

Rooted: Core Truths, Teacher's Guide

Week 1: Who Jesus Truly Is

John 1:1–14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The prologue of John's Gospel is one of the most important passages about the person of Christ in all of Scripture, and a great deal is at stake doctrinally in these fourteen verses. In a handful of sentences John affirms the eternal preexistence of the Word ("in the beginning was the Word"), the personal distinction between the Word and the Father ("the Word was with God"), and the full deity of the Word ("the Word was God"). He then declares the Word the agent of all creation and, in verse 14, the One who became flesh. The teacher should be ready to handle this central truth with confidence and clarity, because almost every serious error about Jesus stumbles right here. Those who reduce Jesus to a great moral teacher deny verse 1. Those who, like the Arians of old and certain groups today, make Him a created being or merely "a god" rather than God deny the plain force of "the Word was God." Those who blur the persons of the Godhead together miss "the Word was with God." This lesson is the foundation of the entire study, because everything else we will say about humanity, sin, salvation, the church, and our hope depends on first getting Jesus right.

Yet John did not write his prologue to win a debate. He wrote, as he says later, "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The truth of who Jesus is was always meant to land in the heart and remake a life. A student who truly grasps that the Maker of the galaxies became a baby in Bethlehem, walked dusty roads, and pitched His tent among us will not walk away merely better informed. He will walk away changed, more humble, more grateful, and more ready to bow. The teacher's task this week is to let the towering truth of Christ's deity do its forming work, drawing students from polite admiration of Jesus into genuine worship of Him as Lord.

So aim at both targets. Send students home able to say clearly what the Bible teaches about the deity and incarnation of Christ, and why it matters, and send them home with a larger, truer, and more wonderful vision of the Lord they serve. The disciple we are forming is not just someone who can defend the right doctrine, but someone whose life is increasingly organized around the One who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, and who loved us enough to become one of us.

Question 1

Student Question:

John opens, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (v. 1). What does John want us to understand about who Jesus is from the very first verse,

and how do the three statements (that the Word “was in the beginning,” “was with God,” and “was God”) together teach both that Jesus is fully God and that He is distinct from the Father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Slow down on the words “in the beginning.” John is deliberately echoing the opening of Genesis. Where Genesis says, “in the beginning God created,” John reaches back to that same beginning and tells us that when it happened, the Word already was. Notice the verb. John does not say the Word came to be or was made; he says the Word “was,” a tense of continuous existence. The Word had no beginning. When everything else began, He simply already was. This is the eternal preexistence of the Son.

The second statement guards a different truth: “the Word was with God.” The phrase pictures the Word face to face with God, in intimate fellowship with Him. This tells us the Word is genuinely distinct from the Father. He is not merely another name for the Father, or a mask the one God wears for a season. The teacher should name and set aside the old error of modalism, which collapses Father, Son, and Spirit into one person playing three roles. John says the Word was with God, which requires two who are truly distinct.

The third statement makes the boldest claim of all: “the Word was God.” Here the teacher can speak with confidence against the mistranslation, promoted by some groups today, that renders this “the Word was a god.” Greek does not use an indefinite article the way English does, and the structure of the sentence actually stresses the full deity of the Word. John is not saying the Word was one god among many or a lesser divine being. He is saying the Word was, fully and truly, God. Hold the second and third statements together and you have the doorway to the doctrine of the Trinity: the Word is distinct from the Father, and yet the Word is God.

It helps to explain why John calls Jesus “the Word.” For readers shaped by the Old Testament, it was by His word that God created (“and God said, let there be light”), and it was His word that revealed Him to the prophets. For readers shaped by Greek thought, the word, or logos, was the rational principle behind the universe. John takes the term everyone recognized and announces something no one expected: this Word is not an idea or a force but a Person, and His name is Jesus. He is God speaking, God revealing, and God acting, now come among us.

Let this truth strengthen the students’ confidence. The faith they hold is not built on a remarkable man who was later promoted by his admirers. It is built on the eternal God who was always there and who entered His own world. Everything in the rest of this study rests on this first verse being true.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The eternal preexistence of the Son (“was,” not “came to be”)
- The personal distinction between the Word and the Father (against modalism)
- The full deity of Christ (“the Word was God”), against Arian and “a god” readings

- The foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity: one God in distinct persons
- The meaning of “Word” (Logos) as God revealing and God acting
- The deity of Christ as the foundation of all Christian doctrine

Discussion Prompts

- How would you respond, kindly, to someone who says Jesus never claimed to be God?
- Why does it matter that the Word “was God” and not merely godlike or a created being?
- How does the eternal existence of the Son change the way you think about Jesus?

