

SESSION 5

JOHN: SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS



If you could be a spokesperson for any product, what would it be?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLsecondnature

THE POINT

*Christ-centered living chooses
to exalt Christ, not self.*

THE PASSAGES

John 1:26-34; 3:26-30

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The moon is about 245,000 miles away from earth, but it is moving through the universe at 2,300 miles per hour right now. The moon is covered with thousands and thousands of craters. The largest crater is 181 miles in diameter and about eight miles deep. The moon may have a lot of craters, but one thing it doesn't have is light.

The moon is the brightest thing in the night sky. You can still find your way through the dark by the "light" of the moon, but that "light" is not coming from the moon at all. All the moon can do is reflect the light from the sun.

If the moon appears to be that bright, then the sun must be absolutely dazzling. In fact, looking at the moon makes me wonder about the sun. The moon points me to the sun.

In a similar way that the moon reflects the sun, followers of Jesus live in such a way as to reflect the true Light of the World. It must be our single-minded focus to reflect Him and exalt Him—not ourselves—in all things.

John 1:26-30

26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

KEY WORD:

the Lamb of God (1:29)—In the Jewish sacrificial system, a flawless lamb was offered for the atonement of sins. Jesus, God's sinless Son, offered Himself to provide forgiveness for sins.

The birth of John the Baptist was, to say the least, unusual. John's mother and father loved the Lord and yet were without a child, which in that culture was often seen as a sign of divine displeasure. Then came the day when Zechariah was performing his priestly duties. An angel appeared before him and told the priest his wife Elizabeth would bear a son. The angel said his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born; people everywhere would rejoice at his birth; he would turn many people back to God; and he would be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1:5-17).

But this is where the story of John the Baptist takes an interesting turn. John moved out into the middle of the desert. He lived as a hermit, wore clothes made out of camel hair, and ate locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:1-4). He may have had a wild look in his eyes, and he went around quoting obscure passages from the prophetic Scriptures about making paths straight and preparing the way of the Lord. As if that weren't enough, he made a point to

insult pretty much everyone of importance. For example, he called the religious Pharisees a “generation of vipers” (v. 7). He publicly rebuked the ruler of the region and later got himself thrown in prison and ultimately beheaded (14:3-10; Mark 6:17-28).

From an earthly standpoint, we might look at John the Baptist and see a life of wasted potential. We might see someone who, even before his birth, was destined to greatness and then threw it all away. Or we might see someone who realized that true significance—true greatness—is found when we lose ourselves in pointing to the greatness and salvation of Jesus

All John’s life work can be summed up in John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God.”

“Don’t look at me, look at Him. I’ve just been paving the way. You want to look at my hair and my clothes and my lifestyle? Well, look, but realize that everything about me is about him. Look! Here comes the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” John would have utterly wasted his life if he had spent his effort on anything except Him who was eternally valuable—the Lamb of God.

We would do well to take a lesson from John, for we fill our schedules and spend our effort on things that are going to burn away. If the renown and honor of Jesus Christ is not the driving factor behind everything in our lives, then it makes no difference how hard we try at them—they will be utterly insignificant. But if we get behind what God is about—that which has eternal value—then we can be sure our lives will not be wasted. Our lives are not wasted if we do what John did. John pointed people to Jesus. Every part of our lives should scream to a world that needs to see: *Look! Here is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!*

How does our culture determine greatness?

QUESTION #2

John 1:31-34

31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

John pointed to the greatness and salvation of Jesus. But verse 31 sounds a little confusing, because John and Jesus were related. They had known each other since they were born. How, then, could John say he didn't know Jesus?

It's the same reason all of us can say we didn't know Jesus. There was a time when we might have known facts and stories about Jesus, yet we didn't believe in His true identity and confess Him as Lord. At some point, though, we had a personal encounter with Jesus. This was the moment when all the stories and all the facts became reality for us. This was the moment when we began to see Jesus as He really is.

John certainly got a glimpse at who Jesus really is at His baptism. John saw that Jesus is the Messiah, the One and only son of God.

That moment of clarity might not have been as dramatic for you as it was for John. Perhaps you realized the truth about Jesus while sitting in a church service. Or maybe it was through a conversation with a parent or a friend. But having believed in Him, you were deeply and irreversibly changed. The old was gone, and the new had come as you became a new creation, born again in Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are His witnesses—the ones who steward the message of the gospel and share how our lives have been changed by our

encounters with Jesus. All our testimonies, though they might be varied in their details, have a few critical things in common we can use as we point to Jesus.

- ▶ **Who we were.** Before Christ, we were dead in our sin—without hope. We were objects of God’s wrath (Eph. 2:1-12). Without God’s intervention, this is the only existence we would have for all eternity. As witnesses to God’s grace, however, we no longer need to shy away in shame of what we once were. By remembering and testifying to our lives before Christ, we bear witness to the amazing and sustaining grace of what God has done for us.
- ▶ **Who Jesus is.** Jesus is the main Person in our testimony; we bear witness not about ourselves, but about Him. We are but supporting characters as we recount who Jesus is and how He saved us from our sin. As we talk about who Jesus is, we must also bear witness to the gospel. We must help others see the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We must be faithful to explain the consequences of sin, and how Jesus’ death alone can bring us into His family.
- ▶ **Who we are.** We can also bear witness to who we are now. If we are truly alive in Christ, then we will have a continually growing understanding of Jesus. The fruit that comes from our saving encounter with Jesus should be evident to others. In fact, Peter tells us we should live such good lives in the world that, even those who accuse us of wrongdoing will see our good deeds and give glory to God (1 Pet. 2:12).

