

THE WORD BECOMES FLESH

DEVOTIONAL READING: [John 1:1-14](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [John 1:1-14](#)

JOHN 1:1-14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.



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KEY VERSE

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.—John 1:3

PARTNERS IN A NEW CREATION

Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify “the Word.”
2. Explain the respective missions of John the Baptist and “the Word.”

3. Identify one way he or she can continue the mission of John the Baptist—and make a plan to commit to it.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Caring in Person
- B. Lesson Context
- I. The Eternal Word (John 1:1–5)
 - A. Being with God (vv. 1–3)
 - Proof of Identity*
 - B. Light in Darkness (vv. 4–5)
- II. The Human Witness (John 1:6–8)
 - A. Sent by God (vv. 6–7)
 - B. Testified to the Light (v. 8)
- III. The True Light (John 1:9–13)
 - A. Rejected by Some (vv. 9–11)
 - B. Accepted by Children (vv. 12–13)
- IV. The Only Son (John 1:14)
 - A. Dwelt with Humanity (v. 14a–b)
 - B. Glorified by the Father (v. 14c)
 - Dwelling Among Us*

Conclusion

- A. Embodied from the Start
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Incarnation	In-kahr- <i>ney</i> -shuhn.
logos (Greek)	<i>law</i> -goss.
synoptic	sih- <i>nawp</i> -tihk.

Introduction

A. Caring in Person

I enjoy nearly every aspect of ministering in local churches. Visiting church members remains a special task. During some visits, I might drink tea with a longtime church member as I ask about the person's walk with Christ. Other visits might be during less than happy circumstances—I might visit a church member in the hospital and pray for his or her healing. A church member once told me, “I didn't fully understand how much you cared, until you came.”

My in-person ministry to the individuals in my church demonstrated my love for them. Scripture tells of God's love for his people. The extent of his love has been and still is being demonstrated for the world to see.

B. Lesson Context

The beginning of John's Gospel is unlike that of the three other New Testament Gospels. Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy and the birth narrative of Jesus ([Matthew 1:1–24](#)), Luke's Gospel begins with two birth narratives ([Luke 1:1–2:21](#)), and Mark's Gospel skips straight to Jesus' adult ministry ([Mark 1:1–20](#)). But the introduction to John's Gospel differs dramatically.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “synoptic” because of their similar perspectives on recounting the person and work of Jesus. John's Gospel stands apart from the others as the writer stresses Jesus' divine identity as the Son of God and Messiah ([John 20:31](#)). The introduction to John's Gospel draws the reader's attention in referring to the eternality of the Word of God.

Throughout this week's Scripture text, John makes reference to “the Word” ([John 1:1, 14](#)). By using this designation, John is actually reflecting philosophical and rhetorical concepts common in his day. Specifically, John's use of the underlying Greek word for “Word”—*logos*, from which we get our English word *logic*—reflects the ways philosophers tried to make sense of the world. Pagan philosophers used the term to address the ways the pagan gods communicated with the cosmos and the created order. For pagans, the concept of “the Word” was an attempt to make sense of the world and the animating forces therein.

However, John upends the pagan expectations. Instead of a distant animating life force or an obscure connection to supernatural “reason,” John applies the concept of the Word to the eternal God of Israel. This God is the one through whom all creation came into being. This God has revealed himself specifically to his creation.

That John would repurpose a concept used by pagan philosophers makes sense considering the context and audience of John's Gospel. The Gospel was likely composed in the second half of the first century by Jesus' own disciple John—“the disciple whom Jesus loved” ([John 21:20](#)). This was “the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down” in the

Gospel (21:24).

In addition to this Gospel, John the apostle—not to be confused with John the Baptist (see commentary on [John 1:6–8](#), below)—also wrote the New Testament epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John and the text of Revelation. We might assume that John wrote his Gospel to appeal to a broad audience, Jew and Gentile. If these were the collective audience of his Gospel, then John’s emphasis on repurposing pagan philosophical concepts would be understandable; these communities would be familiar with such ideas.

I. The Eternal Word

([JOHN 1:1–5](#))

A. Being with God (vv. 1–3)

1a. In the beginning was the Word,

John begins his Gospel with the same words that introduce the Hebrew Scriptures: “*In the beginning*” ([Genesis 1:1](#)). In both accounts, this phrase highlights that God is eternal—he exists beyond our limited understanding of space and time. The concept of the eternal God, who existed before creation, needed no further introduction for John’s audience (see [Hebrews 1:10](#); [Revelation 4:11](#)).