Question 2

Student Question:

Most of us, if we are honest, carry a Jesus who is a little smaller and more manageable than the eternal Word John describes. In what specific area of your life have you been treating Jesus as an advisor you consult rather than the Lord you obey? What would change this week if you took His full deity seriously?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the goal is not new information but honesty. It is one thing to affirm in a classroom that Jesus is God. It is another thing to live, Monday through Saturday, as though He is. Many sincere believers carry a Jesus they consult like an advisor: helpful when asked, easily overruled when His counsel is inconvenient. The aim of this question is to expose the gap between the deity we confess and the lordship we actually grant Him.

Help students name the gap without shame. The places we keep from His authority are rarely dramatic. They are ordinary: how we spend money, how we talk about people who are not in the room, what we do with an evening, how we treat our families, what we look at on a screen. We rarely say out loud that Jesus has no authority there. We simply never invite Him in. Ask students where, if they are honest, Jesus functions more like a consultant than a king.

Then turn toward one concrete step. If Jesus is truly God in the flesh, then no corner of life is outside His rule, and taking His deity seriously will look like an actual change somewhere this week. Resist letting the answer stay general. Press gently for a single, specific area where a student will begin to live under His lordship between now and the next gathering.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between admiring Jesus and submitting to Him as Lord
- The lordship of Christ touching every area of life, not a religious compartment
- The danger of a “consultant” Christ whom we consult but do not obey
- The deity of Christ as a direct claim on daily obedience

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most often treat Jesus as an advisor rather than your Lord?
- What is one area of life you have quietly kept off-limits from His authority?
- What concrete step would taking His deity seriously require of you this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

John says, "all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (v. 3). Why does it matter that Jesus is not simply part of creation but the One through whom all things were created, and how does this truth shape the kind of trust and worship He deserves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 is sweeping in its reach: "all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." John leaves no exceptions. Everything that exists came into being through the Word. This is not a minor footnote to His deity; it is a direct demonstration of it, because Scripture everywhere reserves the work of creation for God alone. The One through whom all things were made stands on the Creator's side of the line, not the creature's.

This verse also closes a door that false teaching keeps trying to open. Some have claimed that Christ was the first and highest created being, the first thing God made, who then made everything else. John forecloses that idea in the same breath: "without him was not any thing made that was made." If absolutely every created thing was made through Him, then He Himself is not among the things that were made. Paul says the same in Colossians 1:16 and the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 1:2. The teacher can hold these passages together to show one consistent witness across the New Testament.

Press the truth into worship and trust. Worship belongs to the Creator, never to a creature, so if Christ is the Maker of all things, He is rightly worshiped. And the One who made the galaxies and holds every atom together is entirely worthy of our trust. The hands that formed the world are the same hands that were nailed to the cross for us. That combination, infinite power joined to self-giving love, is the most reassuring truth a struggling believer can hold.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the agent of all creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2)
- The Creator and creation distinction, with Christ on the Creator's side
- A scriptural answer to the claim that Christ was the first created being
- Worship belongs to the Creator, and therefore to Christ
- The trustworthiness of the One who made and sustains all things

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter whether Jesus is the Creator or merely a creature?
- How does it change your prayers to know you are praying to the One who made you?
- What does it mean to entrust your whole life to the One through whom all things were made?

Question 4

Student Question:

John writes that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (v. 5). Where is there a corner of darkness in your own life, a habit, a fear, or a wound, that you have kept away from the light of Christ? What would it look like to let His light into that place?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the truth inward. John says “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The word translated “overcome” carries the sense both of mastering and of comprehending; the darkness can neither defeat the light nor even grasp it. The picture is of a relentless, undimmed light that the deepest dark has never been able to put out. That light is Christ, and He shines into real lives, including the parts we would rather keep hidden.

