



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: **Gospel of John (Part 2)** Theme: **I AM**

Overview: Jesus made several claims about himself in the Gospel of John. These claims connected the dots between his name, his identity, and his mission. They all have Old Testament antecedents with additional connections to Israel. In Part 2 of this three-part study in the Gospel of John, students will learn of Jesus' superiority to Abraham, how Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the exclusive way of salvation, and the true vine (new Israel). This LORD is the great I AM.

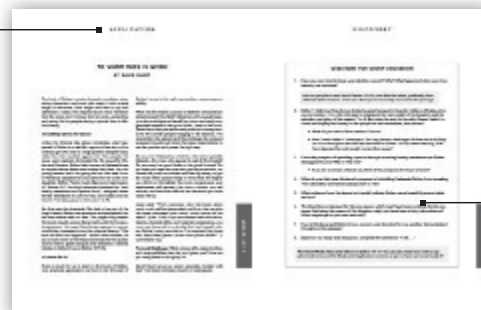
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

Although he is not identified in this Gospel account, aside from describing himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20, 24), the apostle John has long been recognized as the author of the fourth Gospel. Both internal evidence and the witness of early church leaders identify the apostle John as the author.

Audience

John's Gospel was likely to have been written in Ephesus to both Jewish and Gentile Christians of the late first century. John's purpose was to encourage the Christian community and to reinforce belief in Jesus' divinity. John states that his Gospel was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31, *New International Version*).

Date

John's Gospel has traditionally been dated after the writing of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Church tradition has John spending his final years in Ephesus and writing his Gospel account, along with his letters, late in life. The fourth Gospel is often dated between 85 and 95.

Setting

Church tradition says that the apostle John, along with Mary, Jesus' mother, relocated to the city of Ephesus in

Asia Minor after the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70. From this location, John wrote his Gospel and his letters to both encourage the early saints and to assure them of the divinity of Jesus.

Theme

Jerome (c.345-420), one of the early leaders of the church, described John's Gospel as a "spiritual Gospel." While the Synoptic Gospels provide an historical overview of Jesus' life, Jerome contended that John's Gospel was more theological and reflective. John's themes in his Gospel include the Divinity of Jesus (1:1-3, 1:14, 5:18, 8:58, 10:30, 14:9, 20:28, 20:31), Light versus Darkness (1:4-5, 3:19-21, 8:12, 12:35-36, 12:46), Love (3:16, 13:1, 13:34-35, 15:9-13), Truth (1:17, 4:23-24, 8:31-32, 8:44-46, 14:6, 15:26, 16:13, 17:17, 18:37-38), and the Necessity of Belief (1:12, 3:16-18, 6:35, 11:25-26, 20:30-31).

Why Study the Gospel of John?

John clearly stated that his Gospel was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). John goes beyond merely telling the story of who Jesus is, he calls for a committed relationship with Jesus. John both provides further details about Jesus' life that are overlooked in the Synoptic Gospels and he provides theologically rich insights into the life of Christ and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. John's Gospel clearly demonstrates the divinity of Jesus and provides essential information for understanding the rest of the New Testament.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: John 8:31-58

WEEK 2: John 10:1-18

WEEK 3: John 14:1-21, 27

WEEK 4: John 15:1-20, 26-27

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Do the work of the Father, who has set you free and claims you as his child.**

STUDY: Gospel of John (Part 2)

THEME: I AM

LESSON TEXT: John 8:31-58

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 1:1, 12; Exodus 3:13-15; Matthew 1:1; 3:7-9; Romans 9:6-8

STUDY

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM

BY MARK SCOTT

It is hard to overstate the significance of Abraham. Today he is looked to as the father of three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His name is mentioned 11 times in this lesson text. In the music department, I've heard people say, "It all goes back to the polka"; in the Bible, we could say, "It all goes back to Abraham" (Genesis 12:1-3).

The controversy about Jesus continued to swirl in this "festival section" of John's Gospel (chapters 5-10). His claims and miracles had the religious leaders nearly in a fit. Whether the festival was Passover, Tabernacles, or Dedication, Jesus was a lightning rod of controversy. Jesus finally came up to Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles (John 7:10), and the dialogue there led to an aggressive and pointed confrontation.

