

Describing spirituality can be challenging within a religiously pluralistic society. Fortunately, two Johannine scholars broached the topic of spirituality in the FG over three decades ago. Sandra Schneiders provided an early description of this concept when she wrote, “Spirituality is lived participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. While history lies *behind* the text and theology is expressed *in* the text, spirituality is *called forth by* the text as it engages the reader.”¹ Many writers prefer Gail O’Day’s description as their exemplar. “There are thus two poles in any discussion of spirituality. The first is the yearning for wholeness, the yearning to be reborn as children of God. The second pole, however, is the resistance to wholeness because of fear.”²

Beyond the landscape of Johannine studies, Carissa Sharp and Kathryn Johnson speak of “theo-focused” and “ego-focused” spiritualities. For their purposes, a theo-focused spirituality seeks to understand more about God while an ego-focused spirituality seeks individual growth and understanding.⁴

In *Spirituality According to John* Rodney Reeves notes, “John believed our spirituality depended on abiding in words — the words ringing in the ears of the first Christians who gathered to hear John’s Gospel should help them imagine a world redeemed by the Word.”⁵ Words do matter and the words included in the Fourth Gospel are still heard today. My paper will explore how accentuating repetition may illuminate one or more dimensions of Johannine Spirituality .

Repetition in the FG

Works by Thomas Popp and Gilbert van Belle in the first decade of this century re-emphasized the importance of repetition for the FG. Thomas Popp's work on stylistic features in John identified a vast number of style figures.⁷ van Belle praises the Fourth Evangelist noting, "the Evangelist is an expert in repetition and variation."

The application of repetition for understanding the Gospel of John has been sporadic at best until recently. van Belle records that Edwin A. Abbott noted that repetition is essential for exegesis in 1906, yet much scholarship which followed in the 20th century overlooked repetition as integral to the FG.⁹ Periodically other scholars would examine structural repetition in the Fourth Gospel, including H. Maynard and M.E. Boismard in the 50s and C.H. Talbert in the 70s.¹¹ Giving attention to repetition in the Fourth Gospel provides a crucial element for interpreting the text of John within the appropriate parameters formed by the text's original language and context.¹²

Types of Repetition

I prefer to categorize repetition into two types: Direct and Indirect. Direct repetition distinguishes itself through written words and phrases. A search for the word "Passover" (in Greek, *pascha*) finds ten (10) occurrences in the FG. One could assume the Evangelist's use of this term is dictated by chronology. Yet, when one examines the evidence, one notices the recurring phrase, "now the Passover of the Jews was near" with minor variations each time.¹³ Such repetition *could* be merely chronological, yet I find it more likely that the phrase is a literary technique designed to impact the reader.¹⁴

On the other hand, Indirect repetition requires a more nuanced understanding. Two examples will suffice.

1) The two words *agapaō* and *phileō* can be distinguished based on their etymology. However, most Johannine scholars recognize little distinction between the two since the Evangelist appears to interchange them from a stylistic preference.

2) The use of *hōra*. The word refers to a time period in the day (1:39; 4:6, 52-53; 11:9; 19:14, 27), a moment in the future (4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:2, 4, 21, 25, 32), and most famously Jesus's moment of glorification (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).

Repetition in John 16

I selected John 16 as a test case because of my research on repetition in the Gospel. As I have stated elsewhere, eight words found in John 1:1–18 appear more than 25 times in the text.¹⁵ At least five of those words appear in John 5, 12, 16, and 17. This paper focuses on four of those words: Receive, Believe, Truth, and Word (*lambanō*, *pisteuō*, *alētheia*, and *logos*). This section will illustrate how giving attention to repetition provides additional substance for understanding them at this juncture in the Gospel.

Receive

On three occasions, *lambanō* appears: John 16:14, 15, and 24. In the first and third cases, the word appears in the Future Middle Indicative tense.

