

Living Word
BIBLE
STUDIES

JOHN

That You May Believe

KATHLEEN BUSWELL NIELSON



JOHN

Living Word BIBLE STUDIES

Joshua: All God's Good Promises

Nehemiah: Rebuilt and Rebuilding

Psalms, Volume 1: Songs along the Way

Psalms, Volume 2: Finding the Way to Prayer and Praise

Proverbs: The Ways of Wisdom

Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs: Wisdom's Searching and Finding

Isaiah: The Lord Saves

John: That You May Believe

Colossians and Philemon: Continue to Live in Him

1 & 2 Thessalonians: Living the Gospel to the End

JOHN
That You May Believe

KATHLEEN BUSWELL NIELSON


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2010 by Kathleen Buswell Nielson

Lay-flat edition released 2018

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865–0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *ESV Bible*® (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-62995-585-8

CONTENTS

Foreword by Philip Graham Ryken ix
A Personal Word from Kathleen xi
Introduction xiii

LESSON 1 (JOHN 1:1–18)

Beginnings 1

LESSON 2 (JOHN 1:19–51)

Seeing Christ 15

LESSON 3 (JOHN 2)

What This Christ Brings 31

LESSON 4 (JOHN 3)

Life in Christ . . . How? 45

LESSON 5 (JOHN 4)

Christ Comes to the World 63

LESSON 6 (JOHN 5)

Witnesses to the Christ 79

LESSON 7 (JOHN 6)

Christ the Bread 95

CONTENTS

- LESSON 8 (JOHN 7–8)
Confrontations with Christ 111
- LESSON 9 (JOHN 9)
Christ the Light 127
- LESSON 10 (JOHN 10)
Christ the Shepherd 141
- LESSON 11 (JOHN 11)
Christ the Resurrection and the Life 155
- LESSON 12 (JOHN 12)
Christ Knows His Hour 169
- LESSON 13 (JOHN 13:1–30)
Christ Embraces the Cross 185
- LESSON 14 (JOHN 13:31–14:31)
The Christ of Comfort 199
- LESSON 15 (JOHN 15–16)
Abiding in Christ 215
- LESSON 16 (JOHN 17)
Christ's High-Priestly Prayer 231
- LESSON 17 (JOHN 18)
Christ Despised and Rejected 243
- LESSON 18 (JOHN 19)
Christ Crucified, Dead, and Buried 255

LESSON 19 (JOHN 20)

Believing in the Christ 267

LESSON 20 (JOHN 21)

Following Christ 283

Notes for Leaders 301

Outline of John 307

Chart of Seven Signs 308

Chart of “I Am” Statements 310

Chart of Jewish Festivals 312

Suggested Memory Passages 314

Notes on Translations and Study Helps 316

FOREWORD

I sometimes think of John as the “inside-out and backwards gospel.” I think of it as the “inside-out gospel” because it speaks to the heart—the heart of love that Jesus had for John as his “beloved disciple” and the heart of love that John invites us to have for Jesus. By touching our hearts, John’s gospel has the power to change us from the inside out.

John is also the “backwards gospel” because of the way it opens and closes. Most writers—including many biblical authors—tell their readers why they are writing at the beginning. For example, Luke begins by telling his excellent friend Theophilus exactly why he wrote his gospel: “that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). But John waits until the end. It is not until the end that he tells us he has written these things “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 20:21).

John’s beginning is also backwards. Many writers—including some biblical authors—wait until the end of a book to summarize what they have said. For example, Mark keeps the full identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God a secret until the end of his gospel. But John tells us what he wants us to know right from the start. His extraordinary prologue (John 1:1–18) states his

thesis and opens up nearly all of the major themes in the gospel that follows.

These are all signs that John is unlike any other book that has ever been written. When people first explore the claims of Christ, they often hear recommendations to start with the gospel of John, and rightly so. This is the gospel where Jesus says “I am” this, and “I am” that, clarifying his true identity as the Son of God and Savior of the world. John is also the gospel in which Jesus performs seven “signs,” or representative miracles, which demonstrate the full range of his saving power, even to the extent of raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

But this is not the climax of the gospel. Starting in chapter 13, John shows us the full extent of the love of Jesus, who went to the cross to die for our sins, before rising with life for the world. To read John by faith, therefore, is to know God’s full gift of salvation in Jesus.