Abraham and Israel

John 8:31-47

Some Jews believed Jesus' word and were being liberated to the freedom that only he could give (v. 31). In these verses, John clearly juxtaposed the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus. Those leaders had heard Jesus teach about his Father, so they made this bold claim intending to one-up Jesus' Father: "We are Abraham's descendants" (v. 33). They obviously said this in a boastful manner, and then they claimed to not have been enslaved. They had a bad case of spiritual amnesia. Can you say, "400 years in Egypt?"

The term *slavery* was not always literal for Jesus, however. Slavery to sin can be a form of terrible solitary confinement. Only Jesus (not Abraham) can set those prisoners free. Jesus agreed with those debating him that they were Abraham's "physical" descendants, but they were not living up to the spiritual legacy of Abraham. Evidence of this was their desire to kill Jesus.

Jesus told the leaders that they had another father; this statement angered them, so they said, "Abraham is our father" (v. 39). Jesus took them to the woodshed by accusing them of being very unlike Abraham (vv. 39-41). This sounded to the Jewish leaders like a charge of spiritual illegitimacy, so they went in for the kill, "The only Father we have is God himself" (v. 41). Jesus' logic was impeccable. If God really was their Father, they would love his Son and hear what he wanted them to hear.

Jesus asserted that their real father was the devil. Therefore, their father was a *murderer*, their father was not *holding to*

the truth, their father had no truth *in him*, and their father was *the father of lies*. Jesus was not afraid to relate the truth to anyone. He asked a question no other human would be willing to ask: "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (v. 46). Only an extremely confident or foolish person would possibly expose themselves to such potential criticism. The bottom line was that Israel's leaders did not truly *belong to God*.

Abraham and Jesus

John 8:48-58

The Jewish leaders responded to Jesus' words with name-calling and charges. They charged Jesus with being a *Samaritan* and being *demon-possessed*. Jesus denied these accusations by saying he sought no glory for himself but only for his Father. Jesus was so "other-centered" that there was no way he was making bogus claims. If people would just obey Jesus, they would be spared from death.

This was preposterous to the leaders, so they reminded Jesus that Abraham had died, as had the prophets. So, they asked him two questions: (1) Was Jesus greater than Abraham, and (2) Who are you? Jesus responded by talking about how the Father and Son *glorify* (a key word in John's Gospel) each other, and how he knows the Father intimately. In fact, Jesus said, if he did not know the Father, then "I would be a *liar like you*" (v. 55). That statement angered them.

Jesus then verbally needled them by saying, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (v. 56). (Note: Momentarily, and for the sake of the argument, Jesus agreed that Abraham was their father; compare this with v. 39.)

The religious leaders were thinking only on a physical plane. They could tell that Jesus was not 50 years old. How could he know Abraham? Then Jesus made one of his most stunning claims ever, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (v. 58). Critics who contend that Jesus never claimed to be God need to read this verse again. The leaders knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. It is why, a verse later, they moved to stone him. Jesus refused to be polarized, and yet he is the most polarizing figure in history.

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APPLICATION

KEEP THE FOCUS ON CHRIST

BY DAVID FAUST

Years ago, a wise older minister gave me some good advice. “Always read the Gospels a lot,” he said, “because in the daily grind of leading a church and preaching week after week, it’s tempting to take your eyes off Jesus.” At first, I didn’t understand what he meant. How could a church called *Christian* fail to keep Christ central to its faith and practice? But I have seen it happen. Have you?

Would a visitor to your church readily recognize that Jesus Christ is the congregation’s focus—the main reason you gather to worship and scatter to serve? The Bible addresses marriage and parenthood, money management, relationships with friends, managing our emotions, and addressing social ills, and we need to hear sermons about practical topics like these. But a generic, politically correct form of spirituality won’t change the world. The church’s primary mission isn’t merely to “do church” and dole out advice about the pursuit of happiness, but to glorify Christ and help others become his disciples.

The Key Person

Life insurance companies sell “key person” policies that pay if an organization’s CEO or another key leader dies. Let’s be clear: The church’s key person will always be Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. He is the centerpiece of our faith, the heart of our message, and the head of the church. His death, burial, and resurrection are “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Christ is the key to understanding the Bible. He declared, “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39).

He is the key to finding freedom. He promised, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

He is the key to knowing God. He claimed, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

He is the key to a peaceful death. He said, “The one who believes in me will live, even though they die” (John 11:25).

The Great I AM

Charming personalities should never take precedence over Christ. Catchy marketing, trendy programs, and crowd-pleasing preaching must never overshadow the risen Lord or distract people from the gospel. Any religious system that leaves out Jesus ultimately will fail.

