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The Creating Word Becomes Flesh

Bible Background • JOHN 1:1–14

Printed Text • JOHN 1:1–14 | Devotional Reading • GENESIS 2:1–3

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the meaning of the Word for the world, FIND true inspiration for life in Jesus, and LIVE in relationship with Creator God because of the “light” (grace and truth) that Jesus gives.

In Focus

Sister Nancy is a gifted Christian who serves on her church’s Board of Trustees. However, this was not always the case. She is a recovering alcoholic who used to verbally abuse her husband and children. After years of tolerating Nancy’s behavior, her husband had finally had enough. One weekend Nancy arrived home drunk as usual and found her husband, children, and all their possessions gone.

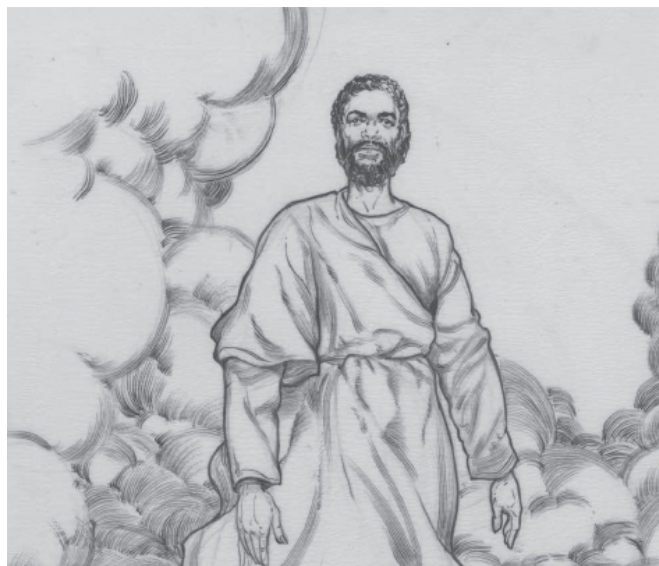
Nancy had been miserable without her family. One of her coworkers, Mitch, noticed her downward spiral and invited her to come to church with his family next Sunday. After service, they all went out for lunch together. Mitch’s wife, Bea, asked Nancy what she thought about coming to church with them more often. Nancy said she probably wouldn’t be able to make it. Mitch and Bea pressed her, and Nancy confessed she didn’t feel comfortable going to church when her life was so messed up.

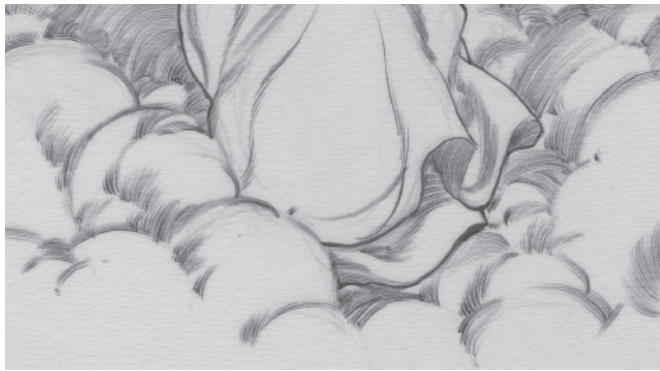
Her co-worker, Mitch, told her about the life-changing relationship he had with Jesus. Jesus was Mitch’s light and life, and from what Nancy could see, it was a glorious light and life. Then Bea asked Nancy if she would like to become a new person in Christ. Right there in the restaurant, Sister Nancy gave her life to Christ. She no longer drinks; she and her family are reunited and happy.

Sister Nancy did not just turn over a “new leaf.” She actually became a new person in Christ.

How would your life have been different if you didn’t have new life in Christ?

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3, KJV)





“God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.” (John 1:3, NLT)

FOCUS VERSES

KJV John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

NLT John 1:1 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He existed in the beginning with God. **3** God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

4 The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

6 God sent a man, John the Baptist,

7 to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony.

8 John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

9 The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.

11 He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

People, Places, and Times

Gnosticism. Many of the early Gentile believers had been exposed to varying strains of Gnosticism (an early heresy) and did not believe in the humanity of Jesus. As people from diverse backgrounds became part of the church, it became necessary for the apostles to correct errors in doctrine as well as encourage the existing believers. In the Gospel of John, the writer seems to be addressing a mixed audience of believers and unbelievers, Jews, and Greeks. The other Gospels had already been written and circulated. John used his writing not to simply tell stories about Jesus, but to explain Christian theology, especially the place of Christ Jesus.

