

# Reading for Intent

## *September 11, 2022*

### Lesson Summary

#### ***Main Passages***

John 5:39-40

#### ***Session Outline***

1. The Word Proves True (John 5:37-42)
2. The Word Must Be Treated Correctly (2 Timothy 2:14-17; Revelation 22:18-19)
3. The Word Keeps Us from Sin (1 John 2:3-6)

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#### ***Theological Theme***

God's Word is true and was given to His people for a purpose. We should be careful to rightly interpret and apply Scripture to our lives.



## Leader Guide

# Reading for Intent

### Introduction

Anyone who has traveled overseas where a different language is spoken or even tried to converse with someone who doesn't speak English, knows the fear of being misinterpreted or misunderstood. There are countless scenes from movies where someone is tricked into saying something that was not what they wanted, and embarrassment quickly followed.

Not understanding the culture or the language can lead to missing out on the meaning of words and phrases. Though it was originally written in different languages, Scripture was given to us from God for a purpose. It is our responsibility to learn it, know it, and live by it.

- ❓ Share an instance where you experienced misinterpretation or misunderstanding due to a language barrier.
- ❓ What is your favorite scene from a movie where a misinterpretation happens? What makes these scenes entertaining?


### Session Summary

The world we live in does all it can to keep us from knowing and living God's Word. We are constantly encouraged to believe whatever truth we choose and to find our truth inside of ourselves. This is completely counter to the absolute truth of Scripture and puts our focus on the wrong place.


As Christians we need to know how to protect ourselves from the misinterpretation of Scripture and to devote ourselves to knowing and believing the whole of God's Word. When we recognize the benefits of correctly handling God's Word, we will be more motivated to treat it in the right way.

### 1. The Word Proves True (John 5:37-42)

Think about what happens in a court of law. Two sides are trying to prove two different things. They use previous decisions and laws but ultimately what is the deciding factor comes down to witnesses—people who can swear under oath about what they saw with their own eyes or experienced in some way. Eyewitness testimony is one of the strongest presentations in a court of law and can be the thing that sways what is proven true or false.

 Why do you think eyewitness testimony is considered strong evidence? Why is it significant that there were witnesses to the truth of the Bible and the truth about Jesus?


Scripture has been given to us and is vital in the development of Christ followers. In the first chapter of John, Jesus is identified as the Word (John 1:1-5). Here in the fifth chapter of John, Jesus continued to explain His role in God's plan for the world. It's clear that there were some differing opinions and thoughts about Jesus and Scriptures that were being touted in that day. People will always come against the truth and try to sway God's people to believe lies over truth.

 How did Jesus show that the people He spoke to had missed the point of the Scriptures? What did He say was the point and why is this important for us today?

John wrote what Jesus had to say about some of the different witnesses and testimonies to His role and place. In these verses, Jesus stressed that the Word of God proves the truth of Jesus, and Jesus proves the truth of the Word of God. Neither contradicts the other and both are without flaw or error. We can know and learn Scripture to know Jesus more fully.

Studying Scripture was not a new concept in that day. Religious leaders had developed a practice of reading and memorizing the Word, but Jesus pointed out that their motives were wrong. It seems odd to say that there can be wrong way to read Scripture, but Jesus made it clear. He said that when you study the Bible to find arguments to back up your own selfish motivations instead of studying to know Him better—you are missing the point.

When we search Scripture, it should bring us closer to Jesus. Jesus said the people were not willing to “come to [Him]” and find life. That is a great tragedy of religion. People can read and memorize the Word of God yet still miss out on a relationship with Jesus. We need to be challenged on how we approach Scripture. It is true and should be treated as such.

 Application: Why is it important that we first understand the original intent of the words of Scripture before looking for how they apply in our lives today?

## Still in the Wilderness

Jesus's affirmation that his hearers had not heard God's voice or seen his form (cp. 1:18) seems to allude to wilderness Israel, which received the law at Mount Sinai without hearing God's voice or seeing his form.

## 2. The Word Must Be Treated Correctly (2 Timothy 2:14-17; Revelation 22:18-19)

As we learn to treat God's Word correctly, we realize our responsibility regarding Scripture. Paul took the subject of the Word very seriously and wrote about it in some of his letters. He was never afraid to be direct and use strong language about important matters. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul addressed the issue of handling the Word of God. He gave some specific instructions of what to do and what not to do.