Help students name their own darkness gently. Everyone has a corner kept in shadow: a habit they are ashamed of, a fear they will not say out loud, a wound they have never let heal, a relationship full of bitterness. Jesus said that people love the darkness and avoid the light because they do not want their deeds exposed (John 3:19–20). That instinct to hide is universal. But the light of Christ does not come only to expose; it comes to heal. He shines into the dark place not to humiliate us but to set us free.

Move the conversation toward one honest step. Bringing something into the light usually means naming it before God in confession, and often before a trusted brother or sister, since John later writes that walking in the light includes fellowship with one another and cleansing through Christ’s blood (1 John 1:7). Invite each student to identify one place they have kept in the dark and one small step toward letting Christ’s light in this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the light that the darkness cannot overcome or comprehend
- The human instinct to hide from the light (John 3:19–20)
- The light of Christ as healing, not merely exposing
- Confession and the fellowship of the church as means of walking in the light (1 John 1:7)

Discussion Prompts

- What is one area you have kept in the dark, away from Christ's light?
- Why are we so often afraid to bring our darkness into the light?
- What would it look like, concretely, to let Christ's light into that place this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). What does it mean that the eternal Word became truly human without ceasing to be fully God, and why is the incarnation, God actually taking on flesh, essential to the Christian faith rather than an optional detail?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 14 is the hinge of the prologue and, in a sense, the hinge of all history: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Take the word "flesh" seriously. John does not say the Word seemed to become human, or appeared in a body while remaining at a distance. He says the Word became flesh. The teacher should name the old error of Docetism, which taught that Jesus only appeared to be human, and set it firmly aside. Jesus was truly, fully human: He hungered, wept, slept, bled, and died.

At the same time, becoming flesh did not mean the Word stopped being God. He did not trade His deity for humanity; He took humanity to Himself while remaining fully divine. This is the great mystery of the incarnation: full deity and full humanity united in one person, neither one diminishing the other. The word translated "dwelt" is worth pointing out. It means to pitch a tent or to tabernacle, and it deliberately recalls the tabernacle in the wilderness, where the glory of God dwelt among Israel. In Jesus, the glory of God has pitched its tent among us in person.

Explain why this is essential rather than optional. Scripture says there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5), and that He had to be made like His brothers in every respect to become a merciful and faithful high priest (Hebrews 2:14–17). If Jesus were not truly human, He could not represent us or die in our place. If He were not truly God, His death could not save us. Only one who is both God and man can bridge the gap between a holy God and sinful people. Remove the incarnation and the whole gospel collapses.

Finally, let students feel the nearness of God in this verse. The infinite God did not stay at a safe distance and shout instructions from heaven. He moved into the neighborhood. He knows what it is to be tired, misunderstood, grieved, and tempted. When we pray, we are not speaking to a God who cannot understand our lives. We are speaking to the Word who became flesh and lived one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The incarnation: the Word became truly flesh (against Docetism)

- Full deity and full humanity united in one person, with neither lost
- “Dwelt” or “tabernacled” among us: the glory of God present in Christ
- The incarnation as essential for mediation and atonement (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14–17)
- A Savior who must be both God and man in order to save and represent us
- The nearness and approachability of God in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it essential that Jesus was fully human and not only appearing to be?
- Why is it essential that He remained fully God when He became flesh?
- How does “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” change your sense of God’s nearness?

Question 6

Student Question:

John says that “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v. 12). How did you first come to receive Christ, and in what ways does living as a genuine child of God still need to take deeper root in how you see yourself and how you live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 12 moves from who Christ is to what He gives: “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” This question is meant to be personal, so begin there. Invite students to remember how they first came to receive Christ. For some it was a long, slow turning; for others a clear moment. Letting people tell that story, briefly, warms the room and reminds everyone that becoming a child of God is a real event in a real life.

Draw out the new status John names. Those who receive Christ are given the right to become children of God. This is staggering: not servants kept at arm’s length, but sons and daughters brought into the family. Many faithful believers, though, still live like spiritual orphans, anxious and striving, never quite sure they belong. Press gently on whether students truly see themselves as God’s own children, or whether that identity has never really taken root.

