

The Word Moved Into the Neighborhood: Who Jesus Is Before He Says a Word (John 1:1-18)

JOHN 1:1-18 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

God didn't stay far away. He became a real person named Jesus, so when you look at Him you're seeing what God is actually like.

Opening Lines

Before we read a single verse, I want to tell you a name. It's the name of the person who first pointed me toward Jesus, and I've never properly thanked them. By the end of tonight I'd like every one of us to have a name like that written down, because John 1 starts with a man whose whole job was pointing.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Everyone leaves having seen that the Word who was God before the beginning pitched His tent among us, and that the Light is still shining in whatever dark they walked in with. Success is someone naming the person who first testified to them about the Light, and one person owning their place as a child of God.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the Logos background on Greek philosophy and Ephesus before you cut anything else. It is fascinating, but the room needs verse 14 more than they need a lecture on verse 1.
- Where the moment lives: It lives at verse 12, when people realize 'children of God' is a right given, not a grade earned, and apply it to the worst moment of their week. It also lives in the silence after verse 14 is read slowly.
- Your prep: Write down the name of the person who first invited you to see Jesus, and text them a thank-you before you teach. Then read verses 1-18 out loud twice, once fast and once slow, stopping on 'made His dwelling among us.'

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Use the classroom opening (Genesis 1:1 beside John 1:1). 0-4 min: opening echo and first lines. 4-8 min: read John 1:1-18 aloud slowly yourself. 8-16 min: teach the word *skēnoō* with the bedsheet tent in the middle of the room, ending on verse 14 and ten seconds of silence. 16-20 min: Go First, Go Real, where you answer the table question with a real name, then have people turn to a neighbor and do the same. 20-36 min: discussion

questions 2, 3, and 4 with the whole room, spending the most time on 4. 36-42 min: out-loud commitments, taking volunteers if the room is too big to go around. 42-45 min: big idea verbatim and prayer over what people named. Transformation happens at question 4 and in the silence after verse 14. Cut first: question 5, then shorten question 2 to a single answer.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Use the small-group opening (you go first with the name of your John the Baptist). 0-5 min: your sixty-second story and verses 6-8. 5-15 min: everyone answers question 1, the table question, with names and what those people did. 15-19 min: read John 1:1-18 aloud, then reread verse 14 slowly. 19-27 min: teach skēnoō with the sheet held up among the chairs, ending in silence. 27-50 min: questions 2 through 5, with at least 10 minutes on question 4 so people can name where they feel least like God's child. 50-56 min: everyone finishes the commitment sentence out loud. 56-60 min: big idea verbatim and spontaneous prayer naming their people and commitments. Transformation happens in question 1's thank-you confessions and question 4's honesty. Cut first: the Greek-and-Jewish Logos background, then question 2.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Use the coffee opening ('If you could see God's face for five seconds, what would you see?'). 0-5 min: the question, and just listen. 5-8 min: read verse 18, then verse 14, on a phone or a shared Bible. 8-13 min: describe skēnoō in words instead of props, God pitching His tent in the middle of the camp, and let a moment of quiet follow verse 14. 13-18 min: you answer the table question first, then they do. 18-26 min: question 4 or question 5, whichever the conversation is already moving toward. 26-30 min: each person says one thing they'll do this week, you restate the big idea, and you pray briefly over what they said. Transformation happens when they compare their picture of God to Jesus. Cut first: the word study, reduced to a single sentence about the tent.

Go First, Go Real

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach. This week we drill it deliberately. When you ask the room a personal question, you answer it first, and you answer it for real. Not the polished testimony version, but the specific one with a name, a place, and a detail that costs you a little to say. Tonight's table question asks who first invited people to see Jesus and whether they've thanked them. You go first. Say the actual name. Say what they actually did: the ride to church, the Bible they left on your bed, the question they asked at the wrong moment. Then say honestly whether you ever thanked them. If you haven't, admit it. If you texted them this afternoon because of this lesson, tell the room. Your answer sets the depth ceiling for everyone else. Give a vague answer and you'll get vague answers back. Give a real one, kept short at about sixty seconds, and you've given the room permission. Level 1 is simply this: go first, every time, with something true and specific. Watch how much faster the room opens.

