



LC STUDY GUIDE
"Your Place In God's World"
The Passage: John 1:19-30
January 22- February 4

How to use the LC Study Guide

Hello Leaders! Thank you for your ongoing commitment to pursue Christian community and the study of Scripture that leads to life transformation in Christ and strives to serve "the other."

These studies have been designed with the following aspects in mind:

1. To facilitate a discussion on the passage of Scripture that was preached that particular Sunday using the Inductive Bible Study Method (not necessarily on the themes of that particular sermon). In summary, this method stresses "Observation" (what the reader can see from the text), "Interpretation" (what we can learn when we study the text with various tools, commentaries, and resources), and "Application" (how we can apply the Scripture to our lives).
2. Groups using this study range from the new leader to the highly experienced. Groups themselves have their own context. This study attempts to hit the middle. The stronger studies require about an hour or two of leader preparation to contextualize this resource to the needs and personalities of your group.
3. In addition to prep time, please spend time in prayer during preparation and before and after the study. It's the power of the Holy Spirit that illuminates the Word of Scripture and we are humbled that He uses our combined efforts as part of this work. (For more tips on using this study, please see the endnotes.)

As always, we are so grateful for you, your gifting, your servant leadership and all that you do for the cause of Christ. Please let us know if we can help you in any way.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Tim, on behalf of the LC Team

Introduction

We continue to unpack the Scripture passages from our current sermon series, "Your Place in God's World." Today we look at John 1:19-30. We want to appreciate the text and also ask, "What can we learn from John the Baptist's lens of calling and vocation?"

John 1:19-30

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

○ – Spend a few moments slowly reading this passage.

Identify the number of assumptions that are made and examine how John responds to them.

○ – In this scene, the religious establishment has become aware of the popularity of John the Baptist. People are actually leaving their towns and looking for this man in the wilderness so that he can baptize them. Questions linger like, "Is this guy the Messiah?" and "What is really going on here?" If you were one of the priests and Levites sent to investigate what was going on, what would your report have sounded like upon returning to Jerusalem?

** For context: Notice that the Jerusalem leaders didn't send Sadducees or even Pharisees to open the conversation with John; they sent people he would be more familiar with. They knew that John was the son of a priest (Zechariah) and a student of Hebrew Scripture. He might therefore engage more thoughtfully with priests and Levites (the ancient Israelite tribe of priests and current temple functionaries).*

There is speculation that John was a member of the Essenes (a more fringe sect of the Jewish order that focused on repentance and rejection of the establishment) or a member of the Qumran community (pronounced Koo-m'ran). While there are a few similarities between John and the Essenes, the New Testament and the early church fathers never link them together. Also of significant note, John's message only pointed to the one that "would come after him" in Jesus and not toward Essene teaching.

I – The reader gets a sense that John is confident in he who is not, who he is, and his why. The ones who the Pharisees sent ask if he is Elijah and then the Pharisees ask outright, why was he baptizing? Look at John's response. Why do you think he didn't directly answer the "why" question?

ELIJAH: For centuries many Jewish believers looked for the return of Elijah before the great and terrible "day of the Lord" from Malachi 4:5, as Elijah didn't die but was taken up into heaven according to 2 Kings 2:1-12. John rejected that he was Elijah. It's helpful to remember that Jesus referred to John as having the spirit of Elijah but not inferring that he was actually Elijah reincarnated. Again, John knew who he was not and who he was.

BAPTISM: Baptism is a fascinating subject in the New Testament. John was using baptism as a practice for repentance and cleansing, not the way we use it as identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus, which of course, had not yet happened. There are many possibilities but in addition to the call of repentance, it was also a subversive moment of identification away from the religious establishment and a pointing towards what was next. In effect, the baptized were responding to John's message of his preparing the way. And those responding were saying, "We are publically withdrawing our identification from the traditional Jewish establishment and waiting in line for this Messiah." John does more than directly answer the question. It's beyond the practice of baptism; his why is to tell everyone of the coming Deliverer.

A – We return to the question from the beginning. What can we learn and apply about calling and vocation from John the Baptist? How does this scene help us when others are trying to entrap us in their narrative of us? How can we live freely in the calling and mission the Lord has given us?

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching” rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.