

# **Session 1: John 12:1–50**

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

To honor God we must honor his Son, Jesus, the one whom the Father sent to redeem us.

### **Head Change**

To know that Jesus is the Son of God, the prophesied Messiah who fulfilled Scripture and came so that we might know the Father.

### **Heart Change**

To feel a desire to know Jesus and obey his commands.

### **Life Change**

To put your faith in Jesus, the light of the world.

## **OPEN**

**Imagine that all of the lights in your home were turned off. How well do you think you could navigate your home—including cleaning, cooking, and hosting friends—without any light?**

Most of us would struggle without light. If we were deprived of our sense of sight, our world would become much more difficult to navigate. Simple tasks would be complicated and potentially dangerous. In the same way, living apart from Jesus deprives us of spiritual light—God’s wisdom and guidance.

In this study, Dr. Tony Evans will guide us through the second half of the Gospel of John, showing us who Jesus is and how our lives can radically change when we turn to him. In our passage today, Jesus says that he is the light of the world. Through him, we can know the Father and see the path of obedience he’s called us to.

## **READ**

Read John 12:1–50. If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to John 12:1–8, 12–19, 44–50.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What kind of deliverance were the Jewish people looking for?**

**What was the result for those who followed Jesus secretly?**

**What did Jesus say about those who rejected him but still wanted the Father?**

Show Session 1: *John 12:1–50* (10 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

John 12 highlights two types of people—those who celebrated Jesus and those who were outraged by him. The reaction to Jesus today is the same: Jesus may be denied or loved, but he cannot be ignored.

Read John 12:1–8.

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary hosted Jesus and his disciples for dinner not long after he had raised Lazarus from the grave. Mary anointed his feet with expensive perfume, a generous and expensive gift. While some people scoffed at her gift, Jesus defended her extravagance. **What can Mary’s boldness, and Jesus’s reaction, teach you about how God sees your humble acts of worship? What do you think would be an extravagant act of worship, like Mary’s perfume, in today’s culture?**

Judas, the treasurer of the disciples, objected to Mary “wasting” a valuable asset. But we learn that Judas’s motives for objecting were not as pure as they sounded—he was a thief, more inclined to steal than to give. **How would you describe Mary’s and Judas’s attitudes toward money? Toward Jesus?**

Mary behaved more like a true disciple than Judas, even though he was one of Jesus’s twelve disciples. Jesus saw that Mary was offering her gift in faith and rebuked Judas directly: “Leave her alone.” **What happens to you when your act of faith is encouraged and praised? If you observe someone stepping out in faith contrary to cultural norms, what could you do to defend and encourage them?**

When a dead man walks out of his grave, word gets around. Read John 12:9–11.

Lazarus’s resurrection became big news in Judea, which drew crowds of people to Jesus and angered Jewish leaders. Factions and jealousy among church leaders remain a troubling reality today. **In what ways have you observed religious leaders’ feuds and arguments take attention away from Jesus?**

**What part can you play in online or in-person conversations to keep the focus on Jesus rather than “winning” an argument?**

Some of the chief priests were Sadducees, a Jewish sect that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Lazarus was a walking contradiction of their beliefs. Despite living, breathing proof that resurrection did and could happen, they were unable to admit

they were wrong. **Have you ever struggled to change your position on certain aspects of your faith even when the evidence suggested you were wrong?**

**What steps can you take to seek truth above preference or tradition?**

***Note:** To learn more about the different Jewish sects during Jesus's lifetime, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Read John 12:12–19.

The day after Mary anointed Jesus with oil, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, welcomed by eager crowds as the long-awaited king of Israel. As Dr. Evans said, the people expected political deliverance, but Jesus offered spiritual deliverance. The people were not looking for a spiritual savior and, as a result, misunderstood what Jesus came to do. **In what ways can we misunderstand Jesus?**

When we are focused on a particular need, as the people of Jerusalem were focused on political liberation, we can miss what Jesus is doing in our lives. **As you go about your day, how can you prepare your heart for God to do unexpected work in your life?**

***Note:** To learn more about Messianic allusions during Jesus's final days before his crucifixion, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Read John 12:20–26.

The raising of Lazarus caught the attention of virtually everyone, including the Greeks—non-Jews who were visiting or living in Jerusalem. They, too, wanted to meet Jesus. **How did you first hear about Jesus? What is it about him that makes him irresistible to you?**

When Jesus was told that the Greeks wanted to meet him, he replied with an enigmatic metaphor about grains of wheat. Then he said that following him requires that we “hate” our life in this world. Dr. Evans explained these confusing passages saying, “If you give up your life for [Jesus], you gain your life and the productivity it was designed to produce.” **What results, or “fruit,” have you seen after you committed to following Jesus? Which aspects of your life have you feared giving up or giving over to God?**

As Jesus's followers, we are called to give up our ambitions, selfish desires, and independence if we want to be used by God to further his kingdom. Jesus said that to serve him, we must follow him. **What could it look like for you to follow Jesus more faithfully? In what ways can your allegiance be pulled from him to other people, accomplishments, or acclaim?**

Read John 12:27–36.

Jesus submitted himself to the Father's will despite being troubled by the suffering he knew was coming. If Jesus could admit that his soul was troubled, we should feel the freedom to do the same. But, many times, we hide our struggles and try to endure them alone. **What can prevent us from acknowledging our burdens and difficult circumstances to one another? To God?**

How can Jesus's vulnerability encourage us to confess our struggles and seek the Father's comfort?

God used the cross, a symbol of oppression, to bring freedom and eternal life to all who would accept it. He turns death into life. **What negative event or circumstance in your life has God used for good? How does remembering his power encourage you in any current difficulties?**

Dr. Evans reminded us that light helps us see where we're going—only by sticking with Jesus's perspective, truth, and goodness can we navigate a dark world full of evil and tragedy. **What hope has your faith given you during hard circumstances? How has God's Word guided you through challenging decisions?**

***Note:** To learn more about how light is used throughout the Bible to describe God, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

Read John 12:37–43.

In this passage, John explains why Jesus was not completely accepted by quoting the prophet Isaiah, who predicted the people's willful blindness toward the Messiah. **Have you ever scoffed at how people who encountered miracles in the Bible still rejected Jesus? How realistic is it to think we would be any different if we had been alive to see Jesus?**

In verse 42, we learn that some who believed in Jesus did so secretly. We all face the same temptation to seek people's approval over God's. **In what circumstances have you been tempted to keep your faith quiet? What happened when you stayed silent? On the other hand, in what ways have you been blessed when you spoke up or acted on your faith?**

Jesus equated himself with the Father: whoever believes in him believes in the one who sent him. But to reject Jesus is to reject God. Jesus's words were radical and likely as difficult for many to accept then as they are now. **In what ways do people today respect Jesus as a teacher, but not as God? How can Jesus's words help clarify his identity as fully God when you tell others about him?**

Jesus emphasized that the Father sent him to save the world. But our own decision to reject or accept him is what judges us before the Father. Jesus's words show us both his role as savior and our responsibility to respond to him.

**Who do you think Jesus is? Have you accepted him, rejected him, or are you still curious about him? Explain your answer.**

No matter how you answered the previous question, stay open to learning from Jesus in this study. Examine his claims. Watch his behavior. When we see Jesus, we see the Father, the true light of the world. **What could you do to learn more about Jesus in the Gospel of John?**

### **LAST WORD**

As Jesus approaches his last days, anticipating his coming suffering and death, he is more and more willing to reveal his identity. He challenges his followers with real-world truth about the cost of identifying with him. It won't be easy for him or them, but he assures his listeners that they can trust him. He has come from the Father to save them, if only they would listen and believe.

Are we listening? Do we love our lives too much, or are we willing to lose our lives for his sake? Jesus is telling us that giving ourselves to him is worth the cost. Are we willing to see the world through the light of Jesus's life?

### **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## **1. Religious Groups in Jesus's Day**

During his visits to Jerusalem, Jesus was repeatedly confronted by a contingent of religious leaders who questioned his teachings, attempted to trap him into saying something heretical, and plotted to kill him. But who were they, and why did they consider Jesus a threat?

There were two primary Jewish groups in Jesus's day: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Members of each group could have been priests or members of the Sanhedrin, the authoritative religious council for Jews.

The Pharisees were a large group of spiritual leaders who demanded exacting obedience to the Mosaic law. But, in their zeal to honor God's Word, many of them did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Their desire to maintain Jewish religious identity and purity while under foreign oppression led them to develop additional rules and traditions to the law.

Read Mark 7:1–8.

Verses 3 and 4 explain the extra rules and traditions the Pharisees insisted everyone follow. **What were Jesus's disciples doing that upset the Pharisees? In what way did the Pharisees' extra rules take away from the intent of the original law?**

When following rules—and appearing to be more holy than the people around us—becomes more important than loving God and our neighbors, we've traded true devotion for a mask of spirituality. **In what ways was the Pharisees' zeal to do "right" things actually an empty ritual that missed the point of the law?**

It is very easy to vilify the Pharisees, but their legalism and judgmental hearts are not so different than our own. **How have you seen a tendency in yourself to rely on habits, rituals, and man-made rules to prove your spirituality?**

**In what ways is it easy to judge people whom you do not perceive as very spiritual?**

Jesus's insightful interpretations of the law and his willingness to call out those who were righteous in their own eyes angered the Pharisees. As Jesus's ministry progressed, the religious leaders felt increasingly threatened by his popularity, leading to their repeated attempts to trap or kill him. In the end, they succeeded.

Mentioned less often in the Gospels, the Sadducees were another group of Jewish leaders. Contrary to the Pharisees, they valued the supreme authority of Scripture to the exclusion of oral traditions from former generations. They tended to be wealthy, aristocratic, and elitist, often siding with Romans to keep regional peace. They also denied the resurrection (see Mark 12:18; Acts 23:6–8) and the existence of fate. Jesus consistently warned against their focus on the letter of the law rather than the intention behind it.

Read Luke 20:27–40.

The Sadducees asked Jesus what Scripture taught about a highly unlikely scenario. Their focus on details and hypotheses caused them to miss the rich truth Scripture revealed about God himself. Jesus's answer pointed out that they were focused on lesser things, like marriage, when they should have been rejoicing that the very words they used revealed the reality of the resurrection.

We are not all that different. Sometimes we are so busy bolstering our own positions that we miss the main revelation of the Bible—the person and love of God himself. **What topics or points of contention in the church can distract us from our purpose and calling?**

**What steps can you take to keep God at the center of your study of his Word?**

## 2. Old Testament Prophecies Alluding to Jesus

One of the big questions in the Gospels is the identity of Jesus—was he the long-awaited Messiah? Jesus often asked people not to say anything or refused to answer the question when asked. But the Gospel writers clearly understood that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies in the Scriptures. Scholars have found dozens of predictions that were accomplished by Jesus. We will examine just a few here.

Read the prophecy from the Old Testament and the way Jesus fulfilled that prophecy in the Gospels. Then, consider the questions that follow.