1b. and the Word was with God,

Not only is the Word eternal, but *the Word* also coexists *with God*. In this sense, the Word shares in God’s nature in a distinct way (compare [John 1:1c](#)). John highlights the close relationship between the Word and God ([10:30](#); see also [Matthew 3:17](#)).

1c. and the Word was God.

While *God* the Father and the eternal Word are of one and the same nature, they are also two distinct persons. The Word shares the same nature as God the Father ([Colossians 2:9](#)) but operates in unique ways (see [Hebrews 1:1–3](#); [1 John 4:14](#)).

John had to stress that *the Word* is equal to the eternal God of Israel. Therefore, the Word has the same attributes as God, specifically eternity and divinity (see [John 8:58](#)).

2. He was with God in the beginning.

John concluded the introductory text by again referring to the eternal nature of the Word (see [John 1:1a](#), above). The nature that characterizes *God* the Father also has characterized the Word since *the beginning*.

3. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John transitions from a discussion on the nature of the Word to a discussion on the work of the Word. The Word is creative and personal. Genesis tells how God created by his word

(see [Genesis 1:1–31](#); [Psalm 33:6](#)). John applies the idea to the work of the eternal Word in *him* making *all things*. As the Word coexisted with the Father, the Word is the source of life; and through the Word, all things came into existence (see [1 Corinthians 8:6](#); [Colossians 1:15–20](#); [Hebrews 1:2–3](#)).

PROOF OF IDENTITY

After years of saving, my wife planned to take our children to Europe. In the weeks leading up to the trip, I helped ensure that all important details of the trip were addressed. Among the most important was the location of our children’s passports. Before the trip, I placed the passports in a safe location—or so I thought.

From the second airport, where my family was to connect for their international departure, I received a panicked phone call from my wife. During check-in for that flight, she realized that she held my passport rather than our son’s. We spent the next 24 hours scrambling to prove our son’s identity. Since my wife and our kids were already halfway across the country, we needed an expedited passport for our son! Because we could quickly prove our son’s identity, the trip continued as planned.



Visual for [Lessons 5 & 7](#). Have learners pair up and each take one minute to discuss the relationship between the light and life.

John's Gospel begins with a proof of identity. The Jesus who would teach people and do miraculous works was also eternal with God because he was (and *is*) God. We can trust his teaching because his identity tells us he speaks the words of his heavenly Father. What prevents you from declaring Jesus' divine identity to others?

—R. O.

B. Light in Darkness (vv. 4–5)

4. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The Word of God did not simply create *life*, but life preexisted *in him* by nature of the Word's relationship with God the Father ([John 5:26](#)). The substance of life is more than physical, for in the Word is found eternal life (see [1 John 1:2](#); [5:11–12](#)).

In bringing *light* into the world, the Word contrasts with the world's darkness. In this

regard, John speaks of spiritual light (see [John 3:19–20](#)). Jesus connects himself with the nature of this light (see [8:12](#); [12:35–36](#)). The spiritual light is available to the whole world (see commentary on [1:9](#), below), but not all people would receive the light ([3:19–20](#)).

5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word became a spiritual *light* for all people who would receive the Word. Again, John expands on the creation account and God’s creation of light by the power of his word (see [Genesis 1:3](#)).

Darkness might specifically refer to people who have resisted the Word. They experience spiritual blindness as they willfully live in the darkness of their evil (see [John 3:19](#)). However, darkness could also refer generally to the status of the world as a whole (compare [12:46](#); [1 John 2:8, 17](#)). John could be referring to both possibilities. The two types of darkness could occur simultaneously but would not diminish the role of God’s light.

The darkness *has not overcome* the scope of God’s light. This phrase might allude to the way the light is overtaking the darkness, in the same way that darkness might overtake a person ([John 12:35](#)). As God’s light overtakes darkness, the darkness is unable to overpower the brilliance and power of the light.

What Do You Think?

What areas of a believer’s life might especially need God’s light to shine?

Digging Deeper

How might darkness affect the relationships between believers (see [1 John 2:7–11](#))?