Notice that he started off by reminding us to focus on what is most important—to keep our eyes on the gospel. It is easy to get distracted by the many other things going on around us. The enemy loves to pull God's people away from what is important and get us thinking about and consumed with lesser things. Paul specifically listed the temptation to get caught up arguing about words. There is no end to people with opinions, and many want to argue and debate them all. Paul knew this was an issue and pointed out that we should refuse to get caught up arguing but instead to stand for truth. It is also vital to note that you cannot stand for what you don't know, which reinforces the need for us to be in the Word and to know the Word.



How do we get caught up arguing about words that have no profit to the gospel? How are we in danger of this if we don't understand the original intended meaning of the Scriptures?

God's Word has been given to us as a guide for life. When we take our eyes off the truth and focus on the opinions and thoughts of people, we easily get led astray. Paul said that will be to the ruin of the hearer. Think about times in your life when you listened to or focused on the wrong things. Before long you start thinking the wrong thoughts and then acting the wrong way. Most people know someone who got caught up in wrong thinking and found themselves far from God without consciously choosing to stray. Even those who know truth can get caught up in lifestyles and habits that are far from God. When we exchange the truth for a lie it will be to our ruin.



When have you or someone you know gotten caught up in sin because of believing a lie over the truth?

Paul gave some proactive instructions to focus on the truth. We are to be diligent and focused on whose approval we are seeking. One way to keep from arguing about things that don't matter is to be diligent about how we are living our lives. Just as Timothy could choose whose approval he sought, we have the same choice today. Do we work hard for the Lord, or do we take the easy road and follow the world, seeking its approval and

acceptance? Paul told the truth. He stressed that to live a life for the Lord was not going to be easy, but it would be worthwhile. When faced with something tough, having the right motivation can help. Paul pointed out that when we make the right choices with how we handle Scripture we can be those people who have nothing to be ashamed about in the end. When we work as unto the Lord and seek His approval, then we will obey the Word as we should.

Paul exhorted his readers to rightly handle the Word of Truth. Think about what that means. Do you study the Word? When you hear it preached or taught do you verify what you hear with what the Bible says? Are you learning Scripture and memorizing it so you can live by it? These are all helpful to rightly handle the truth. Paul also warned of a few things to avoid. He said to stay away for irreverent babbling because it will spread like gangrene and works against the desire to handle God's Word rightly. What we do with what we hear really matters as we seek to understand the intent of God's Word rightly.



Application: How will you seek to understand the original meaning of the Scriptures? What kinds of resources does our church have to help with this?

### 3. The Word Keeps Us from Sin (1 John 2:3-6)

Any discussion about the Word of God and how believers are responsible to treat it should also include the positive results from right understanding and application. Scripture is full of the benefits people experience when they treat God's Word correctly. From feeling safe, receiving answers, being wise, growing in godliness, or being protected, there are numerous rewards that come from knowing and obeying Scripture. Even though it can be hard to make the right choices and live like Jesus, when we see and understand the benefits of knowing and obeying God, the hard things become a little less difficult or at least worth the effort. The world will tell you to give up and not even try, but God's Word assures us that it is worth it every time.



How have you seen positive rewards motivate behaviors either in you or someone else?

In 1 John 2, we see that one of the rewards we experience when we choose to read Scripture with intent is fruit that comes through fellowship with the Father. These verses offer some great personal evaluation points to help believers identify where they are in their faith journey. If we love God, then we will obey His commandments that we find in His Word. No one can determine exactly where another person's relationship with the Lord is, but we can all look to see what kind of fruit is being produced in our own lives.

If the Word of God was given to us for a purpose—to know Jesus and how to live for Him—then doesn't it stand to reason that all believers should be concerned about whether they are approaching it rightly? We don't have to live in doubt or uncertainty. The Bible makes it clear that we can know we have been using Scripture correctly when we know Him the way He desires us to. Think of these verses as a good self-evaluation to check where you stand in your faith journey. You do not have to wonder, you can know.



How does 1 John tell us we can know if we are in right relationship with Jesus and His Word?

If you know God and love Jesus, then you will keep His commandments. This is a byproduct of being in relationship with Him. This does not mean you are perfect but that you are continually in the process of becoming more like Jesus and less like your old sinful self. We will not be completely free from sin until we get to heaven, but once we are in a real relationship with Jesus and know Him through the Word, we will see fruit in our lives that looks like Him. When we fail to know the truth of God's Word and abide in Him, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to believing the lies of the world instead of the truth. Do you have a desire to keep God's commandments and live a fruitful life? A true Christ follower will desire to live more as Scripture commands in order to look like Jesus. It's not enough to only say you want to be like Jesus; you must live in accordance with this proclamation.