### **Zechariah 9:9 and John 12:13–15**

By embodying the prophecy so specifically—riding a donkey into Jerusalem, allowing them to call him king of Israel—Jesus was accepting the crowd’s acclamation. The people thought he was the coming king, and he was. But they wanted him to lead a military revolution, a return to Israel’s independent glory days. **What kind of salvation was he bringing instead?**

### **Psalm 69:9 and John 2:14–17**

After Jesus cleared the temple of the moneychangers, the disciples recognized that he was fulfilling Psalm 69:9. **Why was Jesus upset with the moneychangers? How did his attitude and action honor God?**

### **Isaiah 53:1 and John 12:37–38**

Despite all the miracles Jesus had performed, some people refused to be convinced he was the Messiah they’d been waiting for. He did not meet their preconceived notions of who the Messiah would be. Has Jesus ever disappointed you? What do you expect him to do or do differently? How do you reconcile your disappointment with God’s plan?

### **Isaiah 42:1–4 and Matthew 12:15–21**

Jesus delighted his Father as he taught about justice and brought healing to the crowds who followed him. We are among “the nations” mentioned in this prophecy, people who live half a world away from Israel and look to Jesus as our hope. His mission to save humanity includes us. **How does seeing Jesus fulfill Isaiah’s words help you worship him more?**

In his grand scheme of salvation, God placed hints and predictions about the hopeful future he had in store for his people. From his birth to his death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled every prophecy and proved that he was the Messiah. But only those whose hearts were aligned with the Father’s could see and understand what Jesus was doing. If you feel like you struggle to know Jesus, be encouraged—even the disciples, men who were with Jesus every day, needed a lot of time before they grasped just how amazing Jesus was. Take heart, he’ll be patient with us too.

### 3. Metaphor of Light

In John 8:12, Jesus proclaimed that he was the light of the world. In John 12, he revisits the metaphor of light, contrasting himself with the darkness that inevitably overtakes any who reject him. Without the light, how are we to see through and push back the darkness? He pleads, “Believe in the light so that you may become children of light” (John 12:36).

Biblical authors consistently use the theme of light versus darkness to picture ethical dualism. Together, the words describe the opposite ends of the good–evil battle. Light is a symbol always connected with the presence of God, while darkness represents all that opposes God.

In Genesis 1:3, God created literal light. Light established the boundary to darkness and brought order and function to the chaotic void (Gen 1:2). Throughout the rest of Scripture, light is associated with God’s presence, truth, and order.

Read Psalm 119:105 and Proverbs 6:23. The psalmist describes God’s Word as light to illuminate one’s path. Similarly, in the proverb, wise advice is compared to a lamp, a light, a way to life. To walk in the light is to follow God and choose wisdom. **To what extent do you rely on God’s Word to guide your decisions and actions?**

Walking in the light requires that we follow God’s ways, looking to him for guidance on what is good. As we walk in the light, we also gain fellowship with him and other believers. Read 1 John 1:5–10.

“God is light.” Therefore, we must be honest about when we fail. His goodness overflows into forgiveness, so we don’t need to hide from him when we sin. **What has repentance looked like in your life? What would it look like for you to turn to God first when you sin so that you can “walk in the light”?**

Light and dark are not equal powers. Though darkness can impact us, we know that God will prevail over evil. His ways of wisdom and justice are always better than selfishness and hate. The ultimate darkness is death, and Jesus has conquered it, giving us bright hope for an eternity with the light of the world. **How do you allow the hope of God’s victory over evil impact your daily life? What can you do to keep the hope of a living future with God central to your thinking?**

## **Session 2: John 13:1–38**

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

#### **Main Idea**

Mature disciples teach the truth of Jesus primarily through our love for others, manifested in our servanthood.

#### **Head Change**

To know that disciples who humbly and authentically love one another best represent Jesus.

#### **Heart Change**

To feel inspired to mimic the humility and love of Christ through practical service to others.

#### **Life Change**

To show others who Jesus is by loving them in practical, tangible ways.

### **OPEN**

**If you had to choose, would you prefer to hear “I love you” or experience acts that express love toward you?**

We hear a lot about love in our culture. We love our spouse, but we also love pizza. In general, “love” is a positive feeling or desire for someone or something. But when the Bible talks about love, it’s not empty talk or a fleeting feeling. Love—true love—is laying yourself down for another person.

In this session, we will see an example of love as Jesus washes his disciples’ feet and gives us a new commandment: to love one another just as Jesus has loved us.

### **READ**

Read John 13:1–38. If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to John 13:4–11, 21–28, and 34–38.

### **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**Why did Jesus wash his disciples' feet?**

**What was Jesus's new command?**

**What is the defining characteristic of a disciple of Jesus?**

Show Session 2: *John 13:1–38* (13 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

Jesus and his disciples gathered to celebrate Passover, the annual feast that commemorated God rescuing his people from slavery. But Jesus knew this occasion would be unique. Read John 13:1–5.

John offers us an inside look at the thoughts and feelings of Jesus and his disciples. We learn that Jesus knew his “hour”—the appointed time for him to be crucified—was near. But he had a few things left to teach his disciples. **How does the text describe where Jesus was going? What did his impending journey inspire him to do for his followers?**

Read John 13:6–15. Jesus surprised his disciples by subverting the social order. He, who was due the most honor, took on the role of the least important person in the house. The master humbled himself to serve his followers. **What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples by performing such a menial service?**

**Note:** *To learn more about the tradition and meaning of foot washing, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Dr. Evans said Peter was “clean”—that is, saved and righteous in God's eyes—but walking in a sinful world had left his feet dirty. We live in a sinful world that tempts us—sometimes successfully—to sin. Like Peter, we need Jesus to wash the sin from us. In what ways can the world give us “dirty feet”? **What circumstances have left you feeling in need of spiritual refreshment?**

Christians do not live perfect lives. We all “walk in the dirt” and are called to help one another get cleaned up. Through accountability, encouragement, exhortation, and even rebuke—all done with love—we can spiritually wash each other's feet. **Who is helping you stay close to Jesus? How do you help one another walk through this sinful world with integrity?**

Read John 13:16–20. Jesus took the role of a servant for two reasons. First, by washing the disciples' feet he was giving us an example of how to live—in humble service to one another. Leadership according to Jesus was (and is) counter to what our culture

expects. **When have you seen leaders humble themselves to serve someone or take on a menial task? How did that experience influence your opinion of the leader?**

In verse 15, Jesus told the disciples to serve one another just as he had served them. We are to imitate Jesus by humbly serving one another. **What does serving others look like for you? In what ways can you “lower yourself” in your daily life at home, work, or the community, to help lift someone else up?**

Second, washing the disciples’ feet revealed God’s character—he is a self-giving God, showing his love through service. He calls us to be like him, sacrificially serving others. **What can make it difficult to show sacrificial love to others? In what ways can you grow in self-giving love toward others?**

***Note:** To learn more about what Jesus meant when he said he wanted people to believe that “I am he,” go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Read John 13:21–30. Jesus made it clear that he knew what Judas was planning. Yet Jesus still washed his feet, shared dinner with him, and even offered him bread—all of which were expressions of friendship. He kept loving Judas. He does the same with us even when we are committed to our sin. **When a friend betrays you, how do you react? What could it look like to respond to them in the way that Jesus responded to Judas?**

Judas rejected Jesus’s friendship and left dinner intent on betrayal. Dr. Evans commented, “When we reject Jesus’s friendship, we open up the door to the devil to enter in and take over.” The devil is always attempting to thwart Jesus’s mission. As Jesus’s disciples, we are targets for the devil’s deception. **What are you doing to stick close to Jesus? How do you fight the temptations to go your own way?**

***Note:** To learn more about the devil, or Satan, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

Read John 13:31–35. Love should be the primary characteristic of Christ-followers. As Dr. Evans elaborated, “Your discipleship will not be primarily known by your biblical knowledge. Your success will not be known by size, reputation, riches, but by love for one another.” **What do you generally look for when trying to identify who might be a Christian? How far up on your list of characteristics is “loves well”?**

**What do you think makes Christians stand out in our culture today? What do we need to do to be known by our love?**

We tend to prioritize knowledge, positions, platform, and financial success to gauge spiritual credibility. But Jesus says our discipleship can only be measured by our love for one another. **How do you judge your own “success” in God’s kingdom? What could you do to be more known by your love?**

Dr. Evans defined Jesus’s love as, “the decision to compassionately, responsibly, and righteously seek the wellbeing of another.” **In what ways is Dr. Evans’s definition similar or different from your idea of love?**

The kind of love Jesus commands us to practice is costly. It can be exhausting. But it is not a suggestion. Jesus actually commands us to sacrificially love the people around us. **In which relationships do you find it easier to love sacrificially? Which relationships are more difficult?**

Read John 13:36–38. Peter’s enthusiasm for following Jesus was well-meaning but, as we will learn, founded on emotion more than anything else. Jesus warned him that his pride would lead to repeated failure. We, like Peter, can let emotions determine the way we live out our faith. **What can we admire about Peter’s passion? In what ways can pride or enthusiasm blind us to our weaknesses?**

We are called to show everyone we meet the love Jesus demonstrates in John 13. His love is more than a feeling—it is a choice to serve. **Whom has God put in your path that you can serve? Who around you needs you to show them the love of Christ?**

### **LAST WORD**

We respect and honor our leaders because of their presence, their accomplishments, and their position. But true leaders humble themselves as servants, giving their lives for the benefit of others. Jesus did not come as a stereotypical CEO or power broker; he came as a loving servant.

Love is not glamorous—in fact, it is hard work. But love, real love, is a requirement for all Christians. Our God is a self-giving Lord, and all disciples mimic their master. As Dr. Evans put it, “Fake Christian or plastic saint? We’ll know by the love you show.”

### **GO DEEPER**

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But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## **1. Foot Washing**

During Jesus’s time, roads were rocky and occasionally steep and pack animals could be expensive. The average person walked everywhere they needed to go in sandals or barefoot. As a result, their feet were always dirty—caked with mud, cut and bruised by stones, and dirtied by dung.

Jewish culture prized hospitality. A Jewish host was expected provided their guests with water so they could wash their own feet upon arrival (see Genesis 18:4; Judges 19:21). To show a higher level of honor, a host might even provide a servant to wash his guest's feet. **How do you offer hospitality? What makes you feel welcome in someone's home?**

**What might be the equivalent of foot washing today?**

Read Luke 7:36–47. A woman interrupted dinner to pour perfume on Jesus's feet. She washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Though horrified that Jesus would allow a sinner to touch him, Simon, the host, had neglected to offer even the basic courtesy of water for Jesus's feet.

The woman, a sinner, served Jesus in a greater way than his host, Simon, who felt his status made him worthy of Jesus's presence. When we forget the debt Jesus paid for us, we can become like Simon, feeling like we deserve Jesus's presence and service while withholding service from others. **In what ways can we take God's presence and forgiveness for granted?**

Just as we saw in this session, godly love lays down its reputation, honor, status, comfort to serve others. Jesus showed us how to serve one another. By following his example, we both remind ourselves of how much he has forgiven us and show others how he serves sinners. **What motivates you to serve others? Where in your life are you regularly showing love to those without the ability to serve you back?**

In God's kingdom, humble service is essential. We do not only serve those who are important but—like the woman—those whom society sees as unlovable and unworthy of our attention. **Who has God put in your path that you can sacrificially and humbly serve today?**

## 2. "I Am He"

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus makes several "I am" statements in his teachings, calling himself things like the bread of life, the light of the world. But these statements are more than simple metaphors. They are markers of Jesus's true nature and mission.

