

**GOD
OUR
HOME**

ABOUT THE DEVOTIONAL

God Our Home is a 10-week study of John designed to grow readers in biblical literacy and love for the Scriptures. In John 15, Jesus invites us to “make our home” in him. What does it mean to “abide” in Christ in a way that makes a relationship with God our home base? We’ll follow St. John’s lead, making connections between the Old and New Testaments and using Scripture itself to help clarify our questions. The gift of the Scriptures is knowledge of the God who’s opened himself up for us to establish a home—a life—in him.

GOD
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Katie Noble

God Our Home: A Study of the Gospel of John

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Published by Hosanna Revival in Cincinnati, OH

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Cover design: Hosanna Revival

First printing, 2023

Printed in China

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Hardcover: 978-1-954053-30-4

To our unexpected family in Licking County, Ohio



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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

God Our Home

It's not unusual for me to feel a pang of homesickness in the afternoons. For years, around 4:30 p.m., when the shadows begin to lengthen, a longing to be back at my childhood home has welled up: for the familiarity of the gravel drive under my small bare feet, the songs of cicadas and mourning doves in the catalpa trees. I didn't identify the longing as homesickness until late in my twenties—years past my own childhood, miles away from my childhood home, already building a home and a childhood for two sons of my own. It took me even longer to realize it wasn't so much the structure of home I longed for but the feeling of home: knowing that I was known, that I had purpose and value in a particular place among a particular group of people. I long to feel safe, seen, provided for, and protected. I was embarrassed, at first, to share this dull sadness with anyone. But the more I shared, the more company I found in the longing to belong somewhere, to someone.

It's dangerous to relegate these particular longings to childhood. Longing to find our place is not a childish experience; it is a human experience—one that followers of Jesus may feel even more acutely than our unbelieving neighbors. The knowledge of home—a place and a people to which we belong—is deeply woven into our DNA and compels us regardless of the health of the earthly home in which we were raised. Each of us knows, in our bodies if not our minds, that safety, intimacy, protection, and provision exist and could be available to us, even if our earthly childhoods were scarred by neglect or abuse. Our collective and individual disturbance at the lack of those realities (e.g., anger at the injustice of parents' absence, grief over losing them through death or disaster) is proof that the knowledge of having a

place and a people has been woven into our subconscious, God-given identity. Our recognition of and lament over our insecurity, anxiety, and loneliness exposes our deep knowing that identity, purpose, and relationship are out there and could be ours if only. . .

For most of us, home is the physical location of our deepest vulnerability. Some of our vulnerabilities were met with godly tenderness and love and we learned the inherent goodness of belonging to a place and a people. Others of us had our vulnerability exploited and were severely wounded and left home with deep anger and wariness, suspicious of belonging to anyone or anything. For better or worse, it is our home that forms our understanding of what is to be expected in relationships; it is where we learn whether or not we are safe, desired, and purposeful. In order to protect our fragile hearts, many of us have learned to quiet the longing to belong, believing pursuit of such a circumstance—whether physical or socio-emotional—to be naïve and weak, a search bound to end in disappointment. Others have launched a full-fledged campaign of building that sense of belonging for ourselves, stopping at no cost or obstacle, only to find that it wasn't found in a forever home or the spouse of our dreams.

If you're disillusioned and disappointed today, if you're feeling isolated, inadequate, anxious, and embarrassed, you've picked up the right book. The pages to come are specifically written to capture our wandering hearts and set them on the path homeward to God himself.

God created mankind to “live and move and find their being” in relationship with him.¹ In Genesis 2, we find the first human beings living in perfect harmony with God and one another, full of purpose and freedom with a place and a people to which they belonged. God

1 Acts 17:28.

created us to need him so that he could meet the need and be enjoyed and glorified forever. This was true even before the fall of mankind. Our mortal need to belong to a home and a place (rather than finding complete satisfaction within ourselves, which is something only God can do) isn't a result of sin. Our spiritual yearning for home exists because we were built by the hands of God to find our belonging in the heavenly home and the holy community prepared for us before the beginning of time. What the fall introduced was not the need to belong, but the doubt that God could be trusted to meet it. When the serpent sowed the seed of doubt in the character and trustworthiness of God ("Did God actually say..."),² the certainty of mankind in their place and people, their home, was shattered. Instead of resting in God's presence and provision, mankind took on the yoke of spiritual homelessness.