II. The Human Witness

([JOHN 1:6–8](#))

A. Sent by God (vv. 6–7)

6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

John transitioned to describe the *man* who would turn out to be the earthly forerunner to the Word. As this forerunner was *sent from God*, this man served as a prophet to the ministry of God. Old Testament prophets served a similar role as they proclaimed God’s will to his people—even when the people refused to listen (see [2 Chronicles 24:19](#); [Jeremiah 7:25–26](#); [35:15](#)).

This prophet, *whose name was John*, is not the apostle who wrote the Gospel, but John the Baptist (compare [Matthew 3:1](#); [Luke 7:20](#)). As a witness to all who would hear, John the Baptist came before the incarnate Word of God to prepare the hearts of all people for the Word’s arrival (see [Luke 1:15–17](#)).

7. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

John the Baptist *came* into the world with a God-given commission: to bear *witness* and *testify* to Jesus Christ, the *light* of the world (see [John 1:19–34](#)). Before John the Baptist was tragically murdered ([Matthew 14:1–12](#)), he served as a herald declaring the coming of the Messiah. Many of Jesus’ own disciples came to follow Jesus and *believe* after hearing John’s witness ([John 1:35–42](#)).

What Do You Think?

How might you bear witness to your neighbors of God’s light of salvation?

Digging Deeper

How can believers maintain a faithful witness when God’s light is rejected by others?

B. Testified to the Light (v. 8)

8. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

As John the Baptist spoke regarding *the light* of God, some people thought that he might be the promised Messiah (see [Luke 3:15–18](#)). At the time of the composition of John’s Gospel, some people apparently still held to that belief. However, the Gospel dispelled that misunderstanding. John the Baptist only gave *witness* to that eternal *light* (see [John 3:28](#)).

III. The True Light

([JOHN 1:9–13](#))

A. Rejected by Some (vv. 9–11)

9. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Even though John the Baptist’s witness illuminated the hearts of his audiences, the Word of God is the *light* for humanity. Truth implies accuracy and veracity (see [John 19:35](#)). However, as the Gospel uses the word in this specific instance, *true* emphasizes the light’s authentic nature as being from God. (Compare the usage of the same word in [John 4:23](#); [6:32](#); [15:1](#); [17:3](#).)

The true light has come *into the world* and has been revealed to *everyone*. Those people who receive the gift of Jesus Christ will live in the light of his salvation (see [John 12:46](#)).

10. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

John described a sad irony related to the coming of the true light. While that light *made*

the world and dwelled *in the world*, not all people accepted him. In John’s Gospel, “the world” can refer to the entirety of planet Earth (see [John 21:25](#)). However, it can also refer to the world’s rebellion in hostility to God and his Son (see [7:7](#); [15:18–19](#); [16:20](#); [17:14](#); also [1 John 2:15](#)). Either possibility could be understood as the object of John’s observation. Despite the creation of the world by the Son of God ([Colossians 1:16](#)), many people *did not recognize him*.

What Do You Think?

How might believers recognize and know God’s presence in their lives?

Digging Deeper

To what extent does creation reveal God to the world (see [Psalm 19:1–6](#); [Romans 1:20](#))?

11. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Since the true light, the Word of God, created the world and was in the world, the world and the people therein are considered *his own*. Therefore, when he came to the world, it was as its originator and possessor. However, the reception was less than welcoming, even from the people most intended to accept him.

In this verse, John’s Gospel looks at the totality of Jesus’ earthly ministry. From the standpoint of several decades after Jesus’ ascension, John reflects on the nature of that ministry. The reality was that Jesus’ *own* people—the children of Israel—*did not receive him*; nor did they receive his message of salvation. In this sense, the words of Isaiah were fulfilled: Jesus was “despised and rejected” ([Isaiah 53:3](#)) and he became like “the stone the builders rejected” ([Psalm 118:22](#); see [Matthew 21:42–44](#)).

B. Accepted by Children (vv. 12–13)

12. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

Despite the sad reality that many people rejected Jesus as God’s Son, many others *did receive* Jesus and his testimony to God’s eternal life. As a result, these people received God’s grace (see [John 1:16–18](#)). Further, they came to know God the Father all the more clearly as they received his Son (see [Matthew 10:40](#)).

The underlying Greek text translated as *right* (compare [Hebrews 13:10](#); [Revelation 22:14](#)) can also be translated as “power” (see [John 19:10–11](#)). God gives the power (see commentary on [John 1:13](#), below) for believers to claim the right to a new identity.

