

Apostle John

Passages: Jn 1:39; 19:26–27; 20:8; 21:1–7; Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20; 3:17; Gal 2:9; 1–3 Jn

Memory Verse

“Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:21)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Work [Behavior]
1. Jesus called John to serve. 2. John’s life reflected the glory of God.	1. God has called us to serve. 2. God has the power to change us.	1. Follow God’s calling. 2. Act out God’s word and transform ourselves so that others can see Jesus in our lives.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Calling of John
- B. Facts About the Apostle John
- C. John’s Early Years with Jesus
- D. John’s Transformation
- E. An Apostle of Love and Truth

Life Application

- 1. Becoming Fishers of Men
- 2. Acting Out the Word
- 3. Transforming into Better Christians

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Strive to fully understand God’s teachings and to be good workers for Him.

A. The Calling of John

Like Peter, John was a fisherman by profession. His parents were Zebedee and Salome. His mother, also a disciple, was one of the women who visited the empty tomb of Jesus. He first followed John the Baptist and came to know Jesus through him. John recorded the exact time he first met Jesus—about the tenth hour, or four in the afternoon—and he remained with Jesus the rest of the day (Jn 1:39). Later, he followed Jesus Christ with his brother James when Jesus called them (Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20). From then on, John would be more than just a disciple; he would become an apostle.

B. Facts About the Apostle John

1. He was the brother of James, another of the twelve disciples of Jesus.
2. He authored two New Testament books and three epistles: the Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the Book of Revelation.
3. John was part of Jesus' "inner circle," along with Peter and James. They all joined Jesus when:
 - Jesus restored the daughter of the synagogue ruler to life. When Jesus went to the ruler's house, Jesus "permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James" (Mk 5:37). This illustrates the close relationship the three disciples shared with Jesus.
 - Jesus brought the three to the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus was transformed before the eyes of Peter, John, and James. He intended for the transfiguration to remain a mystery, instructing the three to "tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead" (Mt 17:9). People share secrets with those whom they trust, and Jesus clearly trusted these three.
 - Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew 26:36–37, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray with Peter, John, and James, sharing this moment of deep sorrow and fear with only these three disciples.
4. John was entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of Jesus' mother Mary. Even while suffering on the cross, Jesus remembered His mother and entrusted her into John's care. Why did Jesus choose John over His own brothers? His own brothers still did not fully understand His work and the salvation He was going to carry out (His brothers only believed after Jesus' resurrection). So, John took up the responsibility by taking Mary to his home that day (Jn 19:25–27). Being entrusted with the responsibility to take care of Jesus' mother was actually a great blessing.
5. John had a quick understanding. Upon seeing Jesus' empty tomb, John immediately understood what had happened (Jn 20:8). Later, when a person on the shore told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, John was quick to recognize the person as the Lord they loved (Jn 21:1–7). This demonstrates John's awareness of his surroundings and of those around him.
6. Of Jesus Christ's disciples, John lived the longest.

C. John's Early Years with Jesus

John and his brother James were called by Jesus “Boanerges,” that is, “Sons of Thunder” (Mk 3:17). From this name, it appears John had a flashing temper. It is clear that John and his brother James had the zeal to follow Jesus. However, in his early days, John acted rashly and impulsively. Let us look at the following examples.

1. John and some other disciples stopped someone from casting out demons in Jesus’ name because he was not Jesus’ follower. Jesus gently rebuked them, saying, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side” (Mk 9:39).
2. Another instance can be seen through his mother’s request that he and his brother be seated on Jesus’ right and left, elevating them to a greater status above other disciples in the kingdom of God (Mt 20:20–21). This appeal reveals their ambition and lack of understanding in both the cup that Jesus had asked them to partake, and in the notion of servitude.
3. James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans who refused to welcome Jesus. Once again, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of love and tolerance for the lost, saying, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Lk 9:55–56).

D. John’s Transformation

We can infer from John’s change in character that Jesus’ humility and His act of supreme love for mankind made a profound impact on John. He grew to understand the need for love and humility in following Jesus and serving Him. In his later life, John’s impulsive and rash personality transformed into one of compassion and humility.

1. In the Gospel of John, John refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” five times (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) instead of using “I” or “me.” He was described as the one leaning against Jesus’ chest at the last supper, but he also tried to show that Jesus did not show him favoritism, demonstrating his humility (Jn 21:22–23).
2. When Jesus was nailed on the cross, Jesus commissioned John to take care of His mother, a call that John took seriously. “And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (Jn 19:27). His presence at the cross during Jesus’ crucifixion showed his love for Jesus and conveyed the closeness and trust they shared.
3. After the Pentecost, John and other disciples of the Lord fervently preached the gospel of salvation. John often worked with Peter, performing miracles (Acts 3:1–10), and preaching boldly before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13) and in Samaria (Acts 8:14). Through the course of his life, John continued to grow in spirit and in works for the Lord. He helped to establish and act as a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9), and later served congregations in Ephesus and Asia Minor. When the Romans exiled him to the island of Patmos, he received teachings from God that became the Book of Revelation.
4. In his later life, John’s ambitious and rash personality was transformed into one of compassion and humility. When exiled on the island of Patmos by the Romans for preaching the gospel, John wrote: “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9). John describes himself as a “brother” and one who shares