But the goodness of the gospel is that the heavenly place and people in which we were meant to find our belonging were not destroyed by sin. The deep rest found exclusively in the presence and provision of God is available to us today, even if we find ourselves wandering and afraid. There is no amount of effort, moral performance, or financial or social status that will bring us closer to our home in God. It is fully accessible for you and for me, right now, as we are, by the abundant grace and mercy offered by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

In God's perfect plan, he did not set up his kingdom like a Fortune 500 company or elite institution; he set it up as a family of which he is the Father. He doesn't give us a step-by-step plan to succeed as his disciple; he offers us a home: a place to rest our heads, take our meals, laugh and cry, move and find our beings. John's account of Jesus' life, work, and teaching paints a stunning picture of what this means and how we embody this blessed reality.

² Genesis 3:1.

In twenty-one chapters, John illustrates the ever-present presence and provision of God—the home we were created for—as the only safe foundation upon which to build our lives and set our hopes. Our true belonging cannot be found in anything but the eternal. The pursuit of such temporal fulfillment will leave us exhausted and disappointed. Marriage and friendships cannot provide us with the security of God’s unfailing, unconditional love. No city or dream home can offer the safety our souls crave. No physical health can replace the glory of the heavenly body awaiting us on the other side of death.³ No job is sustainable forever. Nothing and no one but God himself can properly hold and satisfy the longings of our soul to be, at last, at home. This can only be found in communing with Christ, on our way home to God. Author Dallas Willard puts it this way:

...that we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities He Himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of the Father.⁴

It is this pursuit of making a home in God that allowed the ancient mothers and fathers of our faith to

[die] in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking

3 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

4 Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), ix.

of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.⁵

It was the joy of home in God that emboldened Jesus who “endured the cross, disregarding its shame.”⁶ This is the invitation extended to us by Christ as we see in John's Gospel: make your home in God, build your home in his presence, trust his provision, taste and see his goodness, and find your rest. The exceeding glory of this process is that the groundwork is already laid. God has come to us and made his home in us. To make our home in God is to agree with the process he’s already begun in us by grace through faith in his Son.⁷ All that’s left for us to do is to receive him as our own. And that’s precisely what we’ll do together in the coming weeks.

Explanation of Methodology

The Gospel According to John is a stunning work of theological literature. The depths of truth and beauty captured by John have been explored by many for decades, and still there are new books, studies, and commentaries published every year that seek to shed light on its profound mysteries. You’re holding one right now!

What we need to know from the very beginning is that there’s more to the life of Christ, the character and promise of God, and the hope to which we’ve been called than any human mind can fully comprehend. John's Gospel is a book about these expansive cosmic truths. Thus, our

⁵ Hebrews 11:13-16.

⁶ Hebrews 12:2.

⁷ Ephesians 2:8.

study will be merely an introduction in how to find and be transformed by what we read in the Scriptures, not a comprehensive examination of its contents.

The first few sections of our study will be information heavy, particularly as they pertain to the cultural and historical context in which John was writing. This contextual foundation will support the theological realities found in John's Gospel. As the study progresses, supplemental information and my own commentary will decrease, and you'll be encouraged to engage in the intellectual study of the Scriptures on your own. My hope is that these exercises build your knowledge of how to study the Bible as a historical document and learn to trust yourself to use the tools available to you to deepen your communion with God.

We won't only be engaging our minds, however. We'll also train ourselves in meditative contemplation of the Scriptures: the practice of quieting our hearts to sit in the presence of the Holy Spirit who transforms us from the inside out from one degree of glory to the next.⁸ Knowledge of the Scriptures can only take us so far. It's only when we grasp it with our hearts and bodies that it can change us and the world in which we live. To deepen our communion with God through the Scriptures, we'll practice reading the full text contemplatively. Contemplative reading is a spiritual practice of engaging a text with one's whole being, not just the brain. Practically, this will look like taking a moment of quiet prayer before reading the section's text, inviting the Spirit into your time of reading, then reading slowly (repetitively if necessary) without the pressure to analyze. This spiritual discipline is rooted in the faith that "the word of God is living and active,"⁹ thus it is able to transform

8 Psalm 131; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

9 Hebrews 4:12.

our hearts and minds regardless of our intellectual effort. This kind of reading will take more time than reading merely for information. So, if you need to spend your entire allotted study time reading the section's text contemplatively, do that! Do not fall into the trap of believing that intellectual study is more valuable than soul-level communion with God.