Background

The author of the book of John identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20). Most scholars agree that the apostle John is the author of this book. John was well-known in the early church and was intimately familiar with Jewish life. He would have been an eyewitness to many of the events recorded in the Gospel of John.

Dating of the Gospel of John is a matter of debate, with dates ranging from AD 50 to 95 or later. However, most scholars accept the later date of AD 95. Although we may not know the exact date of the writing, we do know that the first-century church was thriving. Even amid the threats of persecution and heresy, the church continued to grow.

John wrote to encourage the believers, most of whom were Jewish. He affirms their Jewishness as well as their faith in Jesus Christ, contrasting them with the Pharisees, who claimed to be the true or real Jews. The first 14 verses of the book of John summarize the whole Gospel. In these verses, we are introduced to Jesus—who He is, what He does, and the role He plays in the eternal plan of God for the world.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Is the Word (John 1:1–3)
2. Jesus Is the Light (vv. 4–9)
3. Jesus Reveals God's Character (vv. 10–14)

In Depth

1. Jesus Is the Word (John 1:1–3) John introduces Jesus as the “Word.” The word used here is *logos*. The Greeks understood *logos* to mean not only the written or spoken word, but also the thought or reasoning in the mind. Jewish believers also used the word *logos* to refer to God and would have connected this concept to the wisdom personified in the Old Testament (see Proverbs 8). In tandem with wisdom was ability; in this case, God’s wisdom was used to create the universe. Jesus is that wisdom personified. Through Jesus, all things were created. To understand the creation, we must know the Creator. All of these concepts are bound up in the word *logos*. As believers today, we may not realize all the nuances that the author intended. But what we must learn is clear: Jesus was, is, and always will be. He is God. He is the Creator and the Source of all life. The entirety of our Christian faith rests upon accepting these truths.

How have you seen loaded words used or abused in your life?

2. Jesus Is the Light (vv. 4–9) John speaks of Jesus as “the light.” Jesus is Life itself, and that Life is our Light (v. 4). When we receive this life Jesus offers, His light replaces our spiritual darkness, and we become more like our Creator. However, many people live in deep darkness, which often connotes sin in the Bible. Even though Jesus is the light to dispel darkness, many people refuse to accept the light of salvation. It’s the same today. People are so thoroughly entrenched in their sin and ignorance that they are blind to the light.

God can use anyone to pierce through the darkness. In Jesus’ time, God sent John the Baptist to bear witness to Jesus (vv. 6–7). John the Baptist did not want people to believe in him; he pointed the way to Jesus. Today, God uses His written Word and the power of the Holy Spirit to testify to the Light. He also uses believers. Every believer should view himself or herself as a testimony to the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ.

What has the Light of Christ made clear to you?

3. Jesus Reveals God’s Character (vv. 10–14)

Although Jesus created the world (Colossians 1:16), the world did not recognize Him as Savior (John 1:10). Jesus came to the Jews first, but most of them rejected Him as their Messiah. His gift of salvation is offered freely to all. When we do receive Jesus, God gives us the right to become His children (v. 12) not physically

the right to become His children (v. 12), not physically, but spiritually. We are considered His heirs (Galatians 3:29), eligible to receive all of His promised blessings.

We cannot become God's children by any means other than through salvation in Jesus Christ whom God sent to the earth to take on human flesh. He came to live with us, to feel our pain, to experience our joy, and to know our sorrow.

John's Jewish readers would have understood the word "dwelt" to be connected to the word for "tabernacle," where God's presence dwelt. As modern-day believers, we can't physically touch Jesus, yet we can see His glory. We can testify to the miracles He has worked in our lives and the lives of others. We can bear witness to the power of salvation.

Why did Jesus need to become a human to understand humanity?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who is the "Word" (John 1:1)?
2. What is the "light of men" (v. 4)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus came to give meaningful, real life to all who will receive Him. He is the living revelation of God, who expressed God's truth in a way we can understand. It is our task to share this light with others. What are effective ways to be witnesses to Jesus' light today?

Liberating Lesson

Jesus came into this world in the form of human flesh, yet those around Him did not acknowledge Him for who He is: God. They chose to continue living in darkness rather than receiving the Light. Things aren't so different in our world today. In modern society, many people have become accustomed to a fast-paced, hectic lifestyle. They are easily distracted, often bored, or generally dissatisfied with life.

