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July 1, 2018

## JOHN 1:1-5

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the people you've used over the course of history, in particular those who are used by you to pen the words of God so that we might be able to read them now and understand more of who you are. We thank you that those aren't just the ideas that writers wrote down, but you used their ideas as they were writing them and orchestrated your Holy Spirit's presence in their processing so that as they wrote down those words they became the very words of you. We don't take that lightly. We take it seriously. So as we look at your word today, Lord, we recognize that you speak to us and we're asking you to do that. You know what we need today, each one of us. So teach us and inspire us and encourage us from your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today we start this new book. I'm really excited about it. Now we teach in our church verse by verse through the Bible. There are other ways to teach. If you go to other churches you'll see that they might do a series on evangelism and a series on family and another series on finances. There's nothing wrong with that. That's a great way to teach and we can get inspired by pastors who preach that way. But there's something about preaching through the Bible verse by verse, though, that's very attractive to me. I like it because I never know what's coming next. There's an adventure about it.

As such, I know what the passage is for next week. I know that we're going to continue on with John 1. I was going to go all the way through verse 18 today, but as the Lord worked it into my heart, I just felt like 1-5 is where we need to be. So we'll pick it up in verse 6 next week. I know what the passage is, but I don't know exactly what God's going to do in my heart over the next seven days before I teach next Sunday. That adventure is something I really enjoy.

I enjoy coming to God's word and opening it up and knowing that, as God's word says, it's living and active (Hebrews 4:12). That means that if I open it today and read it, it will be different than how I read it five years ago or ten years ago or even last week. I may get something new out of it, or I will get something new out of it today than I did before. I can go back and read my sermons from years ago that I preached on the gospel of John. I've been a pastor for thirty-eight years or so and I've preached a lot of sermons. So I can go back and look at those sermons. But if I look back at them, they're somewhat dry. It was what God was doing in my life then. Now He's doing something different. I have never preached through John at this time of my life. This is new. God is going to do something in my heart and I intend to share that with you. I just enjoyed meditating on this passage that we're going to look at today.

So I'd like you to stand with me and we're going to start today by looking at the first verses in John 1:1-5. I hope you have your Bibles, you're open them up, you're reading along in your version of the Bible. This is the NIV that I've chosen to use today. So let me read these verses that will get us started in the very beginning of the gospel of John.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

You may be seated.

The scene was quiet in the church as it's come to the place we are now. There haven't been a lot of writings going on. Paul's writings are continuing on, but the gospel writings that took place maybe even twenty years beforehand have been out for a while. And now John feels this burden to share something else and to write down the story of Jesus in a completely different way than the first three gospels that have already been shared.

The person, John, was a disciple of Jesus Christ. We learn how Jesus came to know John, or maybe John came to know Jesus, in Matthew 4. Here's the story. In verse 18 it says – *As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.* And that changed John's life. He became one of the twelve disciples.

But he wasn't just one of the twelve apostles. He was one of an inner circle of apostles. We have him recorded as three of the apostles, including John, who went with Jesus on special events. For example, Jairus' daughter was dead and Jesus raised this little girl from the dead. The Bible tells us that Peter, James, and John were there. There's an inner circle of disciples.

There was a time when they were up on the mountain (we call it the Transfiguration), this bizarre experience where Jesus turned into light. The light was so bright and blinding they covered their eyes. It was so much they just fell down on the ground. Three disciples were there to see this – Peter, James, and John.

The night before the crucifixion, Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, "Would you come out with me? I want to go pray about to tomorrow's events." They didn't fully understand what was going to happen, but He did. So as they were there, Jesus went off a little ways further and they saw that He was praying in agony.

John knew Jesus personally. In fact the Bible tells us five times in this gospel of John that he's *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. The reason it's described that way is because John seemed to be the closest person to Jesus on this earth, that He shared with the most. The Lord's Supper, the

last meal that they had together, John sat right next to Jesus. It even says he was reclining on Jesus next to him. John had this personal relationship.

I suppose I favor the gospel of John in a special way because of its personal interaction, its personal descriptions, and its personal call for each one of us. John was there at the crucifixion of Jesus, and from the cross Jesus said to John, “John, take care of my mother.” From the cross that’s what He did. He calls to John and says that. John had this special relationship. It was John who was also in the upper room when Jesus rose from the dead and came into the upper room there, made Himself known to them. He was there. He was there the second time when Thomas was there as well. He was there to experience Jesus in that dimension of His resurrected life. John was there at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down and empowered people with all these languages. Peter preached a sermon and people got saved. John saw that. He experienced that personally.

