

“If you imagine John as he has often been portrayed in medieval art – meek, mild, pale-skinned, effeminate, lying on Jesus’ bosom looking up with dove-eyes, forget that junk. He was a rugged, hard-edged fisherman like the rest: intolerant, manly, ambitious, explosive, zealous, bigoted, aggressive, impertinent.” (MacArthur)

John’s story represents how Jesus changes a life. John is remembered as the “apostle of love,” the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” the one who wrote to his “little children,” “beloved,” the one who never mentions his own name in his Gospel. “In fact John’s theology is best described as a theology of love. He taught that God is love, that God loved His own Son, that God loved the world, that God is loved by Christ, Christ loved His disciples and they loved Him, and that all men should love Christ and each other.” (MacArthur)

When John was a younger man, in his brash way, he was seeking the truth. That is another powerful theme of John’s: truth. He is considered one of the most “black and white” (no gray area) writers in the NT.

When we see John first, he is with the Baptist. No doubt as part of the “family” he had heard of the angelic visitations and proclamations and he is there “seeking.” He unhesitatingly begins to follow Jesus when John the Baptist declares that Jesus is “the Lamb of God.” We’re going to study John’s journey with Jesus, but let me remind you of three quick stories.

In Mark 9:38, John tells Jesus of a man he (acting alone) had rebuked to stop teaching in Jesus’ name because he was not one of them.

Luke 9:54. Because the Samaritans were inhospitable, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven, like Elijah, to destroy them.

Matt 20:20-28. James and John’s mother solicited Jesus that her sons might hold high places of honor in His kingdom. And in Luke 9:46-48 we see the same incident.

So, how did our rough and tumble, truth-seeking friend come to be the “apostle of love”? God tenderized him with the lessons and events of his life. John’s strong willed personality and his search for the truth lead him down an interesting road. John saw our Lord crucified: the only eyewitness of the apostles. He took care of Mary until she died. He saw all of the events of the early church; in fact, he was a significant participant in it. He experienced the death of each of the other apostles: his own brother was the first. John was around when his original teacher/friend/cousin, the Baptist, was executed. He saw Jerusalem utterly destroyed. He was exiled to the Island of Patmos where he slept on the hard rock ground in a cave. John learned the virtue of balance: to speak the truth in love. Many, if not all of us, are on this same road. We start off with God and the truth and our natural, God-given talents (full of vim and vigor) and God leads us to people, places, and events that mold and temper us into the likeness of Christ. John was merely an example of *one*, which happens to be well documented – one we get to see and experience. (look at your own example...)