Believe

On four occasions, *pisteuō* appears: John 16:9, 27, 30 and 31. In the first instance, belief and sin are placed in antithetical positions. In the second, the disciples are assured of receiving what they ask because they

are in a relationship of love (*phileō*) with both Jesus and the Father. The final two appearances come as the disciples confess Jesus has come from God and Jesus tests their statement with a question.

Truth

On three occasions, *alētheia* appears: John 16:7 and 13 (2x). The first modifies Jesus's words to them, and the second describes the Spirit's character and role.

Word

As a noun, *logos* does not appear in John 16. However, the concept is inherent to the material.

- 1) The chapter begins and ends with a reference to “these things I have spoken” (16:1, 4, 33).¹⁶
- 2) The demonstrative pronoun *tauta* is paired with *laleō* on two other occasions (16:6 and 25).
- 3) The verb *legō* shows up 16 times (16:4 {2x}, 7, 12, 15, 17 {2x}, 18 {2x}, 19 {2x}, 20, 23, 26, 29 {2x}) with only three not referring to Jesus as the subject for the verb.

Summary

The close proximity of RECEIVE and BELIEVE in John 16:24 and 27 draws my attention to that particular section of the chapter.¹⁷ Since these two words are presented as the WORD Jesus spoke, a triad of repetition is present within this section. Furthermore, the two *amēn*, *amēn* sayings in John 16:20 and 23, increases the volume of repetitive chords as well. Two questions require further investigation: First “What significance does this smaller segment play in the text’s discussion?” and Second, “What

significance has repetition and prior association of these three thematic ideas in the Gospel's text illuminated?"

Answering the second question provides background context for seeking responses to the first question. I draw the following responses from my recent book.

- 1) Regarding the use of RECEIVE throughout the text up to John 16.
 - a. "The act of receiving Jesus's words represents a crucial step in the judgment decision. Those who receive these words, which are the Father's words, receive no condemnation."¹⁸
- 2) Regarding the use of BELIEVE throughout the text until now.
 - b. "Believing results in confession and greater recognition of Jesus's identity."²¹
- 3) Regarding the repetition of WORD prior to John 16.
 - a. In the third chapter of John, "Three *amēn, amēn* sayings emphasize the word of Jesus, with the last two connecting his word with life-giving power."²²
 - c. "Jesus states that those who love him will keep his words; that is, his commandments."²⁴

This brief foray shows that Believe, Receive, and Word are closely related. I can now suggest that Receive and Believe form a symbiotic relationship, if not a synonymous one, around the word of Jesus. How a person engages these three ideas determines how they experience the life of the ages.²⁶ In our text, John 16:24, Jesus commands/instructs his disciples that they may now ask the Father in his name and they will receive. Jesus's words expand upon the *amēn, amēn* saying of 16:23 and signify this new relationship they experience with the Father and the Son.

Jesus develops his idea further in 16:26–27 and clarifies the Father’s love for them. Jesus identifies this new relationship to those in his presence whom the Father loves because they have loved Jesus and have already believed he came from the Father.

I now return to the first question: “What significance does this smaller segment play in the discussion?” The repeated *amēn, amēn* phrases around the *paroimia* of the woman in labor set the stage for the command by Jesus that the disciples should ask so they might receive – most probably to ask for overwhelming joy (John 16:23).²⁷ .

In John 16:26–27 the topic returns to the theme of asking specifically in Jesus’s name. Although the focus of the petition is left out in 16:26, the repetition from 16:23 indicates the disciples will ask the Father. Since they have entered into this relationship of love with the Father and the Son, they can ask the Father directly.²⁸ Following these words by Jesus the disciples are portrayed with a somewhat amazing, instant understanding of the clarity of Jesus’ words to them.

The section of the Farewell Discourse beginning in John 15:26 moves the story’s POV from the present situation to a time in the future.²⁹ These words are presented as Jesus’s final teaching to his disciples prior to the arrest scene.³⁰ In John 16:23–28 Jesus is described as speaking plainly enough for the disciples to decipher his meaning. They have now received and believed his words of truth — at least to the degree possible at that time given the model for believing portrayed throughout this Gospel.