Why This Passage Matters

This is the first lesson in a series called *Who Do You Say I Am?*, and John answers the question before anyone else gets a turn. Before Jesus heals anyone or says a single word in this Gospel, John tells you who He is. He is the Word who was with God and was God, the one through whom everything was made, who then became flesh and pitched His tent among us. Everything your group reads for the rest of this series rests on these eighteen verses. Get this wrong and Jesus shrinks into a good teacher with nice sayings. Get it right and every story that follows becomes God Himself walking into the room. Some people in your room have heard verse 1 so often they no longer hear it. Others privately suspect God is distant, disappointed, or simply absent. John answers both: no one has ever seen God, but the Son has made Him known. Tonight you get to stand exactly where John the Baptist stood, a witness who is not the Light, pointing at the Light. You are not the point, and that is the freedom of it. You get to hold up the sentence that split history in two and watch it land on people you love.

Catch the Fire First

Before anyone in your room does it, you do the central exercise yourself. Sit down with a pen and write the name of the person who first invited you to see Jesus. Under it, write the specific thing they did, the actual moment, not a summary. Then read verses 6-8 and write one sentence describing how that person was 'not the Light' but 'came to testify about the Light.' Notice how ordinary and flawed they were, and how God used them anyway. Now do the hard part: if you've never thanked them, contact them today with a text, a call, or a card, and tell them what they did. If they've died, write the thank-you anyway and tell God. Finally, read verse 14 slowly, out loud, alone, and sit in silence for thirty seconds afterward. If you haven't felt the weight of 'the Word became flesh' in your own kitchen, you won't be able to hand it to anyone else.

Bring Your Own Story

- Prompt: Who was your 'John the Baptist,' the ordinary person who pointed you to Jesus without pretending to be Him?
- Prompt: When did you feel least like God's child, and what would verse 12 have said to you in that moment?
- Prompt: Name a 2 a.m. dark you've actually lived through where the Light was still on, even if you could barely see it.
- SAMPLE, polished: 'My grandmother was a faithful woman who shared the gospel with me.' SAMPLE, real: 'My grandmother kept asking if I'd prayed about it, and I rolled my eyes at her for three years. I never thanked her before she died.'
- Guardrail: real is not raw. Share a wound that's healed enough to point to Jesus, not one you're still bleeding from in front of the room.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Have one person read Genesis 1:1 aloud. Immediately have someone else read John 1:1. Ask: 'What did John just do?' Let them spot the echo. Then say: 'John is telling us the story of Jesus doesn't start in Bethlehem. It starts on page one of the Bible, before there was anything at all. Tonight we find out who was there.'"

Make the familiar strange: set two texts side by side and let the echo do the teaching.

SMALL GROUP: "Tell your own story first in about sixty seconds: the name of the person who first invited you to see Jesus, what they did, and whether you've thanked them. Then point to verses 6-8: 'John the Baptist's whole job was this. He wasn't the Light; he pointed at the Light. Every one of us had a John. Who was yours?'"

Go first, go real: the leader's honest answer sets the depth for the whole circle.

COFFEE: "Ask: 'If you could see God's face for five seconds, what do you think you'd see? Kind? Disappointed? Bored? Honestly.' Let them answer without correcting anything. Then slide the phone or Bible across and read verse 18: 'No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son... has made Him known.' Say: 'John says if you want to know, look at Jesus.'"

Open with one honest, curious question that the passage answers.