This study is designed with space to take a day off when you need to or to spend a full day sitting with God's presence as it comes to you in the text. Some weeks are more content heavy than others. On those weeks, give yourself the grace to take the time you need. Do not allow the intellectual element of this study to cause unnecessary anxiety (I'm talking to you, high achiever! There are no awards for finishing your study first!).

Feel free to use any additional study tools to bolster your understanding of the text once you've sat with the Spirit in contemplative reading and prayer. If you're unfamiliar with what's available, here's a list of some of my favorites:

- **The concordance in the back of your Bible:** Here you'll find keywords found in the Scriptures. I use this a lot when I want to know how particular words or phrases are used in other places in Scripture.
- **A study Bible:** The commentary found in study Bibles can be incredibly useful as we seek to understand the broader context of the particular Scripture we're studying. Our family's favorite is the ESV Study Bible.
- **BibleGateway.com:** I use this website all the time to search for Scriptures and compare Bible translations. Reading different

translations can add nuance to our understanding of Scriptures which have been translated from ancient languages and don't always have a direct English word-for-word translation.

- **BlueLetterBible.org:** This website is incredible for helping us understand the author's original linguistic intent. The entire Bible can be found here in its original language with multiple tools for defining the original words and connecting those words to their other instances in Scripture.

At the end of each section, you'll find a list of questions that will repeat throughout the duration of the study. The questions are the same week to week to encourage a gradual building of our knowledge of the character and purpose of God: our Father and our Home.

One last request before we begin: that you would do this study in community. Put another way, I'm asking you to invite at least one friend (a group of three or more is preferred) to do this study with you. As we'll see in Section 1, the foundation of the gospel (and, indeed the entire kingdom of God) is a relational invitation. The refrain of the beginning of Jesus' ministry is "come and see."¹⁰ It is the invitation of one person to another to shift their mindset and behavior in order to behold,¹¹ contemplate, and fall in love with the character of God as demonstrated by Christ. In God's divine wisdom, relationships are the means by which the character and truth of God are revealed to a lost and broken world. The pursuit of life with God will not last if the pursuer is alone. We are our truest selves in relationship to others, for it is by relationship and for relationship that we were created. As a bonus, studying the Word in community will crack the Scriptures'

¹⁰ John 1:39, 46 NLT.

¹¹ John 1:36.

profound beauty even wider, as you'll experience the presence and provision of God through the story of others. Studying the truth of God within the context of lived experience with those you love is a surefire way to forge friendships that manifest the gospel deeper in you and further into the world around you. Doing a Bible study, perhaps this one, with that friend you admire may be the thing that solidifies your partnership for the long run. And, the cherry on top, they'll hold you accountable to actually finish the study—and, I promise, the best part is the ending. So, if you don't already have a group set up to journey with you for the next few months, set this book down, send out that group text, and come back when you're ready.



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Introduction to the Gospel of John

John's Gospel is perhaps one of history's most precious literary masterpieces. The author, John the apostle, was incredibly intentional in the way he structured this work to convey both the elemental truths of Jesus' life as well as the vast, unsearchable glory of its power and implication on all of human history. There is no single work that could properly convey all that this Gospel has to teach us about our God (certainly not the one you hold in your hands now). As mentioned previously, it's important to view this study as an introduction to the Gospel of John and the study of Scripture rather than a comprehensive overview of the book. My prayer is that this study would whet your appetite for deeper study, not quench it. I promise there is much more to discover beyond these pages. Here, we'll dip our toes into the water of John's Gospel, opening our souls to receive what God has prepared for us to encounter.

