close with worship rather than mere resolution. The right response to the prologue is not first to try harder but to look up and adore. As students leave, let the last note be wonder: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and He has made the invisible God known, full of grace and truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sweep of redemption from eternity to incarnation to adoption.
- A growing, enlarging vision of Christ as the goal of studying this passage.
- Doctrine meant to produce trust and worship, not only knowledge.
- Specific, concrete trust as the fruit of seeing Jesus rightly.

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of John's prologue most enlarged your view of Jesus, and why?
- What is one specific area where Christ is calling you to a bigger trust this week?
- How can wonder at who Jesus is reshape the way you pray and worship?