I’m not suggesting that we bore people with trite, shallow answers or neglect contemporary issues that need to be addressed. The point is, the gospel is always timely and relevant. In a world that pulls us in a thousand different directions, the church’s compass must always point to Christ.

He is the great “I AM.” “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). He is greater than the lawgiver, Moses . . . greater than prophets like Isaiah, Elijah, and Daniel . . . greater than apostles like Peter and Paul . . . greater than Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley . . . greater than philosophers and religious leaders like Confucius, Socrates, Buddha, and Mohammed . . . greater than any of our famous politicians, movie stars, economists, academics, athletes, musicians, and celebrity pastor/teachers. At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow.

Let’s commune with him faithfully in the Lord’s Supper, honor him with our obedience, and unashamedly declare his name. Whatever else happens when Christians gather, may it always be obvious that we have “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Personal Challenge:

When was the last time you read through one of the four Gospels? By reading one chapter per day, you can read Matthew, Luke, or John in less than a month, or you can read Mark in a little over two weeks.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe an experience when hearing the truth was painful for you.

Ask two people to read aloud **John 8:31-58**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. What does it mean to be a true disciple of Jesus, and how does knowing the truth set us free?
3. Why do you think Jesus' claims about his connection to Abraham were so polarizing?
4. Why does Jesus say that the Jews do not know the Father despite claiming him as their God?
5. What does it mean to be a slave to sin, and how does this concept apply to our lives?
 - Why is slavery to sin so insidious and challenging?
6. What do you learn about Jesus from his statements to the Pharisees?
 - What do you learn about the Pharisees from their statements to Jesus?
7. Why is it important to recognize Jesus as the Son who sets us free, and how does embracing his teachings lead to true freedom?
8. What is the significance of Jesus using the divine name "I AM" when speaking about his existence before Abraham?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. Quietly assess some of the sinful behaviors you struggle to overcome. Early each morning for the next several days, ask God to help you overcome these sinful impulses.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 10:1-18**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Pray, study, and meditate so when you hear Jesus' voice, you will recognize it.**

STUDY: Gospel of John (Part 2)

THEME: I AM

LESSON TEXT: John 10:1-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 10:19-30; Ezekiel 34; Psalm 23; Luke 15:1-6;
1 John 3:16

STUDY

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

BY MARK SCOTT

Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson sang, “Mommas Don’t Let your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys.” In the ancient biblical world, they would have substituted the word *shepherds* for *cowboys*. The biblical world had a love/hate relationship with shepherds. Shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34), and by the first century BC they were the ragamuffins of society (Luke 2:8-20). But Scripture has high regard for shepherds. God is viewed as a shepherd (Psalm 23; Luke 15:3-7), and the leaders of God’s people are expected to be good shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1-8; Ezekiel 34).

Our lesson in John’s text takes place sometime between the Festival of Tabernacles and Festival of Dedication (7:10; 10:22). Jesus had already claimed to be the bread of life, the water of life (implied), and the light of the world (6:35; 7:37; 8:12, respectively). In this passage, he claimed to be the *gate* (door) and the *good shepherd*—using both metaphors twice each. These 18 verses are packed with Pharisees, gatekeepers, thieves, robbers, hired men, shepherds (6 times), and sheep or flock (14 times).

The Shepherd Is the Gate

John 10:1-10

After the blind man was healed and vindicated by Jesus (John 9), the Pharisees set up Jesus by asking, “Are we blind too?” (9:40). Jesus affirmed that they were spiritually blind (9:41). They had neither the eyes to see nor the ears to hear and accept the “Son of Man” (9:35).

The *sheep pen* was well known in the ancient Near East. It was not uncommon for several flocks to be joined together at night so the shepherds could take turns watching the sheep. The shepherd would often lie down at the entrance of the pen, his body essentially becoming the gate; anyone who tried to get in by some other way was called a *thief* or a *robber*. A *wolf* and a *hired hand* are also mentioned later. Metaphorically speaking, these could be good people like John the Baptist (compared to Jesus, he would be lesser and thus a robber) or these could refer to false teachers (like the religious leaders taking issue with Jesus in John 5–10). The metaphor gets mixed here in that the shepherd is the gate at times, and then also the one whom the gatekeeper allows to enter. The *figure of speech* can go either way (10:6).

