



**JOHN - SMALL GROUP SERIES
LESSON 1**

Writer: Mike Sheley
Project Supervisor: Nick Diliberto
Artwork: Ever Graphics
Editor: Angela Ivey

Created by Ministry to Youth
ministrytoyouth.com

JOHN - SMALL GROUP SERIES

Lesson 1

Bible: John 3 (Nicodemus); John 10; John 15

Topics: Jesus is the way to eternal life. Jesus is our shepherd. Jesus is like a vine.

INTRODUCTION

What we call the book of John is the fourth biography of Jesus in the Bible chronologically, written towards the end of the first century.

John, the author, was one of the disciples, known as “the disciple Jesus loved.”

He tells us in the text exactly why he wrote this book:

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name (John 20:30-31, NLT).

John probably wrote both to call unbelievers to get to know and start following Jesus, as well as to encourage believers who were struggling in their faith, especially in light of false teachings that were popular at the time.

In this book, John focuses on both the humanity and deity of Jesus—how he was both fully God and fully man at the same time.

As we start this study on Jesus in the book of John, we must keep in mind that the sections we are reading are part of a larger book.

Ideally, we’d sit down and read the whole book before even starting this series.

If you want to get the most out of this series, I’d like to see if you are up for that challenge.

Whether you want to just read it yourself, or listen to an audio Bible like [Streetlights](https://www.streetlightsbible.com/streetlights-online-stream), it will take about two hours to read the whole thing—pretty short compared to most books you read now. (<https://www.streetlightsbible.com/streetlights-online-stream>)

However, reading the entire book will help you remember John's overall focus on both the humanity and deity of Jesus while helping to both introduce people to Jesus so they can become disciples while also encouraging disciples as they faced false teaching.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the shortest book you have ever read? Longest book? Favorite biography?
2. If you are new to Christianity, what do you hope to learn during this study?
3. Or if you're already a follower of Jesus, what encouragement or help do you hope to get from this study?
4. What questions do you have about Jesus' life and/or ministry as we begin this study?

Read John 3:1-21 - Jesus is the way to eternal life.

1 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. 2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

4 "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

5 Jesus replied, "I assure you; no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7 So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

9 "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

10 Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? 11 I assure you; we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. 12 But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about

heavenly things? **13** No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. **14** And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. **17** God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

18 “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. **19** And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. **20** All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. **21** But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

Say: I don’t know if you know much about the Pharisees, but they were religious leaders who often had confrontations with Jesus.

They were usually upset because they strictly taught God’s laws, so much so that they held the laws and their related traditions above the importance of people.

In Nicodemus, who was a member of this group, we have someone who is not highly likely to have been a follower of Jesus.

This may also explain why he approaches Jesus at night when most people won’t see this conversation.

Because of Nicodemus’ family and important position in the Jewish faith, he probably thought he would be part of God’s Kingdom based on those things alone.

Yet, Jesus points out that what is needed is a new spiritual life from God.

In **John 3:16**, we get one of the most famous verses in the Bible that sums up what God did through Jesus:

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

The conversation ends abruptly.

If you want to know how this encounter affected Nicodemus, you can check out **John 7:28-52** and **John 19:31-42**.

Discussion Questions

1. How do some Christians today act, talk, or post as if growing up in a Christian family or going to church makes them a follower of Jesus?
2. Those are not bad things, but what really makes someone a follower of Jesus? (especially based on this passage.)
3. Nicodemus was supposed to be an “expert” in Jewish laws. What evidence do you see in the passages in chapters 7 and 19 that something here must have affected his beliefs?
4. What is an example of something you believed as a kid but had to rethink or learn differently as you have gotten older?

Read John 10:1-21 - Jesus is our shepherd.

1 *“I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! 2 But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. 5 They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.”*

6 *Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, 7 so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. 9 Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. 10 The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*

11 *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 12 A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so, the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. 13 The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.*

14 *“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, 15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So, I sacrifice my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring*

them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 *“The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”*

19 *When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. 20 Some said, “He’s demon-possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?” 21 Others said, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*

Say: Shepherding was one of the three major occupations of Palestine, along with fishing and farming.

So, most people listening to Jesus would have easily connected with this story.

For us to get the most out of this allegory, we need to understand a little about shepherding in Jesus’ time and location.

Most of the sheep were kept in a cave or pen overnight with one opening or gate and let out every morning to graze.

Since several flocks could be kept together, the sheep learned which shepherd to go to because they recognized their own shepherd’s voice.

Jesus gives us a vivid picture of His care for us and His desired relationship with us through this shepherd allegory.

Discussion Questions

1. Would you say that you have spent enough time with Jesus that you recognize His voice?
2. Which of His biographies have you read completely? How often have you read or do you read them?
3. Is anyone using a Bible reading plan to work through the four Gospels? Who wants to start one this week so we can get to know Jesus’ voice better?
4. When Jesus says His purpose is to give us a “rich and satisfying life” in verse 10, the imagery is of a cup overflowing with water. In what ways can following Jesus fill your life?

5. In what ways have you seen “the thief” steal, kill, and destroy lives?
6. Look back at verses 17-18. Discuss how they cause you to think about what a great sacrifice Jesus made to pay for your sins. What is hard about imitating that kind of love?

Read John 15:1-8 - Jesus is like a vine.

1 “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

Say: Again, Jesus uses an illustration that would have been more common to His original listeners than to most of us today.

However, with a little study, we can understand and apply this passage to our lives.

In verse two, when He says, “cuts off,” this actually is a verb (in the Greek) that can mean “to lift up.”

That sounds totally different. But for someone working on a vine that is low to the ground and not producing fruit, lifting it up and cleaning it can allow the vine to become healthy and produce fruit.

This makes more sense in context, too. We think of lifting up and encouraging struggling believers so that they can be more “fruitful” in their lives, as well.

If you want to see what kind of fruit grows in the life of a believer, check out **Galatians 5:22-23**.

Pruning is the cutting back of the vine so that it uses more energy to produce fruit instead of just woody branches.

This image can apply in our lives in the cutting back of good things to allow more opportunity for better things.

Finally, the theme of verses 5-8 is on remaining connected to Jesus as a branch stays connected to the vine.

Just as we need to come to know Jesus' voice as the sheep know the shepherd's, we also need to spend time with Jesus so that we can have the healthy, fruitful kind of life He is describing.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between cutting off someone who is struggling and lifting them up?
2. What are some tips you have for how you can encourage and lift up other believers to help them have a healthy faith and fruitful life?
3. If you honestly examine your life, what are some activities, people, and resources that may need to be pruned to make more room for Jesus? For example, are there any shows you have binged an entire season of while not reading even one of Jesus' biographies (Gospels) all the way through?
4. Look up **Galatians 5:22-23**. Which of these fruits do you see in the lives of each other and in your life? Can you think of examples of these in Jesus' life?
5. What habit can you develop this week to help you connect or stay connected to Jesus? How can you hold each other accountable to do this?