On the Priesthood

St John Chrysostom · c. 347 – 407 · Text: NPNF translation (1889)

Who wrote it

John of Antioch, later called Chrysostom ("golden-mouthed") for his preaching, lived for a time as a monk before being ordained in Antioch. He became archbishop of Constantinople in 398 and died in exile in 407. On the Priesthood is a dialogue with his friend Basil, explaining why John avoided the ordination both were expected to accept.

What to look for

- The friendship with Basil and John's defence of his "holy deceit" (Book I).
- Christ's question to Peter, "Lovest thou Me?", as the root of pastoral care (Book II).
- The dangers of vainglory and ambition, and the weight of the priest's responsibility (Book III).
- The importance of preaching and sound teaching, and handling praise and criticism (Books IV–V).
- His comparison between the life of a monk and the life of a priest (Book VI).

Reading plan

Session 1	The friends and the deception Introduction and Book I
Session 2	Love and responsibility Books II–III
Session 3	Preaching and teaching Books IV–V
Session 4	Monk and priest Book VI

Discussion questions

1. Was John right to deceive his friend? How does he justify it, and are you persuaded?
2. Why does Chrysostom see love for Christ as the starting point for caring for others?
3. Which temptations of leadership does he warn about most strongly?
4. Why does he give so much attention to preaching and teaching?
5. How does he compare the challenges of solitude with those of serving in the world?
6. What could anyone in a position of responsibility learn from this book?

Tips for a group

Read each session's pages before meeting. Bring one sentence that struck you and one question. Keep discussion to 45–60 minutes and end by sharing one thing to carry into the week.

Read it free

The full text is free to read online, with EPUB and plain-text downloads:
ancienttalks.com/books/chrysostom-on-the-priesthood.html