This shepherd has an intimate relationship with his sheep. He knows them *by name*, he *leads them*, they *follow him*, and they *know his voice*. In fact, they know him so well they will not follow any other shepherd. Jesus crossed over from the analogy to the spiritual dimension when he spoke about the sheep being *saved*. In addition, they will be secure—that is, they will be able to freely go in and out in the pasture. Others would only hurt the sheep, but the shepherd who is the gate wants to give the sheep life to the full.

The Shepherd Is the Sacrifice

John 10:11-18

Sheep typically were raised for consumption or for sacrifice, but this shepherd will offer himself for the sheep because of his love for them. So, Jesus is not only the entrance to eternal life, he also is the means by which they will receive eternal life (through his vicarious, once-for-all, substitutionary death on the cross). *Hired hand* probably is a reference to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day.

The most stunning thing about this shepherd is that he sacrifices himself for the sheep—something that is mentioned four times in the text. The *wolf* (devil?) *attacks the flock and scatters it*. But the sheep know the shepherd, and importantly, they know the shepherd on the same order as the Father knows the Son; that relationship in the triune God is a strong theme in the Gospel of John.

This shepherd’s sacrifice knows no boundaries. Jesus said he has *other sheep*. This must have been offensive to the religious leaders. To think that this Good Shepherd cared about other sheep—such as Gentiles—would have been blasphemous to them. These other sheep would listen to the Shepherd in the way that Israel was supposed to listen. The shepherd’s sacrifice was not done under compulsion. Rather it was accomplished by the pure volition of the Shepherd.

Jesus is the gate to eternal life and the gift of God for the sacrifice for our sins, so why would anyone not want to hear his voice and respond accordingly?

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APPLICATION

CARE FOR THE FLOCK

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus didn't happen to notice some sheep grazing nearby and remark offhandedly, "I am the good shepherd." The Lord was addressing the Pharisees when he made this bold claim, and for emphasis, he said it more than once (John 10:11, 14). Jesus deliberately identified himself with Scriptures like Psalm 23:1 ("The Lord is my shepherd"), Psalm 100:3 ("Know that the Lord is God. . . . We are his people, the sheep of his pasture"), and Isaiah 40:11 ("He tends his flock like a shepherd").

And by claiming to be "the good shepherd," Jesus pointed to Ezekiel 34, which denounced evil shepherds who cared for themselves at the expense of God's flock. That same chapter predicted God would send a leader who "will tend them . . . and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34:23). The title "good shepherd" had not only messianic implications, but Jesus also was contrasting himself with the self-serving Pharisees. They were bad shepherds—"hired hands" who would run away when wolves attacked the sheep—or worse, they were "thieves and robbers" who "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:8-13).

Pastor Is a Verb

Everyone needs shepherding, even those who lead the church. Do you know anyone who is "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36)? Is there a "flock" in your family, workplace, church, small group, or neighborhood that relies on you to nurture their faith, protect them from spiritual harm, and guide them in the right direction?

Pastor should be a verb before it's a noun. It's an action to do, not just a title to wear. In the New Testament, shepherding was a ministry to fulfill, not merely an office to hold. Unless leaders actively shepherd the flock, it's inaccurate to call them pastors.

Why do so many Christians—even elders and church staff members—resist the work of shepherding?

It's messy. Animal sheep produce manure. Human sheep produce complex questions, troubled marriag-

es, chronic illnesses, tense interpersonal conflicts, and countless other problems. Eugene Peterson described pastoral leadership by citing William Faulkner's description for how he went about writing a book. Faulkner said, "It's like building a chicken coop in a high wind. You grab any board or shingle flying by or loose on the ground and nail it down fast."

It's inconvenient. Shepherding is unpredictable. You can't always confine it to your office and schedule it on your calendar. Searching for lost sheep will take you to uncomfortable places and awkward situations. Sometimes the flock needs attention in the evening, on weekends, and during holidays. Shepherding may require difficult conversations, late-night emergency room visits, and heart-wrenching funerals.

It can't be learned from books alone. Bible college and seminary professors do their best to impart pastoral skills to their ministry students, but many shepherding lessons are best learned through observation and personal experience.

Shepherding Has Its Rewards

Although it's wearisome at times, tending God's sheep can be incredibly rewarding. There is joy in heaven and on earth when you find a lost sheep and bring it home to a well-fed, well-led flock.

Peter exhorted first-century elders, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them," and then he promised, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:2, 4).