In our series *The Gospel of John: Part 1*, Dr. Tony Evans highlighted Jesus's "I am" statements:

- John 6:48     *I am* the bread of life.
- John 8:12     *I am* the light of the world.
- John 8:58     Before Abraham was born, *I am*.
- John 9:5         *I am* the light of the world.
- John 10:7, 9   *I am* the gate

John 10:11 *I am* the good shepherd.

John 11:25 *I am* the resurrection and the life.

In John 13:19, Jesus predicted Judas's future betrayal so that, when it happened, the disciples would believe "I am he." This statement is our translation of God's Hebrew name, Yahweh. Jesus was equating himself to the God of Israel. **What was it that convinced you Jesus was God?**

Jesus revealed himself as "I am" knowing he would soon be crucified for the sins of the world. He was about to do more than wash feet; he was about to lay his life down to save his people. **What does it mean to you for Jesus to love you so much that he would lay his life down for you? How does his humble, sacrificial love cause you to worship him more?**

### 3. Who is Satan?

In John 13:2, we read that "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray him [Jesus]." And later in the chapter, during supper, "After Judas ate the piece of bread, Satan entered him" (13:27).

Who is this devil, also called Satan? What do we know of his motives and strategies? What is his end? The Bible reveals him to us progressively as Scripture unfolds from Genesis to Revelation and is very clear that he is our supernatural opponent. **What is your understanding of Satan? How has he been described to you?**

In the New Testament, many supernatural adversaries are called demons (daimon). They are corrupt and hostile to God, dedicated to thwarting his will, sometimes causing death or anguish (Mark 5:2–13), and overpowering people physically and mentally (Matthew 17:18). Second Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 describe them as beings cast out of heaven and awaiting their final judgment.

Their leader is called Satan, a Hebrew title meaning "adversary" or "accuser." Two prophets give us more background on Satan. Read Ezekiel 28:1–19 and Isaiah 14:12–15.

These passages are laments, primarily about human kings (Tyre and Babylon). But many scholars believe the prophets are comparing these tyrants to a divine rebel—the evil being who spoke through the serpent in Eden, tempting Eve to disobey God.

Putting all the texts together, we conclude that the serpent of Eden is the same devil that tempted Jesus and the one who influence Judas to betray his Lord. He is the one we fight against even now, as the apostle Paul encourages us in Ephesians 6:11–12, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the

authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.”

Thinking too much about the devil can scare some people. **How do you deal with thoughts and discussions about supernatural evil? In what ways has your perception of Satan changed since you became a Christian?**

While he is a tempter, deceiver, accuser, and adversary, Satan will not win. He will be defeated once and for all and evil will reign no more. Revelation 12:9 says, “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

We do have a spiritual opponent, but God is greater than he is. We don't have to worry about Satan or his demons because we have been saved by the sovereign God who holds our life and hope in his hands. **What can you do to balance the tension of the reality of Satan's presence in the world today with the knowledge that Christ is superior to him in every way? How does knowing that Jesus has already planned out Satan's defeat give you hope for today?**

# **Session 3: John 14:1–15:17**

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

As we abide with Christ, the Holy Spirit empowers, comforts, and reveals truth to us so that we can live faithfully.

### **Head Change**

To know that when we abide with Jesus, the Holy Spirit illuminates Scripture so we can know God and his will.

### **Heart Change**

To feel motivated to abide with Christ consistently so that we will become more and more like him.

### **Life Change**

To prioritize time in God’s Word, absorb more of Christ and his character, and seek opportunities to reflect him in our personal spheres of influence.

### **OPEN**

**How strong do you like your tea or coffee? What’s your secret to making the perfect cup?**

The strength of your morning brew depends upon how long you let the tea leaves or coffee grounds sit in the water. The longer they steep, the darker the water becomes, and the more flavorful your drink tastes. Similarly, the “flavor” of our spiritual fruit depends upon how well we abide in, or hang out with, Christ. The longer we infuse ourselves with God’s Word, the more deeply we’ll know and the better we’ll resemble Christ.

### **READ**

John 14:1–15:27. If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to John 14:1–17; 15:1–17.

### **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What’s the most direct way to know the Father?**

**Which members of the Trinity are involved in our Christian life?**

## How can we impact the spiritual growth of others?

Show Session 3: *John 14:1–15:27* (11 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

In John 13, Jesus announced his departure to the disciples. Despite saying he was going somewhere the disciples could not follow, Jesus had many hopeful things to say to them. Jesus told the disciples that he would soon leave them, and they would carry on his work even further. He's turning their attention away from their sorrow toward a brighter future. **In what ways is sorrow or grief debilitating? How does a reminder of hope give you strength in your pain?**

Read John 14:1–14.

Jesus comforts his disciples promising to prepare a place where they could all reunite. His departure was not abandonment, but a reason to hope in a heavenly future. **In what ways can the hope of eternity with Jesus help us weather the storms of today?**

In 14:6, Jesus makes a bold statement: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Many people struggle to accept the exclusivity of Jesus, wanting a variety of ways to God. Jesus cannot be ignored or sidestepped as we seek God. He is the only way to God. **What does it look like for you to make Jesus your priority in everyday life?**

**How can we, as Jesus's disciples, point people to his way and truth in word and action?**

Dr. Evans said, in Jesus, "God took a selfie." Sometimes we think of the Father of the Old Testament as very different from Jesus in the Gospels. But Jesus says they are one. When you look at Jesus, you see the Father. When Jesus speaks, he speaks the words of the Father. When we respond to Jesus, we are responding to God the Father. He is the manifestation of the Godhead in human flesh. **How do you typically think of the Father? Do you imagine him to be different from Jesus? How so?**

In verse 11, Jesus points to his miracles as evidence of his divine nature. His actions back up his claim to be God. **What can Jesus's life and actions teach you about who God is?**

Read John 14:15–26.

**Note:** To learn more about praying "in Jesus's name," go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

In verses 15 and 23–24, Jesus directly connects obedience with love. True affections are followed by actions. While many may think that love is a license to live how we please, Jesus sees obedience as an obligation of love. None of us obeys God perfectly, but love without action is not love, much less the kind of worship that honors God. **Do you think of love and obedience as necessarily connected? Why, or why not?**

## **What do you think a healthy relationship between love and obedience looks like?**

Jesus announces the coming of the Holy Spirit, whom he calls the Advocate, Counselor, or Helper, depending on the Biblical translation you are using. Jesus says in verse 17, “He is the Spirit of truth.” **How will the disciples know the Spirit? What will he do for the disciples?**

***Note:** To learn more about the Trinity, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

One of the Spirit’s primary tasks is to illuminate Jesus’s teaching so that we can understand and apply it to our lives. **In what way can studying and applying the Bible be difficult for you? What would it look like to actively seek the Holy Spirit’s help as you study God’s Word?**

Read John 14:27–31. Jesus hints that difficult events are about to happen, but he offers his disciples his peace. God’s peace is not like the world’s peace—it sees beyond our immediate circumstances and trusts in God’s capable oversight of all things. Even when our lives are in chaos, we can trust God and look forward to his better future. **How would you define “peace”? What practices could help you redirect your thoughts and feelings toward Jesus when you are afraid or worried?**

***Note:** To learn more about the peace of God, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

Read John 15:1–16.

The chapter opens with another vivid metaphor: “I am the true vine,” says Jesus (15:1). Though he is leaving, Jesus is not going to be disconnected from his followers. Every disciple of Christ is a “branch” (v. 2) of the vine, extending his influence across the world. **How does the image of a vine affect your understanding of your relationship to Jesus?**

Dr. Evans told us that Jesus expects his disciples to bear increasingly more fruit, and to remain fruitful throughout their lives. Fruit always reflects the character of the tree, so the closer we are to Christ, the more we will act, think, and look like him. **How well do your behavior and thought life reflect Christ’s character?**

***Note:** To learn more about the fruit of the Spirit, go to **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.*

Dr. Evans illustrated the idea of abiding with a tea bag. When tea is immersed in hot water, it imparts its strong flavor to the water. But if a tea bag is only dipped into the water, it will not impart much flavor to the water at all. Our spiritual maturity reflects the amount of quality time we spend with Jesus in God’s Word and prayer. **Are you an**

## **“immerser” or a “dipper”? What does your habit of abiding, or spending time with God?**

The more we spend time with God, willing to be taught by his Spirit, the more we will bear fruit that looks like Jesus. We must not let the world distract us from abiding with him. **What plan do you have in place to prioritize time with God? What can you do to encourage regular times of prayer and devotion?**

### **LAST WORD**

Jesus wasn't going to abandon his friends. He promised to send the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who would strengthen and teach the disciples how to follow Jesus one day at a time. But the Holy Spirit is not just a promise to the twelve disciples—he is available to everyone who follows Jesus.

The more we abide with Christ, immersing ourselves in him through prayer and study of his Word, the more we'll look like him. Let's commit to abiding with Jesus, to knowing the Father, and listening to the Spirit. The more time we spend with God, the deeper we will know him and bear fruit for his kingdom.

### **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## **1. Praying in Jesus's Name**

We often end our prayers by saying, “In Jesus's name.” On one hand, we treat this phrase as somewhat meaningless, a ritual closing to our prayers. On the other hand, some believe that the phrase itself holds the power to gain God's special attention and blessing. It's as if God may not answer our prayers without that phrase. Both extremes miss the mark. Praying in Jesus's name is powerful and essential, but it is not a secret key to gaining blessings.

So what did Jesus mean when he said he would do whatever we ask in his name?

To lend someone your name is to extend your approval—their words and actions align with your wishes and values. To pray in Jesus's name means that our prayers align with Christ's will. In the context of John 14–15, we are far more likely to pray in alignment with Christ when we've been abiding with him, conforming more and more to his image.

**What do you think it means to pray in a way that does not align with God's character? When you pray, how confident are you that your requests mirror his will?**

Prayers in Jesus's name also carry his authority. In John 10:25, Jesus said, "The works I do in my Father's name testify about me . . ." Jesus's actions mirrored the Father's will, character, and were done by the Father's power. In other words, Jesus worked on the Father's behalf. He had his Father's authority. So, too, as we pray in Jesus's name, he answers our prayers with his Father's power and authority. In prayer, we are completely reliant on him. **What circumstances do you need God to step into with all of his power and authority?**

**What changes can you make in your prayer life to pray according to Jesus's will, character, power, and authority?**

## **2. Understanding the Trinity**

The Trinity is a core doctrine of the Christian faith. We believe in one God who exists eternally as three persons, the Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person is fully God, yet there is one God. If the Trinity sounds confusing, you are in good company. God's nature is ultimately a mystery to us all. But some guidelines can help us wrap our minds around our three-in-one God.

When we talk about the Trinity, it can be tricky to accurately describe the way the three persons of the Godhead relate to one another. The acronym DUE can give us some helpful guidelines:

D: Distinction—The three persons of the Godhead are unique. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. Each has their own unique role.

U: Unity—There is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:6). While all three persons of the Trinity are unique, they share the same essence. The Trinity is God.

E: Equality—All three Persons are fully divine. The Father is God (John 6:27). Jesus is God (John 20:28). The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3–4). No person of the Trinity is superior or inferior to the others.