This new identity that believers claim is that of sons and daughters—the *children of God*. As people accept Jesus, believe in him, and follow his teachings, they experience new birth into the family of God (see [John 3:3–8](#); [20:31](#)).

13. children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

The new family identity happens by virtue of birth, but not a physical birth. John uses three negative phrases to stress that being *born* as *children* of God cannot be attained through physical procreative acts (compare [John 3:3–7](#)). No physical reality—a person’s *descent*, the human desires, or human *will*—can result in this new birth. Only through faith in “the word of truth” can a person be *born* into the family of God ([James 1:18](#)).

IV. The Only Son

([JOHN 1:14](#))

A. Dwelt with Humanity (v. [14a–b](#))

14a. The Word became flesh

John previously stated that *the Word*—the true light—had come into the world ([John 1:9](#), above). The nature of that coming into the world is now evident. The Word took on human *flesh*. This identifies the eternal, preexistent Word as the Son of God—Jesus Christ. Eternal life comes by salvation through Jesus Christ, the Son of God ([11:25](#); [17:3](#)).

In the scope of John’s New Testament writings, the concept of flesh can refer to fallen human nature in contrast to the ways of God’s Spirit (see [John 6:63](#); [1 John 2:16](#)). However, it can also refer to a physical human body (examples: [John 3:6](#); [Revelation 19:18, 21](#)). John’s usage in this instance regarding the Word refers to the latter. In ways mysterious yet glorious, the Word of God *became* human and entered his creation (see [1 John 4:2](#)).

This reality is the central component of the Incarnation, a doctrine that describes the Word of God becoming a human man in Jesus Christ. The details of the Incarnation are a paradox: the Word of God humbled himself to live among his creation ([Philippians 2:6–8](#)). This occurred as God sent his Son, born of a virgin ([Galatians 4:4](#)), conceived by God’s Spirit ([Matthew 1:20](#)). The *how* of the Incarnation is a mystery to the human mind. Despite this mystery, the result of the Incarnation is clear: salvation for humanity through God’s incarnate Son.

14b. and made his dwelling among us.

In the Incarnation, the Word of God did more than just come to earth. In Jesus Christ, the Word *made his dwelling* within creation. By describing the incarnate Word in this manner, John alludes to God’s presence—his dwelling place—in the tabernacle in the camp of ancient Israel (see [Exodus 40:34–38](#); [Ezekiel 37:27](#)).

The same God who made his presence known in a particular way to ancient Israel has revealed his presence through Jesus Christ. God took up residence in the midst of his creation

by taking on the same flesh and blood as humanity ([Hebrews 2:14](#)). As a result of this intimacy of relationship, God will be a Father, and his people will be his children.

B. Glorified by the Father (v. 14c)

14c. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John includes himself as among *we* who *have seen* the *glory* of the incarnate Word of God. John had seen firsthand the person and work of Jesus Christ ([1 John 1:1–4](#)). He had also been among the closest of Jesus’ disciples who saw his glory firsthand (see [Matthew 17:1–8](#); [Mark 9:2–13](#); [Luke 9:28–36](#)).

In addition to providing proof of Jesus’ divine nature, *the glory* observed by John could only be ascribed to God *the Father*. The incarnate *Son* was able to receive (and show) this because he was the unique and *only* Son of God (see [John 1:18](#); [3:16](#), [28](#); [1 John 4:9](#)). There is no other like Jesus!

As the unique and only Son of God, Jesus demonstrated the attributes of his Father for the world (see [John 1:16–17](#)). Through the Incarnation, God’s *grace* was made available to the world ([Romans 3:21–24](#); [Ephesians 2:7–8](#)). Furthermore, Jesus embodied God’s *truth* ([John 14:6](#)). Through the incarnate Word, God’s truth has been revealed to all humanity ([John 8:31–32](#); see [Ephesians 2:15–17](#)).

What Do You Think?

How might believers live in a way that reflects to other people the grace and truth of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How do [Ephesians 4:15](#) and [1 Peter 3:15–16](#) inform your answer in this regard?

DWELLING AMONG US

My graduate school professor and his family sensed God’s call to begin a new ministry in Memphis, Tennessee. Unfortunately, they faced trials during the transition. For example, they could not find housing in the new city. Their ministry would not last if they could not find a dwelling place.