Personal Challenge:

Who depends on you for spiritual leadership and protection? Ask God to help you shepherd your flock well.

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you spent much time around sheep? Share some of your personal observations and knowledge about sheep.

Ask two people to read aloud **John 10:1-18**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. In Mark Scott's lesson, he described how "the shepherd would often lie down at the entrance of the pen, his body essentially becoming the gate." What symbolism does that hold when we think of Jesus, our Good Shepherd?
3. What can you do to train yourself to recognize Jesus' voice?
4. When Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (v. 10), what does he mean?
 - Earlier in v. 10, he says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Who is he talking about?
5. Can you identify times when you've encountered someone or something behaving like a "hired hand" or "thief/robber" in your faith journey?
6. Share some incidents from Jesus' life when he stood up to "wolf attacks."
7. Focus on verses 14 and 15, which effectively say that we can know Jesus as well as Jesus knows his Father.
 - How does that make you feel?
 - What spiritual disciplines or practices have helped you the most as you have come to know Jesus better?
8. Verses 15 to 18 are packed with symbolism that those listening to Jesus in the moment almost certainly did not completely understand. Discuss what Jesus likely meant or was alluding to when he said the following:
 - "I lay down my life for the sheep" (v. 15).
 - "There shall be one flock and one shepherd" (v. 16).
 - "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (v. 18).
9. Why is Jesus' mention of having "other sheep" significant, and how does this concept challenge the religious leaders of the time?
10. How does the idea of Jesus gathering different sheep into one flock convey unity?
 - What steps can you take in your own life to promote unity among fellow believers, regardless of your differences? Take some steps toward unity with other Christians this week.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 14:1-21, 27**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Believe in Jesus and do great things in his name; have peace in your heart.**

STUDY: Gospel of John (Part 2)

THEME: I AM

LESSON TEXT: John 14:1-21, 27

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 10:9; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6

STUDY

I AM THE WAY

BY MARK SCOTT

The exclusivity of Jesus is a problem in a pluralistic country like the United States. There is immediate pushback when anyone says, "This is the only way." Some people think such exclusivity is narrow-minded. They contend Christian believers are pushing them into an uncomfortable corner. They charge Christians with making a reductive fallacy (i.e., a logical fallacy where many options are reduced to just one).

But what else are Christians to believe and say when Jesus said that he is the gate (John 10:9), and when Peter said that salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12), and when Paul said that there is one mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5)?

John 14–16 contains the Upper Room Discourse of Jesus on the night of his betrayal. It is possible that only chapter 14 was actually spoken in the upper room, for the chapter ends with these spoken words, "Come now; let us leave" (14:31). But did they actually leave right then? Jesus could have spoken the words of John 15–16 as they journeyed to Gethsemane, but he just as easily could have said these things while still in that upper room. The discourse contains warnings, promises, teaching, dialogue, metaphors, object lessons, and claims. Jesus' most stunning claim is that he is the only way to God (14:6).

He Is the Way to the Father's House

John 14:1-9

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, predicted Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial, and taught about the new mandate (love commandment), he sought to calm the disciples' fears by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." He repeated those words in verse 27. He acknowledged that the disciples believed in God (Father), and he challenged them to put their faith in him.

Where is God's house? Is it the universe? The tabernacle? The temple? The heart of believers? It seems likely that Jesus was speaking of heaven. This *house has many rooms*. Heaven is big. Heaven is being prepared. Once Jesus returns, heaven will return with him, and heaven and earth will be rejoined in perfect harmony (Revelation 21:1-5). The best thing about heaven is Jesus. He will be there.

Jesus' words confused at least two of the disciples (Thomas and Philip). Thomas expressed what the others were thinking, "How do we get there?" Jesus made his exclusive claim. He is the only way because he is *the truth and the life*. The only way to God (*the Father*) is through Jesus. Philip wanted to see the Father. Jesus reminded him that

in seeing Jesus they had in fact seen the Father. Jesus is the way to the Father's house.

He Is the Way to the Father's Works

John 14:10-14

Since the triune God is united and in perfect agreement, one member can lead people to another member's work. The Father is at work in the world to bring it back under his control. Jesus came to accomplish the Father's work by taming fallen creation, healing people, and saving the planet. The disciples would soon embark on participating in that same mission.

