

THE TRUE LIGHT

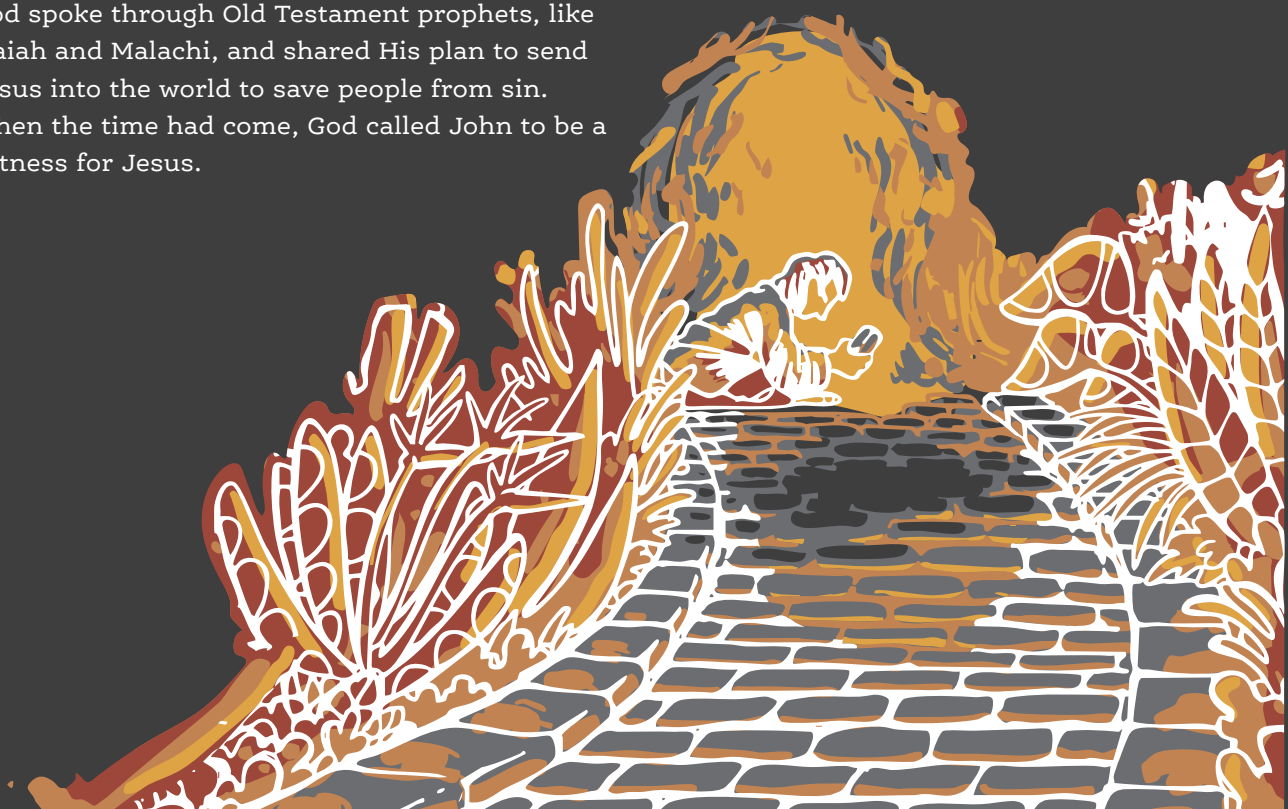
MAIN POINT.

Our lives should point to Jesus and prepare others to know Him.



CHRIST CONNECTION

God spoke through Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah and Malachi, and shared His plan to send Jesus into the world to save people from sin. When the time had come, God called John to be a witness for Jesus.



POINTING TO THE LIGHT

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Luke 1; John 1

JOHN FULFILLED A PROMISE

LUKE 1:5-17

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years. 8 When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. 10 At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. 16 He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."

THE LIGHT WAS COMING

JOHN 1:6-9

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our lives should point to Jesus and prepare others to know Him.

Leaders: As you study about John the Baptist, reflect on how you can be a witness to the true Light.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JOHN FULFILLED A PROMISE

LUKE 1:7

“The mention of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s childlessness and their being past childbearing age points to the human impossibility of the coming events and heightens the miraculous character of God’s intervention in their son’s birth. Luke assumed that his readers would recall similar situations in the OT in which God blessed the barren with a son who was uniquely called to fulfill a divine task.”¹⁹

LUKE 1:8-9

“According to some estimates, there were approximately 20,000 priests in Palestine at this time. Each of the 24 divisions ministered in the Temple for one week twice during the year. Since there were hundreds of priests in a division, they were chosen by lot to officiate at certain rituals. Such a privilege as the burning of incense, which took place daily morning and evening, would fall to the lot of a given priest no more than once during his lifetime.”²⁰