Now John is older. It’s been many years since those events took place. John has had a lot of opportunity to see what’s going on, to experience life. And he sees people not experiencing the life that he’s experiencing. John knew something that he wanted to communicate to everyone else. How is he going to communicate that message? He’s just burdened with this and feels the need to pen something down and send this message out and this letter to people. What is he going to say? How is he going to start? What is the message that he’s trying to communicate?

Well he wants to be different than the other gospel writers that three of them already wrote. And he’s not going to write to the other audiences that Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote to.

Matthew, his book is written to the Jews. So when you read it, it is rich with prophecies from the Old Testament. So that the Jewish people can see that He is the Messiah, the King of the Jews. The gospel of Mark was written to the Romans and shows the authority of Jesus, the servanthood of Jesus in His life. We have the busiest examples of Christ’s life in the book of Mark. Now Matthew had a lineage that took him to a kingly origin. Mark doesn’t have a lineage at all. Why? Because servants, that’s not important.

Luke, on the other hand, was a very educated guy. He was a doctor. And when he wrote his book, his desire was to communicate that Jesus was the ultimate man, because he was writing to the Greeks, who of course had the Spartan games and they viewed man as very important. He wanted them to know Jesus is a man’s man. So He is referred to as the Son of Man, and His lineage takes him back to Mary, the humanity of Jesus.

Now John has seen all of that. Those are around, but he wants to write something different. John has this idea that he wants to communicate and he’s trying to figure out... You know he’s got all the information in his mind. I know that some of you have a book that you could write. It’s one thing to have a message, it’s another thing to get it down on paper. And you could frame your story, your life message into a very interesting dialogue that we could read. That’s what John is thinking. How am I going to write this down? What am I going to say?

He describes his struggle a little bit as he’s writing in the gospel of John 21:25. He says – *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the*

*whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.* So John has to pick and choose the things that he's going to share with us. Some of them are the same that Matthew, Mark and Luke share. Some of them are different.

But he has a message he wants us to understand. It's a message that has to do with life. That as John is looking at these people that are all around him, he wants to write a letter that's to the whole world, not just to a particular geographical area. He wants everybody to understand there is life. There is a deeper life, guys. You're moving around doing what you're doing. There's something more than this. I want you to understand what that is. He has this passion. He wants people to know there is more to life.

I'm sure you experience the same thing that John was experiencing. When you look around at people who are just living their lives every day. Get up, get their coffee, go to work, deal with whatever they have to do, come home, have some entertainment, go to bed. Next day, it's the same thing again. And he's seeing these things. There's something much more important. This life I want to share with you, John is saying, is strategic.

In fact, he even quoted Jesus, takes Jesus' words about life so that we can understand what this life is all about. He says in these words the quotation – *The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I come that they might have life and have it abundantly.* There is something really big here that John wants us to understand. There's more to life than what we're doing right now. There's another whole plan that adds meaning, significance to everything that we're doing. It helps us rise above the challenges that we're experiencing. Good things can be there and it's this life abundantly that he wants us to know, he wants us to experience. He wants to get to know this and that's John's whole gospel. That's why I've entitled this whole series "Get a Life in Jesus." Because that's what John is saying. He's saying there is a life that's much bigger than you know.

Now John actually writes in his book the purpose of his book. So let's look at that purpose. He says in John 20:30-31 – *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John's whole goal is to get the people around him and the people that are just living their lives to understand there's something more. There's abundant life waiting for you, eternal life waiting for you. And eternal life doesn't start after you die. It starts right now when you make a commitment to Jesus Christ and embrace Him as the authority, as the Lord of your life.

So how do we start a book like that? How do we come to this very important idea that he wants to communicate? See, he has this idea. John has this goal, this theme that he wants to communicate to people this idea that there's a bigger life.

Where do we start? He says let's start in the beginning. All the other writers start somewhere else. But John takes us all the way back, and you ought to be thinking when he says *in the beginning* about the very first words of the very first book of the Bible. Remember that? *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* So he's going back all the way to the beginning. He'll even go before that, but he's going to the very beginning, back to creation.

He's going to use this idea, this term to describe what he wants to share. He's going to use the term *Word*, which is translated *logos*. Now if you were living at that time, the word *logos* would mean a lot to you. It's a word like philosophy or ideas or meaning of life. It's a very significant word. So it wasn't a foreign word to them. He didn't make this up to be like the communication vehicle between God and us, although that's what it means. The word *logos* is this idea of the grand philosophy of life.