Father and Son are so united that to believe in one is to believe in the other. To be in one is to be in the other. To do the work of one is to participate in the work of the other. Jesus' works (miracles) were evidence of how the Father was destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Jesus invited the disciples into those works (the miracles recorded in Acts). Jesus said people who believe in him and his works *will do even greater things*. What will these be? Greater than miracles? He perhaps means preaching the gospel. These works must include prayer, and they must be in accordance with Jesus' commands, or otherwise one is doing ministry by the power of the flesh.

He Is the Way to the Father's Helper

John 14:15-21, 27

In each chapter of the discourse, Jesus made promises to the disciples about the Holy Spirit. He is the *Advocate* (i.e., the one who came alongside another, thus *The Helping Spirit* by Carl Ketcherside). This *Spirit of truth* had been living alongside of the disciples for three years. Now he would be living in them. They would not be *orphans*.

Jesus would be taken from the disciples within hours, but they would see him again after his resurrection. Following his ascension, the disciples would realize the great unity of the Godhead and experience both love and peace.

In AD 1054, there was a great split between the Eastern and Western churches over *filioque* (a Latin word meaning "and the Son"). Did the Father give the Spirit or did the Son give the Spirit? Yes! Because God is the way to God.

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APPLICATION

UNTROUBLED HEARTS

BY DAVID FAUST

On the very troubling night before the crucifixion, Jesus promised to give his disciples peace. “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he said (John 14:1). Yet, that same evening he predicted, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). How can we reconcile those two verses? Is it possible to face our troubles with untroubled hearts?

When the Lord said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” he used the Greek word *tarasso*, which meant to stir up, disturb, or throw into confusion—the kind of distress that often arises inside our minds. To describe the troubles his followers will face, Jesus used a different word, *thlipsis*, which means oppression, affliction, or tribulation—the kind of trouble that comes from the outside. *Thlipsis* described the way winemakers pressed grapes to extract their juice. (It’s translated “hard pressed” in 2 Corinthians 8:13.)

We should expect to face pressure from the outside, but we can have peace on the inside—the overall well-being the Hebrews called *shalom*.

Troubled Times

What do our souls need in troubled times?

Faced with conflicting ideologies, beliefs, and lifestyles, we need to choose the right direction. According to the Federal Highway Administration, there are more than 4 million miles of paved public roads in the United States, plus countless miles of unpaved trails, backroads, and paths. Likewise, contemporary culture confronts us with a multiple-choice test of spiritual pathways in the form of contrasting worldviews. The Greek word *hodos* (“road”) meant a physical highway, but it also could refer to the path we take in life. The Lord told Jeremiah, “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Faced with deception and misinformation, we need a heavy dose of reality. Politicians twist the truth to get

our votes. Sales reps lie to get our money. Journalists mingle facts with their own opinions. Preachers scratch “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3) and hesitate to address tough topics because they don’t want to offend. Who will shoot straight with us and confront us with reality? Who offers what the Greeks called *aletheia* (truth, uprightness, dependability, reality)? Who will tell us what we need to hear, not merely what we want to hear?

Faced with death and destruction, we need a daily infusion of hope. How can we experience *shalom* while death stares us in the face? Individually and collectively, we are sliding down a steep hill toward an open grave. Where can we find what the Greeks called *zoe* (life)? More than a mere physical existence, we long for abundant life, which includes a clear conscience, a compelling sense of purpose, and a hopeful future.

Our Trouble Bearer

To some, Jesus’ claim, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) sounds overly narrow and restrictive. Actually, though, this verse contains good news. There’s a way out of the mess we’re in. Jesus is the way (*hodos*). He is the truth (*aletheia*). He is the life (*zoe*). He is our direction setter and our trouble bearer. He defines reality. He is the source of abundant life now and forever.

The Lord “daily bears our burdens” (Psalm 68:19). Through faith in him, we can face troubled times with untroubled hearts.

Personal Challenge:

Jesus claimed to be “the way, the truth, and the life.” How do those words impact you personally? Thank the Lord for helping you find direction, face reality, and live with hope.