LUKE 1:17

“The ministry of Elijah is particularly helpful in describing the character of the prophetic ministry of John. It was Elijah who had issued a dramatic challenge to the people of God in the face of a militant paganism (1 Kings 18:21-40). John the Baptizer was to fulfill a similar prophetic role in calling God’s people back to their covenant with God. John was not Elijah revived from the dead, but his ministry was to be characterized by a similar prophetic earnestness, a passion for reformation, and a forthright denunciation of ungodliness. His ministry was to be, in reality, a fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy . . . (Mal. 4:5-6).”²¹

THE LIGHT WAS COMING

JOHN 1:6-9

“Although a lonely herald without credentials, [John] dared to be a prophet of the dawn in a day when the age of prophecy had been relegated to an idealized past. His only motivation was the sense of mission by which he came, his only purpose was to point beyond himself in witness, and his only message was of the light. We were introduced to many immensities in the first stanza of the Prologue, but here is a wonder worthy to stand beside them: a single man in touch with transcendence, a man obsessed with light when other men were content to live in the shadows, a man willing to renounce the securities of the status quo and to depend entirely upon the future to vindicate his hope.”²²



CONTEXT

The intertestamental period encompasses roughly four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments, from Malachi’s prophecy to the prophecy of John the Baptist. Some scholars refer to this period as the “silent years” because God paused speaking through prophets. Though the Jews lived in a fairly peaceful state under Persia, the Greek invasion by Alexander the Great led to drastic change, as Greek culture infiltrated Judean culture. Alexander’s successors continued to rule after his death, but the most notorious was Antiochus Epiphanes. He overthrew the priesthood, ordered Jews to worship Zeus, and set up a pagan altar, profaning God’s temple with pig sacrifices. Mattathias Maccabeus, a Jewish priest, and his sons led a successful but costly revolt (the Maccabean revolt); the Jews won their independence, reinstated the priesthood, and rededicated the temple in December of 164 BC (the origin of Hanukkah—an eight-day celebration of God miraculously providing oil to light the menorah). In 63 BC, Rome conquered and occupied Israel, placing heavy taxes on the people. They searched desperately for One who could save them from governmental oppression—for the Messiah. In this world of darkness, the first flicker of light appeared with the birth of John the Baptist. He would pave the way, for the true Light was coming.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Prayer and Providence

If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, He often uses prayer to accomplish His divine purpose. Though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that “prayer changes things,” and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, HELP US TO TESTIFY ABOUT THE TRUE LIGHT. MAY ALL OF OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS POINT TO JESUS AND PAVE THE WAY FOR OTHERS TO KNOW HIM. MAY YOUR LIGHT WITHIN US POINT TO TRUTH AND SHED LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

How long do most light bulbs last? History's longest-lasting light bulb is the Centennial Bulb, located at a fire station in Livermore, California. The light bulb has run continuously since its installation in 1901! The bulb's long run is likely due to its low wattage and continuous operation, which prevents the filament from breaking down.²³

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

BREAKING OR KEEPING

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN HAS SOMEONE BROKEN A PROMISE THEY MADE TO YOU?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL FOR SOMEONE TO BREAK A PROMISE?**
- **WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN SOMEONE BREAKS A PROMISE TO YOU?**

At some point, we've all broken a promise or experienced someone breaking a promise they made to us. While some broken promises are easy for us to forgive, some destroy our relationship with the other person. Today, we'll see how God keeps all of His promises to us.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do promises mean anything to you? If you've ever had someone break a promise, then you may not take them seriously. You may even put up walls of distrust, requiring people to prove themselves over time before you believe them. Kept promises build trust; broken promises damage it. When we are hurt by broken promises, we may become hesitant to believe people when they say they'll do something or be something for us. We don't want to risk being hurt again by allowing ourselves to believe someone else's words. But we must realize that God isn't like people who've betrayed us. He isn't going to break a promise. He never, ever has; He never, ever will. God's promises have either already been fulfilled in Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection, or they'll be revealed when Jesus returns to make all things new. If you've been hurt by someone, know that God deserves your trust. He won't fail you; He won't leave you; He has already given His Son for you. God is truth (John 14:6). He is love (1 John 4:8). His Word is sure.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our lives should point to Jesus and prepare others to know Him.

JOHN FULFILLED A PROMISE

READ LUKE 1:5-17

HAVE YOU EVER PRAYED FOR A LONG TIME FOR SOMETHING AND FELT LIKE GOD WAS SILENT OR LATE?

Many of us know how waiting feels. Maybe you prayed for someone's healing or for someone to overcome addiction. Maybe you begged God to send you one good friend. But that person isn't healed or is still an addict; you're still lonely. Waiting for God's plans can be really difficult, causing us to wonder if God hears us. Zechariah had begged for a child, and though God seemed unresponsive, He heard every prayer. He had a better plan to give Zechariah a child. Our timing isn't always God's timing; our plans aren't always His plans. **God hears us; He isn't ignoring us; He isn't late in accomplishing His good plans for us.**



WHY DO YOU THINK GOD CHOSE AN OLDER, CHILDLESS COUPLE TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE IN MALACHI 4:5-6?

Zechariah and Elizabeth were “well along in years,” meaning they must've been past typical childbearing age. Elizabeth had been barren also. **Age and inability worked against them, but they had been faithful to the Lord, even when their prayers felt unanswered.** God wasn't limited by their age or inability and chose this couple because of their faithfulness, challenging people's assumptions about who God could use and how He could work. **John's birth magnified God's power to do the impossible and revealed His divine plan to send a messenger to prepare His people for the coming Messiah.**



WHY DO WE OFTEN NOT TRUST GOD'S TIMING? WHEN HAVE YOU WANTED GOD'S TIMING TO BE DIFFERENT?

Leaders: Share commentary about Zechariah's opportunity to burn the incense. Imagine a life-long prayer going unanswered—or so you thought. Of all times for Zechariah to be selected from almost 20,000 priests to serve inside of the temple, he was chosen for this moment in history—the moment God chose to send him a son and to send the Messiah. Though Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child and likely felt crushed and dejected, they remained faithful. Now, they would parent the one who would pave the way for their Savior, a plan God shared over seven hundred years prior through Isaiah (40:3-5) and again four hundred years prior through Malachi! Zechariah received a special revelation from God: God had heard his prayers. **The praying, the waiting, the disappointing years came together in the light of God's purpose. What felt like God's long silence was His careful, intentional preparation.** What does this show us? **God always hears us.** You may be praying, waiting, or battling disappointment; God's plans may be different than yours; His timing may not be your desired timing. But you can know that waiting isn't punishment; silence isn't neglect. **God hears you, and His ways are good because He is good.**

THE LIGHT WAS COMING

READ JOHN 1:6-9



WHAT'S MORE COMMON: SEEKING ATTENTION FOR OURSELVES OR GIVING ATTENTION TO OTHERS? WHY?

So much about our culture drives us to crave attention. We crave more likes and followers on social media. We crave comments; we desire to be seen. Maybe social media has conditioned us to believe that everyone needs to know about our achievements and to demand some type of recognition. What's rare is throwing attention off of ourselves and onto others. In the most beautiful way, John the Baptist did exactly this. **His lifestyle gained the world's attention, but instead of keeping it for himself and allowing it to inflate his ego, John lived to point to Jesus.** John's purpose was to be a witness to the Messiah so that through his testimony, others would know the Savior. What if we lived this way? What if our lives only and always testified to the Savior and helped prepare others to meet Him?

WHY DO WE NEED LIGHT? WHAT WOULD LIFE BE LIKE WITHOUT LIGHT?

If you're scared of the dark (and who isn't?), then a world without light would be terrifying. Our imaginations would run wild, creating all sorts of new fears about what may lurk in the darkness. Light gives comfort and heat; light reveals reality instead of illusion. Without light, we couldn't thrive. The world would fall into chaos, unable to sustain human life. **We require light to live.** Is it surprising that Jesus called Himself "the light of the world" (John 8:12)? **Spiritually, His existence gives us life and helps us thrive; Jesus is truth, illuminating the reality of sin and lighting our way to the Father.**



WHY WOULD JOHN NEED TO ANNOUNCE THAT "THE TRUE LIGHT" WAS COMING? WHAT DOES THIS TELL YOU ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD?

In this context, "true" implies "perfect" or "ultimate." The writer conveys that all the lights before Jesus—the prophets, priests, and so on—had been imperfect, incomplete. **But the true Light was coming—the Light all the other lights pointed to all along (Isa. 9:2). John was the messenger yelling, "This Light, guys! This is the Light! Look to Him!"** Jesus perfectly revealed the way to the Father. But consider this: The world was so darkened by sin and hopelessness and the people were so blind spiritually that they risked missing the Light. **John's life was a mirror reflecting the Light, the Messiah, to the world.**

WRAP-UP



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT YOUR LIFE POINTS TO JESUS AND PREPARES OTHERS TO SEE HIM?

When the angel announced to Zechariah that he would have a son, he explained that the son would prepare people to meet Jesus (Luke 1:17). John was filled with the Holy Spirit, empowering him like Elijah to proclaim truth and call people to repentance. John would live in a way that pointed to Jesus instead of himself. As believers, many of us don't live this way. Sure, we may timidly share our faith in class if we absolutely have to, but most days, we're content to blend in as much as possible. **Instead of our lives pointing to Jesus—instead of our lives preparing people to meet Jesus by seeing His character reflected in us—we dim the light within us.** But the same Spirit who lived within John lives in us! Maybe you need to vocalize your faith and share the gospel with a friend or with someone who sits next to you in class. Maybe you need to love people who others ignore or make fun of in your school. Maybe you need to use godly language and drop the profanity. **Your life is a witness to Christ; your life speaks, even if you remain silent; your life can help others find the Light.**

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