

# Life Group Questions

Dec 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Witness to the Word** – Pastor Vinh Doan

John 1:6-8, 19-23

## NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Happy Advent, Life Groups!

This will be the last set of questions for December because most groups will be having Christmas celebrations and/or taking a break. I'll resume writing questions for the January 5 sermon.

Please send me videos and photos of your Christmas gatherings!

Ricky and Karen Sanchez, our missionaries in Thailand who serve orphans with HIV, will be here from December 10 to the end of January. They're open to visiting Life Groups and sharing what they do. I *HIGHLY* recommend you invite them. John Dyck invited them to share in his group when I was in it and it was incredible to hear what God is doing. You can even consider combining with other Life Groups together to have a mission theme gathering! If you want them to come, please email Ricky and Karen: [sierrasanchez@hotmail.com](mailto:sierrasanchez@hotmail.com).

I just finished *Women of the Word* by Jen Wilkin. It's a great book on five principles for Bible study. I really like her suggestion of printing out the Bible passage you're studying so you can mark it up with underlines, notes, questions, and more. Instead of adding a small Bible passage in the notes, I've made it bigger so you can print it out and mark it up.

Merry Christmas, y'all!

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**For underlining, color marking, and jotting notes.**

**John 1:6–8, 19-23**

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

<sup>19</sup> And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

<sup>20</sup> He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

<sup>21</sup> And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”

<sup>22</sup> So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

<sup>23</sup> He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

**Isaiah 40:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our  
God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

## LET'S OPEN UP

### 1. What stood out to you from the sermon?

Were there any questions that made you think or points that God used to convict you? Is there something from the sermon you'd like to share with others who didn't hear it or questions you have?

### 2. Is there a favorite announcement you like to hear?

As a kid, were you excited to hear that school was canceled due to snow? Maybe you dread meetings and you *love* to hear someone say, "If there's nothing else, then we'll end this meeting here." Perhaps you're a big music or movie buff and you lose it whenever your favorite musician or director/actor announces their next release date.

Back in university, there was a group of students who called themselves The Scavengers. Whenever one of them ran across free food on campus, they'd message everyone in the group. Soon they would converge. Sometimes you'd hear someone yelling "Scavengers!" to call everyone over.

In this passage, we learn about John who was sent to announce the coming of Jesus.

### 3. Would you rather *be* a celebrity or *work for* a celebrity?

Perhaps you would love to be a famous athlete, K-pop idol, movie star, TikTok influencer, or investor mogul in the Capital Room. You'd be so happy as people recognize you on the street, crowds cheer your name, and everyone would die to be noticed by you. You'd also be rich with tons of privileges.

Maybe you don't want all that attention and prefer staying low. You could be the celebrity's agent, personal trainer, makeup artist, chef, or publicist. You won't get the fame or recognition. Instead, your job is to make the celebrity more and more famous.

John wasn't sent to make himself famous. His job was to get the people ready for the real VIP, Jesus.

## LET'S DIG IN

### 4. Why did John come?

This John is not the John who wrote the Book of John. He's often called "John the Baptist" because he did a lot of baptizing. Check out Luke 1:5-25 and 1:57-80 for more background on John.

**Sent from God.** While the Word has the attributes of God (e.g., eternal existence, creation power, source of life), John is sent from God. John is not God. He's also sent on a mission. In the Old Testament, God sent prophets (e.g., 2 Chronicles 24:19; 25:15; Jeremiah 7:25; 25:4; 28:9; 35:15; 44:4; Ezekiel 2:3). They usually called God's people out on doing lots of evil. Instead of repenting and asking God for forgiveness, the people often killed the prophets (Luke 11:47-50). John's taking on a similar role.

This is a critical moment in history. The last Old Testament prophet was Malachi, who prophesied around 430 B.C. Afterward, God stopped sending prophets. The Jewish historical book 1 Maccabees mentions that "prophets ceased to appear among [the Israelites]" (1 Maccabees 9:27). There was a 400ish-year period of silence as the people waited for God to speak. (400 years ago, Samuel de Champlain was settling what would become Quebec

City.) Now, after the long wait, God was sending a prophet to prepare His people for something bigger than a prophet (Luke 20:9-16).

**Witness about the light.** The Greek word for witness is μαρτυρία (martyria), from where we get the word martyr. To bear witness means, “to confirm or attest someth. on the basis of personal knowledge or belief, bear witness, be a witness.” (BDAG). It’s similar to why we have witnesses today in court. The judge and jury weren’t at the crime scene and people didn’t have cameras, so they needed witnesses to say what they saw or experienced.

He’s there to tell people about the light, not himself.

**That all might believe through him.** We recently went through 1 Corinthians 1-4. The Corinthian church had factions. Paul called them out for placing their identity and status on their human leaders. Just like Paul, John wasn’t about getting a personal following. He wanted people to believe in Jesus because only Jesus could save them. He was just the messenger, preparing their hearts for Jesus’ arrival.

## 5. Who did the religious leaders think John was?

After hundreds of years, a wild prophet appears. He’s wearing camel hair with a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey, while living in the desert away from society (Mark 1:6). He’s telling everyone God’s about to do something big. Who is this he? Religious leaders want to know, so they send investigators with a few theories.

**The Christ/Messiah.** Christ isn’t Jesus’ last name. Χριστός (christos) is the Greek equivalent of מָשִׁיחַ (masiah), where we get Messiah. Christ and Messiah both refer to someone who is anointed with oil. In the Old Testament, God would tell people to pour oil on someone’s head (anoint) to indicate they were God’s special person for a special purpose, like priests (Leviticus 4:16) and kings (1 Samuel 24:6). A thousand years before John’s time, God prophesied that a descendent of King David would sit on the throne forever (1 Samuel 7:11-16). The Jewish people waited for God’s special king to come back to sit on the throne.