Teaching the Word

Teach one word tonight: the verb behind 'made His dwelling' in verse 14. In Greek it is *skēnoō*, from *skēnē*, a tent. A woodenly literal rendering would be 'the Word became flesh and pitched His tent among us.' Any Jewish listener would have thought of the tabernacle, the tent in the wilderness where God's glory lived in the middle of the camp. That's why John says in the same breath, 'We have seen His glory.' Make it physical. Bring a bedsheet or a small pop-up tent. Have two people hold the sheet up like a tent roof in the middle of the room, right among the chairs, not up front. Say: 'God didn't build a palace at the edge of town. He pitched a tent in the middle of the camp, close enough to hear your neighbors arguing, close enough to smell dinner cooking.' Tie it back to verse 1. The one who was there in the beginning, through whom all things were made, set up camp in a dusty, broken neighborhood like ours. Moses asked to see God's glory and was told no one could see His face and live (Exodus 33:20). Now John says: we have seen His glory, full of grace and truth. Then lower the sheet, slow down, and read the most keepable line in the passage: 'The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.' Then stop talking. Hold the silence for a full ten seconds. Don't explain it. Let it sit.

Discussion Questions

1. This week's readings kept saying 'come and see.' Who first invited you to see Jesus, and have you ever thanked them? Tell us their name and what they did.

Coaching note: You answer first, briefly and specifically. Ask for names, not categories: 'my mom' is fine, but push gently for the detail ('what did she actually do?'). If someone says 'nobody, I found it myself,' honor it and ask what first made them curious. Don't let anyone skip the thank-you half; that's

where a real commitment is forming.

If it stalls: Easier way in: 'Was it a family member, a friend, or someone you barely knew? Just pick one.'

2. John starts the story of Jesus in verse 1, 'in the beginning,' not at a manger. What changes about how you see Jesus if you start the story there?

Coaching note: You're after the realization that Jesus isn't a created being or a great man who became divine. He is the one through whom everything was made (v3). If someone gets theological, affirm it and bring it back to the ground: 'So the hands that made the stars also held a hammer in Nazareth. What does that do to you?'

If it stalls: Concrete version: 'Verse 3 says nothing was made without Him. Look at your coffee cup, your hands, the person next to you. Does that change anything about Jesus for you?'

3. Verses 10-11 say the world was made through Him but didn't recognize Him, and His own people didn't receive Him. How is it possible to be close to Jesus and still miss Him?

Coaching note: Resist letting this turn into 'those people back then.' Steer it toward church people today, including us: familiarity, busyness, expecting a different kind of God. If a lively detour starts, test it: is it pulling toward verses 10-12 or away from them, and are the quiet people with it? If yes, follow it and drop something later. If it's two people debating who's in and who's out, say: 'Let's you and I finish that after. I want to get us to verse 12.'

If it stalls: Yes/no way in: 'Have you ever sat in church and realized afterward you hadn't thought about Jesus once? What was going on?'

4. Verse 12 says those who receive Him are given 'the right to become children of God,' born of God, not of human effort. Where in your week do you feel least like God's child?

Coaching note: This is where transformation lives, so slow down. Go first with a real, small moment, like a sharp word over the laundry or snapping at your kids. When people answer, don't fix them. Hand verse 12 back: 'A bad evening can't revoke a right God gave you.' If someone gets emotional, let the silence hold them before anyone rushes in.

If it stalls: More personal and concrete: 'Think about the last time you had to apologize to someone at home. Did you feel like a child of God in that moment, or like a failure?'

5. Verse 18 says no one has ever seen God, but the Son has made Him known. If Jesus is what God is actually like, what picture of God might you need to let go of?

Coaching note: This is the deepest question, and many will need a moment. Common answers: God as disappointed, distant, a scorekeeper, or tired of me. Answer each by pointing at Jesus: 'Is that what Jesus was like with people?' Don't argue anyone out of their picture. Just set Jesus beside it and let them compare.

If it stalls: Easier version: 'Finish this sentence honestly: When I picture God looking at me, He looks ____.'