These guidelines can be helpful in describing the Trinity, but God's nature is difficult to grasp. We struggle to understand God, and we are also limited. He is not an idol we can draw or sculpt an image of. His mind is, by definition, beyond our reckoning. How could we truly ever explain a holy God in a simple way? But while we cannot fully explain God, but we can still praise and honor him because of what he has chosen to reveal about himself. **What does it look like to trust God even when we don't fully understand him?**

**How can knowing God as Trinity deepen your worship of him?**

### 3. The Peace of God

One of God's primary characteristics is peace: he is Yahweh Shalom, "the Lord is Peace" (Judges 6:24), Isaiah 9:6 calls the savior (Jesus) the Prince of Peace, and Galatians 5:22 tells us that one of the fruits of the Spirit is peace. God truly is all about peace.

The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, has connotations of health, prosperity, welfare, and wholeness. It means much more than merely an absence of conflict. **How would you describe a relationship that enjoys shalom, the fullness of true peace? What makes that kind of friendship desirable?**

In our world full of conflict, shalom can feel far off, if not impossible to experience. So, how can we experience the peace of God? First, we must experience peace with God by being reconciled to him through Jesus our Lord and savior. Read Romans 5:1–2.

When we've accepted the gift of grace, we can rest securely, knowing that our sins are forgiven and we are at peace with God. **What do you think it means to be at peace with God? How does a right relationship with him change the way we live?**

Second, the peace of Christ is a gift available to us during difficult times. Read Philippians 4:6–7.

When we are tempted to worry over things that are beyond our control, God wants us to turn to him in trust. He wants us to pray about our fears and hopes and, because he is all-powerful and trustworthy, wants our hearts and minds to rest. He is in control, wants the best for us, and will not abandon us. In Christ, you do not have to be afraid of what might happen tomorrow. **When you feel out of control, what is your instinctual reaction? Where do you turn? At what point do you turn to God for help?**

**What can you do to remind yourself that God is in control? To turn to him first when you feel anxious?**

Finally, we are called to be instruments of God's peace for the people around us. Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). When we prize peace enough to work at it, to spend time and effort to reconcile broken relationships, we show the world we are his children and resemble our Father in heaven. **Who comes to your mind when you think of a peacemaker? What steps can you take to proactively seek peace rather than merely not engaging in conflict?**

Peace is integral to God's nature, and he wants us to experience his peace. Have you trusted him for your salvation? Are you turning to him in your daily circumstances and seeking his strength and wisdom? The world needs his peace, and as you rely on him, you can show the world the peace-filled wonder of life with God.

#### 4. Fruit of the Spirit

You can easily identify a plant by its fruit. When we see peaches on a tree or blueberries on a bush, we naturally conclude that we're looking at a peach tree or a blueberry bush. In the same way, you can determine what someone believes or values based on their actions.

Read Galatians 5:16–25.

Paul begins by encouraging believers to “walk” or act according to the Spirit. In doing so, we will fight our natural inclinations, which he calls “desires of the flesh.” Even though we have been redeemed by Jesus, our desires will continue to bump up against the will of the Spirit for the rest of our lives. **In what ways have you experienced the struggle between your self-centered inclinations and godly behavior?**

Look back over the list of behaviors in Galatians 5:19–21. The works of the flesh are, sadly, very common, even among believers. We've all been guilty of some of them. But the Spirit offers us a better way. **When you fall into one of the fleshly behaviors listed, what usually helps you rise out of them? What could you do to remove or deny those behaviors in your daily life?**

When a person trusts Christ and yields to his lordship, the Spirit of God indwells him or her. But, while the Spirit's presence is constant, believers must choose to submit to his leading. The more we follow the Spirit, the more evident Christ's influence in our lives will be. That is why godly behaviors are called the fruit of the Spirit.

When we are led by the Spirit, we love others more wholly. We experience and express joy and peace. We are empowered to be patient, kind, good, and gentle. We become more self-controlled. All these behaviors require us to put others first and practice self-denial in glad submission to Christ. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit requires effort. **In what circumstances have you noticed your life resembling Christ more often? Which fruit of the Spirit do you need to make an effort to cultivate in your life?**

None of the spiritual “fruit” comes naturally to us! Rather, we need the Spirit's power and leading to direct us in his ways instead of our own. But, as you cultivate these godly behaviors, remember that they do not earn us “brownie points” with God. The fruit of the Spirit are a result of abiding with God, who already has fully forgiven and fully accepted you.

Read John 15:1–5.

Jesus compares himself to a vine and his followers as the branches. We get our nutrients and life from the vine and cannot produce fruit apart from it. Take a moment to pray and consider how you might abide with God more. Ask him to develop his fruit in you so that you might resemble him more and become a greater blessing to those around you. **What does your practice of abiding in Jesus look like? How could you spend more time with him?**

## **Session 4: John 15:18–16:33**

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

The Holy Spirit testifies to us that Jesus has overcome the world, bringing hope, peace, and strength as we endure trials.

### **Head Change**

To know that the Holy Spirit encourages us with the truth of Jesus's victory over worldly powers.

### **Heart Change**

To feel hope in the Holy Spirit's presence and assurance.

### **Life Change**

To listen to the Holy Spirit as he convicts us of sin and offers hope during trials.

### **OPEN**

**Who was your favorite teacher in school? What was the most important thing he or she taught you?**

As students, we were not expected to begin class already knowing the content. Teachers explain new information. Good teachers help us understand what to do with that information. And the best teachers help us become better people.

There are many things the Holy Spirit does, but one of his primary roles is to teach us God's will and enable us to become more like Jesus. Without him we are unable to know the truth of Jesus, understand God's Word, or stand firm against opposition. Our session today explores how the Spirit testifies to Christ and enables us to face the world.

### **READ**

John 15:26–16:33. If you are running short on time, read John 15:26–16:11, 25–33.

### **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**Why is it better for us that Jesus left and the Spirit came?**

**Who does the Spirit testify about?**

**Why can we have peace during trials?**

Show Session 4: *John 15:26–16:33* (12 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

Hearing about Jesus's departure and coming persecution is enough to make anyone afraid. But Jesus's message was one of clarity and comfort. When we know what is coming and the One who is in control, we can stand firm in chaotic circumstances.

Read John 15:26–16:11.

Jesus reminded his disciples that he was sending the Spirit of truth to them. John 15:26 is one of the few verses that reference the Trinity all together. The Spirit, sent from the Father, would testify about Jesus, the Son of God. Each person of the Trinity is united in purpose—to proclaim the wonder of Jesus to us. **What does this verse teach you about God's unity? Why is it important to know that each person of the Trinity is involved in our lives?**

Jesus offered his disciples the hope of the coming Spirit so they would not falter in the face of persecution (16:1–4). Despite being kicked out of the synagogue and even killed, remembering the truth would uphold them when opposition came. **What is your reaction when you face trouble or trials?**

**What can you do to help yourself remember the Spirit is always with you?**

**Note:** To learn more about how Jesus's predictions to his disciples came true, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Jesus told his friends that his departure was a good thing. How could that be? When Jesus left, his disciples received the Spirit, whom Dr. Evans called "our ultimate witness." It was better that Jesus ascend to heaven so the Spirit could come and minister by dwelling within each believer. **Do you think of the Spirit as your present teacher? Why, or why not?**

**What do you think it looks like to listen to or respond to the Spirit's leading?**

**Note:** To learn more about the Greek title John uses for the Spirit, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

The Holy Spirit has several tasks in the life of a believer. First, he convicts the world of sin (16:8–9). Without believing in Jesus, we cannot be forgiven and redeemed. **When have you sensed the Spirit convicting you of the wrongness, or sinfulness, of a decision you have contemplated or an action you’ve observed?**

**Which people do you pray will accept Jesus as their Lord? What role do you have in their lives, and how have you been able to influence their journey of faith?**

The Spirit of truth also convicts us of righteousness (16:10). He knows what is right and what is wrong; what is God’s will and what is not.

Finally, the Spirit convicts the world about judgment (16:8, 11). Jesus declared that devil has already been judged. His end is determined. He will lose. All the conflict we endure until then reflect his ineffectual efforts to change our secured destiny with Jesus. **How does knowing that God will defeat evil for good influence the way you endure pain and sorrow now?**

Read John 16:12–15.

The Spirit will glorify Jesus—make him look good, or advertise him, as Dr. Evans said. If the Spirit’s job is to elevate Jesus, we should be able to determine if someone is led by the Spirit. All we need to see is if their life is elevating Jesus or themselves. **Thinking of yourself, to what degree are your words and behavior Spirit-led?**

**In what ways could you glorify Jesus—advertise him—more in your life?**

Read John 16:16–33. Jesus again warned his disciples that he was leaving them. Their initial sorrow, he said, would turn to joy, much like a laboring woman forgets the pain of childbirth when she sees her new baby. **What could it look like for you to find joy even during suffering? What does it look like to remain hopeful in your hardships?**

We will face suffering in this world. There’s no getting around it. But Jesus offers us hope. “Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33). With his Spirit living within us, he did not leave us alone to face the world. He’s right here with us. **When have you needed moral courage? What comfort does Jesus’s promise give you?**

#### **LAST WORD**

Dr. Evans said we are like pole vaulters who lean on their poles in order to reach a height they could never touch with their own strength. We have the Spirit to help us do more than we would possibly imagine. By the Spirit, we can overcome temptations and trials and, in the process, glorify Jesus. His consistent presence with us gives us hope, clarity, help, and wisdom as we continue to turn to him in all circumstances.

#### **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## 1. The Paraclete

Jesus consoled the disciples saying, "When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me" (John 15:26 CSB).

The Greek name used for the Holy Spirit in John 15 is *parakletos*. No one English translation encompasses the depth of meaning held in that one Greek word, which is why differing translations render *parakletos* as Counselor, Comforter, Helper, and Advocate. It is a title rich with connotation, forcing English translators to choose merely one aspect of its complex meaning.

As a counselor, the Spirit gives us clarity as we seek truth and holiness. He helps us gain wisdom and understand the Scriptures. **What is the value in asking the Spirit to be your counselor as you study the Bible? How has he helped you gain insight and understanding regarding God's desire for you in a given situation?**

In the KJV, *parakletos* is translated "comforter." The Spirit offers comfort to the hurting, reminding us of God's love and constant presence with us. He is in tune with our emotions and intimate needs. **In what situations have you experienced the Spirit's comfort? How could you or someone around you use his comfort today?**

In the NIV, NRSV, and NET, readers will see *parakletos* translated as "advocate." Jesus is a *parakletos* (1 John 2:1), too. He pleads with the Father as a mediator for his followers, pointing to his atoning work on the cross. The Spirit reminds us that our salvation is based on Jesus's work, not our own. **In moments of self-doubt or regret, what value can you find in praying for the Spirit to remind you that Jesus has paid the price for your sins?**

And if you read the NASB, ESV, or NKJV, you will see the Spirit called our "helper." He actively works in our circumstances. **What situations might remind you to seek the Spirit's help?**

The Spirit is within us now on Earth, near to us, helping us in our needs, ready to advise, comfort, envelop us in God's all-loving embrace. **How does understanding *parakletos* give you a deeper appreciation for God's personal attention to you?**

## 2. Jesus's predictions come true.

Jesus warned the disciples of future events, difficult ones that both he and the disciples would experience. Though often we tend to think of his comments as a prediction of our persecution, many of his predictions were fulfilled within hours or days of his resurrection.