Spirituality in John 16

The descriptions of spirituality by Schneiders, O’Day and Reeves form the lens for this paper. Schneiders’ focus rests with the text engaging the

reader. O'Day discusses a spectrum represented by a yearning for and a resistance to wholeness. Reeves describes spirituality as abiding in Jesus's words. My own work tracing the repetition of themes from the Prologue has sharpened my focus to John 16:23–28 within the larger context of 16:16–33. Some preliminary observations will frame this discussion.

1. The context, as well as the content, consists of words spoken by Jesus (and his disciples) as presented by the Evangelist.
2. The focus is on a future activity that will draw the audience further into this relationship of Love with the Father and the Son. (John 16:23, 26, “in that day” [*en ekeinē tē hēmera*])³¹
3. Jesus presents a movement along the spectrum of language, from a figurative method (*paroimia*) to an open (*parēssia*) method for communication. (John 16:25)³²
4. Jesus confirms the shift from himself as the intermediary with the Father to the disciples' direct access to the Father through the Spirit of Truth. (John 16:23 and 27)

With these four considerations in mind, I turn my focus to the aspect of spirituality in this passage. First, the disciples' connection with Jesus will continue onward through the coming Paraclete, introduced in John 14:15.³³ This Spirit of Truth³⁴ abides with them (John 14:17) because the disciples receive him while the world cannot do so. This Helper who abides with them—and in them—brings the words of Jesus to the disciples' remembrance (John 14:26). Yet this Spirit of Truth cannot arrive until Jesus departs.³⁵ The Paraclete represents both abiding in Jesus's words and the potential for wholeness — at least as Jesus describes it for the disciples.

Second, I find the statement by the disciples that they believe Jesus comes from God follows their nascent sense of understanding Jesus's plain speaking. This apparent plain speaking by Jesus most likely begins after the disciples respond with the words "we don't understand what he is saying" (John 16:19) If this starting point is accurate, then the plain speaking by Jesus includes the *paroimia* of the woman in labor. The sense of abiding in Jesus's words implies a point in the relationship when those words are viewed as coming from Jesus speaking plainly and openly. This greater understanding represents movement toward wholeness, or as O'Day described this, "the yearning to be reborn as children of God."

Third, as I examine the surrounding context through the lens of repetition the passage expands to encompass vv. 16–33 in a sort of inclusion if not an entire chiasmic structure.³⁶ In particular, John 16:16 and 33 form an *inclusio* in the message of Jesus.

- 1) Jesus is speaking in 16:16 and 33.
- 2) The disciples speak after and before Jesus, (vv. 17–18 and 29–30) and their words display an antithetic parallelism where they first admit a lack of understanding and later acknowledge a degree of understanding.
- 3) The section 16:23–31 forms two ABA' chiasmic structures with the discussion by Jesus and the disciples on figurative language forming the two centers.³⁷ (See *diagram at end or on the handout*)

In the first element of each chiasm Jesus speaks (vv. 23–24, 27–28). The topic of the first chiasm concerns asking the Father and then they will receive. In the second he mentions that they have believed that Jesus comes from the Father. The relationship between receive and believe

established throughout earlier portions of the Fourth Gospel strengthens this probable structural connection. When the disciples use the verb *pisteuō* in the perfect tense earlier at 6:68, Jesus challenges their statement of belief with his own comments forecasting a less than positive future for them, as he does now in this passage.³⁹

Where might this passage rest on Gail O'Day's spectrum of wholeness. O'Day employs the language "transformed identities" and "transformed community" on the positive end of the spectrum.⁴⁰ Within this small section we see Jesus continuing to offer the disciples a new way of living, one based in the Spirit of Truth. This new opportunity first comes to the disciples in the shape of a riddle in John 16:16, a riddle they openly confess they fail to understand. Jesus clarifies the riddle with his ensuing discussion of their forthcoming initial grief and subsequent joy. This joy arrives at the moment when Jesus will see them again, at which point full clarity will commence (John 16:23). This moment reflects that transformed identity — an identity only available after Jesus returns from a place he has yet to go at this point in narrative time. If I incorporate Schneiders' concept that the text engages the reader, then this transformed identity is made available to those hearing/reading the Gospel because Jesus has overcome death prior to them encountering this written narrative for the first time.