Questions You May Hear

"Why does John call Jesus 'the Word'?"

The Greek word is Logos. To Jewish readers it was the word God spoke to create the world

and to reveal Himself, and to Greek readers it meant the ordering reason behind the universe. John takes a word both groups already valued and says that Word is a Person who became flesh.

"How can the Word be 'with God' and also 'be God' at the same time?"

John deliberately holds both together: the Word is distinct enough to be 'with' God and fully God in His own nature. Early teachers who said Jesus was a created being, like Arius in the fourth century, couldn't get past verse 1, and the church has held to John's claim ever since.

"Is the John in verse 6 the same John who wrote this Gospel?"

No. Verse 6 is John the Baptist, the man sent to testify about the Light. The Gospel's author is the apostle John, who wrote near the end of the first century, probably from Ephesus.

"Verse 18 says no one has ever seen God, but didn't Moses talk with God?"

God told Moses directly, 'You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live' (Exodus 33:20), and Moses only saw God pass by as He proclaimed His name. John's point is that the face Moses was denied is now shown to us in Jesus, full of grace and truth.

For Experienced Leaders

- Read verses 1-18 aloud yourself at the start, slowly, and don't hand it off to a volunteer tonight. This is poetry, and a stumbling first read loses the room's ear for the whole evening.
- When a conversation jumps the rails and crackles, ask yourself two questions: is it driving deeper into verses 1-18 or using them as a launchpad, and are the quiet people with it? If both answers are good, cut your outline without guilt. If it's three talkers on a hobbyhorse, kindly promise to finish it afterward and return to verse 12.
- Someone will want to spend twenty minutes on Greek philosophy or the Trinity. Give it a two-sentence answer, affirm the question, and move on. The room didn't come for a seminar; they came to see His glory.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: No summary. Go around the room and ask each person to finish one sentence out loud: 'This week, because the Light is still shining, I will _____. ' Give examples straight from tonight: thank the person you named, apologize at home as someone who is already God's child, or say 'your light is still on, Lord' the next time you're awake at 2 a.m. You go first. Passing is allowed, but most people won't.

Close by praying out loud over the specific names and commitments people just said: the grandmother, the coworker, the apology at the kitchen table, the 2 a.m. worry. Don't read a written prayer; saying their actual words back to God, and thanking Him for the witnesses they named, is the point.

If you run out of time: If the room gets stuck at question 1 or question 4 because people are telling real stories and the quiet ones are with it, stay there. You have permission to never reach question 5. One real answer at verse 12 is worth more than five questions finished on schedule.

Midweek follow-up: Three or four days later, text anyone who named a person they'd never thanked: 'Did you get a chance to thank [name]? I'd love to hear how it went.' Bring one or two of those stories back to open next week, with their permission.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/john/1-1-18/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- The person who first invited me to see Jesus was: _____. What they actually did:
- Verse 3 says nothing was made without Him. One ordinary thing I'll look at differently this week, knowing Jesus made it:
- Verse 14 says the Word 'pitched His tent among us.' Where in my actual neighborhood, home, or workplace do I most need to remember He lives close?
- Verse 12: the moment in my week when I feel least like God's child is:
- When I picture God looking at me, He looks _____. After looking at Jesus (v18), I think He actually looks:
- My out-loud commitment tonight: 'This week, because the Light is still shining, I will...'

Take-home actions:

- The next time you owe someone at home an apology, make it at the kitchen table as a son or daughter of God who is already secure. A bad evening cannot revoke the right He gave you (John 1:12).
- When you're awake at 2 a.m. with worries about money, health, or the kids, say it back to Him out loud: 'Your light is still on, Lord, and this dark has not won' (John 1:5).
- When a long day ends with the list unfinished, sit down, eat, and receive from Him without proving you deserve it first. His fullness gives grace upon grace, and His supply isn't running low because yours is (John 1:16).

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. John 1:14