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you do focusing on one verse from John 1:1-18 each day this past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 14:1-21, 27**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. In verse 1, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Why might the disciples' hearts have been troubled?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (v. 6)?
 - What is the context of this statement?
 - What is Jesus' purpose in saying this?
4. What are your opinions of Thomas's question (v. 5) and Philip's question (v. 8)?
 - Are they surprising? Revealing? Disappointing? Encouraging?
5. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these" (v. 12).
 - What are some things that Jesus' disciples did that might be considered greater than what Jesus did?
6. What is one area in your life where you can actively participate in the Father's works and become an instrument of change?
7. Have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit during difficult moments in your life? How?
8. When we show our love for Jesus by keeping his commands, he promises to show himself to us (v. 21). How and when does he show himself to us?
9. Why is obedience to Jesus' commands an essential aspect of loving him?
 - What is a command from Jesus you have found particularly impactful in your life, and how have you demonstrated obedience to it?
10. Focusing on verse 27 . . . In what ways is the peace Jesus offers distinct from what the world offers?
 - Consider some issues that have been troubling you in recent weeks. This coming week, through prayer, ask God (through Jesus) to bring peace to your heart.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 15:1-20, 26-27**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Glorify God by bearing the fruit of Christ's life flowing through you.**

STUDY: Gospel of John (Part 2)

THEME: I AM

LESSON TEXT: John 15:1-20, 26-27

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Matthew 3:7-11; Galatians 5:22-23

STUDY

I AM THE VINE

BY MARK SCOTT

The next step beyond a metaphor is an allegory. A metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things (that is, bringing “A” and “non-A” together, such as in the statement of Jesus about Herod, “Go tell that fox” [Luke 13:32]; Herod was not a fox, but he acted like one). By contrast, an allegory can be a more complete narrative than a metaphor, and possibly have more than one point of comparison (for example, in Jesus’ parable of the sower, soils, and seed in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23).

As Jesus continued his Upper Room Discourse in John 15, he moved beyond metaphor by claiming to be the true vine of Israel. Then he connected the dots between the vine and himself, the gardener and his Father, and the branches and the disciples. If, by this time, Jesus and the disciples had left the upper room and were on their way to Gethsemane (John 14:31 ended with Jesus’ words, “Come now; let us leave”), perhaps they walked past a vine that sparked this analogy.

The Vine and Fruit

John 15:1-8

To start this chapter, Jesus made a characteristically audacious claim—as he was inclined to do in John’s Gospel—by saying, “*I am the true vine.*” (He repeats this a few sentences later, but without using the word *true*.) It probably meant Jesus was claiming to be the New Israel. In just a few hours, Old Israel, who thought of themselves as God’s vine in the world (Isaiah 5:1-7), would compromise themselves in this respect by trying and condemning God’s Son. Jesus was the provider of the real fruit from heaven. Jesus said that the Father was the *gardener* (i.e., one who cultivates the earth).

The true vine of Israel wanted the *branches* (disciples) to *bear much fruit*. Three conditions must be met for the branches to produce a bumper crop. First was the pruning of unproductive branches. Dead branches must be cut off and *thrown into the fire and burned*. Second, there was the pruning of the productive branches. *Prune* means “to take away or lift.” It seems so counterproductive, but any backyard gardener knows it is vital to prune good branches. This is not often fun (cf. Hebrews 12:7-11). Third, remaining in the vine is the most important condition. Some form of the word *remain* occurs in this text 11 times. It means to “dwell, live, or abide.” No wonder Jesus said if we do not remain in him we *can do nothing*. But remaining in him guarantees production of fruit and even answered prayers.

The Lord and Love

John 15:9-17

In these verses, Jesus turned to *love*, one of the major themes of the Upper Room Discourse. After Jesus gave the great mandate (“love one another,” 13:34-35), *love* dominates the Gospel of John, with the word occurring more than 20 times. Here Jesus called his fruit-bearing disciples (cf. Galatians 5:22-24) to love one another in the same way the Father and Son love each other.

Love is connected with four virtues in this paragraph. First is the matter of obeying commands. Love is not antithetical to obedience; love is both the fruit of obedience and the reason for obedience. Second is the matter of sacrifice. Love’s highest gift is sacrifice—something Jesus knows all too well. Love means laying down one’s life for another (1 John 3:16). Third is the matter of joy. Jesus wanted his joy in his disciples, and he wanted that joy to be complete (i.e., full). And joy is still the second fruit of the Holy Spirit. Finally, there is the matter of friendship. C.S. Lewis put this kind of love at the top of his list (*The Four Loves*). Jesus called them *friends*, not *servants*. And out of this friendship comes answered prayer (as in the former paragraph).