Jesus came to free us from the rat race. His light reveals that we are in fact human beings, made in the glorious image of God. Jesus' light burns away our ignorance and reveals our worth. It is then up to us to embrace that worth instead of taking the darker, but easier, path.

Application for Activation

This week, ask God to reveal Himself to you in a new

THIS WEEK, ASK GOD TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO YOU IN A NEW way. Spend time praying, reading the Word, and meditating on what you have read. Let God's Word permeate your spirit so that you might know God more deeply. Rejoice in the fact that God has revealed Himself to you through Jesus, the Word made flesh, and that He will continue to do so.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

More Light on the Text

John 1:1–14 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John begins his Gospel with a clear reference to Genesis 1:1. The book of Genesis opens with an affirmation of the nature and character of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The purpose of the statement in Genesis is threefold: (1) to identify the Creator, (2) to explain the origin of the world, and (3) to tie the work of God in the past to the work of God in the future. Likewise, John is clearly identifying Jesus, the Living Word made flesh, as God the Creator (John 1:3) and affirming Him as the only source of life and redemption. This Gospel from its very start is heralding the deity of Jesus Christ. John is not referring here to a particular time in the past; rather, he is affirming the preexistence of Jesus.

“Word” here is expressed using the Greek word *logos* (**LOW**-goce), which has several meanings. Ordinarily, *logos* refers to a spoken word, with an emphasis on the meaning conveyed, not just the sounds produced. But here, *logos* is used as an expression of communication with God. It is more than everyday speech; it is the creative power of God (see Psalm 33:6). John's Greek readers would have understood the nuances of *logos*, realizing that John was presenting Jesus as the power that controlled all things. John is clearly asserting that the divine Word is the source of creation and of all that is visible and invisible in the world. John leaves no

question as to the nature, character, and glory of the Word—the “Word was God” (John 1:1). John is saying that the Word is deity—one with God in nature, character, and glory.

2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. John begins the second verse by reiterating the divine, preexistent nature of the Word. He proceeds to explain the role of the Word in the beginning. The word “made” (Gk. *ginomai*, **GHI**-no-my) means “came into being, happened, or became.” John is communicating the idea that this creative work happened out of nothing, that the Word did not rely on preexisting material to create the universe (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2).

John also begins to give us a hint as to the identity of the Word by referring to the Word as “him.” The Word is more than just an expression of the personality of God; it is the person of Jesus Christ. So John is saying that the Word, which was preexistent with God, was in complete fellowship with God, possessed all the divine nature and characteristics of deity, and created everything.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. “Life” in Greek is *zoe* (dzo-**AY**) and is used throughout the Bible to refer to both physical and spiritual life. It is frequently qualified with the word “eternal.” Jesus was the embodiment of the fullness and quality of life that God offers to those who believe (John 14:6). The life that Jesus was to offer would be the light of all humanity.

Here, John uses the metaphors of “light” (Gk. *phos*, foce, “to manifest”) and “darkness” (Gk. *skotia*, sko-**TEE**-ah, “dimness” or “obscurity”) to illustrate the differences between a life of grace, mercy, and forgiveness and a life of sin and death. The word “comprehended” (Gk. *katalambano*, kat-al-am-**BAN**-o) has two possible meanings. One meaning is “understood, perceived, or learned” and communicates the fact that those who live in the darkness do not receive the light because of a lack of understanding—they don’t get it. Another meaning is the idea “laid hold of or seized” and communicates the fact that the darkness (perhaps Satan or more generally sinful humanity) will never have the ultimate victory over the light of Jesus. John is saying that some who see the light will be unable to understand and receive it because Satan has blinded them (2 Corinthians 4:4). But John says that no matter how dark the darkness of

evil seems in the world, no matter how the global circumstances seem to indicate that evil is winning, darkness cannot overcome the light that comes from the life of Christ.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. The apostle John goes on to talk about John the Baptist. The ministry of John the Baptist is prominent in the Gospel of John. Here, the apostle John is affirming the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus echoed this assertion when He said that John the Baptist was the last of the great Old Testament prophets, who came in the spirit of Elijah (Matthew 11:9–10; Mark 9:13). John the Baptist had a unique call and ministry to be a witness of Jesus, the Light (Matthew 4:4; John 1:4).

In verse 7, the word “witness” (Gk. *marturia*, mar-too-**REE**-ah) means to affirm by testimony what one has seen, heard, experienced, or known. Therefore, John the Baptist had the prophetic duty of preparing the way for Jesus by preaching the testimonies of God.

The goal of John the Baptist was the same as the goal of John the apostle: to bring humanity to a place of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The author is careful to specify that John the Baptist was not the genuine light, but that he came to “bear witness” (Gk. *martureo*, mar-too-**REH**-o), to testify of, or report on the One to come. This kind of witness would affirm by testimony what one has seen, heard, experienced, or known. John the Baptist testified to the world of the nature and character of Jesus so that “all men through him might believe.”

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The apostle John makes it clear that John the Baptist was not the Light. He was only to bear witness of the Light. Like the moon that does not shine its own light, but only reflects the light of the sun, so John the Baptist reflects the Light of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus would be the true Light that would light every person. The word “true” (Gk. *alethinos*, al-aythee-**NOS**) refers to that which is sincere or genuine. The apostle John is saying that John the Baptist pointed others to the light to come, and that Jesus Christ was the authentic Light. As we walk in the light, we learn to comprehend the things of God. It is our joy as believers to shine the light of Jesus to those around us.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. Here, the Greek word for “world” is *kosmos* (**KOS**-mos). It can refer to the universe (both things and people), the inhabitants of the earth (i.e., humanity), and the evil world system alienated from God. Gnostics believed that the flesh and the material world were evil. The apostle John may have been refuting this heresy by making the statement that Jesus “was in the world.” In other words, Jesus was not alienated from the material world and its inhabitants; this was the world that He had created (v. 3).

Even though Jesus was in the world that He had made, the world “knew him not” (v. 10). The Greek word for “knew” is *ginosko* (ghee- **NOCE**-ko) and refers to more than just head knowledge. It means “recognized or perceived” and carries the idea of knowing something intimately. John is conveying the real problem with humanity: The world should recognize its Creator. This recognition should motivate humanity to have a relationship with Jesus, but the world does not recognize Him, nor desire to have an intimate relationship with Him.

The rejection of Jesus by the world comes to a head in verse 11. There are two different meanings for the word “own” in this passage. First, He came to His “own” (Gk. *idios*, **EEdee**-os), meaning “property” or “possessions” (i.e., homeland). Second, His “own” received Him not; the word is masculine in the Greek and refers to His own people, the Jews. For hundreds of years, the Jews had waited for the Messiah; now, when He came, they refused to receive Him as such.

While here on earth, Jesus preached to a mostly Jewish audience. They were not only blinded by their sin, but they were hindered by their religion and preconceived ideas. Their pride is more important to them than anything else, and they loathe admitting that they could be wrong.

The world belonged to Christ by virtue of His having created it, but the world did not know Him, would not enter into a relationship with Him, and refused to receive Him because they did not recognize Him for who He was. What a scathing commentary on the sinful condition of humanity!

12 But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of

blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. But there is still hope for sinful humanity. Regardless of how bleak the situation may seem for humanity, God provides hope in the person of Jesus. There will be many who receive Jesus as Savior and Lord and recognize Him for who He is as the Creator of the universe. The word “received” (Gk. *paralambano*, pa-ra-lam- **BAN**-oh) means “took what was one’s own, took to one’s self, or made one’s own.” As used here, “received” is more than psychologically accepting or making some emotional assent to Jesus. Therefore, to receive Jesus means to take hold of everything that Jesus is (Lord, Savior, Creator, Redeemer, etc.) and make Him one’s own so that His presence affects a person’s goals, aims, plans, and desires.

Those who receive Jesus and allow Him to affect their goals, aims, and plans are given the “power to become the sons of God.” The Greek word for “power” is *exousia* (ek-soo-**SEE**-ah) and is best translated as “power of authority (influence)” or “power to act.” What John is saying is that whoever receives Jesus is given the power and authority to act in a way consistent with being a child of God, and that this power gives us access to all of the privileges that come through God’s grace. This power is used when we become children of God. God’s power must be at work in our lives in order for us to live and act in a way consistent with being a child of God (cf. John 1:13).

In verse 12, John goes on to say that the privileges of being children of God are bestowed on those who “believe” on (Gk. *pisteuo*, pist- **YOO**-oh) or have faith in His name. “Belief” here is more than simply something that happens in the mind. To believe on Jesus Christ means to place complete confidence in the nature, person, and character of Jesus Christ so that He influences the total being (goals, aims, plans, and desires). When you “received [Jesus]” and “believe on his name,” John says, you entrusted Him with your life. Then this trust should lead to some sort of action, whereby you take hold of Jesus for yourself in order to be part of the family of God.

Johns tells us that this new birth did not come about “of blood” (Gk. *haima*, **HAH**-ee-mah), referring to the blood of humans or animals. Nor was it a result of “the will of the flesh” (Gk. *sarx*), meaning “carnal nature” or “passions.” Rather, the new birth was a result of something supernatural (cf. John 3:5–6). When we receive Christ, we are adopted into the family of God (see 1 John 3:1). God’s children are not born in the natural way of conception and birth. We are born of God spiritually. Like when humans adopt a child, He chooses us. It’s not because of anything we have done to deserve it but because of God’s grace we can

to deserve it, but because of God's grace we can choose to believe and receive Jesus. We are not physical children, but spiritual children of our Father, God. Like children, we should strive to become like Him. We are frail humans, but when we receive the logos, we will begin to reflect the likeness of Him who is the Living Word.

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John 1:14 is one of the key verses in the New Testament that explains the Incarnation. "Incarnation" is defined as that act of grace whereby Christ took our human nature into union with His divine Person, becoming man. The Word was made flesh. Here, John brings our attention back to the divine Word, or logos. The Word, who is God, who created the universe and provided light to all humanity, became flesh. The word "made" here (Gk. *ginomai*, **GHIN**-oh-mahee) is the same word used in verse 3 and means "came into being." John is not saying that Jesus was some created, lesser god; he is affirming that Jesus existed in eternity past and took on a physical body through the Incarnation.

The divine Word not only took on a physical body, but also dwelt among us. The word "dwelt" (Gk. *skenoo*, skay-**NO**-oh) refers to abiding or living in a tabernacle (or tent). One cannot escape John's allusion to the Old Testament tabernacle, which was built as a temporary and mobile dwelling for God (see Exodus 36–40). The original tabernacle was a temporary meeting place. It had provisional status, anticipating the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In the Incarnation, when the Word was made flesh, humanity did not receive a temporary tabernacle; rather, God Himself in Jesus came to live among us. Dwelling with us was only a temporary solution, however. After His death and resurrection, Jesus gained a permanent spiritual body and went to dwell in heaven.

While He was here, John and the other disciples knew Jesus intimately as Teacher and Friend. They ate with Him, talked with Him, laughed with Him, and cried with Him. The disciples watched Jesus perform miracles, and they knew Him as the Messiah. The One who has always existed, the One who is God, become a human being (v. 14). Although He had always been omnipresent, Jesus had now come to be one of us.

The idea John is trying to communicate here is that the "glory" (Gk. *doxa*, **DOX**-ah, "perfection, honor, and praise") that we see in the incarnate Word is the glory of the Father in heaven. This is the strongest assertion of the deity of Christ that could be made. "Only begotten" is the Greek word *monogenes* (mo-nogeh-**NACE**) and means "unique, or one of a kind." While

we can claim to be children of God in a general sense by receiving and believing in Christ, Jesus is the one and only unique Son of God.

And what is it that we see when we behold His glory? A revelation of God's preeminence and dignity, through Jesus, will reveal that He is "full of grace and truth." God's grace is a demonstration of His love. The word "grace" (Gk. *charis*, **KHAR**-eece) is defined as "favor" or "that which affords pleasure." "Truth" (Gk. *aletheia*, ah-LAY-thi-ah) can be defined as "that which conforms to reality." Jesus is the one and only Son of God, and He conforms to the full reality of God in nature, character, and purpose (Colossians 2:9). The truth as it relates to the nature and character of Jesus Christ dispels any heresies that may rise concerning His divine character.

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Say It Correctly

Incarnation. in-car-NA-shun.

Gnosticism. NOSS-tih-siz-um.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Created the World
through Wisdom
(Proverbs 8:22–31)

TUESDAY

In Christ All Things Hold Together
(Colossians 1:13–17)

WEDNESDAY

Christ, the Head of All Things
(Colossians 1:18–22)

THURSDAY

God's Well-Ordered Creation
(Psalm 104:1–15)

FRIDAY

Praise God for Creation
(Psalm 104:24–35)

SATURDAY

The Son Reflects God's Glory
(Hebrews 1:1–4)

SUNDAY

The Word Became Flesh
(John 1:1–14)

