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Competition among the Pillars?

Certain passages in John's Gospel signal what could be competitive notes.

The Beloved Disciple and Peter. The beloved disciple is portrayed as closer to Jesus than Peter (13:23–25) and as quicker than Peter in getting to the tomb on Easter morning (20:4), coming to faith (20:8), and recognizing the risen Lord when he appears (21:7).

The Beloved Disciple and James. The beloved disciple is entrusted with the care of Jesus's mother when Jesus says from the cross, "Woman, here is your son" (19:26–27). But typically, that responsibility would have fallen to Jesus's oldest brother, James. Jesus's word from the cross characterizes the beloved disciple as "a brother of Jesus" also and effectively promotes him ahead of James in terms of familial authority.

Notably, the apostle Paul maintains that there were three "pillars" in the early church (Gal. 2:19): the disciple Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and the disciple John, who most scholars would identify with the "beloved disciple" responsible for this Gospel.

These competitive tendencies may simply be instances of local pride: the community treasured stories that portrayed their founder in a prominent and favored light. But many scholars speculate that the community associated with this Gospel may have experienced some

tension with other Christian groups (ones associated with Peter or James). This might also explain the Gospel's strong emphasis on the need for Christians to love one another (13:24–35; 15:12, 17) and on Jesus's earnest plea for all of his followers to be one (17:20–23).