When they did eventually find housing, the family could not help but worship God. They asked God to use their home as a place of peace in their new neighborhood. The family wanted to share in the same experiences of the community they were called to serve. They desired to show God’s love toward their neighbors. And they did.

The Son of God made the earth his temporary dwelling place; he moved into the neigh-

borhood of humanity. He understands the human experience—even our weaknesses (see [Hebrews 4:15](#))! As a result, humans have direct access to God through the Son. How will you live differently in light of Jesus’ having dwelt among us?

—R. O.

Conclusion

A. Embodied from the Start

So much of the work of ministering and leading a church requires in-person work. Meeting church members for fellowship, praying for them in the hospital, visiting families with newborns. These and other occurrences are commonplace in ministry and require physical presence. The central theme of the Christian faith required a similar kind of physical, embodied presence.

God extended his love and grace to humanity in an extraordinary way—the Word of God became flesh and dwelt within his creation. This act, beyond human comprehension, was an extraordinary gift of God’s embodied presence. In response, people can accept his gift with humility, gratitude, and faith. As a result of this gift, there is a change of identity to becoming the children of God!

God’s children are tasked with extending his love to others. In an increasingly “disembodied” human experience—demonstrated by the frequent use of smartphones and social media—God’s children can intentionally chose to love others by their physical presence! How will you love others by your presence in the days to come?

What Do You Think?

How does this lesson provide a deeper understanding of the basis of your faith in Jesus?

Digging Deeper

Who can you tell in the coming weeks the ways the Word of God has changed your life?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, you demonstrated your love for us when you sent your Son to live among us and be our light. Help us be attentive to the light of your Son. Show us how we might reflect that light to our community. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God’s salvation has dwelt among us.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Ask a volunteer for the name of a familiar celebrity. Ask volunteers to share information they may know about the celebrity. After no more than 3 minutes, ask the class, “Suppose this celebrity invited you to lunch. What questions would you ask of them concerning their life?” Allow no more than 5 minutes for whole-class discussion.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “After that lunch, you will know the celebrity better than you did before. Today’s lesson shows us the extent of God’s self-disclosure to humanity.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [John 1:1–5](#). Divide the class into three groups with the following assignments to interpret this passage.

Filmmaker Group. Write the outline of a movie trailer using this Scripture passage as its narrative text. Include details for voice-overs, background music, and camera shots.

Broadcaster Group. Write a script for a radio retelling of this Scripture passage. Include details for the genre, the script, sound effects, and the local radio station where this would be played.

Graphic Designer Group. Write a four panel comic strip to depict the message of this Scripture passage. Include details for the dialogue, captions, sound effects, and the title of the comic strip.

Allow groups no more than 10 minutes to design their production. Allow each group to present their work to the whole class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Word/Creator/Light” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually before discussing conclusions in small groups.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [John 1:6–8](#). Divide the class into three groups and distribute to each group handouts (you create) with the text of [John 1:19–34](#). Have each group read Scripture text on the handout and discuss the following questions which you will write on the board.

Identity Group. 1–Who was John the Baptist? 2–What did he consider his purpose and

work?

Mission Group. 1–How did John the Baptist live out his mission? 2–What did he consider to be the limitations of his mission?

Testimony Group. 1–How did Jesus’ person and work fulfill the witness of John the Baptist? 2–How did his testimony differ from the testimony of Jesus?

Alternative. Divide the class into pairs and distribute copies of the “A Witness to the Light” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After calling time under either activity, have groups or pairs present their findings in whole class discussion.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [John 1:9–14](#). Ask class members to give answers in whole class discussion to the following questions, which you will write on the board: 1–Where do you have authority? 2–How, if at all, did you earn that authority? 3–How does that authority provide certain powers? 4–How do we receive the right to become God’s children? 5–What does this right entail?

Into Life

Say, “John the Baptist was *not* the light for which people had been waiting and searching. But he gave witness to the incarnate light of God: Jesus.”

Divide the class into pairs and have them answer the following questions which you will write on the board: 1–If John the Baptist lived in our cultural context, how might his mission look different? 2–How can you continue the mission of John the Baptist in your specific context? 3–What challenges might arise to prevent you from continuing that mission and how will you address those challenges?

Close class by asking each pair to pray that they might continue the mission of John the Baptist and bear witness to the incarnate Word of God.