There were a lot of philosophies at that time. The Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato and Socrates and many others, had lived 500 years before that. Their philosophies were all kind of intertwined into society. People had ideas and these ideas then... When he says the *Word* or the *logos*, *in the beginning was the Word*, that's not anything dramatic. Everybody knows that the philosophy of life starts in the beginning. That's basically how this book starts. This *logos*, this meaning of life, this trying to understand that philosophically started in the beginning. So that's nothing new.

And then he says *the Word was with God*. So now this idea of God for many people isn't a personal being, it's just an idea. If you talk to people about God today who are not Christians, often they'll believe in God, but it's not a personal God. It's just this big idea. The compilation of all the best things that you can think of or kind of the purpose in life or the fate or whatever, that's God. And so that too is not revolutionary to say *the Word was with God* or *the Word was God*. That's all kind of this idea, that big idea of life in there.

What is revolutionary is when he uses the inverse too. The second verse says *He was with God in the beginning*. Now this is very different. This is stunningly different than anything anybody else would think of when they think of *logos* because now he's personalized it and he's made it a person. We're going to see in verse 14 that this person became flesh and dwelt among us. He's referring to Jesus Christ. That's not how he starts. He's talking about the *logos*, the word. The philosophy of life, the meaning of life is what he's talking about.

When I was in college I went to secular university. I learned so much. I'm so grateful for my college years. I tried to live out my faith in my college years and I enjoyed taking a number of philosophy courses. My favorite class in philosophy was one class... I don't even remember the name of the class. But the whole purpose of this semester was to talk about "what is truth?" What is truth? I figure I'm signing up for that, I'm getting into this class because I already have the answer. This is not going to be a problem for me.

So there's only like ten people in the class and the class was set up in a circle. We're all sitting around. It's like a symposium. We're all talking. So we start out the question "what is truth?" and I raised my hand. I got it! The truth is in the Bible. And if we will follow the rules of the Bible then we will have the truth that we need. Teacher says, "Okay, next." I'm going, "Wait, wait, wait." What I felt like saying was, "You don't say 'next' after I say that. Because I answered the question. We are done here." That's what I felt like.

And he goes "next" and the next guy starts talking and he says, "Well yeah, I don't believe in that stuff." This is what he says. "Truth for me is in the newspaper. I can find out the weather,

the sports updates from last night, what the schedule is going to be, the sales that are going on, and any relevant news I need to know for the day. That's truth for me." And I'm going, "Hmm. I've got a problem here." Because now you see my faith is being challenged in a way that I haven't been challenged before. I'm giving the Sunday School answers that I learned in Sunday School. They are not being accepted by this group of people sitting around in this symposium. So I'm feeling really uncomfortable.

So I go back to my mentors. Fred Clark was a tremendous asset for me. Dr. Fred Clark. I'd be running to him after every class. "I don't know what to do here!" Because how do I convince these people that the truth is the Bible? Because they're talking about all these things, whether there's absolute truth or truth is good for this person or there's relative truth. We're talking about... And I'm finding this a very fascinating dialogue, but I don't know how to bring my faith into that. So this guy is helping me, this Fred Clark, my parents are giving me advice about how to go back to class and try to argue some more in the midst of this.

I did this for a whole semester! It was the most frustrating class that I ever had because I don't think anybody came to know Jesus in that class. I was just getting to know Jesus myself in the midst of all of this. Not because I just became a Christian, just because now I'm being taken to a new level in my own faith.

But here's the lesson I learned. Out of that whole class, this is the lesson that I learned – worth my whole secular education was this class – and I learned that truth rests upon authority. Truth rests upon authority. Because I realized that each one of us in that room had a different authority in our lives. The guy sitting next to me, his authority was the newspaper. And so he relied on the newspaper for his choices. Other people relied on themselves or other books, valuable books that they could call upon. Or they would just say the ethics are relative. So whatever works is best. Whatever brings the greatest good, that's the authority. So I got all this stuff that we're talking about and I realized that truth rests upon authority.

Every one of us has a creed that we live by. You do, I do. Now even so does the person who's not a Christian. They have a creed that they're living with and that creed tells them what to do in this situation and that situation, how to think and how to live and how to process their emotions. That creed is what they live by. That truth is what we all have inside. But that's not absolute truth. How do we know what the absolute truth is? That's the question. This is the philosophical dialogue that we're having.

I would suggest that we all choose an authority. So somebody might choose the newspaper, but most people choose their own hearts themselves. I'm the authority about what's right and wrong. I'm the authority about what is true or not. So many choose themselves.

