

# WEEK ONE

# DAY ONE

*“Jesus is history’s most familiar figure. His impact on the world is immense and non-accidental.” - John Ortberg*

John intentionally begins his account of the life of Jesus by returning to creation. The opening verses contain beautiful poetry that paints a picture of God as the ever-present, eternal creator who brings life and banishes darkness. In his immense power, he can create with just a word.

From the very beginning, John does not want the reader to miss that Jesus is God—he has always existed and co-created the universe with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

It is a common misconception that the Old Testament and the New Testament depict different pictures of God. Many have wrongly believed that in the Old Testament, God was angry and filled with wrath and it was Jesus who first ushered in a new day of mercy and grace.

John wants his readers to understand that God has always been a God of grace. Throughout history, he continued to be faithful in the midst of a people who constantly disobeyed and rejected him. He chose them time and again, not because they deserved it, but because they were his.

In the beginning, God chose the people of Israel to represent his presence in the world. This time, God himself would come, bringing life, truth and light to the world. He would live to make the presence and character of God known. Ultimately, he would usher in a new generation of God’s family, inviting those who believed in him to become children of God.

The book of John is an invitation to come and see who Jesus is.

## **READ**

John 1

# REFLECT

1: What did you learn about John the Baptist and his relationship to Jesus in this first chapter?

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2. What is the most significant thing you learned about Jesus from this chapter?

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3. How will that influence the way you live this week?

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## RESPOND

As you begin this study, what do you hope to learn? What would you like to know or understand more about Jesus at this particular time of your life?

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## PRAY

As you consider your response to the question above, spend some time in prayer today asking that Jesus would become real to you in a new way through this study of John.

# WEEK ONE

# DAY TWO

*"[Jesus] is both the rest and the storm, both the victim and the wielder of the flaming sword, and you must accept him or reject him on the basis of both." - Timothy Keller*

The two stories we read in John 2 present strikingly different aspects of Jesus. In the first story, we see Jesus perform at a wedding reception to keep the party going. A few short verses later, we see Jesus angry to the point of chasing people and animals out of the temple with a handmade whip, flipping tables and scattering money along the way. What can we make of these seemingly contradictory accounts?

In order to understand Jesus' response here, we must first understand how the temple in Jerusalem operated at this time in history. In his book, *Jesus the King*, Timothy Keller provides great insight into the background of this story:

*When you stepped in the temple door, the first area you got to was the court of the Gentiles ... This was the only part where non-Jews were allowed ... All of the business operations of the temple were set up there ... Thousands of people flooded into Jerusalem bringing and buying tens of thousands of animals to be sacrificed ... Think of how tumultuous, loud, and confusing our financial trading floors are--and then add livestock. And this was the place where the Gentiles were supposed to find God through quiet reflection and prayer.*

**The very place that was designed for people to seek after God had become a barrier for people to encounter him**—especially for those who did not come from a religious background. Jesus' actions reveal that God will not stand for religious rules and spiritual busyness that block the path of those who are genuinely seeking him.

The response of Jesus here is extreme and his character is paradoxical. We serve a God who turns water to wine. We also serve a God who fights for us and stops at nothing to bring the outsiders in, declaring that access to him is available for everyone.

## READ

John 2

# REFLECT

1: Skim through the chapter a second time. If you were one of Jesus' disciples, what would you think of him? Why?

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2. What are some common barriers that block people from God today?

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3. Jesus fought boldly for everyone to have access to God. How does that impact the way you think of Jesus?

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## RESPOND

Identify a person in your life who has a barrier to having a relationship with God. What is one thing you could do this week to work toward removing the barriers for them?

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## PRAY

In today's reading, we are reminded of the incredible heart of our God. Instead of requiring that we check off a to-do list of spiritual activities in order to measure up to his standard, he comes down to us, and longs to remove any barrier in our lives that would prevent us from having a relationship with him. If you have a relationship with Jesus, spend some time in prayer today reflecting on what you have been rescued from. If you are still exploring faith, think about the barriers that are still present in your life from embracing a relationship with God and what questions you may need to explore in order to address those barriers.

# WEEK ONE

# DAY THREE

*"The greatest need you and I have—the greatest need of collective humanity—is renovation of our heart." - Dallas Willard*

John 3 records an interaction between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus, who is identified as a Pharisee. Pharisees were known as highly religious teachers who carried the responsibility of protecting the laws and traditions of the Jewish faith. While they were highly revered in the community, they also wielded a great amount of power, having the authority to declare who was allowed to access God's presence and who wasn't.

Throughout history, the Jewish people had been in and out of God's favor as they went through various seasons of faithfulness and disobedience. At its worst, the Jewish people were exiled from their homeland by God for refusing to honor him. Groups like the Pharisees rose up as guardians, protectors and reminders of God's laws. Their intense commitment to the law was rooted in the hope that they could prevent something like the exile from ever happening again.

As we look at the interaction between Nicodemus and Jesus, we see that Nicodemus was searching for something. A lifetime of pursuing religion had not been enough to fulfill his heart's deepest longings and answer its most burning questions. Nicodemus reveals the truth that it is possible to know a lot about God and still not know God.

Jesus invites Nicodemus into a whole new way of interacting with God. He explains that true life with God isn't about rules, laws and traditions, but is reflected by the kind of transformation that comes from the inside out. Jesus had not come to check up on his people, ensuring that they were following the rules. He came to completely renew us by "being lifted up" (John 3:14) on the cross, setting us free from a life of rule following and opening us up to a life of love, grace and a relationship with the God who made us.

## **READ**

John 3

# REFLECT

1: What stands out to you about Jesus in today's reading?

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2. What does it mean to be *born* again?

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3. This story shows that God cares more about inward change than rule-following. How does this affect your view of God?

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## RESPOND

While God is the one who does the transforming work in us, we can engage in practices that make it easier to hear his voice and respond. Think about the areas in your life that are still in need of God's transformation and choose at least one of these practices to engage in this week.

### Control of the Tongue

- Intentionally offer praise or thank someone today
- Refuse to participate in gossip or belittling others today

### Unplugging

- Take a break from social media today
- "Unplug" from all electronics by 8:00pm and spend time engaging face to face with your family or spending time with a friend

### Silence

- Spend 10-15 minutes today in complete silence to make space to listen to God
- Set aside some time to go for a walk outdoors, with the intention of utilizing the time to be alone with God. If possible, leave your phone at home or in your vehicle. As you walk, notice what you're experiencing with all of your senses—take in the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations. Thank God for the gift of his creation and the opportunity to experience it.

## PRAY

Read the following words of Jesus and use them as a guide for your time in prayer today. Insert your name into the verses or repeat them in your own words.

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)*