



got life?

The Gospel of John
A Bible Study with Stan Key

SIGNS OF LIFE: INTRODUCTION

I. Profoundly Simple

A. Start here.

Seekers and new converts are often encouraged to read the Gospel of John because “it is the **easiest** to understand.” And yet this amazing book should not be seen as just a collection of stories. Like the ocean, John’s Gospel is shallow enough to delight children playing at the beach but deep enough to cause theologians to bow in humility before the unfathomable truths conveyed in its pages. It is **simply profound**.

B. Black and white in a world that loves gray.

Like our postmodern world, many in the first century struggled with the notion of **absolute truth**. Thomas was a skeptic (Jn 20:25), Pilate was a cynic (Jn 18:38), and many simply believed things that weren’t true (Jn 8:43–47). This Gospel highlights the fact that Jesus not only speaks the truth, he *is* the truth. We must **choose**. Neutrality is not an option. We must decide between light or darkness, truth or error, belief or unbelief, love or hatred, freedom or bondage, salvation or judgment, life or death. Jesus is the great **divider** (Jn 7:43; 9:16; 10:19).

C. The Gospel of Jesus.

This book is called a “Gospel” (Greek, *good news*), because it has a message that John believes will be of great interest to everyone who reads it. He is not promoting a new religion or a code of ethics. John writes to introduce us to a **Person**. The titles he uses to describe him help us to grasp immediately that this is no ordinary man:

- The **Word** (Jn 1:1, 14)
- The **Messiah/Christ** (Jn 1:41; etc.)
- The **Lamb** of God (Jn 1:29, 36)
- The **King** of Israel (Jn 1:49)
- The Son of **God** (Jn 1:34, 49)
- The Son of **Man** (Jn 1:51)
- The **Bridegroom** (Jn 3:29)

D. Outline of the book.

Prologue Jn 1:1–18	Miraculous Signs Climaxing with the raising of Lazarus “My hour has not yet come”	The Passion Climaxing with the raising of Jesus “My hour has come”	Epilogue Jn 21:1–25
	Public Ministry Jesus reveals himself to the world Jn 1:19–12:50	Private Ministry Jesus reveals himself to his disciples Jn 13:1–20:31	

II. Why this book?

A. The purpose of Bible study.

We make a mistake when we imagine that the purpose of Bible study is to learn the Bible! To only learn **what** is written is to miss the point! The real question is **why**?

Jesus lectured the most serious Bible students of his day with words that ought to be foremost in the minds and hearts of all those who study Scripture:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. . . . Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:39–40, 45–47)

The purpose of Bible study is not to know the Bible, but to know Jesus. The written Word is intended to lead us to the **incarnate Word** (Jn 1:14).

B. The key verses: John 20:30–31.

John tells us he wrote not just to share information or to tell a story. His purpose is much more aggressive and invasive. His goal is to confront us with **a decision**.

*Now Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written 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 20:30–31)*

We need to understand clearly that John's purpose is that his book will **rock our world!** Three words help us understand what his intentions really are for us as readers.

1. Signs.

- a. The other three Gospels tend to call Jesus' mighty deeds "miracles" (Greek, *dunamis*) but John never once uses this term. He prefers the word "sign" (Greek, *semeion*), using it some 17 times. The choice of this word is significant. For John, the miracles of Jesus are not ends in themselves. They are "signs" that **point beyond** themselves. They *signify* something. They convey a deeper meaning. For John, Jesus' miracles convey spiritual truth. Like a directional sign on a highway, they point us to God.¹
- b. Although Jesus did "many" signs, John chose to write about only a few of them. These miracles were all public—visible and verifiable—and demonstrated Jesus' authority over **sickness, nature, and death**.²
 - 1) Changes water into wine (Jn 2:1–11).
 - 2) Heals a nobleman's son (Jn 4:46–54).
 - 3) Heals a paralytic (Jn 5:1–18).
 - 4) Feeds 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish (Jn 6:1–15).
 - 5) Walks on water (Jn 6:16–21).
 - 6) Gives sight to a man born blind (Jn 9:1–41).
 - 7) Raises Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:1–44).

¹ It is helpful to remember that sacraments (Baptism, Holy Communion) are often called "signs" (*an outward sign of an inward grace*). They point beyond themselves to a greater reality that they represent.

² Is John deliberately citing seven miraculous signs because he saw significance in the number (see the book of Revelation)? Perhaps. But we should also remember two other signs in John's Gospel: Jesus' own resurrection (Jn 20:1–29) and the miraculous catch of fish in the Epilogue (Jn 21:1–14).

John believed that these particular miracles had the potential to stimulate faith. “Believe me... or else believe on account of the works themselves...” (Jn 14:11). Though these signs made faith **possible**, they did not make it **inevitable**.

- c. But many who saw the signs missed the **significance** (see Jn 6:26). They did not go to where the sign pointed. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this was when God himself **spoke out loud** from heaven so that all Jerusalem heard him!