This study guide—which is the latest in Kathleen Nielson’s exceptional series—is designed to take you deeper into John, deeper into the gospel, and deeper into Christ. It strikes an ideal balance between taking careful note of the details of the biblical text and capturing the broad sweep of John’s narrative. It is faithful to Scripture. It is simple and clear in its explanations, thoughtful and provocative with its questions. Perhaps most helpfully of all, Dr. Nielson’s sensibilities as a poet enable her to convey the full meaning and express the true beauty of John’s many images (light and darkness, life and water, sheep and shepherd, etc.).

In short, this Bible study guide helps the gospel of John do what the Holy Spirit inspired it to do, which is to help you believe that Jesus is the Christ, and to have life in his name.

Philip Graham Ryken

A PERSONAL WORD FROM KATHLEEN

I began to write these Bible studies for the women in my own church group at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. Under the leadership of Kent and Barbara Hughes, the church and that Bible study aimed to proclaim without fail the good news of the Word of God. What a joy, in that study and in many since, to see lives changed by the work of the Word, by the Spirit, for the glory of Christ.

In our Bible study group, we were looking for curriculum that would lead us into the meat of the Word and teach us how to take it in, whole Bible books at a time—the way they are given to us in Scripture. Finally, one of our leaders said, “Kathleen—how about if you just write it!” And so began one of the most joyful projects of my life: the writing of studies intended to help unleash the Word of God in people’s lives. The writing began during a busy stage of my life—with three lively young boys and always a couple of college English courses to teach—but through that stage and every busy one since, a serious attention to studying the Bible has helped keep me focused, growing, and alive in the deepest ways. The Word of God will do that. If there’s life and power in these studies, it is simply the life and power of the Scriptures to which they point. It is ultimately the life and

power of the Savior who shines through all the Scriptures from beginning to end. How we need this life, in the midst of every busy and non-busy stage of our lives!

I don't think it is just the English teacher in me that leads me to this conclusion about our basic problem in Bible study these days: we've forgotten how to *read*! We're so used to fast food that we think we should be able to drive by the Scriptures periodically and pick up some easily digestible truths that someone else has wrapped up neatly for us. We've disowned that process of careful reading . . . observing the words . . . seeing the shape of a book and a passage . . . asking questions that take us into the text rather than away from it . . . digging into the Word and letting it speak! Through such a process, guided by the Spirit, the Word of God truly feeds our souls. Here's my prayer: that, by means of these studies, people would be further enabled to read the Scriptures profitably and thereby find life and nourishment in them, as we are each meant to do.

In all the busy stages of life and writing, I have been continually surrounded by pastors, teachers, and family who encourage and help me in this work, and for that I am grateful. The most wonderful guidance and encouragement come from my husband, Niel, whom I thank and for whom I thank God daily.

May God use these studies to lift up Christ and his Word, for his glory!

INTRODUCTION

When I think of the gospel of John, a picture comes to my mind—a picture of Jesus standing there saying, “Here I am. What are you looking for? *Here I am.*” Whether he’s addressing a Jewish Pharisee or a Samaritan woman or a Roman official or a close companion, Jesus reveals *himself* as the divine answer to their need. “I am . . .” Jesus says repeatedly in this gospel.

John opens with a remarkably beautiful, mind-stretching statement of who Jesus is, followed by John the Baptist ushering Jesus directly on to the stage—where Jesus proceeds to tell us and show us just who he is. John clearly reveals Jesus’ identity as the promised Christ, the Son of God, come to bring life to those who believe in his name (John 20:31). Jesus’ identity and mission control the narrative, as he moves relentlessly toward the cross and resurrection and ascension. In these climactic events, the glory of who Jesus is and what he came to do shines. John wants his readers to believe in this Jesus, so that they will live and not die, now and forever.

We can’t help but notice the differences between John and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). In John we find no birth account, no actual baptism of Jesus or calling of the disciples, no temptation in the wilderness, no parables, no demons, no transfiguration, no institution of the Lord’s Supper. The spotlight is a bit more focused. But only in the

focused light of John do we find that first miracle, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and many discourses—all wound into John's narrative to accomplish his aim of lighting up Jesus so that his reader will *believe*.

All the Gospels include Jesus' use of imagery to communicate his message. Only in John, however, do we receive such a gallery full of pictures through which Jesus reveals himself to the world. Light, wind, water, bread, shepherds, vines and branches—such images open up our minds and hearts to Christ himself, the Lord who made all the stuff of life and the one who comes in the flesh to redeem it. Through these images Jesus weds the most exalted spiritual truth to the most concrete reality; this is the beauty of the Word made flesh. This is what John wants us to see and believe. I pray that in your study of John you will take time to absorb the pictures, to meditate on them, so that the beautiful truth of Jesus will shine into all the concrete reality of your life, both now and in the very real days of eternity to come.

Do spend your study time focusing on the Word, passage by passage, as this study leads you to do. Some of the questions may seem easier or harder; they do reflect the complexity of this beautiful, many-layered gospel. That said, I encourage you to use the questions flexibly. If one seems difficult, don't let it halt you. There may be some questions, or parts of some, which you might want to wait on or come back to. The point is to spend the great majority of time taking in and musing on the Scripture itself. The Bible's living and active words are the words that change our hearts and lives, by the power of the Spirit.

This study assumes that the apostle John wrote this gospel. (Lesson I will treat John the writer in the biblical context.) There has been much critical discussion of authorship, which you can find summarized in several of the commentaries listed in the Notes. Most scholars date this gospel somewhere in the second half (and many in the last quarter) of the first century.

Many point to Ephesus as the place of writing, a center both of the church and of the Roman Empire. From such a point John's call rings out far and wide. He clearly speaks to Jews, continually showing how Jesus comes as the fulfillment of all their Old Testament law. And yet John speaks to every person of flesh and blood; he presents a God made flesh so that the world might believe and be saved. This call to believe, clearly summarized in John 20:31, comes not only to those who do not yet believe, but also to those who do—that they might *abide* in the one they believe in, bearing fruit until he comes again.

Whoever and wherever we are, John's gospel speaks to us. May it speak to you powerfully as you study and as the Spirit guides you to understand these words he led John to write. May you hear and believe Jesus' powerful "I am." May this Word live in your believing heart.

Initial Observations—Lesson 1



Lesson 1 (John 1:1–18)

BEGINNINGS

DAY ONE—START BY READING!

The best way to begin study of a book is to read it! Whether you've read the gospel of John multiple times or never, give yourself this day to a rather quick read-through of chapters 1–10. Jot down initial thoughts and observations on the facing page.

DAY TWO—READ ON!

Continue encountering this gospel in full, as you complete a quick read-through of chapters 11–21. Again, jot down initial thoughts and observations on the facing page.

DAY THREE—WHAT AND WHO?

1. This is one book whose main idea we don't have to guess. Toward the end, the author clearly states his aim. Read John 20:30–31. Memorize verse 31, and

LESSON 1 (JOHN 1:1-18)

then write it out by memory. Underline words that stand out as key.

The gospel itself will open the meanings of these key words as we study. John's aim in writing will be continually evident, as he draws his reader to believe in who Jesus is and so find life in his name. For now, stop to say and pray again the words of John 20:31, asking that its aim will be accomplished in you and in others who read these Spirit-inspired words.

For reflection: Consider this not as an aim accomplished in a moment, but rather as an aim whose accomplishment begins and then continues through a lifetime into eternity.

2. In general, what aspects of this gospel did you notice in your initial reading that seem to reflect the purpose statement found in John 20:31?

LESSON 1 (JOHN 1:1-18)

How would you describe John's method of introducing Jesus in this gospel? What is the general effect?

2. The prologue presents first and foremost the *Word* (Greek *logos*—which has many connotations, including the most basic one of expressing oneself through speech).
 - a. Write down everything you can learn about this Word from John 1:1-5.

image show us, and how does it reveal Jesus to us? How, too, might this light take us back to Genesis 1?

5. Let us recall John 20:31 at this point, which tells us that this gospel is written so that the readers will *believe in who Jesus is* and so find *life in his name*. In light of these key elements of John's theme, examine John 1:1–13.
 - a. How do the elements of John's theme emerge right from the start?

positive statements with negative ones. For example, how do the negatives help clarify the positives in John 1:3, 5, 7–8?

2. The prologue tells what happened when this Word came into the world. How does John 1:9–10 make vivid both his coming and the response to his coming? How does John 1:11 make the tragedy of the response even more vivid?

- b. In John 1:14, 18, what kind of seeing is going on, and how does it depend completely on who Jesus is? *Note: The phrase “the only Son from the Father” implies not a created being (recall vv. 1–3), but a unique member of the Godhead. See the same “only” in verse 18 as well.*

5. Not only what we see but also what we *receive* through Jesus is crucial—and is also the completion of a process this God worked from the beginning, through the Old Testament, finally culminating in his Son. Read John 1:14, 16–17.
 - a. What words repeatedly let us know the riches of what we receive through Christ? What do these words mean, and how are they exemplified in God’s revelation of himself to us in Christ?

Notes for Lesson 1



Initial Observations-Lesson 2