What are some key moments that have shaped your understanding of Jesus?

QUESTION #3

John 3:26-30

26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

Following Christ means embracing a posture of self-denial. It means choosing not to gratify our own desires and living instead in surrendered obedience to Jesus. It also means we choose to lift Him up instead of ourselves. John embodied this spirit of pointing to Jesus.

DIGGING DEEPER**BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM**

To clarify for his disciples what he meant, the Baptizer used a typical Jewish type of parable, drawn from Jewish marriage customs. At that time the bridegroom normally selected one or two close friends to escort the bride to the bridegroom's marriage chamber and to wait outside the room or tent for the bridegroom's shout and often for

receipt of tokens that the marriage had been consummated with his virgin bride. Such friends of the bridegroom were thus able to certify to the wedding guests that the consummation of the marriage had taken place and the joyous festivities could continue (cf. 3:29). John gladly accepted his role as a friend of the bridegroom.

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, vol. 25a of *The New American Commentary*, gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1999), 191-192.

It's important to remember that John also had followers—many followers. He was a popular preacher, a dynamic and fearless personality, and a man of reputation. John's chief goal always had been to point people to Jesus, and over and over he deflected the attention people tried to give to him. He knew His life's purpose was to point people to the Lamb of God. Once Jesus began His ministry John's role seemed to diminish. And John was OK with that.

John's followers became concerned when Jesus' popularity began to grow, because His popularity was costing John some of his own. John's response? "*Good!*" John had built his own reputation, platform, and résumé for one reason alone: he knew the only way to build something eternally valuable was to point others to Jesus.

This is easier said than done. We live in a world of personal advancement. Many people judge their self worth by their number of "likes" or how many "followers" they have. We have so many tools at our disposal—all very useful in drawing attention to ourselves.

What are some symptoms of a life that is self-focused?

QUESTION #4

How can we rebel against this culture of self, and instead, like John, deny ourselves and point others to Jesus? Here are three ways:

- ▶ **Find your identity in Christ.** Our identity is that which, deep within us, tells us who we are. For most of us, our identity is wrapped up in what we do or our perceived reputation. But we must remind ourselves that we are the children of God. This is our true identity—the one we will carry into eternity.
- ▶ **Find your worth in Christ.** Similar to our identity, many of us struggle with the concept of self-worth. We base the quality of our personhood on the opinions of others. But Jesus has shown us the true measure of our worth through His death at

Calvary. We are worth the crucifixion of the Son of God. Now, having been freed from the slavery of others' opinions, we can live to point others freely to Jesus.

- ▶ **Find your applause in Christ.** Everyone likes to be recognized. Most of us like it far too much. We live for the moment when others congratulate us for our morals, values, and positions on particular issues; and we are crushed when they withhold their praise or criticize. Not John. John made up his mind that only one opinion truly mattered—the opinion of the One he served. Later on in His ministry, Jesus Himself validated John's work, informing the crowds that John would be great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 11:11).

What are some practical ways we can decrease so that Christ may increase?

QUESTION #5

SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS

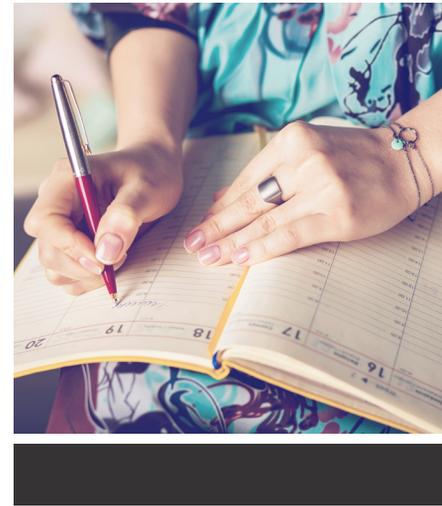
<i>Areas that demand my attention</i>	<i>Percentage of time I give to these</i>	<i>Percentage of time needed when Jesus is my primary focus</i>
_____	_____ %	_____ %
_____	_____ %	_____ %
_____	_____ %	_____ %
_____	_____ %	_____ %

LIVE IT OUT

How will you choose to exalt Christ this week? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Memorize.** Memorize John 3:30—“He must increase, but I must decrease”—and let it drive your words and actions.
- ▶ **Plan.** Take a personal inventory of your life in recent months. Determine who or what your life points to. Consider the steps you need to take in order to place the focus of your life rightfully on Jesus.
- ▶ **Profess.** Write out your testimony using the three points on page 131, expressing your story in a way that keeps all the focus on Jesus. Pray for an opportunity to share your testimony.

Your life is going to point to something. Your clothes, your relationships, and your speech are all signposts pointing somewhere. The question is whether you will take an active stance in making sure all those things point to Jesus.



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLsecondnature**