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JOHN: SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS



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

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

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



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

There are a lot of fascinating facts about the moon. For example, the moon is about 245,000 miles away from the earth, and it's moving through the universe at 2,300 miles per hour. The moon is also covered with thousands and thousands of craters, the largest of which is 181 miles in diameter and about 8 miles deep.

Another interesting fact is that the moon has no light. Yes, it's the brightest thing in the night sky, and you can still find your way through the dark by the "light" of the moon—but that "light" isn't actually coming from the moon at all. The light we see coming from the moon is all reflected 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, 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 Jesus and exalt Him—not ourselves—in all things.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

John 1:26-30

²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’

The man we know as John the Baptist was literally a miracle baby. His birth was announced by an angel who said John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, that people everywhere would rejoice at his birth, and that he would be great in the sight of the Lord. (See Luke 1:5-17.)

Then John’s story took a different turn. He moved out into the middle of the desert, living as a hermit who wore strange clothes and ate strange foods. (See Matt. 3:1-4.) He also made it a point to insult pretty much everyone of importance, calling the Jewish Pharisees a brood of snakes (see v. 7) and publicly rebuking the Roman ruler of the region. Eventually, he got himself thrown in prison and was ultimately beheaded. (See 14:3-10.)

From an earthly standpoint, we might look at John the Baptist and see a life of wasted potential—someone who was destined for greatness, but threw it all away. Or, we might see John as someone who realized that true significance, true greatness, is found only 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.”

How does our culture determine who is important or worthy of attention?

QUESTION #2

In truth, all the deflected praise and the wandering in the desert were not John's refusal to live significantly. They were his refusal to live insignificantly. John would have utterly wasted his life if he spent his effort on anything except Him who was eternally valuable—Jesus Christ, 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 will burn away. If the renown and honor of Jesus Christ is not the driving factor behind school, work, family, relationships, and 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 behind—that which has eternal value—then we can be sure our lives will not be wasted.

John 1:31-34

³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Verse 31 sounds a little confusing, given that John and Jesus were related and 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 as our Savior. This was the moment when all the stories and all the facts became reality. We began to see Jesus as He really is.

I DIDN'T KNOW HIM

Use the chart below to see how your focus has changed since learning the truth about Jesus. How would you describe your primary focus during the following stages of life?

The year before you learned about Jesus:

The year after you learned about Jesus:

This past year:

How has learning to focus on Jesus helped you exalt Him rather than yourself?

"For every look at self,
take ten looks at Christ!"

— ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE

John certainly got a glimpse at who Jesus really is at His baptism. John saw that his own relative, one he thought he knew for so long, was more than just a relative. He's the Messiah.

As Christ's witnesses, our testimonies will have different details. However, we all have a few critical things in common we can use as we point to Jesus:

- ▶ **Who we were.** None of us came into the world believing in Jesus. Before Christ, we were dead in our sin—without hope. We were objects of God's wrath. (See Eph. 2:1-12.) By remembering and testifying to our lives before Christ, we bear witness to everything 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. 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 satisfy God's justice and 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 and obedience to Jesus. 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. (See 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 to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” ²⁷ John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.”

It’s important for us to remember that John also had followers. Many followers. He was a popular preacher, a dynamic and fearless personality, and a man with a stellar reputation. John knew his life’s purpose was to point people to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Once Jesus began His ministry—once the One to whom John had been pointing was fully engaged in His earthly ministry—John’s role seemed to diminish.

And John was okay with that.

John’s followers, on the other hand, were not okay with that. They 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 resume 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 for us. We live in a world of personal advancement. We admire those who are self-made men and women. We judge our own self-worth by the number of “likes” we get or how many followers retweet our clever quips. We have so many tools at our disposal, all of which are very useful in drawing attention to ourselves.

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.

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

QUESTION #4

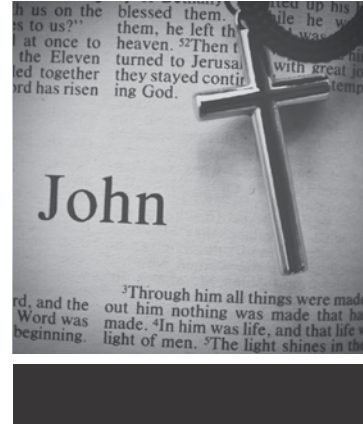
What are practical ways we can honor Jesus in our everyday lives?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you choose to exalt Christ this week, instead of yourself?
Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Memorize John 3:30—“He must increase, but I must decrease”—and let it drive your words and actions.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Write out your testimony using the three bullet points on page 104, expressing your story in a way that keeps all the focus on Jesus. Pray for an opportunity to share your testimony with someone new this week.



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'll take an active stance in making sure all those things point to Jesus.

My thoughts

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