John also pointed out that those who say they are in relationship with Jesus but are not changed in any way are not living in reality. Simply being able to state some facts about God does not mean you are in relationship with Him. One of the greatest benefits of knowing Jesus and His Word is how your relationship with sin changes. No longer do you enjoy sin like you used to. Because sin separates us from God, we begin to hate sin instead of chasing it. All of this comes from abiding in Jesus and is a great way to evaluate where you are in relationship to Jesus as your Savior and the Word who was with God from the beginning.



Application: How would intentional reading of God's Word compel you to change today? How would your life look different if you believed the Scriptures were completely true and the source of all truth?

## Conclusion

Reading Scripture with intent is a needed value today. As the world around us continues to push agendas that are contrary to the Word of God, we as believers need to know what we believe and learn to know His Word for ourselves. The fact that every word of Scripture is true and

has been proven time and again is the foundation for the way we should respond to the Bible. We must become people who know the truth so well that we immediately recognize when we hear a lie that opposes Scripture. The most powerful lies are ones that have a grain of truth in them but are twisted and distorted just enough to make them false. Our enemy is a master at twisting God's Word to fit his own narrative and will even use the manipulation of Scripture to lead us to sin if possible.

All Christ-followers should take seriously our responsibility to rightly handle the Word of God. This begins by understanding the intended meaning of the Scripture. We want to be those people who stay focused on the important things and not be distracted by idle chatter or babblings. When we are diligent about the Word of God, we will have nothing to be ashamed about when we stand before Him.

To move toward being unashamed before God, it is helpful to recognize where we stand currently. Some self-evaluation can be useful in revealing our true relationship with Jesus. If you truly are in relationship with Jesus and know Him through the Bible, you will see fruit of fellowship in your life. Once you know Jesus you will see sin differently. Though we won't be perfect until heaven, as we become more and more like Jesus our relationship with sin changes. The Bible was given with the purpose for us to know God and love Him. As we do, we will increasingly look less like the world and more like Jesus.

- ❓ Where do you need to grow in your understanding of Scripture? How can you seek to do that on your own? How can you seek to do that as part of our church?
- ❓ How can we as a group encourage one another to read the Bible for intent?
- ❓ How does a right understanding of Scripture always lead to conversations with others about the Scriptures? Whom do you need to have a conversation with today?

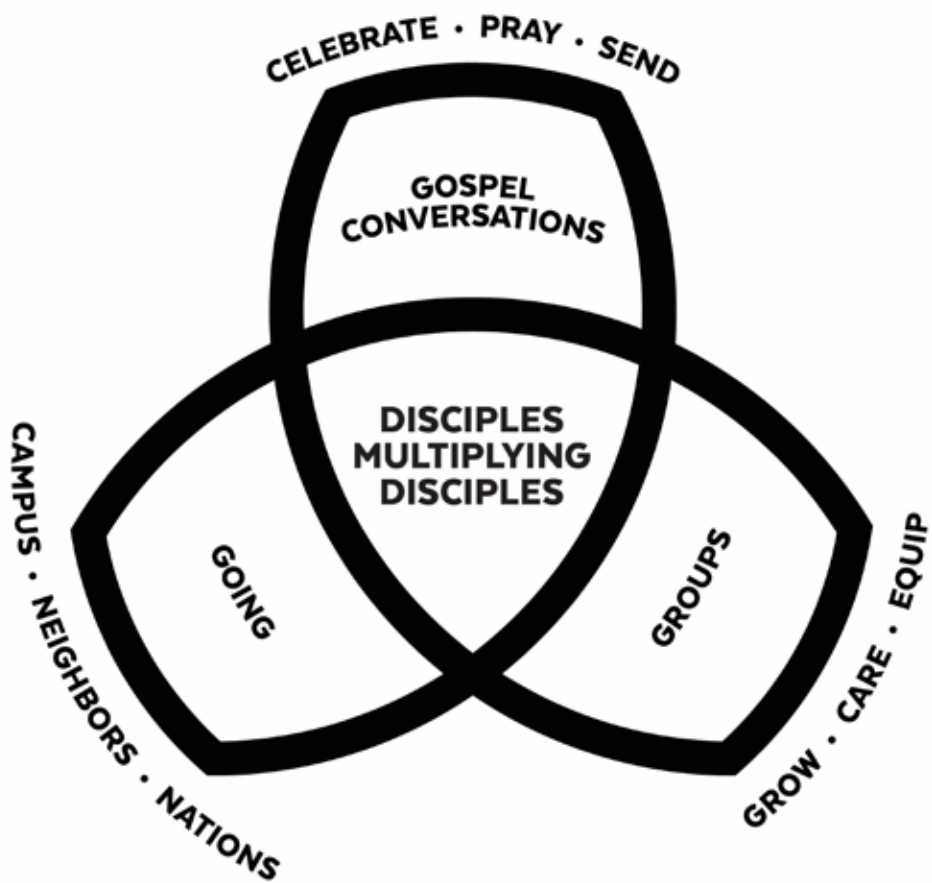
## Prayer of Response

*Thank the Lord for giving you His Word so that you can know Him and know how to live. Ask for courage to be obedient to the things He has laid on your heart this week.*

## Additional Resources

- *A Little Guide to Reading the Bible Better* by George Guthrie
- *Exalting Jesus in John* by Matt Carter, John Wredberg
- *John 1-12 for You* by Josh Moody

# Disciples Multiplying Disciples



## DxD This Week

### ***Call to Action***

Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Apply the questions to the passage; and apply one or more of the resources mentioned/practiced to their own reading of the Bible.



## For Next Week

### Session Title

- Studying to Understand

### Main Passages

- Nehemiah 8:1-8

### Session Outline

1. Get in the Word (Nehemiah 8:1-3)
2. Receive the Word (Nehemiah 8:4-6)
3. Understand the Word (Nehemiah 8:7-8)

### Memorize

*You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life. - John 5:39-40*

# Historical Context of John

## Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God's people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

The deity of Jesus: John emphasized the deity of Jesus from the beginning of his Gospel. The prologue affirms that he is the eternal Word (Gk *logos*) who was with God and was God. Jesus used the significant phrase *I am* seven times in John, claiming the personal name of God as his own. In John, Jesus is always in charge and knows what will happen in advance.

Know and believe: Eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ (17:3). Further, knowledge of God comes from believing and knowing Jesus. Knowing and believing are key terms for John. Both occur more than ninety times in this Gospel and are always used as verbs. Jesus's teaching in John reminds us that knowing God and believing in Jesus are expressed in action.

## Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

## Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John's lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas's confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter's martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

## Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John's Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

## Extended Commentary

### John 5:37-42

5:37–38. Having already introduced the Father earlier in this section, Jesus now added him to the resumé, focusing on his will and his word. The idea of a universal fatherhood of God applies only to creation and humanity. When it comes to spiritual sonship, the issue is personal faith. Note how the rejection of Jesus is a “catch twenty-two” kind of problem. These denying Jews never grasped the Father’s testimony about Jesus because they refused Jesus’ testimony about the Father.

5:39–40. The fifth testimony is one you may have in your hands right now—the Scriptures. Some people have quoted this verse as a command: “Search the Scriptures”—but that is not permissible according to the grammar of the text. Jesus essentially told these combatants, “You are serious Bible students and study the Old Testament carefully in order to gain eternal life. Yet you have been unable to see how your Scriptures prophesied my coming and, therefore, refuse the life that I bring.”

An open heart and open eyes will produce an open mind—but we begin with an open Bible. Not superstitious reverence, but practical use. Doubts concerning the Bible’s authenticity are only about two hundred years old. This should tell us something about the moral and spiritual squalor we see in the modern world.

Nevertheless, these passages also remind us that posting the Ten Commandments on the walls of school classrooms will not produce righteousness. The religious legalism of the first century shows us that. These verses also lead into the final section of this chapter. Tenney raises an important flag as we make this transition: “No less than eighteen unmistakable references to the Old Testament occur in the text of John, most of which are given a direct application to Christ, and there are other allusions in addition. If Moses (and the others) wrote of him, then the testimony would have to be admitted by his enemies as incontrovertible” (Tenney, Merrill C. *John: The Gospel of Belief*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948., p. 111).

5:41–42. The final two paragraphs close the sermon by condemning Jesus’ accusers. The people with whom he spoke had studied the Scriptures for several thousand years. From the writings of Moses to the appearance of the Messiah, they revered God’s writings, but they never understood them. Indeed, if they had grasped only the Pentateuch they would have been ready to receive Jesus as God’s Son and Messiah. They searched to find life and life was in Christ, but they never made the connection. Without the love of God in their hearts, they would be quite willing to accept imposters who claimed only their own testimony and denied Jesus in the face of all the evidence that attested the truth of his message. Verses 41 and 42 remind us of the Lord’s reaction to the “believing” Jews at the end of chapter 2: “But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man” (2:24–25).

The word translated in the NIV as “praise” is *doxa*, the common Greek word for glory or honor. The word appears three times in four verses, indicating John’s emphasis on the rejection of Christ’s glory by his accusers.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Timothy 2:14-17

2:14 It is clear that Paul was willing to confront people when the gospel was at stake. For example, he opposed Peter to his face (Gl 2:11). What he had in mind here was meaningless argument.

2:15 Be diligent could also be translated, “Be zealous.” Paul had in mind a zealous pursuit of God’s approval. One way to do this is to make sure we handle Scripture correctly.

2:17 Hymenaeus was mentioned as a false teacher previously in 1Tm 1:20, but Philetus is not mentioned elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

## Revelation 22:18-19

22:18–19 It is doubtful the wording here directly refers to closing the canon of the Bible (this book). The book (Gk *biblion*, “scroll”) that is not to be tampered with is the book of Revelation, but the wording does imply that all Scripture should be guarded as sacred, never tampered with. The immediate context in Revelation is of a “new Eden” (vv. 1–5). Also, in Gn 3, Eve added to the word of God (Gn 3:3) and the serpent took away from what the Lord had said (Gn 3:4). As a result, this “biblical bookends” effect of Rv 22:18–19 and Gn 3:3–4 infers that, just as Genesis is the first book in the Bible, Revelation is the last.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 John 2:3-6

2:3 John taught an understanding of Christian faith that includes profound assurance, not just the “maybe” of spiritual optimism.

2:4 The words his commands mean the same thing as “his word” in v. 5 and Jesus’s example in v. 6 (“just as he walked”). The true follower of Jesus is not just a talker but a doer (Jms 1:22).

2:5–6 The life of Jesus Christ is the paradigm or pattern for the believer’s life. The love of God in v. 5 could be either God’s love for us or our love for God. The former is probably correct.<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. Kenneth Gangel, *John*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).
2. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*

## Author Bio

### **Kenneth Gangel (John)**

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

### **George Guthrie (A Little Guide to Readin the Bible Better)**

George H. Guthrie, author of *Read the Bible for Life*, is the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. He helped establish and is now a Senior Fellow at Union's Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, which is committed to promoting sound Bible reading, study, and interpretation at the grassroots level of the church. Guthrie has also participated in developing or revising several popular Bible translations including the HCSB, English Standard Version, and New Living Translation.

### **Matt Carter (Exalting Jesus in John)**

Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision at the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, which has grown from a core team of 15 to over 8,000 attending each Sunday since he planted it in 2002. Matt has co-authored multiple books including a commentary on the Gospel of John in *The Christ Centered Exposition Commentary* series. Matt also co-authored a novel of historical fiction, *Steal Away Home* which tells the real life story of famed pastor Charles Spurgeon's unlikely friendship with former slave-turned-missionary, Thomas Johnson. Matt holds an M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a Doctorate in Expository Preaching from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife Jennifer have been married for over 20 years, and they have three children, John Daniel, Annie, and Samuel.

### **John Wredberg (Exalting Jesus in John)**

Josh Wredberg has served on the pastoral staff of churches in Michigan, Illinois, and North Carolina, and as teaching pastor at Redeemer Community Church in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. He is a graduate of Maranatha Baptist University and Shepherds Theological Seminary. Josh has also earned a doctorate in preaching from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Cari, have three boys, Jack, Max, and Caed.

### **Josh Moody (John 1-12 for You)**

Josh Moody (Ph.D., University of Cambridge) is the senior pastor of College Church in Wheaton. He is a pastor, author, conference speaker, and college campus speaker. He is the president and founder of God Centered Life Ministries. His books include *7 Days to Change Your Life* (Abingdon Press 2017), *How Church Can Change Your Life* (Christian Focus 2015), *Preaching to the Affections* (Christian Focus 2014), *Journey to Joy* (Crossway 2013), *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (Crossway 2012), *No Other Gospel* (Crossway 2011), and *The God-Centered Life* (Regent 2007; IVP UK 2006).