

THE TWELVE:

John

Nickname: Together with his brother James, they were known as the “Sons of the Thunder”

Marital status: Unknown

Hometown: Bethsaida (was living in Capernaum)

Profession: Fisherman

Age: 16-18 years old

Relatives: Father - Zebedee

Mother: Possibly Salome (according to some Church tradition)

Brother: James

Social Status: Uneducated. He was in partnership with Peter and James. Fishing business

Personality: Bold, loyal, zealous, intensive, passionate (“son of thunder”)

Death: He was never martyred according to tradition. He died in Ephesus around 98AD. Died as an old man, outlasting the other disciples.

General facts:

According to many interpretations, he was, for a time, a disciple of John the Baptist and was called by Christ from the circle of John's followers, together with Peter and Andrew, to become Jesus' disciples (John 1:35-42).

The apostle John also is credited with writing five books of the New Testament: the gospel according to John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John and the book of Revelation.

INTRODUCTION

We can't talk about the twelve disciples without looking at the life of John in detail. Although we looked at him earlier along with his brother James, we need to also look at him specifically.

Remember, the point of this series is to bring back a clear understanding of discipleship and how Jesus did it. As we come to Jesus, some of us have run into dead ends, but we're given the Gospels in particular to go back and check and see what Jesus intended and find answers to the question of why he called us.

Why did he reach out to Matthew the tax collector? Why did he prophesy over Nathaniel's life? Why did he work through the issue of faith with Thomas? Why did he call any of them? Jesus wants us to see these things and dwell in the truths we uncover. The church facilitates this discipleship and learning process - the Church is a mechanism used to bring out the Kingdom of God. We preach Jesus and the Church works with God the Holy Spirit in seeing his Kingdom

come. All of us are busy in the process of discipleship and we won't stop until we die.

For many of us this has become mechanical. There are many books out there to try and help us with formulas on the Christian life, but through the life of John we learn that discipleship is about *love*. It's about *relationship*. It's not that God saw that the purpose of our life was going nowhere so he sent His son. That may be true; and for many of us the mechanics of our Christianity may be like that. But the bottom line is this: *God so loved the world*. This doesn't mean he loved the Outback or Kangaroos or Table mountain, but *us*, human beings. It was all about *love*. That's why he did what he did. If we move away from that we move away from the primary purpose of our relationship with God. His son did what he did to ensure we get all the benefits of what he did and the issue was so that we could be with him.

Before we look at John you must ask: **How is your relationship today?** You would know straight away. When we wake up in the morning and glance at the pillow next to us, we know whether or not there are things that need to be sorted out. We know when we're out of sorts with people. **Don't neglect your relationship with God - that's what discipleship's about.** John shows us through his life how we can have a loving relationship with God.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

All the Gospels are written to give us a unique perspective of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection. This is because each were written to different audiences for different purposes.

Matthew

- Was written for the Jews
- Written so we can see the link and the follow-on from the Old Testament to the New Testament
- Called "The Lion" Gospel - Jesus represented as the Lion (victorious)

Mark

- An Eyewitness account
- Full of action and purpose
- Called "The Ox" Gospel - Jesus represented as the Ox (a servant)

Luke

- Historically correct - more detailed. Luke was a historian and theologian.
- Written for the Gentiles - a history they can connect with.

- Called “The Son of Man” Gospel (we see this phrase repeatedly in the Gospel)

John

- This is the Gospel that’s totally different.
- It’s a spiritual Gospel - called “The Eagle” Gospel, as it gives us a heavenly perspective.
- An in-depth understanding of the Gospel message

John is not interested in so much historical detail, but more teaching. He is meticulous and it certainly has John's soft character built into it, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. See, this Gospel came from a relationship of love. Where there’s a relationship of love there’s a revelation of things from a heavenly perspective. So we see salvation here, the spiritual message of the Gospel. John is interested in this perspective. It's a pattern all throughout the book.

LESSONS WE LEARN FROM JOHN

1. Intimacy

It’s all about Jesus wanting to have a relationship with us and, through that, he wants to reach the world. We are reminded of the imagery of the bridegroom and bride that we often see in the Bible - which represents our intimate relationship with God. The minute our relationship goes to “owner and subject” or “landlord and tenant” or “boss and servant” there's trouble! This relationship is about love and intimacy!

Amongst the twelve, it is recorded that John had an intimate, loving relationship with Jesus. Four times in the Gospel of John it says of John that he was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). Of course Jesus loved the others but it’s recorded that John was found on Jesus’ bosom. That might seem weird for us today, but we can see that John was always close - he was right next to Jesus.

