

SESSION 1: JOHN THE BAPTIST

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 1:7; Matthew 11:3, 11;

QUESTIONS

1. How did John the Baptist's lineage pave the way for his ministry? Think about how this contrasts with Jesus' lineage.
2. A phrase in the video/script was, *"All Christians have been called by God to play a role in the work of the Church of Christ."* Discuss what this phrase means to you and how it plays out in a practical way.
3. John's improbable birth to older parents, his call into the wilderness and Jesus' request to have John baptize him were some of the defining moments in John's life. What are some defining moments in your life that led you to serve God?
4. John battled doubt near the end of his calling. Discuss how doubt influences you and your calling from God to serve. How do you personally battle against doubt?
5. Is there a difference between John the Baptist's doubt and the doubt of Jesus' disciples at various times? Why do we look at John's doubt so negatively?
6. Discuss the ways you relate to John the Baptist today.
7. How has this session affected your perspective on John the Baptist? What lessons can we learn for how John the Baptist fulfilled his calling?

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ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Old Testament prophecies of John the Baptist's ministry

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Foretells John's baptism

Isaiah 40:3

Foretells about John's ministry in the wilderness

Malachi 3:1

Prophecy of John's arrival to prepare the way for Jesus

Malachi 4:5

Prophecy of John's arrival

John the Baptist in the New Testament

Luke 1:5-25; 57-66

John's birth is announced and John is born

Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20

John prepares the way for Jesus; Jesus's baptism

Matthew 7:18-35; Matthew 11:1-19

John sends questions to Jesus

Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-28

John's death

John 1:6-34

John denies that he is the messiah and testifies about Jesus

John 3:22-36

John testifies about Jesus

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: JOHN THE BAPTIST

In this session we will discuss the role of John the Baptist, an essential figure in the ministry of Jesus Christ. God called John the Baptist to an important role: to testify of the coming of the Son of God and to prepare people to receive Him. His role was foretold by many prophets and he fulfilled his calling in an effective way. As we discuss this man, please think of your own calling and the importance of testifying of Jesus Christ in our words and way of life.

All Christians have been called by God to play a role in the work of the Church of Christ. John the Baptist was born a short time before Jesus and he had a very distinct purpose to fulfill; to prepare the way for Jesus. He was a baptizer, a prophet, a witness, and a disciple, and through his story, believers are reminded to be watchful for their own calling.

John the Baptist's father was Zechariah, and his mother was Elizabeth. According to Luke 1:7, they were both *"righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations."* Although they were very old, the Lord saw to it that Elizabeth would conceive a child. Not only that, but Zechariah was told their son would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would turn many people towards the Lord.

John's escape to the wilderness is an example of what it takes sometimes in order to be able to listen and grow in the Spirit. The wilderness served as his classroom. It was the place where he would become educated by the Spirit and be prepared to go out into public ministry when the time was right.

The most important lesson we can take away from John the Baptist is that he did what he was called to do: he prepared the way for Christ. Jesus found people waiting for Him in the places where John preached. It's where Jesus started His ministry.

Firstly, John preached a message of repentance and encouraged the people to be baptized. Secondly, he forecasted the coming of Jesus. Finally, he baptized Jesus and witnessed God proclaiming Jesus as His son.

John the Baptist was effective in his ministry. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark both note that people not only came from all over the Judean countryside to hear him, but also took action by being baptized in the Jordan River. Perhaps in part due to John's down-to-earth attire - clothes made of camel's hair and a leather belt - he set himself apart from the Scribes and Pharisees and was able to meet people where they were.

Matthew and Mark record John's announcement that *"Someone is coming who is greater than I am – so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of His sandals. I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

John was a little reluctant to fulfill the third part of his calling - the baptism of Jesus. When Jesus arrived at the bank of the Jordan, John tried to talk him out of it. He pointed out to Jesus that he was the one in need of baptism by Jesus, not the other way around. Jesus responded to John by saying, *"it should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires."*

After the baptism of Jesus, we know from the Gospels that he continued to baptize and that he was eventually called into the presence of Herod. John criticized the immoral lifestyle of the king and was thrown into prison. From his prison cell John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus *"Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"* (Matthew 11:3).

John's situation had caused him to be uncertain about who Jesus was. John was expecting that Jesus would usher in a regime of punishment and judgment, but instead He performed works of love. This is why Jesus answered with the words, *"The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."* In other words, He came to give life; not to judge or destroy it.

In Matthew 11:11 Jesus said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."*

Many have used this verse to paint a negative picture of John the Baptist. Jesus was not implying anything negative about John's ministry and work. He was simply teaching His disciples that those who have been born again out of water and the Holy Spirit, those who then belong to the kingdom of God, are, from this perspective, greater than the those just born of woman.

John the Baptist is ultimately put to death by Herod. Today, John stands as an example for all of us on how to fulfill God's calling in our lives. John prepared the way for Jesus and didn't let himself get in the way even when he may have been surprised by Jesus' love for mankind. Jesus cared and

- Bonnie F. Pattison, *Feasting on the Gospels*
(All Bible ref. from Matthew 3)