Then turn toward growth. Living as a genuine child of God reshapes how we carry ourselves: we obey out of love rather than fear, we rest in a security we did not earn, and we take our place in the family of God expressed in the local church. The fuller question of how a person is born of God comes in question 9; here the aim is simpler and more personal. Where does a student need this sonship to sink deeper, and what is one way it could begin to change how they live this week?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The right to become children of God given to those who receive Christ
- The believer's identity and security as a child of God
- Living as a son or daughter rather than as a spiritual orphan
- The family of God expressed in the local church

Discussion Prompts

- How did you first come to receive Christ?
- Where do you still live more like an orphan than a beloved child of God?
- What would change in an ordinary day if you truly believed you are God's own child?

Question 7

Student Question:

John testifies, "we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (v. 14). What does it mean that Jesus is full of both grace and truth at the same time, and why do we so often pit these two against each other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John caps his testimony with a rich phrase: Christ is "full of grace and truth." The words echo the great self-revelation of God in Exodus 34:6, where the Lord proclaims Himself abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. John is saying that everything God showed of Himself there now stands before us, in full, in the person of Jesus. He is not partly gracious and partly truthful. He is full of both, at once and without measure.

This matters because we are forever tempted to pull grace and truth apart. Some imagine that to be gracious you must go soft on the truth, smoothing over sin so no one feels uncomfortable. Others wield the truth like a weapon, technically accurate and utterly unloving. Jesus did neither. Watch Him with the woman caught in adultery: He will not condemn her, and He will not pretend her sin is nothing. "Neither do I condemn you," full of grace, and "go, and from now on sin no more," full of truth. The teacher can use that scene to show the two held perfectly together.

Take students to the cross, where grace and truth meet most fully. The truth about our sin is told there without flinching; sin is so serious that it cost the Son of God His life. And the grace of God is poured out there without limit; that same death is offered freely for our forgiveness. Anyone who wants to soften the truth has not looked honestly at the cross, and anyone who doubts the grace has not looked either. In Christ, the two are one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the fullness of grace and truth together (John 1:14; Exodus 34:6)
- The error of trading away truth for kindness, or wielding truth without grace

- Grace and truth meeting most fully at the cross
- Christ as the standard for holding conviction and compassion together

Discussion Prompts

- Why do we so often treat grace and truth as opposites?
- Where have you seen grace without truth, or truth without grace, do real harm?
- How did Jesus hold both perfectly, and what can we learn from Him?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus held grace and truth together perfectly, never softening the truth to be kind and never wielding the truth to wound. In your own relationships, which do you find harder to offer, honest truth or patient grace? Name one relationship where Christ is calling you to grow in the one you lack.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the previous truth on ourselves. Both honest truth and patient grace are forms of love, and most of us lean naturally toward one and shrink from the other. The goal here is self-knowledge, so encourage students to be honest about their own bent rather than diagnosing everyone else in their lives.

Name the two patterns gently. The truth-leaning person values being right and speaking plainly, and can run over people in the process, mistaking bluntness for faithfulness. The grace-leaning person values peace and warmth, and can avoid every hard conversation, mistaking silence for kindness. Neither is the way of Christ. Growth, for each of us, means stretching toward the quality we lack: the blunt person learning gentleness, the agreeable person learning courage.

Bring it down to one relationship and one step. Ask each student to name a specific relationship, a spouse, a child, a friend, a coworker, where Christ is calling them to grow in the grace or the truth they tend to withhold. The point is not to resolve to be a better person in general, but to take one Christlike step in one real relationship this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination: do I lean toward harsh truth or shapeless grace?
- Truth-telling and grace-giving as both genuine acts of love
- Growth as stretching toward the quality we naturally lack
- Christlike relationships marked by both conviction and compassion

Discussion Prompts

- Which is harder for you to offer, honest truth or patient grace?

- What relationship is God using right now to grow you in the one you lack?
- What is one Christlike step you can take in that relationship this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

John says these children of God “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (v. 13), and that this birth comes to those who “receive” and “believe in” Christ (v. 12). How does the rest of the New Testament fill out what it means to receive and believe in Jesus so as to be born of God, and why does Scripture never let saving faith stand alone, apart from repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the most doctrinally demanding question of the lesson, and it deserves careful, confident handling. Verses 12 and 13 sit very close together and must be read together. Those who receive Christ and believe in His name are given the right to become children of God, and these children, John says, “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Two truths stand side by side here, and faithfulness means holding both. The new birth is entirely the work of God, and it comes to those who receive and believe.

