

Walking with a Friend through the Book of John

Want to help someone read the Bible for the first time? How about jump into John with them?

This is my favorite way to talk about the gospel with someone. As you read with your friend who does not yet know Jesus, you are helping them see from the text that Jesus is offering himself to us as Messiah and bringing us hope. This can give them the ability to see it in the Bible for themselves and open the door to a lot of conversations about what Jesus claims and calls us to do in response.

The Logistics:

Invite your friend to read with you. “Would you want to read through part of the Bible with me? The Bible is so influential, and is still the best seller every year. I think it’s valuable for everyone to have read at least part of it. And I love reading the Bible with people! It’s one of my favorite things!” Yes, I sound enthusiastic when I invite them. It may feel awkward—embrace the awkward and show them warmth and welcome.

I usually recommend meeting at least weekly for 30 minutes for 4-7 weeks, depending on the commitment level they (and you!) are ready for. I encourage them to read 3-5 chapters a week (giving them the exact numbers I want them to read and showing them where they are), depending on what you think best suits your friend. I’ve often met at a coffee shop with a notebook to write on, or napkins in a pinch!

You can also flex this to be shorter with a smaller segment of John, reading one chapter a week over 3 weeks. Choose what best suits your context.

When you meet, do not cover all of the chapters you read—just take half a chapter to discuss during the meeting. Pick a narrative section where Jesus is offering something and people are responding to him. (You don't have to cover all the sections where Jesus is teaching unless your friend has questions about them. These passages are highly contextual to the Old Testament and may not be the easiest for first conversations.)

Each time you meet, ask the five questions below to better understand and apply the text. For those familiar with inductive study, you'll notice the first two cover Observation, the second two, Meaning, and the final question, Application.

Sometime during the course of your weeks together, be sure to highlight the purpose statement of John in John 20:31 even if you don't read the entirety of John 20.

Let's get started.

Read the section together. (Again this is usually a narrative section about Jesus in the book of John. One exception is that I sometimes begin in John 1, which is poetry. It depends on the literacy level of my friend and if they enjoy poetry if I begin there.)

Here's a few passages I will often choose as I move through the book. I wouldn't do all of these—too many. Which you choose will depend on how many chapters you are reading each week, if you want to make it through the whole book, and what best fits with your friend. Sometimes I am shortening the passage, just to fit in time and keep it simple. You may decide to do other passages in John instead. Just keep them as simple as possible.

Suggested Passages to Cover:

John 1:1-13 (make sure to ask what Jesus offers in v12-13)

John 2:1-12

John 3:1-16

John 4:1-30

John 6:1-15 or 22-40

John 8:31-38

John 10:22-34

John 11:1-44 (this one is long, sometimes you have to skim over parts)

John 13:1-20

John 14:1-11

John 18:33-39

John 20:1-18, 30 or 20:24-30

Five Questions:

- What is happening here in this story? (Take time to describe what the text says. The aim here is to be sure to understand what the text says instead of layering hearsay or our own assumptions onto the text. Help focus them on the main plot of the text and not details. Sometimes you have to give the context to explain the story, but do not give too much. You likely know a lot more than is needed for a conversation.)
- What is the need or problem being expressed? (This could be anything from a need for healing, conflict, food, correction, or hope.)

- What is Jesus offering? (Usually he's describing something that he's offering related to healing, life, and a relationship with the Father. Look at his words to discover it. The physical provision is often a sign to who he is and what he will offer spiritually.)
- How do people respond to him? (Different stories hold different responses: positive, negative, both, etc.)
- How should we respond to Jesus? (We are not looking for direct one-to-one correlations, like "Jesus healed the man and I need physical healing, too." Instead, everything Jesus does is meant to point us to who he is. Help your friend consider what Jesus is showing about himself as Messiah in feeding, healing, rebuking, etc.)

*Remember the goal is to help your friend feel like they can read the Bible. This means you should not teach the entire passage, not draw out the biblical theological theme, not explain the interesting Greek in the text that correlates with an epistle. Nope. You can explain who Abraham was if they ask. You can give context for who Jesus is claiming to be. Focus on helping them discover.

See next page for a clean copy of these questions in case you want to work through them together from a sheet.