Soon after hearing Jesus's predictions, the disciples witnessed his arrest and his ascension, experiences that solidified and validated their trust in him. What he said would happen did happen. Through his truth-telling, Jesus shows us how trustworthy he is. **How does knowing that Jesus told his disciples the truth help you trust the rest of his words?**

Other predictions by Jesus were fulfilled later during the disciples' lifetimes. In John 15:27, Jesus says, "You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning." In Acts 2, Peter preached to gathered crowds about Jesus's identity.

In John 16:2, Jesus tells his disciples, "They will ban you from the synagogues. In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God." By Acts 7, the disciples had been beaten, jailed, and thrown out of their synagogues. Stephen, a deacon in the church, was stoned by members of the ruling Jewish religious party.

But, even Jesus's most foreboding predictions did not deter the disciples from stepping out to testify about Jesus. They had every reason to trust his word, and their confidence in his saving power drove them to spread the gospel.

John 16:2 applied to the disciples, but it also describes the experiences of many future followers of Christ. Over the centuries, thousands of Jesus-followers have encountered resistance, persecution, and even death from those in authority. **What makes Jesus worth following? What confidence do you have that his words are true? What would you be willing to endure to spread the gospel?**

# **Session 5: John 17:1–26**

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

When we are unified with God and others, we experience the joy that Jesus prayed for.

### **Head Change**

To know that we, the church, should be unified in the shared purpose of glorifying God.

### **Heart Change**

To feel motivated to build unity in the church.

### **Life Change**

To heal the divisions in the church so that we might glorify God and experience more of his presence.

## **OPEN**

**Think of your best friend or spouse. In what ways are you completely different from one another? What do you appreciate about those differences? Why aren't those differences obstacles to your relationship?**

Every person you know, no matter how close you are to them, is different from you. Their personalities, backgrounds, interests, and talents make them unique. Yet friendships and marriages still form and thrive between diverse individuals. Our distinctions are not divisive but enriching.

The church is supposed to act the same way, letting differences teach and inspire one another on to accomplish our purpose—to glorify Christ. When we are unified—living in community with one another—we will reflect his light to the world.

## **READ**

John 17:1–26

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What is eternal life?**

**According to Dr. Evans, what is Satan's goal?**

## What is unity, and why is it important in the church?

Show Session 5: *John 17:1–26* (11 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

In John 17 Jesus prays specifically for his disciples both in the room with him and all his followers to come. He thanks the Father for them, prays for their unity, and that the Father would be glorified in them.

Read John 17:1–5.

Jesus opened by saying “the hour,” that is, his purpose for coming to earth, was upon him. His purpose was to give us eternal life (John 3:14–15; 20:31) which, in verse 3, he describes as knowing the Father. **How does Jesus’s description of eternal life—knowing God—compare to how you have typically understood it?**

Dr. Evans defined eternal life as “undisturbed, increasing knowledge of God.” **If eternal life starts now, as he noted, what are you currently doing to increase your knowledge of God?**

**In what ways has your knowledge of God increased since you first believed in Christ?**

Read John 17:6–19. Jesus asks the Father to protect his followers after he leaves so that they will be one. His primary hope is not that they would be successful, powerful, or have easy lives. Rather, he wanted them to be one. **Why was unity among the disciples so critical in the days and weeks surrounding Jesus’s death and resurrection? Do you think it is as important for the church to be unified as the disciples were unified? Why, or why not?**

In verse 14, Jesus predicted that the disciples would be hated because they were not “of the world.” Dr. Evans defined “the world” as any place where “God is not a part of the equation.” When we, Jesus’s disciples, involve God in our decisions and prioritize him above all else, we will very likely be rejected, misunderstood, and even hated. **What does your decision-making process look like? When have you been forced to balance living among worldly people yet maintaining a godly perspective?**

In verse 15, Jesus asked the Father to protect his friends from the evil one. He wasn’t asking God to take them out of the world—Jesus was sending them into the world, after all—but he knew they needed spiritual protection. **What kind of opposition have you encountered for being a Christian? Which truth affects you more—that you will face evil, or that God will protect you from it?**

**Note:** *To learn more about the persecution the early church experienced, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Despite the hate or rejection that comes our way, God will protect us. We can rest assured in his provision, even when the world turns against us. **What could it look like to confront the fear of being opposed or hated with the truth that the Father will protect you?**

Jesus described his followers as sanctified, or made holy, but not of the world. When we behave and think like the world more than we do for Jesus, we lose our effectiveness as a witness for Christ. **In what ways do you see worldly influences impacting your choices? What can you do to increase your focus on Christ, his Word, and the mission he has for you?**

Read John 17:20–26. Jesus prayed for both his present disciples and all those who were to come—people like us. His prayer was simple: that we would be one. **What do you think gets in the way of the church’s unity today? What do you think it would take for the church to be “one”?**

***Note:** To learn more about the meaning of glory, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Unity is not inconsequential. Jesus told the Father he wanted us to be one with him so the world might know Jesus (v. 23), so we would see his glory (v. 24), and so that God’s love would be in us (v. 26). The church’s unity is essential to our witness and experience of God. **What can we do to promote and create unity in the church?**

### **LAST WORD**

God wants us to know him. And just as Jesus made the Father known to his disciples, we are commissioned to make God known to the world. But, to be successful, we must be unified, just as Jesus and the Father are unified. When the church is one, we reflect God’s love to the world, and he is glorified. Let us continue to pursue oneness with other believers so that the world will be drawn to know our savior.

### **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## **1. Persecution of the Early Church**

In John 17:14, Jesus alludes to the rejection that his followers would inevitably face. In Luke 21, we get a clearer picture of the kind of persecution he was referring to.

Read Luke 21:12–17. **What kind of persecution did Jesus foretell? Why would his followers endure such violence?**

The Bible records many incidents that fulfilled Jesus's predictions. In Acts 7:54–60, Stephen is stoned to death for publicly proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. His death sparked “a great persecution” of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). **To what degree have you faced opposition for your faith? How have you reacted when being confronted or opposed to speaking about Jesus?**

As a result of the persecution, the church scattered throughout Judea. Those who left Jerusalem continued to preach the gospel (Acts 8:4). Persecution became a catalyst for the expansion of the church. **What does it say about the believers' faith that they willingly endured hardship and continued to preach about Jesus?**

Read Hebrews 10:32–34. The writer describes faithful believers who withstood public insult and suffering and stood by those enduring similar treatment because they had a “better and enduring possession.” No violence or oppression could steal their hope and joy in Christ. Their loyalty to Jesus and one another should inspire us to endure in our faith. **How does the steadfast faith of the early church inspire your faith today?**

The people who walked through Jerusalem with Jesus were physically, economically, and socially oppressed. But they chose Christ because Jesus was their ultimate treasure. **How could they deny their king in the face of temporary pain? In what situations, if any, are you tempted to deny or downplay your faith?**

Today, our persecution in the West rarely, if ever, is like that experienced by the early church. We might be opposed, laughed at, or dismissed, but not imprisoned, beaten, and executed. Read Hebrews 12:1–4. **What would it look like for you to follow the early church's example, enduring all hardships for the sake of knowing Jesus and making him known?**

## **2. Peek at the Greek: What is “glory”?**

Throughout his prayer in John 17, Jesus referred to glory. The Father glorified him and he glorified the Father (v. 1, 4). He gave his glory to his disciples and asked the Father to reveal his glory to all his present and future disciples (v. 22). But what is glory? It is a word we use in church a lot but may be a concept we cannot quite define.

### **How would you define “glory”?**

The Greek word for glory is *doxa*. In the New Testament, *doxa* is used to give us a sense of majestic splendor or a high, honorable reputation. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for glory, *kabod*, carries the sense of a weighty reputation and a name that gives importance to a person or thing. Today, “to give glory” describes offering honor, adoration, worship, and thanksgiving to something or someone magnificent, honorable, or distinguished. We give our best attention and praise to whatever or whomever we see as “the best.”

When we fulfill God's purpose for our lives—work with the gifts he has given us and reflect his character to the world—we make him the center of attention. Our actions point to his good reputation, importance, and splendor.

First Corinthians 10:31 commands us to focus on God's glory: “. . . whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” In every situation, we should focus on honoring God and showing the world who he is. Consider your gifts and sphere of influence. **In what ways can you glorify God in your everyday life? In your relationships? With your abilities?**

As those who follow Jesus, we get to show the world what he is like by living in a way that accurately reflects his character. When we love well, do right, serve others, and submit to God and one another, we reveal a glorious God worthy of our praise and adoration. Consider how you will point others to Jesus today through your words and actions.

## Session 6: John 18:1–40

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

#### **Main Idea**

As Christians, we belong to Jesus’s kingdom and look to him as our final authority in all matters of truth and wisdom.

#### **Head Change**

To know that the goal of Jesus’s ministry is to redeem sinners and bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

#### **Heart Change**

To feel humbled before Jesus, submitting to his commands and authority.

#### **Life Change**

To apply God’s truth, found in his Word, to our daily decisions.

#### **OPEN**

**How do you think our lives would be different if we had a king instead of a president?**

Our experience is far separated from the monarchies and kingdoms of old. Our leaders come and go by the will of the people. As a result, we have no problem criticizing our politicians. But monarchs were (and still are) born into their role—preference and cultural mood had nothing to do with their ascension. They ruled absolutely and demanded their subjects’ loyalty.

In today’s session, Jesus we will learn about Jesus’s kingdom. Like a king, he demands our attention and obedience. But his kingdom is uniquely different from the ones we are familiar with. The kingdom of God is one that we all would want to join.

#### **READ**

John 18:1–40. If you are short on time, read verses 1–11, 16–18, 25–27, 33–38.

#### **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What is our proper response to acknowledging Jesus as king?**

## What is the foundation of God's kingdom?

Show Session 6: *John 18:1–40* (13 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

After dinner, Jesus and his disciples went to an orchard. From other gospel accounts, we know this was the Garden of Gethsemane. There, he was betrayed by Judas. Read John 18:1–11.

Jesus knew Judas's heart was set against him, and he still walked into Judas's trap in obedience to the Father. **What does Jesus's willingness to endure betrayal reveal about his character? About his love for you?**

Jesus willingly accepted betrayal, arrest, and his future execution in order to fulfill the Father's purposes for him. **When you are faced with a difficult decision, how does the potential for difficulty influence your decisions? What do you think it looks like for us to trust God in our difficult circumstances?**

When the soldiers recognized who they had come to arrest, they fell to the ground in shock. Dr. Evans noted that their amazement is the natural reaction to meeting Jesus. **When we encounter God, we cannot help but fall to our knees. When you first met Jesus, what was your response?**

Peter lashed out, striking a servant of the high priest. His fear and aggression revealed how little he understood Jesus's mission. Peter was intent on keeping Jesus safe, but Jesus was determined to save the world through his death. **In what ways is Peter's reaction understandable? What can we do to remind ourselves to trust God when we want to act like Peter—impulsively with more passion than thought?**

After Jesus's arrest, John's account will bounce between the events inside of the courtroom where Jesus is being tried and outside, where Peter begins to deny having met Jesus. Read John 18:12–18.