Affirm the first truth wholeheartedly. No one gives birth to himself. The new birth is God’s doing, His gift and His power, “not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Salvation begins and ends in the mercy and initiative of God. We never want students to imagine they manufacture their own salvation or place God in their debt. Grace is the ground of everything.

Now handle the second truth with equal care, because this is precisely the passage some use to teach salvation by “faith only.” The argument runs: verse 12 says those who believed became children of God, therefore belief alone, with nothing else, is all that is required. But that reading lifts one word out of John’s own Gospel and the rest of the New Testament. John never treats “believe” as bare mental agreement. In the same Gospel, some “believed in his name” yet Jesus would not entrust Himself to them because He knew their hearts (John 2:23–24), and certain rulers “believed in him” but would not confess Him and loved the glory of men more than the glory of God (John 12:42–43). Clearly a person can “believe” in a shallow way that does not save. And it was Jesus, in this same Gospel, who told Nicodemus that one must be “born of water and the Spirit” to enter the kingdom (John 3:5).

Let the rest of the New Testament fill out what it means to receive and believe in Christ so as to be born of God. Faith comes by hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17). That faith turns from sin in repentance (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30), confesses Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9–10), and is baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4). Galatians 3:26–27 ties the threads together beautifully. Paul writes, “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith,” and then in the very next

breath he says, “for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Paul says we become sons of God through faith, and he immediately identifies that faith as the faith that was baptized into Christ. To be born of God and become His child, then, is to come to Christ in the obedience of faith, the faith that hears, believes, repents, confesses, and is baptized into Him.

Guard the balance so students land in the right place. None of this turns salvation into a wage we earn. Repentance, confession, and baptism are not meritorious works that put God in our debt; they are the God-appointed way that faith lays hold of a gift we could never deserve. The new birth remains entirely God’s work. Keep students out of two ditches: the faith-only ditch, which strips obedience out of saving faith, and the cold legalism ditch, which imagines we save ourselves by our performance. The truth runs down the middle: we are born of God, by grace, through a living faith that obeys.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new birth as entirely the work and gift of God (“born ... of God”)
- “Believe” in John as living, obedient trust, not bare mental assent (John 2:23–24; 12:42–43)
- The new birth tied to water and the Spirit (John 3:5)
- Saving faith expressed in repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9–10; Romans 6:3–4)
- Galatians 3:26–27 as the bridge: sons of God through faith, that faith baptized into Christ
- A scriptural answer to salvation by “faith only”
- Salvation by grace through obedient faith, neither faith alone nor self-made merit

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Scripture never let saving faith stand alone, apart from obedience?
- How would you answer someone who says verse 12 proves we are saved by faith only?
- How do we hold together that the new birth is God’s gift and that it calls for our obedient response?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. John has shown you the eternal Word, the Maker of all things, the Light no darkness can swallow, and the God who became flesh and moved into the neighborhood full of grace and truth. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about who Jesus truly is that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to gather up the whole passage and name one specific way Christ is forming them through it. Resist letting answers stay general. “I need to take Jesus more seriously” is a fine beginning, but press gently for the concrete: take Him seriously how, starting where, beginning when.

It helps to walk back through the movement of the passage as a prompt. John showed us the eternal Word who was in the beginning with God and was God, the Maker through whom all things came to be, the Light that no darkness can overcome, the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace and truth, and the One who gives the right to become children of God. Invite each student to ask which of these truths their heart most needs to grab hold of this week, and what it would look like to live in light of it.

Close by reminding students that transformation is the point. The goal of this study is not merely to know more about John 1 but to become more like the Lord John served. A right view of who Jesus is should leave us more worshipful, more humble, and more obedient than we were before. Encourage them to leave with one truth they will carry, return to, and pray over during the week, so the word does its forming work between now and the next gathering.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at transformation, not merely information
- A growing, worshiping knowledge of who Jesus truly is
- The deity and incarnation of Christ as truths to live in, not only to affirm
- The discipline of carrying one truth into the week

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth about who Jesus is does your heart most need this week, and why?
- What would it look like, concretely, to live in light of that truth?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one step?