The figurative language Jesus employs is necessary since the disciples do not see him in the entirety of his own transformed identity. The plain speaking can only come when Jesus returns and sees them again "on that day" (John 16:23, 26).⁴¹ In John 14:1–14, Jesus talks with them of his going to the Father and of asking in his name. The repetition of those two

themes confirms the future aspect of Jesus's words. Transformed identity is only possible following his resurrection.

As a final note, this focus on repetition enhances the influence of the *amēn*, *amēn* sayings throughout this Gospel.⁴² The readers first hear this phrase when Jesus is speaking to those initial five disciples: Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and Andrew's unnamed companion (John 1:51). The narrator portrays Jesus addressing Nathanael, *legei autō*, while the quotation addresses the group, *legō humin*. "You all will see heaven thrown open and God's angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The second *amēn*, *amēn* saying is found in Jesus's words to Nicodemus, "unless one is born from above, one cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).⁴³

If the text is engaging the reader and calling forth a spirituality (ala Schneiders), these first two, *amēn*, *amēn* sayings shape for the reader/hearer a specific, mental context which may carry through to these two penultimate occurrences in John 16, as Jesus speaks of that time between this Passover moment and that time spoken of in the riddle. In this way, the Gospel might imply the promise in 1:51 is about to take place for those who have been born from above and can see God's kingdom. Those individuals in the Johannine audience who are similarly affected are the ones who ask and receive.

Conclusion

This paper explored how repetition of language from the Prologue can illuminate Johannine Spirituality using John 16 as a test case. This layering of multiple lenses can be beneficial, yet may raise more questions than it answers. First, the decision an author or audience makes concerning the

possible meanings behind the idea of spirituality proves crucial. Various proposed lexical domains for this concept will refract the light from the text differently. Our choice to accentuate Gail O'Day's early understanding of the wholeness spectrum directed this paper differently than examining a "theo-focused" or "ego-focused" spirituality would have done.

Secondly, measuring the impact of a single term's repetitious use through a Gospel can be enlightening and should continue to be explored and brought to the attention of modern students of the Fourth Gospel. Ongoing research on intratextual references will shed further light on the inner workings of the Fourth Gospel. Expanding that research to incorporate multiple terms and their combined repercussion presents a greater challenge but may amplify the light even more intensely. I chose to incorporate the terms Receive, Believe and Word due to my previous research. Truth functions as a new variable to my approach. In this instance, the noun form did not appear in close proximity to the other terms nor greatly impact the discussion on spirituality. My original, working hypothesis required adjustments throughout the research.

Finally, unveiling the Fourth Gospel's structural elements will continue to shape how modern readers view this text. The presence (or absence) of concentric parallelism in the text must be brought to light and discussed more fully, especially in the discourse sections. As Johannine scholars engage each other's proposals and facilitate open (and critical) discussion concerning this element of ancient rhetoric, readers outside the Academy might incorporate such information into their own pursuit in understanding the Fourth Gospel and Johannine Spirituality. As modern readers/hearers

gain insight into the Gospel's internal structure, the text can engage the reader and bring Johannine Spirituality to greater fruition.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Proposed Chiastic Structure

A	Jesus speaks a riddle of departure	16:16
B	Disciples repeat the riddle and about going to the Father	16:17
B'	Disciples admit to not understanding his words	16:18
A'	Jesus speaks of departing and anguish	16:19–22
C	Jesus speaks of asking the Father	16:23–24
D	Jesus speaks of figurative language	16:25
C'	Jesus speaks again of asking the Father	16:26
C	Jesus speaks of coming from the Father	16:27-28
D'	Disciples speaks of figurative language	16:29-30a
C'	Disciples speak of Jesus coming from God	16:30b–31
A'	Jesus speaks of scattering, departure, and anguish	16:32–33

¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM, "Death in the Community of Eternal Life: History, Theology, and Spirituality in John 11," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 52. (44–56)

² Gail R. O'Day, "New Birth as a New People: Spirituality and Community in the Fourth Gospel," *Word & World* 8 (1988): 54. (53–61)

³ Carissa A. Sharp and Kathryn A. Johnson, "Assessing Spirituality on Two Dimensions: Closeness to God and Focal Orientation," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 30 (2020): 49. (48–67)

⁴ Sharp and Johnson, 50.

⁵ Rodney Reeves, *Spirituality According to John: Abiding in Christ in the Johannine Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 259.

⁶ Gilbert van Belle, "Theory of Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: A Neglected Field of Research?" in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. Gilbert van Belle, Michael Labahn and Petrus Maritz, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 223 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2009): 21. (13–32)

⁷ Thomas Popp, *Grammatik des Geistes: Literarische Kunst und theologische Konzeption in Johannes 3 und 6*, Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 3 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 60–63. Identified in van Belle, 27.

⁸ van Belle, "Theory," 23.

⁹ Gilbert van Belle, "Repetitions and Variations in Johannine Research: A General Historical Survey," in *Repetitions and Variations in the Fourth Gospel: Style, Text, Interpretation*, ed. Gilbert van Belle, Michael Labahn and Petrus Maritz, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 223 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2009): 41. (33–85)

¹⁰ van Belle, "Historical Survey," 62, quoting H. Maynard, "The Function of Apparent Synonyms and Ambiguous Words in the Fourth Gospel" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1950), 426-34.

¹¹ H. Maynard, M.E. Boismard, *St. John's Prologue* (trans. Carisbrooke Dominicans, Westminster, MD: Newmann, 1957), and Charles H. Talbert, "Artistry and Theology: An Analysis of the Architecture of Jn 1:19–5:47," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970): 341–66.

¹² van Belle, "Historical Survey," 62.

¹³ John 2:13, 6:4 and 11:55 (*ēn de engus to pascha tōn loudaiōn*)

¹⁴ The combination of the two words, *pascha* and *engus*, only occurs elsewhere in Matthew 26:18. The pairing of *pascha* and *loudaios* does not occur in the Synoptics.

¹⁵ Stan Harstine, *A History of the Two-Hundred-Year Scholarly Debate about the Purpose of the Prologue to the Gospel of John: How Does Our Understanding of the Prologue Affect Our Interpretation of the Subsequent Text?* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2015).

¹⁶ See J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) ICC, on John 15:11 for the significance of this wording.

¹⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar NTC, 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 543 categorizes 16:16-33 as a section titled “The prospect of joy beyond the trouble of this world.”

¹⁸ Stan Harstine, *Reading John through Johannine Lenses* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022), 106.

¹⁹ Harstine, *Reading John*, 106.

²⁰ Harstine, *Reading John*, 106.

²¹ Harstine, *Reading John*, 106.

²² Harstine, *Reading John*, 105.

²³ Harstine, *Reading John*, 105.

²⁴ Harstine, *Reading John*, 92.

²⁵ Harstine, *Reading John*, 92.

²⁶ “The reader of the FG is to receive and believe the word of Jesus. Meanwhile, the word of Jesus serves as the point of division between those who will, and those who will not, receive and believe. Those who do receive and believe these words experience the life of the ages made available to them and those who won’t, don’t.” Harstine, 107.

²⁷ DA Carson argues the possibility that they are asking for information, 546. Bernard argues for a more vibrant reading in that they will not ask Jesus but will ask the Father instead, see on 16:23. Keener, 2.1046–47, discusses the classical and first century usage, but moves toward understanding the verb as “request.” He finds it most

probable that Jesus emphasizes their ability to approach the Father directly, although Jesus will still continue to mediate.