with them “the tribulation,” indicating that the church was undergoing intense persecution as he was writing the letter. Despite the fact that he was treated with cruelty and reproach while in exile, he nevertheless encouraged the faith of the members. As John’s experience of Jesus’ love was so strong and personal, he had learned to go beyond suffering for Christ and was able to love the church members deeply despite the persecution.

E. An Apostle of Love and Truth

John genuinely cared about the members’ faith and their daily lives, prompting him to write three letters—1, 2, and 3 John—to encourage the members. These letters are filled with teachings that help us understand God’s love on a deeper, yet practical level. In them, he exhorts the members to love one another, to stay away from worldly desires, and to live a life of holiness to overcome the temptation of heresies. He addresses believers as those “whom [he loves] in truth” and urges them to “love one another” by walking in obedience to Jesus’ commands (2 Jn 1:1, 5–6).

John also wrote much about the truth itself. His joy was to preach the truth, the word of God, to others and to watch them walk in it (3 Jn 1:4). He warned believers not to be deceived by false teachers, false prophets, and “antichrists” (1 Jn 2:16, 26; 3:7; 4:1–7), and desired that the believers have the wisdom and ability to discern truth from falsehood.

In contrast to his earlier days, John’s focus in these letters show a character of love and patience, one who is eager to seek out and teach the truth. That God chose John to write His words in the Book of Revelation also shows us how truly close the apostle was to God. His journey from fisherman, to apostle, to pillar of the church is truly a transformation possible only through Jesus’ love and Spirit.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What was John’s profession before he was called by Jesus?** He and his brother were fishermen.
- 2. How did John answer Jesus’ call?** He immediately followed Jesus, leaving behind his old life without any hesitation.
- 3. What was John like during his early years with Jesus?** He had a flashing temper, was quick to criticize, was ambitious, and lacked love and understanding.
- 4. Where does the Bible record John’s close relationship with Jesus?** (1) Jesus invited John into the house when He raised the synagogue ruler’s daughter. (2) John witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration on the mount. (3) John was with Jesus when He was praying in the garden of Gethsemane.
- 5. Which parts of the Bible did John write?** The Gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the Book of Revelation.
- 6. What was the focus of John’s epistles?** He focused greatly on love, exhorting the members to love one another, and also wrote much about the truth, warning believers not to be deceived by false teachers. His joy was to preach the truth and watch others walk in it.

Life Application

1. Becoming Fishers of Men

When they were called, John, James, Peter, and Andrew all immediately left their nets behind and followed (Mt 4:12–21). As promised by Jesus, these four disciples all became important workers in the apostolic church and brought many to believe in the Lord.

We, too, have been called to do God’s work. But are we willing to give up whatever we are doing in this world to follow Him? It is a difficult decision to make. We can enjoy many worldly comforts and

conveniences without even stepping out of the house. Yet, if we have the heart to work for God, then we need to heed God's calling.

When you think of God's calling, the first thing that may come to mind is becoming a preacher, but our church does not only need preachers. God calls many different workers, and He has given each of us a gift. For some, it is to be preachers; for others, it is not. The church is Jesus Christ's body and consists of many parts that work together to perform various functions smoothly. Have you ever noticed something that needs to be done, yet seen no one take the time to do it?

Remember, whenever we actively follow God's will, we contribute to the goal of the entire church—to bring people to salvation. We may not be directly involved with evangelism, but our work may indirectly help to bring people to believe. When every member is doing their work according to their gifts, the church will be "healthy." We must not hold the perspective that this job or that job is unimportant. No task is considered unimportant in church. To God, picking up a piece of trash from the floor is as important as speaking on the pulpit or leading hymns in front of the congregation. What kind of strengths do you have? How can you use them for God?

2. Acting Out the Word

John's emphasis on the word at the beginning of the Gospel of John reflects the importance of the word in building the foundation our faith. Claiming to have faith is not enough. Whenever we study the Bible or listen to sermons, we need to examine how the teachings can be applied to our lives. We need to act out what we believe (Jn 1; Jas 2:14–26). But how do we act out what we believe? No matter how many sermons we listen to, or how closely we study the Bible, it is impossible to find specific solutions to every single possible scenario we may encounter. Have we encountered a situation where we do not know how to apply the teachings of the Bible to our lives? For many, the answer is often yes, as many situations are not clear-cut and require us to think deeply.

The author of Ecclesiastes said: "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9). We cannot ever say that the Bible is not relevant because its events occurred in the past; many things that happened in the Bible still occur today in our church and society, simply in another form. The Holy Spirit helps us to recognize this and teaches us how a certain passage of the Bible may apply to our lives. If we are willing to seek wisdom on how to act out what we believe, God will show us a way (Mt 7:8).

For example, one time a brother was deciding which university to attend. He had been admitted to several equally prestigious universities, making it a difficult choice to make. So, he prayed to God to reveal His will to him. One day, as he read the Bible, one particular verse struck him immediately: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25). Several of the universities he was considering were far away from any True Jesus Church location. Only one was a few minutes' walking distance from a local church, but the major he was accepted for did not appeal to him. Yet, he knew that this Bible verse was God's answer to his prayer—God wanted him to follow His word.

Have you had a similar experience and found answers to your difficulties within the Bible? God will let us know what is pleasing to Him if we truly put our hearts towards seeking Him. We need only meditate on His word and ask God for the wisdom to apply it to our lives. If God regards us as His chosen, He will reveal to us His immense wisdom and the mysteries of things to come (Gen 18:17).

3. Transforming into Better Christians

God wants us to be perfect, just as He is (Mt 5:48). But we each have our own shortcomings, making it impossible for us to change by our own strength (Rom 7:13–25). We need to rely on the power from above (Acts 1:8). And for these changes to happen, we must first recognize our flaws. This requires wisdom from God, for many people either deny or are unaware of their shortcomings. Sometimes, we must endure a series of trials before we can recognize them.

Once, a young, intelligent sister was admitted into a prestigious university. She believed she could handle her heavy course load by herself. However, prestigious universities are full of students as smart as we are, if not smarter. The difficulty of her studies caused her great frustration. Only then did she realize that she was not able to handle life's difficulties on her own, and that she needed strength from God. Once she humbled herself and prayed fervently, God gave her wisdom so that she was able to solve problems she had been unable to before. Her struggles helped her to see her own shortcomings.

Once aware of our flaws, we need to pray to God to help us change. This lifelong process requires determination on our part, too. We need to remember that our salvation requires us to adopt the image of Christ. But this is only possible with the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit.

Once, a ferocious gangster came to True Jesus Church. He committed many crimes and was on the most wanted list. No one expected him to be able to receive salvation. However, one time he stepped into the chapel and listened to the sermons. In those days, having tattoos meant one must be related to the darker side of society, so many members around him feared him when they saw the tattoos on his arms. But to their surprise, he received the Holy Spirit and was then baptized into True Jesus Church. After he received the Holy Spirit, his heart softened to the point where he dared not even to kill a chicken.

This testimony shows us how the power of the Holy Spirit can transform a person. To become a better Christian, we cannot rely on ourselves but must have faith in God's transforming power.

Memory Verse

"Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." (2 Timothy 2:21)

Meaning

1. In verse 20, Paul explains the many types of vessels, such as gold, silver, wood, and clay. Some vessels were used for honor, while some for dishonor.
2. An unclean vessel has limited uses. However, clean, sanctified vessels are "useful for the Master." The Master refers to God. Those set apart as holy are "prepared for every good work." Therefore, if we are diligent in thoroughly cleansing ourselves of sin, we will be a vessel of honor (The phrase "good work" is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:17, referring to God's word completing and equipping the children of God so that they can serve Him.).

Conclusion

As younger members in church, we may consider ourselves unimportant in the church. However, we saw today that John, a mere fisherman, transformed into a loving and powerful worker and leader in the apostolic church. His profound spiritual knowledge came from his close relationship with Jesus, and his

love for the church came from witnessing Jesus' example and from experiencing the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. If, like John, God calls us today, are we ready to answer? Will we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us into powerful workers for Christ?

Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does it mean to be a vessel for honor? How do we become one?
It means being a vessel that is sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. To become one, we must be diligent in thoroughly cleansing ourselves of sin.
2. How did John answer when Jesus first called him?
He immediately left his old life behind and followed Jesus with no hesitation.
3. What were John's characteristics when Jesus first called him? Provide biblical support.
He had a flashing temper (Mk 3:17), was quick to criticize (Mk 9:38–41), lacked love (Lk 9:51–56), and was ambitious (Mt 20:20–21). He did not understand the cup that Jesus was asking him to partake and did not understand the notion of servitude that Jesus exemplified.
4. How did John's personality change during his time with Jesus and after receiving the Holy Spirit?
He transformed from an impulsive and rash person into one who was compassionate and humble.
5. What is the importance of studying God's word in our lives? How can we better understand it?
God's word is an important foundation for our faith, and it contains the answers to our difficulties. To understand it, we need to study it closely and ask God for the wisdom to apply it to our lives.
6. We learned that to become better Christians, we must first understand our own shortcomings. What is one of your shortcomings? Aside from prayer, how can you work on changing this?
Personal answers.