Well how do you prove to someone what the right... If I could show you an absolute truth, it's Jesus Christ as shown in the Bible. You know that's when I realized that this whole thing involves faith. There's a part of the logic that you can go only so far, but then there's a leap that you take and you end up trusting in something in your life. The reality is that if you trust in Jesus Christ as known in God's word and you try to make your personal truth tie into that, the more you do, the more you're going to experience blessing and life. The more you're going to

understand how you live. The more it's going to make sense to you and you're going to move forward.

I need that now. Not just back then when I was in college. Because I'm sure that part of my creed in life is not totally Christlike yet. I'm continually moving in that direction.

So it's in the midst of that kind of dialogue and philosophy that John is looking at people and he's saying, "Man, there's more to life than the newspaper here. Guys, I've got to write this down. You have to understand this person, Jesus Christ, has changed my world. Not just because of the experience I had in the past, but He's continuing to do that in my life. There is something about life that's a whole new dimension. I want to share that with you. I want you to understand what that is."

He wants to present that to them, so he uses this word *Word* to communicate that idea. Because it's not just this philosophical idea. This *Word* is not an idea. It's a person. A person that, as you can see in the next few verses, you can either accept or reject. He's now a person. Not just something you argue about. He's a person that can embody you. He's a person that you live with day and night. This is a new idea for many people and this is John's message. I think this is the message that we want to share with those people around us. People that don't have that new dimension of their life, so they're living in a dark world. So he's going to take us to this other picture.

I want to take us back to the beginning of the Bible for a moment and I want you to see how the word is used there, the word *Word* in verse 3. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said...* That means He used His voice. He used words. Notice: "*Let there be light,*" and *there was light.* The very fact that God spoke, He used words to create something. In this case He didn't take a bunch of dust or grab something from somewhere else and create something. This time He used His very words and His words created something. There was light. *God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.*

So if we go back now to our passage, we're going to see that in verse 5 John is following this idea of creation and he's taking this idea of light now. He's going to divide the world into two groups. There are those who have the light and there are those who are living in darkness. That's basically what he's saying. There are these two groups that are there. *The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.*

So what John is doing here is he's revealing to us who Jesus is. And he's doing it in a way that can touch every one of us in a very personal way because it touches our own philosophy of life. We all have that philosophy of life, how we're going to handle various things like our money or our finances or our emotions or our relationships. John wants people to know that there's a different way of living that's going to advance you further and you can have this fantastic life.

Now you might say, “I can’t have that kind of life. I’ve really wrecked my life. Dealing in the relationship department, man, I have made such a mess of my life out of relationships.” We’re going to come across a woman who had five husbands, the Bible says, and she then experienced new life in Jesus Christ. It’s powerful because this life can transcend our regrets that we have.

You might say, “Look, I’m a religious person. I’ve got this taken care of.” We’re going to come to a man in chapter 3 who’s a very religious guy, but he realized he didn’t have something. He didn’t have this life. And Jesus is going to introduce him to this idea of being born again so you can experience this new life. All of us need this. And John’s going to pick and choose the stories in order for us to understand what it means to move from darkness into light.

Here’s the key verse in verse 4. *In him was life*. There’s our key word that we’re going to see throughout the book. *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind*. We have a message that God has given to us that we can share with others. But we first have to come to the place where we understand that Jesus Christ is that life that we need ourselves and He is the light for us. Later in John He says – *I am the light of the world*, referring to Himself. He’s the one who brings this light into darkness and gives us something new that we didn’t have before. We all need to get to know that light more and more and more.

Why is it? Because the message that John wants to share is that if you have the light then you know what way to go. There’s this idea of truth that’s just really big that we need to catch that’s *logos* in our lives. There’s this life that’s so powerful.

John chooses to use the words of Jesus by quoting Him and saying this – *Jesus said to him, “I am the way* (the guy that helps you get to where you need to be), *I am the truth* (that absolute truth is what He’s saying), *and I am the life* (that superior life that you can have). *No one comes to the Father except through me.*”

So now we have this very personal dynamic for us that we recognize that yes, there are a lot of philosophies out there, there are a lot of religions out there, but there’s something that makes Christianity unique and special. It’s a personal relationship. It’s not just about a bunch of things you think or believe or do. Now it’s something that you live. It’s something about who you are. John wants us to catch this message about life. That’s what he wants to share with us so that we’ll get it. He says these words – *in him was life*. And that becomes, I think, the key idea that John is going to communicate.