In Christ, you are the disciple whom Jesus loves. At that time, Christ was one man and stuck in human time, so he could only be in one place and one time. But now he is omnipresent, having that close relationship with every single one of us. John shows us that this is what discipleship is about - being the disciple whom Jesus loves. In those times we spend with Jesus we can lean on his chest.

Jesus asked John to look after his mother. This is his heart -

John 19:26-27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said

to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

There was an intimacy there. John was the only disciple who stayed with Jesus through everything – his trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. All the time, we see John is in the background. That’s what we want for our lives. John shows us that the basis of following is loving intimacy -

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Here John shows us the heavenly perspective. If you’re asking about why there are so many religions or why we can't do it our way, it's simple: **you need to be born again.**

In this Gospel there are so many stories that show us the love of Jesus. The woman at the well; the adulterous woman, which demonstrates God's love and forgiveness. Jesus' sermon on the sheep and the shepherd; Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (with that famous verse, “Jesus wept” and he Jews replying, “See how he loved him!”)

Jesus talks about not leaving us as orphans. Jesus prays the most amazing prayers in John 17. He reinstates Peter and it’s full of love and restoration and encouragement.

Here are some great passages in 1 John that show us the theme of John's life.

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 4:19-21

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

The appeal of the Gospel is love! Remember the day you were saved? Don't lose your first love.

When you hear men criticising others and their ministry, biting Christians, hurting Christians, not handling issues, etc. or you are the one who does this, you need to remember: they are born again and you are born again, and this means you're going to spend eternity with each other!

Think about that. Get on with each other! When you read 1 John it says "love one another." We are commanded to love and we should want to love! We are a new species. We are not from this planet, which is full of damnation cursing, criticism, ugliness, deceit etc. We're not from here! We're called to love each other! The church is defined by this love in John 13:35. We are cynical, easy to criticise, easy to pass judgement. We can't have this amazing intimacy with Jesus and then have this degrading attitude towards each other. (See 1 John 4:19).

Forgiveness pleases the heart of the Father. Let's forgive to please him. He has forgiven us so let's show him that that same love is in us. We can hurt each other so much just with the things we say. But we're free from that. Choose to love.

John's life is also a record of one who loved because He was loved. His Saviour's love for him motivated him to loving service. His love for the church is seen in Revelation, where he writes to the churches he cares for and loves, from the island of Patmos where he had been banished for the sake of the Gospel.

2. Sin

John teaches us that only through love do we overcome the weakness of the fallen sinful nature.

1 John 4:17-18

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgement, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

As we learn to be followers of Christ have to know how to deal with sin. It's important. Don't ignore it. Don't build up a hardness toward it - don't have an attitude of "I'll just do it and carry on." No, we have to know how to deal with sin.

If we read 1 John it helps us understand that we've been given everything in Christ to lead lives victorious over sin. Jesus suffered so that we might have victory over sin. The devil wants you to suffer under guilt and condemnation and constant temptation. But Jesus has given victory.

1 John 1:10

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 3:4-10

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There's a brand of teaching that says if you confess and repent once then you never need to do that again. This is an extreme grace message. We're always a child of God but we need to deal with sin when it comes and take responsibility and ask for forgiveness. This is about relationship, not a mechanical forgiveness! And immediately we are forgiven.

John encouraged Christian maturity:

1 John 2:12-14

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

3. Mission

John's life is a travelogue of mission. He is concerned that the Gospel goes out and that the church is healthy. His life is an example to us of commitment to the mission of the Gospel.

After Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, John, together with Peter, took a prominent part in the founding and guidance of the church. He is with Peter at the healing of the lame man in the temple (Acts 3:1f); along with Peter he is also thrown into prison (Acts 4:3); he is also with Peter visiting the newly converted in Samaria, possibly planting a church (Acts 8:14). We hear of John again hosting Paul and Barnabas on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:4).

Then, from church history and the book of Revelation, John ministered extensively into Asia Minor, and was probably based in Ephesus. For a while he led the church at Ephesus.

Because of his faith he was banished to the island of Patmos by the emperor Domitian. Tradition has it that John was miraculously saved from death when he was dipped into boiling oil in Rome during Domitian's persecutions. He then returns and carries on ministering into Asia Minor. He outlasts all the other apostles and dies at the age of 85-90 years old. He was a true and loving father of the faith!

QUESTIONS:

1. Am I motivated by God's love?
2. Do I deal with sin biblically?
3. Am I committed to mission?