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## Themes in the Gospel of John



Sitting in a shop in Tehran, Iran, the Persian rug depicted an ancient forest. Beautifully done, it re-created a scene in Switzerland: mountains, a waterfall, a turquoise lake, forested hillsides, and an expansive blue sky dotted with clouds.

Anyone in that shop could have spent their time noting the details: the number of knots per square inch, the fabric of the carpet, the types of dye used—all the minutiae that resulted in the rug.

Or the person could have focused, instead, on the arresting techniques and themes that gave the carpet its unique beauty: the sky reflected in the lake, the snow that capped the mountains, the verdant forest complemented by the deep green moss. The themes of the carpet combined with one another in a deftly coordinated display of beauty to manifest the splendor of that serene spot in the Alps.

This quarter we will be studying another finely crafted masterpiece. This work is not the result of a brush on canvas, or a precisely framed photograph, or a skillfully woven carpet. Rather, it is the Word of God, as artfully expressed in the Gospel of John.

Words have meaning within their contexts. For anyone to understand what Scripture intends to say, it must be studied in context—the immediate sentences, chapters, and sections, and the overall message of the Bible itself. Finally, because the entire Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, each part should be studied in the context of the whole.

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The intention this quarter will be to understand the message of John's Gospel. It is unique among the four Gospels, often focusing attention on personal interviews between Jesus and just one or two people—such as Nathanael, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, the man born blind, Lazarus and his sisters, Pilate, Peter, or Thomas. Many of these stories appear only in John.

The Gospel of John is the Word of God conveyed to us through the apostle. As with the entire Bible, the Gospel came by the will of God, rather than by the will of humanity. John was merely the willing instrument that the Holy Spirit used to convey many crucial themes: the Word (*logos*), light, bread, water, the Holy Spirit, oneness, signs, testimony, and prophecy. These themes mutually enhance and illuminate one another throughout the Gospel.

*May the Gospel of John  
carry us back to the life  
and ministry of Jesus  
Christ, whom to know  
is life eternal.*

Bible study often concentrates on the meaning of a word or a small passage of Scripture. We check the meaning of the word in a Bible dictionary. We examine the grammar, the immediate context, the historical context, and, using our analogy of the carpet, we get caught up in the examination of the number of knots per square inch, the fabric, the dyes, and the backing. All of this detail is important.

But let us not miss the big picture while examining the details. Indeed, just as the Persian carpet could transport someone to that beautiful Alpine scene, so may the Gospel of John carry us back to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. The details have a role, which is to point us toward the big picture, and in John that big picture is a divinely inspired revelation of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

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# How to Use This Teachers Edition

**“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”**

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

**Final thought:** What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.