Peter and "another disciple" followed Jesus as he was taken in front of Annas, stopping by a fire to warm themselves. There, Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus, a sharp contrast with his previous boasting that he would be willing to die for Jesus (John 13:37). **In what ways can you relate with Peter's fear? When you have been challenged about your faith, how do you respond?**

***Note:** Scholars believe the unnamed disciple who accompanied Peter was John, the author of this Gospel account. To learn more about John, also known as "the beloved apostle," go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

While Peter was denying Jesus outside, Jesus was being questioned by the High Priest. Read John 18:19–24.

Jesus did not back down from the religious leaders' abuse but stood serenely confident through his questioning. While Peter denied the truth to save himself, Jesus was being beaten for speaking honestly. **In today's world, how can speaking the truth get us into trouble? To what degree are you willing to get mocked or rejected for speaking the truth?**

Dr. Evans said that truth was God's key to unlock his plan in the world. **How did defending the truth before Annas move Jesus's plan forward?**

The story cuts from Jesus's trials with Annas and Caiaphas back outside to Peter. Read John 18:25–27.

Peter continued to buckle under pressure from young women and slaves, people with little to no authority in their society. After Peter denied Jesus a third time, a rooster crowed, just as Jesus had predicted. While John doesn't show us Peter's reaction, Luke 22:61–62 tells us that Peter left the courtyard and wept bitterly. His shame was overwhelming. **When is it easy for us to deny Jesus? How much pressure does it take for us to consider denying Jesus?**

**How do you react to spiritual failure?**

The High Priests wanted Jesus dead, but the Romans controlled their land and only the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, could hand down a death sentence. Read John 18:28–40.

When asked, Jesus did not deny being a king, but he clearly described his kingdom as “not of this world” (v. 36). Dr. Evans explained that Jesus meant his kingdom was not sourced from the world—it originated with God. Jesus's first and foremost allegiance was to God and his plans, not the politics of humans. **What can Jesus's answer teach us about the relationship between his church and worldly institutions today? Which “kingdom” have you found yourself supporting more often—the kingdom of God or the political situation in which you live?**

**Note:** To learn more about Pilate and the Roman governance over Israel, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Echoing his statement that his kingdom was not “of this world,” Jesus then said that those who are “of the truth” (18:37) listen to his voice—the source of truth. Those who embrace Jesus as king also align their lives with his Word. **What does it look like for you to listen to Jesus's voice?**

Jesus was betrayed by a friend, arrested on false charges, convicted in a sham trial, and rejected in favor of Barabbas, a criminal. He endured all this so that we might be accepted by God, freed from sin, and made members of God's kingdom. God may also call us into difficult circumstances to build his kingdom. **What difficult circumstances**

**has God called you into? What would it look like for you to serve God during these circumstances?**

### **LAST WORD**

Jesus's kingdom is not of this earth, but he is intent on bringing it to the earth. He is our king; as his followers, we must submit our lives to his will, his Word, and his wisdom. The more we do, the more of his presence we can experience in this life.

But what if God calls us into a difficult situation? What if our circumstances are in chaos? What if our friends have abandoned us? Be at peace, your king has experienced all of these things and is with you. He has not forgotten you. In fact, your struggle may be the means of his kingdom being built on earth.

### **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## **1. Who is the unnamed apostle?**

Throughout the Gospel of John, the author refers to one of the apostles by various vague descriptions— “the other disciple” or “the one Jesus loved”—but never by name. Many scholars believe this unnamed apostle is the author, John the apostle, son of Zebedee.

John enjoyed a close relationship with Jesus: he was part of Jesus's inner circle, along with his brothers, James and Peter, and was present at important events like Jesus's transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37).

John often wrote himself into his Gospel. Read John 13:23; 19:26–27; 20:8. **What do these passages teach you about John's relationship with Jesus? In what way do their interactions deepen your understanding about Jesus's love for his friends?**

Another aid to finding the apostle John in the Gospels and Acts is his partnership with Peter. They sometimes worked together, whether procuring a room for the Passover (Luke 22:8), dramatically healing a lame man (Acts 3:1–10), or encouraging new believers (Acts 8:14–17). Peter's interactions with John support the idea that the unnamed disciple who often partnered with him was the same person, John the son of Zebedee.

Read John 13:23–25; 18:15; 20:4; 21:7. **What do you learn about John from the events he and Peter experienced? How would you describe his friendship with Peter?**

Read John 21:20–24. **What does the author want his readers to know after they've read his account of Jesus's life?**

John and Jesus shared a strong relationship. As his leader, Jesus addressed John's missteps, even speaking sharply to correct his wrong thinking. As friends, they shared a deep connection, loyalty, and grief. Through their relationship, Jesus's humanity shines brightly. **Do you think of Jesus as a relatable person who could be a close friend?**

**What can you learn from John that could help you have a deeper relationship with Jesus?**

## **2. Pilate and Roman Rule in Judea**

Throughout the Gospels, the people of Judea were under Roman occupation. **But why were the Romans in Israel at all?**

In 63 BC, the Romans expanded their ever-growing empire across the Mediterranean and swallowed up Judea. Jewish kings like Herod (Luke 3:1) submitted to Roman rule and his allowed to remain “kings” with limited influence. The true authority in Judea was the governor, men like Pontius Pilate, a Roman prefect tasked with maintaining order in the Jewish territory.

The Jewish historian Josephus described Pilate as an authoritarian leader who did not respect the Jews' religious traditions. His tone-deaf decisions, like hanging pictures of the Emperor throughout Jerusalem and minting coins with pagan symbols on them, provoked riots and led to the rise of a revolutionary group called zealots—men who used guerilla warfare and terror as weapons against Rome. Eventually, Pilate relented from provoking the Jews, but maintained an uneasy relationship with the Jewish authorities. But Judea was a tinderbox, ready to explode into violence. **How would you react if you were living under occupation like the Jews of this time?**

Now that you have an idea of the political climate in Judea, consider some of Jesus's disciples: Matthew worked for Rome as a tax collector and Simon was a zealot. The only place that enemies came together in Judea was under the banner of Christ. **What do the diversity of political viewpoints in the twelve disciples teach us about forgiveness and tolerance in the church?**

While the Pharisees and Sadducees held some authority in Judea, only the Roman governor could hand down a death penalty to a criminal. Pilate was politically vulnerable—he needed to maintain peace in Judea and could not allow a purported “king of the Jews” to remain free. But Jesus, in Pilate's view, an innocent man. Pilate's loyalty to Caesar and his own political future led him to condemn Jesus despite the injustice of the conviction (Luke 23:12; Acts 4:27). **In what ways do the political backdrop of the Gospels help you understand the story more clearly?**

The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, their promised king whom God had said would redeem them. The oppression of Rome weighed heavy on their lives, and they assumed the Messiah would lead a revolution that would bring them political freedom. So, when Jesus appeared preaching “the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15), they thought he meant a new Jewish kingdom on earth. But Jesus had come to bring something even greater—a heavenly kingdom and spiritual freedom. **In what ways can we confuse Jesus’s purposes today? What do you think it looks like to prioritize Christ in our politically free system?**

# Session 7: John 19:1–42

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

Jesus offered himself as our substitute, freeing all who trust in him from the penalty of their sin.

### **Head Change**

To know that Jesus’s suffering and death satisfied God’s justice.

### **Heart Change**

To feel grateful for Jesus’s love—a love that sent him to the cross to save us.

### **Life Change**

To celebrate Jesus’s deep love for us by worshipping him and telling others the good news of salvation.

## **OPEN**

**When have you finished something—a work task, a piece of art, a house project—and felt good about the results? What unique challenges or struggle did it take to finish that project?**

We all accomplish simple projects every day—going to work, cleaning the house, or make dinner. These tasks usually aren’t even worth remembering. But the things that matter most to us usually stretched our capabilities, taught us something new, or changed us in some way. Those accomplishments tend to matter the most to us.

The greatest work of Christ’s life was a mission few would ever accept and no other could ever accomplish. His entire life pointed to his death, a cruel and unjust execution. But when he finished his work, it changed history. As you hear Dr. Evans describe Jesus’s final hours, consider how your response to the cross changes your life—and your eternity.

## **READ**

Read John 19:1–42. If you are short on time, read verses 4–11, 15–19, 28–30, and 38–42.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**Why did the Jewish authorities want to kill Jesus?**

**From where do all governments derive their power?**

**What did Jesus's death achieve?**

Show Session 7: *John 19:1–42* (13 minutes).

**DISCUSS**

As John 19 opens, Jesus remains in Pilate's custody. He has not been found guilty of any crimes, but he is still being treated as a criminal. Despite Pilate's desire to free him, the people want to see him crucified. Read John 19:1–3.

Jesus was forced to wear warped symbols of royalty designed to humiliate him—a purple robe and a twisted crown of thorns. Though he truly was the king of the Jews, the people abused him verbally and physically. And yet, he did not reply to their mocking. He did not retaliate. **As you observe Jesus's unjust suffering, how would you describe the depth of his love for his people?**

Read John 19:4–15.

We may wonder why Jesus was able to remain so calm in the face of injustice and physical pain. In verse 11, Jesus reveals to both Pilate and us why he was not fighting against his captors: “You would have no authority over me at all, if it hasn't been given you from above.” Even in his darkest hour, Jesus knew that God was in control. **How do you typically react to people and God in moments of suffering?**

**In hard circumstances, what could you do to trust in the Father's authority? What could help you remember that you are always in God's hands?**

The Jews did not recognize their Messiah, rejecting Jesus and putting their trust in the authority of Rome. Instead of trusting God to fix their circumstances, they sided with their oppressors. **What authority do you think politics should have over your decisions? In what ways are you tempted to trust political leaders rather than trusting God to change your circumstances?**

As Dr. Evans said, political rulers are temporary and only have the power that God himself gives them. That should give us peace, even in our divided political climate. But politics remains one of the greatest sources of anxiety and fear for Christians. **What do you think is a healthy way for Christians to participate in politics?**

Read John 19:16–24. Crucifixion was an abhorrent means of execution, torturous and humiliating, meant to deter would-be criminals or revolutionaries from standing up to Rome. Jesus voluntarily accepted crucifixion, not as an example of Rome's cruel power, but to reveal God's deep love for criminals, spiritual revolutionaries, and his enemies. **Do you think sin—our own and that of the worst sinners—deserves a punishment as intense as crucifixion? Why, or why not?**

## **What does it mean to you that Jesus endured such trauma for your sake?**

Jesus was crucified between two common criminals. Dr. Evans mentioned that the two men reacted differently to Jesus: one mocked him and the other called on Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom (Luke 23:42). We are asked to do the same: to place our faith in Jesus, who alone can forgive our sins and make us right before God. **Have you put yourself in God's hands, trusting him to rescue you from the penalty of sin? If not, why not? What questions do you still have about Jesus and what it means to know him as your king?**

***Note:** To learn more about atonement in the Old Testament, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

In his final moments, Jesus gave his mother to the care of his disciple. Read John 19:25–27.