28 Perhaps confirming Bernard's analysis from nearly a century ago.

29 The future tense verb is used throughout the Gospel of John. However, in 14-16 the frequency per 1000 words more than doubles that of the next highest section. Most of John has fewer than 10 words per thousand in the future tense. Here the frequency reaches 36 per 1000. Accordance 13.3.0 Search of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (GNT-T), Nestle-Aland, 27th Edition, prepared by Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung Münster/Westfalen, Barbara and Kurt Aland (Editors). Copyright © 1993 by Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart. Morphological tagging by William D. Mounce and Rex A. Koivisto. Copyright © 2003 William D. Mounce. Copyright © 2009 OakTree Software, Inc. Version 5.6.

30 Jo-Ann A. Brant describes the speech from 14:1–16:28 as an insertion between “the prediction of Peter’s denial and the prediction of the disciple’s desertion.” Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 223.

32 Brant describes this figurative language as “designed to comfort more than clarify.” The speech of Jesus from 16:25–28 is laden with “pronounced alliteration” and characterized by “frankness,” a “virtue associated with the intimacy of friendship.” Brant, Paideia 223.

33 Also mentioned in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7.

34 John 14:17; 15:26; and 16:12.

35 See Keener, 2.1043, who emphasizes the future aspect of the Spirit in the narrative time while identifying its present aspect within the audience’s chronological experience.

36 Wayne Brouwer’s dissertation provides an analysis of earlier attempts at chiasmic arrangements for the Farewell Discourse. He proposes that 16:29–33 pairs with 13:36–39 while 16:16–28 pairs with 14:1–14. Wayne Brouwer, “The Literary Reading of John 13–7: A Chiasmic Reading” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1999), 212. *The Literary Development of John 13–17: A Chiasmic Reading* SBLDS 182 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2000).

Charles Talbert finds the chiasmic structure in 16:16-33 with the two *amēn*, *amēn* statements forming the central aspects. He takes the words of Jesus in John 16:31, “do you now believe” as ironic. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: a Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 228-30. He builds on the work of Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 13–21: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (AB 29a; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 728.

³⁷ Keener reminds his reader that “the boundaries of this paragraph are fluid.” He discusses John 16:16–22 and 23–33, whereas many others start the following paragraph at 16:25. In discussing the second section he notes, “The boundaries between paragraphs are ambiguous in this discourse and could be divided in various ways; the continuity of thought is more essential than specific divisions.” 2.1043–47.

³⁸ The BDAG describes *arti* as of the immediate with the first indicator referring to the immediate past and translated as “just now.” *Arti* appears 3x in John with a question punctuation: 9:19, 13:37, and 16:31. The first two occurrences indicate a state of affairs. The Pharisees ask in 9:19 “How then does he now see?” because the man born blind does see.” Peter asks “Lord, why am I unable to follow you right now?” in 13:37 because he is wondering about Jesus statement at the moment. It is likely that Jesus is affirming their belief at this stage as a state of affair.

³⁹ The verb appears in the perfect in 3:18; 8:31; 11:27, and 20:29 as well.

⁴⁰ O’Day, 1988, 60, 61.

⁴¹ The phrase “*en ekeinē tē ēmera*” appears only four times in this Gospel. It appears twice in each of the Synoptics, yet never in a parallel passage. (Mt 7:22, 22:23; Mk 2:20, 4:35; Lk 6:23, 17:31. The other occurrences are at 14:20 and 5:9. John 5:9 may represent a key for understanding the appearances in the Farewell Discourse for the narrator states that day was Sabbath. John 14:18 introduces the them that Jesus will leave them for a while and then return at which point the disciples will know that he is in the Father (14:20), language similar to the riddle of John 16:16.

⁴² See Harstine, *Reading John*, 47–50 and 94–95 for how these sayings draw attention to key themes.

⁴³ See O’Day, 55–59 for her discussion of Nicodemus in light of the spirituality theme.