*The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had **thundered**. Others said, “An **angel** has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the **judgment** of this world...” (John 12:29–31)*

- d. Although not in the category of “miracle”, we should not miss the significance of the **claims about himself** that Jesus made. In referring to himself by the phrase “**I am**”, Jesus was giving a “sign” that was impossible to misinterpret.

- I am the bread of life (Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 51).
- I am the light of the world (Jn 8:12).
- I am the door (Jn 10:7, 9).
- I am the good shepherd (Jn 10:11, 14).
- I am the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25).
- I am the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6).
- I am the true vine (Jn 15:1, 5).
- I am “I am” (Jn 8:24, 28, 58; 18:4–8).

C. S. Lewis famously points out that anyone who makes claims such as these must be placed in one of three categories: lunatic, liar, or Lord.³

*I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a **lunatic** — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the **Devil of Hell**. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him **Lord and God**, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity).*

2. Believe.

- a. The call to believe is a primary concept in John's Gospel. He uses the verb (believe) 98 times. He *never* uses the noun (faith). It is clear that John sees faith as an activity, an action **we do** (“I believe”), not as a thing **we**

³ This three-fold possible response to Jesus is often referred to as C. S. Lewis' “trilemma.”

have (“I have faith.”). To believe is to put our trust and confidence in Jesus, to rely on him and to do what he tells us to do.

- b. Specifically, John writes his Gospel so that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” Note it well: it is not faith that saves us. That would be **faith in faith**. What matters is the *object* of our faith. The Gospel implores us to put our faith (trust, confidence) in Jesus as Christ (Messiah) and Son of God (divine savior).

Faith is only as valid as its object. You could have tremendous faith in very thin ice and drown. . . . You could have very little faith in very thick ice and be perfectly secure. (Stuart Briscoe)

- c. John’s emphasis on faith in Christ is so great that he calls it:

- The **work** of God. “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (Jn 6:29).
- The **will** of God. “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life” (Jn 6:40).

- d. While John believes that the miracles (“signs”) make faith possible, he knows they do not make faith inevitable. The problem is not the **lack** of evidence, but the **suppression** of it (see Rom 1:18). John describes four categories of people who remain in their unbelief:

- 1) Those with **philosophical** problems: they don’t believe that absolute truth even exists. Like **Pilate** (Jn 18:33–38): “What is truth?” These people are never able to have life because they don’t believe that truth even exists.
- 2) Those with **intellectual** problems: they need more evidence. Like **Thomas** (Jn 20:24–28): these people may believe, but only when they have enough rational arguments to make faith possible.
- 3) Those with **emotional** problems: they need inner healing. Like **Martha** (Jn 11:20–27): these people have been wounded by some life experience where they felt God had let them down. How can I believe in a God who let my brother die?
- 4) Those with **moral** problems: they need to repent. When people **love darkness** rather than light, unbelief becomes a type of excuse to permit a lifestyle of sin without the pain caused by a guilty conscience (Jn 3:19–21).

Blaise Pascal stated the matter succinctly: “There is enough evidence to condemn and not enough to convince, so that it should be apparent that those who follow it are prompted to do so by grace and not by reason, and those who evade it are prompted by concupiscence and not by reason.” (*Pensées*, #835).

3. Life.

- a. There are two words for “life” in the Greek language. The word *bios* (root of biology, biography) refers to existence and the duration of time that an organism functions. This word occurs only 11 times in the New Testament and not in John’s Gospel at all. John uses the word *zoe* (root of zoo, zoology) when he speaks of life. It refers to the **quality** of life, not just the

- quantity (Jn 10:10). “Eternal life” refers to the life that God wants to give us **now**.
- b. John gives us a definition of the life Jesus offers when he quotes Jesus in his High Priestly prayer: “And this is eternal life, that they know **you**, the only true God, and **Jesus Christ** whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3).
- c. Believing in Jesus makes this life possible. And you can recognize the presence of this life by the evidence of **love** (Jn 15:9–17; see I John 3:14) and **joy** (Jn 16:20–24). This is true because Jesus not only offers us life, he *is* life (Jn 11:25; 14:6)! “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God, does not have life” (I John 5:12).



Since Jesus Came into My Heart

Rufus H. McDaniel (1914)

*What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
since Jesus came into my heart!*

*I have light in my soul for which long I had sought,
since Jesus came into my heart!*

Refrain:

**Since Jesus came into my heart,
since Jesus came into my heart,
floods of joy o'er my soul like the sea billows roll,
since Jesus came into my heart.**

*I'm possessed of a hope that is steadfast and sure,
since Jesus came into my heart!
And no dark clouds of doubt now my pathway obscure,
since Jesus came into my heart! [Refrain]*

*There's a light in the valley of death now for me,
since Jesus came into my heart!
And the gates of the city beyond I can see,
since Jesus came into my heart! [Refrain]*

*I shall go there to dwell in that city, I know
since Jesus came into my heart!
And I'm happy, so happy, as onward I go,
since Jesus came into my heart! [Refrain]*