Jesus (who had four younger brothers) indicated the important bond of spiritual family. Many times, our biological family does not share our faith and we need a “faith family” to support us in our spiritual journey. **What benefit have you found to be in community with fellow Christians (whether relatives or not)? In what ways have you provided one another with practical, emotional, and spiritual support?**

Read John 19:28–37. Jesus's death fulfilled, or gave deeper significance to, multiple Old Testament passages, many of which Dr. Evans pointed out in the video. When we see the connection between Jesus's death and Scripture, we can clearly see that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. **How is your faith enriched by understanding the connection between Jesus and the Old Testament passages about the Messiah?**

***Note:** To learn more about specific Scriptures that Jesus fulfilled during his passion, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

In verse 35–37, we read that everything Jesus endured was to fulfill the scriptures so that “you also might believe.” Every fulfilled prophecy is another confirmation of God's love for us. **When you read the account of Christ's crucifixion, what do you learn about God? What new insight do you have into the breadth of God's love for you?**

The men who cared for Jesus's body were secret disciples, men of influence who were afraid of the social consequences of following him. Read John 19:38–42.

Unlike Peter, the men who buried Jesus stepped out of the shadows and publicly associated themselves with Jesus when it was most dangerous to do so. **What are some consequences of associating yourself with Jesus today? Whose rejection have you been afraid of? What would it look like to humbly proclaim your faith in the face of disapproval?**

This could have been the end of the story—a broken Messiah laid in a tomb while his closest disciples were silent and scattered. While we know what will come in the next chapter of John, try to put yourself in the shoes of Jesus’s followers on this day. Maybe it is not hard—maybe you have felt like your faith is fruitless, like it has all come to nothing. **Where do you turn when the future seems hopeless?**

We don’t have to live without hope because our redeemer lives. His death is a fulfillment of Scripture and how promises are sure. Despite what we may feel, hope is never far away. **What could you do to remind yourself and the people around you of the hope we have in Christ?**

### **LAST WORD**

Jesus’s passion, his suffering and crucifixion, remains the hinge event of history—and the central element of our salvation. He came to earth in order to die for us, the substitute sacrifice uniquely able to pay the price for our sins. He gave himself as a gift out of his great love for us. How we respond to him will dictate our lives today and eternally.

The Gospel of John was written so that you might believe in Jesus: the light of the world, the way, the truth and the life. Do you believe?

### **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## **1. Atonement and Old Testament Sacrifices**

Atonement is the process of two estranged parties being reunified or “at-one” with each other. Because our sin separates us from God, we must atone, or be forgiven, for our sins before we can be at one with him. Our atonement came through the death of Jesus. But how did atonement work in the Old Testament, when people sinned but had no redeemer to take away their sin?

In the Old Testament, God’s covenant included animal sacrifice, a pathway for the forgiveness of sins. The punishment for sin was always death (see Romans 6:23), but God allowed an animal—bulls, sheep, goats, and birds—to take the place of the sinner offering the sacrifice.

Read Leviticus 1:1–4.

God gave Moses detailed guidelines on how to correctly go about sacrificing an innocent animal on behalf of a sinful person.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, through the days of Jesus, Hebrew priests were constantly making animal sacrifices for God's people, because no matter how many sacrifices were made, people kept sinning. Read Hebrews 9:11–14.

The blood of bulls and goats was an incomplete sacrifice, unable to take away sin once and for all. It could only cover a Hebrew until they sinned again. **How soon would we have to make another sacrifice if every one of our sins required a new atonement?**

This passage lists a few ways Jesus is a better and final sacrifice. **What makes Jesus a more complete atonement for us?**

Read Hebrews 10:8–14. Jesus is the final sacrifice for sin. We do not need to punish ourselves or make new atonements when we fail God. **In what ways do we try to atone for our sins instead of trusting in the complete work of Christ?**

Jesus is also our good high priest, who is seated at the right hand of the Father. Unlike human priests, his work is finished. **When you trust in Christ for atonement, what security can you have that was not available to Old Testament saints?**

If you have trusted in Jesus, you don't have to pay for your sins. That work is finished. You only need to trust in the one who has overcome the sin that plagued the world since Genesis. **In what ways, if any, do you try to pay or "make up for" your sins? What would it look like to trust in Jesus's finished work instead of your own efforts?**

## **2. The Scriptures Jesus's Crucifixion Fulfilled**

Throughout John's account of Jesus's death we find allusions to prophecies about the Messiah, noting how Jesus fulfilled each one. John's record meticulously shows that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah and that his death was no accident. It was his destiny, which he knew and accepted (John 18:4). As the promised king, he had come to fulfill the Old Testament that pointed toward him, Israel's long-awaited savior.

In the following Scripture comparisons, notice who is fulfilling ancient prophecy.

Read Psalm 22:18, then John 19:23–24.  
Read Psalm 34:20, then John 19:31–33, 36.

The soldiers had no idea their actions were fulfilling out long-foretold prophecies. Their actions validated God's plan of salvation. **What do you learn about God as you see enemies of Jesus act in ways that directly fulfill his Word?**

Psalm 22 contains a variety of statements that allude to the Messiah's suffering. Read 22:1–8, 16–18. **What parallels do you see with the accounts of Jesus's passion in John 19 and Psalm 22?**

Ancient texts written by and for Israelites in the time of David connect directly with events and people during Jesus's lifetime. The Bible's continuity is one evidence of its reliability. Sixty-six books written over a span of 1,500 years in three languages combine to tell one grand story, God's plan to redeem his people.

Take a moment to thank God for giving us his Word, telling us his story, and showing us his character through it. **What have you read that makes you worship God today?**

# **Session 8: John 20:1–31**

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, whose death and resurrection grant eternal life to all who believe in him.

### **Head Change**

To know that all those who believe in Jesus are freed from the penalty of sin and have an eternal future with God.

### **Heart Change**

To feel joy and gratitude for Christ's victory over death.

### **Life Change**

To share the good news of Christ's resurrection freely and frequently.

## **OPEN**

**What is a piece of good news you have shared recently?**

We are, in many ways, natural evangelists. When we watch a good movie, we tell others to see it. When we eat a good meal, we eagerly share the name of the restaurant with our friends. When we find something good, we can't help but share it.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the culmination of his mission on earth and the most powerful event in history. The shock and awe of his appearance to the disciples brought them unimaginable joy. As his disciples today, we too experience the joy of knowing Christ lives. And like Mary Magdalene, we know that such wonderful news begs to be shared.

## **READ**

Read John 20:1–31. If you are short on time, read John 20:1–7, 15–18, 24–29.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**How do we know that God accepted Christ's death on the cross as a sufficient payment for the sins of the world?**

**What should believers be doing with their knowledge of the resurrection?**

Show Session 8: *John 20:1–31* (12 minutes).

### **DISCUSS**

After three days, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John went to Jesus's tomb, but what they found was not what they expected. Read John 20:1–10.

Peter and John, saw the expensive burial cloths on the ground of Jesus's tomb, but his body was nowhere to be found. The carefully rolled facecloth seemed to confirm that Jesus himself had risen. John records that when he entered the tomb, he believed Jesus had been resurrected. **If you have trusted in Jesus, what evidence convinced you to believe in his resurrection?**

*Note: To learn more about the importance of Jesus's bodily resurrection, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Read John 20:11–18. Mary did not recognize Jesus until he spoke to her. But after hearing his voice, she recognized him at once. **How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? What could you do to know him more deeply, to recognize his voice speaking to you in the midst of all other voices vying for your attention?**

Jesus gave Mary the task of telling his followers that he was alive. Though the culture didn't value women's word, Jesus did. Dr. Evans noted that Jesus's directive validates the call for women to proclaim the gospel. **In what ways does your church encourage women to develop and use their spiritual gifts? If women have played a role in your own spiritual journey, who were they, and what did they do that impacted you?**

The call to share the truth of the resurrection belongs to all of us, women and men alike. Telling others about Jesus's victory over death can take many forms, whether in person, to large groups, through writing, or creating art. **What method do you most often use to share the gospel?**

Mary's message to the disciples was simple: she had met the risen Lord and then shared his message. Our communication of the gospel should be just as clear as that (see Matthew 28:18–20). **How do you usually explain the good news of Jesus to someone who has never heard it before? In what ways do you change your approach with someone who has been raised in church?**

Read John 20:19–23. The disciples were hiding behind locked doors, afraid the authorities might find and crucify them as they had Jesus. While we may never be under the same violent threats the disciples endured, we can let fear control our faith. **In what ways can you sympathize with the disciples' fear? What is your typical reaction when you feel afraid to talk about your faith?**

Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and share the news of his resurrection with others. Dr. Evans said that if we are not sharing Christ with others, we aren't taking the resurrection as seriously as we should. **Who in your life needs to hear the good news that their sins have been forgiven? What do you think it means to have a "lifestyle of evangelism"?**

Read John 20:24–31. In many ways, Thomas's skepticism seems reasonable, doesn't it? Could a man really raise from the dead? We often treat doubts like a flaw, but they are a normal part of living by faith. **In what ways can we view doubt as a condemnable part of our faith?**

Jesus didn't scold Thomas for having doubts. Rather, he invited Thomas to touch his wounds, a moment of grace for the disciple with whom many of us can relate. Instead of silently wrestling with our doubt, we should take them to Jesus. **What doubts did you overcome after first hearing the gospel? What sorts of doubts are you wrestling with now?**

**What does it look like to show grace to each other when they share doubt, just as Jesus showed grace to Thomas?**

***Note:** To learn more about God's reaction to our doubt, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Much of Jesus's life and words were not recorded, but John included all the information that would help his readers believe that Jesus is the Messiah. **What does John say is the purpose of his Gospel?**

**As you have studied the Gospel of John, what is your conclusion about Jesus?**

As Dr. Evans mentioned, those who have believed in Jesus have a responsibility to share the good news of his death and resurrection with others. **How can you live, speak, write, or otherwise communicate in ways that invite people to know Jesus better?**

### **LAST WORD**

Jesus is alive! John 20 is one of the most significant passages in all of Scripture, for in it we see the risen Christ and hear his voice offering peace and urging his disciples to believe in his works. Their belief, though mingled with fear and doubt, changed the world.

Some believe, some wonder, and some doubt, but Jesus loves us all through our questions and fears. God works through imperfect people to build his kingdom and is inviting us to join that work. Consider this: the gospel has come all the way through history to us. It's our turn to share it.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

## 1. The Significance of Jesus's Bodily Resurrection

Each of the Gospels includes an account of Jesus's death and resurrection. But how do we know that his sacrifice satisfied the Father's wrath, that it was sufficient to forgive all sin once and for all? The answer is Jesus's bodily resurrection.

The biblical writers took care to show that Jesus rose with a physical body. His friends and family recognized him, touched him, and ate with him. Mary clung to him briefly, while Thomas was invited to poke his wounds (John 20:27). He specifically reassured them that he was not a ghost:

"Why are you troubled," he asked them, "And why do doubts rise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet. But while they were still amazed and in disbelief because of their joy, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" So they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. (Luke 24:38–43)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul emphasized the historical nature of Jesus's resurrection—he truly is alive. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

### What proofs does Paul give for Jesus's physical resurrection?

The resurrection proved that Jesus had conquered death, the penalty of sin. As a result, we can live in freedom from our sin and with the hope that we will be with Jesus in eternity. If Jesus were still dead, decayed in a tomb, he would have no power to make good on his promises to raise up his followers to new life.

To those who denied any resurrection, Paul emphasized the importance of Jesus's resurrection. Read 1 Corinthians 15:16–20.

As Jesus goes, so go those who believe in him. If he is still dead, our lives end at our own deaths with no hope for eternity. **How have you understood the significance of Jesus's physical resurrection?**

Only a savior who is alive can save us. Jesus cannot forgive and offer us a future if he is still in the grave. But he does live, and he does forgive, and we do have hope. Take a

moment to praise and thank God for his incredible plan to bring you into an eternity with him.

## 2. Doubting God

People tend to feel safe with certainty. Faith, by nature, has some sense of mystery, questions that don't seem to have answers. For some, these questions can feel like proofs against their faith and lead them to reject Christ. But our doubts are not flaws. Rather, they are opportunities to investigate our faith more deeply and to trust God with the mysteries of life.

Jesus encountered many people who struggled with doubt. Nathanael doubted Jesus because he had bought into his cultural assumptions about Jesus's hometown: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Nicodemus couldn't logically understand Jesus's teaching that a person must be born again (John 3:4), though he continued to pursue greater understanding. Jesus's own brothers, Mary's other sons, suffered from being too familiar with Jesus—how could their brother be the Messiah? And let's not forget Thomas, labeled for centuries by his doubt in the risen savior.

Read Mark 9:17–27.

Many of us can identify with the father of the possessed boy, caught between belief and unbelief. The man, desperate to get his suffering son help, had brought the boy to Jesus. "But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us," he told Jesus in verse 22. Jesus responded, "If you can? Everything is possible for the one who believes." **When have you felt like the father in this story? How does Jesus's response to him impact your own faith struggle?**

**What did it mean for you to trust God for help when you did not know how he would respond?**

How often have you quoted the boy's father as you prayed, "I do believe; help my unbelief!" The struggle to trust God is a common, very human condition. Willing ourselves to believe does little to fix our problem. So how do we endure our times of doubting God?

Consider these three ideas:

**Keep turning to God even when it feels futile.** Our problem is not the struggle to believe but when we stop wrestling with God. We may lose sight of him but we cannot stop looking. Like the boy's father, run to Jesus even if you aren't sure what he will do for you. You display faith in the very act of continuing to turn to God. **When have you wrestled with God? What did that experience teach you about yourself and about God?**

**Wrestle with your doubts in community.** We find encouragement and support with others who share our faith, and in our times of weakness they help hold us up and keep us pointing in God's direction. Stick close to your faith community. It is very likely that people in your church or small group may have wrestled with the same doubts you are struggling with. **Who could you talk to about your doubts? In what ways could your church community support you as you wrestle with your questions?**

**Finally, remember God's mercy for doubters.** Jesus did not condemn the boy's father for his doubt. Rather he answered the man's prayer and healed the boy. Our Lord is eager to draw you near to him. Remember his goodness, his love for you, and his finished work of redeeming you. Take a moment to bring your doubts to God. **What questions do you have for him? How might you trust him to help you with these questions?**

# Session 9: John 21:1–25

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

We should eagerly seek God after we have failed him because he is eager to forgive and restore us.

### **Head Change**

To know that Jesus does not disqualify us from his service when we fail.

### **Heart Change**

To feel confident in God's unending love for us rather than a fear that he might abandon us.

### **Life Change**

To go to God in humility and hope after we've failed him, knowing that he restores his wayward disciples.

## **OPEN**

**When have you been offered a second chance? How did you respond to their offer?**

We all fail and need second chances, but we don't often expect to be given a second chance. When we fail someone, we expect them to reject or punish us. But God is not that way.

In our final session, Dr. Tony Evans will explore Peter's journey from his great denial to his humble restoration, revealing God's heart for sinners and failures. Where guilt and shame tell us we need to hide from God, Jesus seeks us out.

## **READ**

Read John 21:1–25.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What is the significance of the charcoal fire?**

**How does Jesus treat a disciple who wishes to be restored?**

Show Session 9: *John 21:1–25* (10 minutes).

## **DISCUSS**

John 21 acts as an epilogue, resolving the tension between Jesus and Peter, the disciple who denied and abandoned him. Read John 21:1–14.

After Jesus’s crucifixion, some of the disciples returned to their old habits—fishing on the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. In a way, it was like Jesus hadn’t changed their lives at all. **When have you been tempted to respond to failure by going back to an old, familiar habit? What can make it easy to give up on God’s plan and stick to our known routines?**

The disciples only recognized Jesus when their nets were full. Sometimes, we don’t recognize God is at work in our lives until we see a miraculous change. **What big changes has Jesus caused in your life? When in that process of change did you recognize God was at work?**

When Peter realized the Lord was back, he jumped in the water and swam to shore. His first instinct was to go to Jesus. **What feelings or doubts can stop you from rushing to Jesus when you’ve sinned?**

Read John 21:15–19. Dr. Evans reminded us that Peter’s denials occurred around a charcoal fire (John 18:18). At the shore, Jesus deliberately recalled Peter’s failure as they stood together over another charcoal fire. As Dr. Evans said, “Jesus brought him back to his failure to face it.” **When have you let shame keep you from healing? How willing are you to face your failures in order to start healing?**

Jesus asked Peter the same question three times: Do you love me? His repeated question can feel like a condemnation, but Jesus is offering Peter a chance to repent for each of his three denials. Christ covered Peter’s sin completely with restoration. **When you think about God’s forgiveness, do you think there are limits or areas of your life he won’t restore? Explain your answer.**

***Note:** To learn more about the Greek words for love, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Jesus brought Peter back into full friendship with him. Jesus did not hold Peter’s failure over his head or see him as a less-trustworthy friend—the reconciliation was complete. **In what ways can our forgiveness be conditional?**

**Is there anyone in your life to whom you need to extend full—rather than conditional—forgiveness? How might you go about restoring that friendship?**

Jesus seemed to not be concerned with Peter’s less-than-enthusiastic response to his questions. He did not ask for more and didn’t remind Peter of his sins. Instead, Jesus immediately commissioned Peter to care for and lead his “sheep”—the ones who believed and followed Jesus. Despite our faithlessness, God is ever ready to forgive

and restore us. **Do you want to be restored and forgiven? What can Peter and Jesus’s conversation teach you about God’s desire for your future?**

Jesus beckoned Peter to follow him while simultaneously warning that he would end up dying for his faith. We are also called to follow Jesus, but being his disciple is costly. **What price have you paid for following Jesus? What encouragement do you have for others who are struggling to stay faithful or who are new in their faith journey?**

***Note:** To learn more about Peter’s life and death, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Read John 21:20–25.

Jesus had just told Peter of a difficult and undesirable future, leaving him to wonder if others would also have difficult a life. Jesus’s reply was blunt: “What is that to you?” God has a unique plan for each of us. Comparing our lives to the people around us distracts us from the mission Jesus has for us. **In what ways have you been tempted to compare your life with others?**

God is not a vengeful boss, punishing us for our failures. He is a gentle and merciful friend, giving us grace beyond what we deserve. He has a plan for each of us, purposes to build his kingdom designed specifically for us. All he asks is that we follow him, no matter where the road leads. **How would you describe your current relationship with Jesus?**

**What could you do to commit to following him more closely today?**

### **LAST WORD**

Peter’s restoration shows us that God knows our weaknesses and his forgiveness is only a moment away. We just have to be ready and willing to admit we have sinned and failed him. Let God know you are ready to be restored. He did it for Peter and can do it for you. He’s got kingdom work waiting for you.

The second half of the Gospel of John shows us a savior willing to save us no matter the cost. As we trust that his sacrifice on the cross paid the price we owe for our sins, we can step out in full confidence, knowing that God loves us fully. He’s well aware that we will fail, and he calls us to share in his kingdom work anyway. Will you follow him?

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## 1. Peek at the Greek: Words for “Love”

The New Testament authors wrote primarily in Greek. Sometimes, a Greek word has no direct translation into English, while other times several similar words in Greek will be translated with just one word in English.

Such is the case with the word “love.” In English, it can mean anything from preference to lifelong affection for a person. We love chocolate and we love God—one word carries vastly different levels of regard. Greek offers several different words for love each with its own level of feeling and commitment.

In Jesus’s restoration of Peter, he uses two different words—*agapé* and *phileo*—that our Bibles translate as “love.” When we dig into these words, Jesus’s questions to Peter take on a depth we may otherwise pass over.

*Agapé* is divine, perfect love. It is unending, unfaltering, and without blemish. God consistently displays this kind of love to us in his compassion, kindness, sacrifice, and patience to us.

Read 1 John 4:16–21. Every use of the word “love” in this passage is *agapé*. How would you describe God’s love?

### **What do you think it looks like to show others *agapé* love?**

The more common Greek word for love is *phileo*. It refers to the kind of love a person has for their own family or close friend. To act with *phileo* meant one would show favor or preference for someone. It is a willingness to be hospitable toward someone. In the New Testament, *phileo* is never used of God’s love, only people’s love for one another.

Jesus’s first question to Peter was “Do you *agapé* me?” Peter responded, “I *phileo* you”—I love you like family. Like many of us, Peter recognizes that his love for Jesus is not unconditional—our love for Jesus can waver. **In what ways does our love for God fall short of *agapé*?**

The third time Jesus questioned Peter, he used Peter’s word for love: “Peter, do you *phileo* me?” He met Peter where he was. If *phileo* love was all Peter could give, Jesus offered him friendship and grace. Jesus offers all of us the same grace, and chance after chance to be reconciled to him.

Understanding the different words for love helps us understand Peter and Jesus’s conversation and God’s intention for his people much more fully. **What does it look like for you to love God the best you can today?**

## 2. Peter’s Life and Death

The apostle Simon Peter lived out his faith with exuberance, if not prudence, during the years of Jesus's earthly ministry. He was one of Jesus's closest friends, privileged to experience personal teaching and amazing events (Matthew 17:1–9), but was known for his impulsiveness and speaking before thinking. But God used Peter, flawed as he was, to build his church.

Jesus, hearing Simon proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah, accepted his worship and declared that the church would stand upon that truth. He then gave Simon the nickname Peter, or Cephas, which means “Rock.” Peter went on to become the steadfast leader of the fledgling church, proclaiming the gospel to the crowds in Jerusalem immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:14–40).

**What have you seen as flaws in yourself that would prevent you from serving God? How does Peter's erratic journey give you hope?**

Peter knew the kind of death he had to look forward to—Jesus has told him what was coming. But that grim future did not stop him from building an eternal legacy. In his letter to the church, Peter wrote, “I think it is right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder, since I know that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed made clear to me” (2 Peter 1:13–14).

The Bible does not tell us about Peter's death, but early Christian writings speak of Peter's martyrdom in Rome under the reign of Emperor Nero in 64 AD. St. Clement of Rome, Eusebius, and Tertullian mentioned that Peter was tortured and crucified, his arms stretched out just like Jesus had foretold. Even in his gruesome death, Peter was emulating his Lord.

While we cannot know with certainty the details of Peter's death, historical documents give us enough evidence to know that Peter remained faithful to Jesus until the end—his *phileo* love had matured into *agapé* by the time he gave his life for his savior. **What legacy do you hope to leave behind? How are you contributing to that legacy now?**