As with any scriptural study, it's important to have at least an elementary understanding of how this book of the Bible came to be included in the canon of Scripture. The author, John, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, an apostle of the early church, and identified as the son of Zebedee. He was a Palestinian Jew who lived among and wrote to a diverse audience to convince them of Jesus' messianic identity and the eternal life available through belief in him.¹² John likely wrote his Gospel in Ephesus between AD 70 and AD 100, decades after Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended to heaven.

¹² John 20:30-31.

The Gospel of John stands apart from those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The first three are known as “synoptic” (from the Greek word meaning “viewed together”). They include much of the same material and are written from a similar point of view. John’s Gospel is distinct in style and material emphasis. While it does contain many of the same literary elements of historical narrative and fulfillment of prophecy, it also contains poetry and is woven together in a particularly intricate way. Some commentators break the Gospel of John into two sections: the first (John 1:19-12:50) is called “The Book of Signs: the Signs of the Messiah,” a collection of wondrous works performed by Jesus that demonstrate and prove his divine identity. The second (John 13:1-20:31) is called “The Book of Glory: Jesus’ Preparation of the New Messianic Community and His Passion.”¹³ The signs or miracles of the first half of John are incredibly divisive, leading to the salvific belief of some witnesses and murderous anger in others.

John uses repetition of words, phrases, and themes to emphasize importance. As you read, you’ll be asked to make note of these repeated ideas by underlining or circling them. As you see them, add each to the list on page 292. By the end of our time together, you’ll have a list of elements you know are meaningful to Jesus.

There are numerous resources available to us to deepen our cultural framework as we study the Gospel of John. I encourage you to engage outside resources whenever possible!

13 Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 10.



PART ONE

THE BOOK OF SIGNS



PART ONE

The Book of Signs

Many scholars refer to the first twelve chapters of John's Gospel as the Book of Signs. This section of John's Gospel spans the course of nearly three years, while the second half of the book takes place within a matter of days. It is thus wise to read these chapters as an expansive look at the person and purpose of Jesus, the Son of God, rather than a mere string of events.

Within the first “half” of the book, we see the signs of Jesus’ divinity in his miraculous works and passionate discourses with the Pharisees and Jewish leaders. We find Jesus revealing his character as the true and comprehensive essence of the glory of God. One author describes the glory of God as “his presence and beauty.”¹ This is precisely what Jesus demonstrates in the Book of Signs. We’ll see his method of bringing God’s kingdom to earth in the way he heals the sick, provides for the needy, challenges false teaching, and invites the social and moral outcast into God’s family. The Book of Signs gives us a clear picture of who Jesus is, and by extension, who God himself is. We see who and what he cares for most deeply, what drives him to anger, and the magnificence of his power.

Such a demonstration is an immense, unearned kindness from God. An all-knowing and all-powerful God has every right to demand obedience and devotion regardless of the understanding or buy-in of his creation. But the God of John's Gospel is patient and kind, opting to invite his children back home by love rather than force. May we see this time of

1 John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 31.

study as an opportunity to get to know the God Jesus embodied, that we may accept the invitation home with confident joy.

We are wise to know a place before we make our home within it. Consider a first-time home buyer: It is prudent to have a home inspected for major damage and to have an understanding of the neighborhood as well as the schools your children might attend if you were to purchase the home. God knows that we need to know these things in the process of making our home in him, building our entire lives around his character, reality, love, and law. So he shows us before we ask him. This is the purpose of the Book of Signs—to give understanding to those who might move their entire being into the shelter of the Most High God.



section

one ##

SECTION ONE

John 1

John's Gospel paints a vivid picture of what it means to make our home in the presence and provision of God. Consider this poem at the beginning of John as an example of God revealing himself to us with intention and patience. This text displays God's goodness and faithfulness and opens the door to immeasurable beauty available to us if we are ready to walk through. Though the fullness of God's character and reality lies far beyond human comprehension, it is gradually revealed in and through the flesh and blood of Jesus and the experience of those who lived alongside him. These verses remind us that life with God is both inconceivable and as real as the heart beating in our chests. It's in this tension that we'll begin our study of John's Gospel together, sitting in the real-time reality of cosmic glory.

Begin by reading John 1 from start to finish. Take note of remarkable passages or phrases, questions you may have, and repeated words, phrases, and themes in the "Notes" section at the end of your study.