So what? Let’s just pause for a moment and ask that question. Okay. So we’ve talked about philosophy. We talked about truth. We talked about ideas and we can go deep. Some philosophers go really deep and some go just a little bit deep. They all get wet. The idea is we are trying to understand what it means to live the godly life with God at the center of that.

But I want to take you to another verse that I think will bring this home for you and me so that we know what to do with it when we leave here. This idea of this grand life that God has for us and that Jesus is the light of the world. Let’s go to this idea of light.

Mathew 5:14 says this. First of all, remember He says – *I am the light of the world*. Now what he’s saying is – *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden*. Do you see that? In John He’s saying *I am the light of the world*, but in the Sermon on the Mount He is communicating to people *you* are taking that light and sharing it with other people.

We have a mission. All of us have this mission to share the gospel with other people. And the gospel is relevant to every area of our life. How are going to do that? How do you do that in a complicated world, in a complicated age?

I put a handout in your bulletin. I’d like you to take it out. It’s a tool that we can use (it looks like this) that we’ll use over the next period of time as we’re in the gospel of John. So I’m going to make reference to this over the next several months as we continue to study the gospel of John. We call it Five for Five. How can you be a light in your little world? How can you be missional about your own situation in your own life?

There are five things. Choose five people. Five people that God is placing on your heart. Ask the Lord for those. They could be coworkers, they could be friends, they could be neighbors, they could be family members. I don’t know who they are. But God will place five people on your heart. Write their names in those spaces at the bottom and do these five things for them.

Daily pray for them. That’s number one. Pray for them every day.

Number two: Touch base with them once a week. Hear their story. What’s going on? Care about them. “I want to know what’s going on in your life.” Touch base with them to listen to them and hear about what’s going on in their story. If you’re going to be the bridge, if you’re going to be the light to shine, you got to know a little bit more about what’s going on in a person’s life. Touch base with them once a week.

Number three: Surprise them with kindness once a month. It’s amazing what kindness does. It opens up the heart of a person.

Number four: Invite them into special events, birthday parties, holiday parties, fun outings, or whatever. If that’s at the office, you’re going to try to invite them into things that show value to them. Invite them into those things to demonstrate this value to them.

Number five: Look for opportunities to share your testimony or the gospel. The gospel message applies to so many areas of our lives. You may end up sharing the plan of salvation with someone to help them understand that they’re a sinner in need of a Savior and want to come to know Jesus Christ. “Let me show you and pray with you right now.” “That would be great.” But many times there’s a lot of stuff that goes on before that. We’re talking someone is just upset about something. We’re saying, “Can I pray for you? Because God answers prayer.” That’s the gospel in the midst of a caring concern for someone.

Someone this week came to me (who knows I’m a Christian) who’s not a Christian, and she said, “I’m having a problem.” She shared that problem in her life. “Would you pray for me? Put this on your prayer list.” I told her I would pray for her. It’s an opportunity now for me to go back to

her and talk to her about the gospel. It may not be the plan of salvation yet, but it could be talking to her about the power of God in her life. So we're looking for ways to share that message with people because people struggle continually.

My son was telling me yesterday that he sat with a woman who's ninety-two years old who's not yet a Christian and she was talking about the need for forgiveness. Just the need for forgiveness. I don't know whether it's a need to be forgiven or to forgive. I'm not sure. But Josh had the ability to talk to her about how the gospel message applies right here. We keep doing that kind of thing, and you know what happens? People say, "I want more of that. I want to understand that."

Who has God placed on your heart? We are lights. This is not a program. This is not an activity. This is not something you do. This is something you are. This is just the way that we practice who we are to be lights.

I'm just giving you an idea of how to be a light in your world and I want to encourage you to take this. Take it and use it over the next weeks. Allow God. I'm going to talk about it regularly. I'm going to remind you about it and I hope we'll have some testimonies about what God might be doing in your life and through you as you share the message of Jesus with other people in various contexts.

But where does it start? It starts by writing down some names that God is placing on your heart and being aware or being spiritually sensitive to the Holy Spirit in your heart. You start here. And then once He does that, where do you go? You go back and talk to Him about it and you pray. You just start right here and then allow it to flow from there and let's see what God does in the midst of that. Just an idea, a *logos*. This is a person. And when people get in touch with the person of Jesus Christ, it adds a whole new dimension to their life.

John had a passion. I think that's the same passion you and I want to have in our lives today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I think people need Jesus as much today as they did back then. We are the light of the world. God has placed us in that position. It's our job to pass that word on. Amen?