The Jewish people had lots of supposed indicators for when the Messiah would come, such as the Nile stopping, the Roman Empire collapsing, or an entire generation of God’s people behaving “entirely innocent” (Sanhedrin 98a). We also see the Samaritans were looking forward to the Christ as well (John 4:25, 28-29).

**Elijah.** John and Elijah dressed pretty similar, an animal hair outfit with a leather belt (Matthew 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8). They also preached a message of God’s judgment (Matthew 3:1-12; 1 Kings 21:17-24).

Elijah’s life didn’t end in death. God took him alive into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). God later told His people He would “send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Malachi 4:5). The Jewish people waited for Elijah to come down before a pivotal moment in history.

This guess was close to the truth, but not quite. John was not the actual Elijah but came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). In a sense, he’s not the original Elijah, but the sequel.

**The Prophet.** Moses told the people that God would raise a prophet like himself (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18). Moses saved God’s people when they were in slavery and oppression under the Egyptian Kingdom. Now God’s people were being oppressed by the Roman Empire, so they were looking for Moses 2.0 to save them.

## 6. What was John preparing?

John quotes Isaiah. The illustration is of God traveling to His people. The local geography meant this wouldn't be a nice, flat, straight trek. There will be many winding paths, going up and down. Check out this video of hiking from Jericho to Jerusalem (<https://youtu.be/q6Uz9gldm68>). It's stunningly beautiful, but difficult desert terrain.

So, Isaiah and John are saying, "God is coming! Let's make His trip as smooth as possible!" Imagine getting dump trucks and dynamite to flatten the mountains and fill the valleys. Then bring in steamrollers and pavers to smooth out the rocky trails.

Of course, John and Isaiah aren't calling for a monumental infrastructure project. God doesn't need to walk on the ground. It's a metaphor for hearts. Earlier in Isaiah, God declared that His people "draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). They approached God physically, but inside they were a million miles away. God wants to close the gap between Himself and His people's hearts.

In Luke 1, an angel tells John's father that's John's mission: "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the *hearts* of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:16–17).

So, get your hearts ready! God is coming!

## LET'S GROW

### 7. How can you prepare your heart for Jesus?

I don't know what's going on with you, but I can offer two suggestions to help you process.

**Find Out / Remember who Jesus is and what He's done.** If you don't believe in Jesus, find out about who He is and what He did. If you do, great! Don't forget the basics.

Jesus was and is God. He created the universe that we live in. He made us, too.

Instead of loving and appreciating Him, all of us prefer to love other things more. We love comfort, distraction, people's approval, material objects, or our autonomy. Instead of loving people the way God wants us to, we only love others when they make us happy. We ignore people who don't benefit us and get angry when they get in the way. When we do that, we sin. We break His laws and separate ourselves from Him. And because God is just, we deserve punishment.

Even though we've turned away from Jesus, He still loves us so much He came to die on the cross and take on our punishment (Romans 5:8). When we celebrate Christmas, we're celebrating Jesus coming down to fulfill His mission to save us from our sins.

If we believe that He died for us and turn to follow Him, we can be saved from our sins (Romans 10:9). We will be forgiven and we can have a relationship with Jesus that goes on into eternity (John 17:3).

**Clear the way for Jesus.** Just like any relationship, things can get in the way of maintaining that relationship. What's preventing you from abiding (spending time with) Jesus? For example, Christmas season is *full* of

activities and festivities. Are you so busy thinking about and planning these events that you don't have time to pray and read the Bible? Gifts are great, but are you spending so much on random, soon-forgotten gifts you're unable to bless others meaningfully with your money?

Are there sins you need to repent of? You can't love people when you're harboring anger or spreading gossip. Maybe you need to forgive or spread encouragement. It's hard to envision how Jesus wants you to experience Him this Christmas when your mind is filled with sexual fantasies or you're trying to enforce your own vision for Christmas.

**Get Jesus to help you.** I know it isn't easy. I struggle, too. We all do. Praise Jesus that He knows that we struggle (Hebrews 4:15-16). Ask Him for help! Ask other Christians to pray for you and encourage you. Remember, Jesus wasn't satisfied looking down at us from heaven. He came down to earth to rescue us out of love. Jesus *wants* to help us.

### **8. What light do we bear witness to?**

If someone looked at our Christmas season activities, what would it point to? Would it point to the light of fun activities or the joy of gifts? Would people think that the focus is on family or tradition? Of course, those aren't bad, but they aren't Jesus.

As Pastor Vinh mentioned in his sermon, we naturally avoid the light or we will make ourselves the light. We may focus on the fun, Santa/winter stuff while with non-Christians in order to avoid talking about our faith. We can make ourselves the light by trying to be the charismatic life of the party, drawing people to ourselves. Do we work extra hard to decorate and clean our homes to make the perfect potluck place so we can be recognized as master hosts?

How can we bear witness to Jesus' light?

### **9. Who can we bear witness of Jesus to?**

We all have people around us who don't know about Jesus. Think about your shift manager, mortgage broker, workout partner, or professor. How about your neighbor, kid's friend, or doctor? Who can you share Jesus with?

Take some time to share with the group. Don't forget to pray. Ask Jesus to give you opportunities to share and to prepare their hearts for the Good News.