*Section One***ONE | JOHN 1:1-18***Glory and Mystery*

Begin by taking a deep breath and offering a prayer of welcome to the Holy Spirit. Ask God to illuminate the text and grant you wisdom to understand.

John's prologue is one of the most theologically rich passages of all four Gospels. It's an example of John's use of poetic language—one of the elements that distinguishes his writing from those of the synoptic authors. Many scholars believe that the words we read here were lyrics to an ancient Christian hymn that John added after the Gospel's completion around the same time he penned the letters we know as 1, 2, and 3 John.¹

The revelation of Christ—that is, what and who Jesus reveals through his life and teaching—is a major theme of John's Gospel. In 1 John 4:9, John writes, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” The apostle Paul affirms Jesus' revelatory glory in his letters, particularly in Colossians 1:15, where he writes that “[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”

Here's the catch: The glory of God cannot be fully contained by the human mind. His thoughts are innumerable, the riches of Christ are unsearchable, his power is absolute, and his understanding is beyond measure.² John's Gospel immediately confronts our mortal minds

1 G. M. Burge, *John: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2000), 52-53.

2 Psalm 139:17 NLT; Ephesians 3:8; Psalm 147:5.

with the eternal mystery of the divine. This type of knowledge—what Scripture calls “the wisdom of God”³—requires an understanding far deeper than intellectual ascent. It is a knowing that saturates the mind, passes down into the heart, and is manifest in the fruit of the Spirit.⁴ This way of knowing God calls for our full consciousness and is accessed through spiritual disciplines such as meditative prayer. You may or may not enjoy meditative prayer or pondering the boundless majesty of the infinite, triune God, but personal preference doesn’t invalidate the invitation of the Scriptures to “come and see.”

So to begin, if you’ll be so brave as to give it a try, we’ll sit in the mystery. You’ll find a few questions following this introduction to assist in your meditation. Today will not be as “intellectual” as the rest of this study, but it is equally (if not more) important to our understanding of and communion with God. We’ll return to this passage to conclude our study in a couple of months, applying what we’ve learned to cement our understanding of the glorious mystery. Today, let the Scriptures stretch your holy imagination through the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*.⁵ Here are the steps:

1. *Read the text once through, aloud to yourself if possible. Reflect for a minute or so, noticing your spirit’s initial reaction to the text.*
2. *Read the text aloud again, this time noticing if there is a particular word or phrase that catches your attention.*

3 1 Corinthians 1:19-31.

4 Galatians 5:22-23.

5 For more information on Lectio Divina, run a quick Google search. I found a guide by Redeemer: “Lectio Divina: ‘Divine Reading,’” Redeemer, https://www.redeemer.com/learn/prayer/prayer_and_fasting/lectio_divina_divine_reading (accessed November 29, 2022).

3. *Read the text again, then sit in quiet reflection for five to ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to reveal how this passage interacts with your soul's experience today.*
4. *After your fourth and final reading, leave a few minutes for prayer particularly to hear God's invitation through it. What might he be asking you to step into? What might he be inviting you out of? How might this passage become behaviorally true in your life today rather than merely intellectually true?*

After your practice, spend time thanking God and reflecting on your experience of contemplative reading. Make note of your initial impression and internal dialogue. Write down questions raised during your time. Share these reflections with your group when you meet. You may also consider engaging in Lectio Divina together during your gathering.



*Section One***TWO | JOHN 1:6-8, 15, 19-34***John the Baptist: An Example of Life in God*

The jump from the sweeping poetics of John 1:1-5 to verses 6-8 can feel jarring. Some scholars speculate that the apostle John (the author, not the Baptist) added these sentences to the prologue in order to connect them to the original beginning of the Gospel in verse 19.⁶ But the insertion of this flesh-and-bone example of discipleship within a vast, beautiful narrative of the life of Christ provides us with a profound reality: our everyday lives are wrapped up in this cosmic glory, too.

Read the text once through in its entirety, noting any phrases, explanations, or questions that catch your attention in the “Notes” section. Remember that John regularly uses repetition to convey significance. Begin your time of devotion by taking these areas to God, then proceed to the questions below.

Upon first reading, what do you infer about John the Baptist’s understanding of Jesus? How does his life, language, and posture reflect this understanding? Until this point, did John the Baptist have a full understanding of who Jesus was (v. 31)?

6 G. M. Burge, *John: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2000), 56-57.

What do you know of John the Baptist's prior relationship with Jesus of Nazareth? (Consult Luke 1 for help.)

Read Isaiah 40:1-5. John the Baptist quotes this passage when asked about his identity. How do we see this prophecy embodied by John the Baptist's lifestyle and personality?

Consider what it would have taken for John the Baptist to commit so fully to his calling as the forerunner to the Messiah. What is the significance of his “testimony” (a term for evidence used in a court of law and a major theme throughout the rest of the Gospel of John)? To what does he “bear witness”? To whom does he “bear witness”?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their response to the reflection question above.

Apply this to your own life. What of God have you witnessed? What is the significance of this “evidence”? Where might the Spirit be inviting you to extend your “testimony”? Is there a person, or group of people, who may benefit from the information you’ve gathered as you’ve “come and seen” the person and implication of Christ?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their response to the reflection questions above.

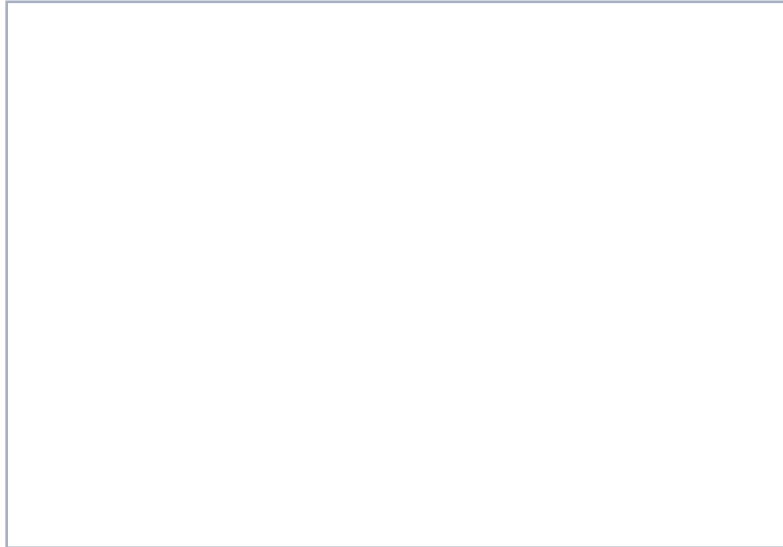
Section One

THREE | JOHN 1:35-42

Jesus, the Lamb of God

To grasp the significance of the pronunciation of Christ as the “Lamb of God,” we’ll need to visit the term’s origin. Begin by reading today’s passage and writing down all you know about the biblical significance of lambs, sheep, and shepherds in the space provided below. This metaphor will surface again in John’s Gospel, expanding our understanding of how God relates to his people.

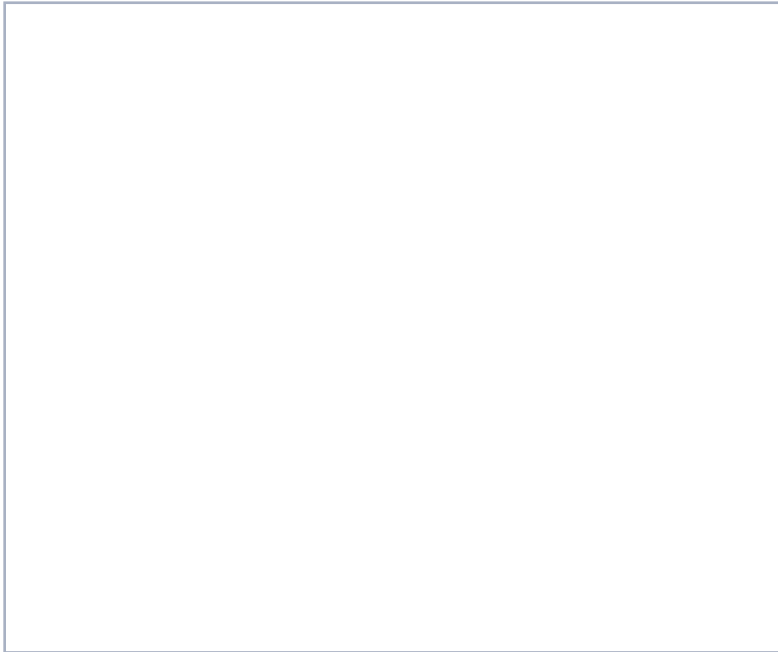
PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE



Read the following passages from the history of the people of God (Israel). Write down everything you gather about the purpose, significance, and beneficiaries of lambs used in ritual sacrifice.

- *Exodus 12:1-13*
- *Exodus 29:38-46*
- *Leviticus 4:32-35*

GATHERED KNOWLEDGE



Write a brief explanation of how lambs were used by the people of God in the days before Jesus' birth.

Isaiah 53 prophesied that the Messiah would act as a sacrificial lamb whose blood would atone for the sins of Israel. Read Isaiah 53, then draw a connection between what we've learned about the purpose of lambs in ritual sacrifice and the purpose for which Jesus came to earth.

The concept of sacrifice would have been deeply familiar to the people of Jesus' time. Sacrifices were regularly made by priests and lay people in the synagogue to atone for personal and communal sin. Hebrew families observed Passover every year, killing a lamb, spreading its blood on their doorposts, and consuming its flesh as a remembrance of God's deliverance and provision in their greatest time of need. The language of Isaiah 53 would have been well known by the disciples of John the Baptist, memorized in childhood.

With such familiarity, what do you think could have been his audience's initial response to hearing John the Baptist (their teacher, cultural leader, and friend) herald Jesus of Nazareth as the “Lamb of God”? How does what we know about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus clarify this prophetic term used by John the Baptist?

What did you learn about the identity of Christ from today's readings?

Section One

FOUR | JOHN 1:43-51

The Call of the Disciples into God's Family

Discipleship was a very common socio-religious practice in Jesus' day in which boys would be trained up in the reading and interpretation of Scripture and memorizing the entire Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) from a very young age. After a rigorous process of vetting and eventual acceptance by a Rabbi—a spiritual teacher and community leader—a disciple would begin years-long training in wisdom and tradition. A rabbi would have expected full submission from his disciples. Disciples followed the rules of their teachers, learned to live according to their standards, and committed to continue these teachings to their own eventual disciples once their rabbi could no longer serve. This process could be incredibly biased, favoring the rich and powerful, overlooking those with willing hearts who didn't seem to have much to offer. But as we'll soon see, God's process of calling disciples is quite distinct from the common cultural process.

Read the passage in full, taking note of anything that strikes your interest, marking repeated phrases and words in the "Notes" section at the end of your study.

What do the first disciples of Jesus know about their new teacher when they begin to follow him?

How does the number of Jesus' disciples grow? Who brings new followers into Jesus' fold?

Do Jesus' disciples have to undergo rigorous testing in order to be considered worthy of following Jesus?

Consider the cultural magnitude of what is happening here. Not only is Jesus “stealing” disciples from John the Baptist (who willingly lets them go), but Jesus is simply inviting nonreligious, peasant fishermen to join his team. It makes all the sense in the world that some, like Nathaniel, would be suspicious of what was happening here.

What was Nathaniel's primary reservation regarding discipleship to Jesus?

What was it that finally changed Nathaniel's mind about the character and trustworthiness of Jesus?

Consider your own introduction to Jesus of Nazareth. Do you remember the moment you first heard of or experienced him? If you don't recall a specific moment of introduction, recall your earliest memory of responding to Jesus in a personal way. What was it about him that captured your heart and imagination? What, if anything, about your initial impression of him has changed?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their response to the reflection questions above.

Section One

REFLECTION

According to this section's reading, what is true about:

THE CHARACTER OF GOD *(as displayed through Jesus)?*

THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

THE PEOPLE OF GOD *(this includes you)?*

What was encouraging in this section's reading and reflection? What was challenging?

Did God meet you in a unique way through your time of prayer and contemplation?

What further peace have you been given as you make your home in God?

*After this section, what more do you believe about the family of God?
What about your place within God's family?*