The World and the Persecution

John 15:18-20, 26-27

Bearing fruit that lasts and loving others unconditionally does not mean the walk will be easy. Jesus never overpromised (except concerning the world to come). He said the world would hate the *branches*. Like teacher/like students. Like master/like servants. Persecution of one means persecution of the others. But obedience of one also means the obedience of the others.

Who can sustain the persecuted disciples? The answer is the *Advocate* (helper, counselor, companion). The Father and Son would send the Holy Spirit to the disciples. He would not only give testimony about Jesus (which is what he is most comfortable always doing, since he does not want the spotlight), but he would also help the disciples with their testimony for Jesus.

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APPLICATION

NO PRUNING, NO PROGRESS

BY DAVID FAUST

My wife took the pruning shears to an overgrown houseplant and chopped it down to a stub. I was sure she had killed it, but the remarkably resilient plant now thrives in a corner of our kitchen with stems a yard long, covered with healthy green leaves. Every year, I take my hedge trimmers and whack away the overgrown branches of my lilacs and rose bushes, and each summer they reward my efforts by producing more colorful flowers.

I'm not sure why God designed things this way, but sometimes cutbacks lead to growth spurts.

Jesus illustrated this truth when he said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:1-2).

Pruned

I don't enjoy being pruned. The Master Gardener, our heavenly Father, trims branches with surgical precision, but if you're like me, you don't like how it feels when the cuts occur.

Your career was on track and things were going well at work. Why did your company lay off employees and eliminate your job?

You took care of your body and tried to stay in shape. Why did God allow you to get cancer?

You enjoy your circle of friends, but as time passes, some of them die or move away, and you miss their companionship.

You liked your church the way it was. Why did the leaders make disruptive changes that hurt feelings and caused several longtime members to leave?

You have done your best to earn a living, spend money wisely, tithe, and give generously to those in need. Why is your budget so tight? Why isn't God showering you with financial rewards?

Productive

We don't always understand the pruning process, but it's wise to trust the Gardener. According to Jesus, the Father prunes branches that are already fruitful to make them more fruitful. If the Lord cuts something out of our lives, his goal is to make us more productive, not less.

Gideon must have been bewildered when God reduced his fighting force from 32,000 to 300 men, but God used that miniature militia to defeat the Midianite army (Judges 7).

The Israelites cowered in fear because of Goliath's threats, but a sling-wielding young shepherd solved the giant problem a sizeable army couldn't overcome (1 Samuel 17).

The apostles must have been dismayed when the crowds dwindled because of Jesus' hard teaching (John 6:60-69), but the Lord used a handful of convinced, devoted followers to change the world.

Thousands of disciples were baptized in Jerusalem, but soon the church was decimated by persecution. The believers scattered to far-flung regions of Judea and Samaria, but the Master Gardener used this painful pruning to fulfill a positive purpose. Those scattered followers of Christ were like seeds a farmer plants in the soil. They bore fruit and "preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4).

It's strange how life works. No pain, no progress. No tension, no transformation. No cutbacks, no fresh starts. Thank God for the seeds he is planting and the lifeless branches he is pruning from your life. He is not trying to hurt you. He is preparing you to bear more fruit.

Personal Challenge:

Think of a time when God pruned you and cut something away from your life. Have you seen any new growth emerge in the process? Read James 1:2-5. Have the unpleasant "cuts" you have endured resulted in greater perseverance, maturity, and wisdom?

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is your level of experience with gardening? What is your least favorite part of gardening . . . or what part of gardening do you find to be the most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 15:1-20, 26-27**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize these verses.

2. In verse 3, Jesus says believers are already clean because of the word he has spoken to them. What does "cleanliness" signify in this context?
 - How does experiencing God's forgiveness and the knowledge that you are "clean" impact your relationship with Jesus and your ability to bear fruit?
3. How can we abide in Jesus and have him abide in us?
 - What specific steps can you take to nurture and deepen your connection with Jesus?
4. Can you think of a time when you experienced God's loving discipline or pruning in your life? How did it help you grow?
5. How does Jesus calling his disciples friends instead of servants change the way you view your relationship with him?
6. What does it mean to love one another as Jesus has loved us?
 - How does keeping Jesus' commandments relate to remaining in his love?
7. Jesus helped his Father God to create the world, and yet the world hates him. The world also hates people who follow Jesus. How did we get to this point?
8. Why is it so difficult (yet important) to be—as the saying goes—"in the world but not of the world"?
9. As best you can, describe how the "Advocate . . . the spirit of Truth," whom God ultimately sends to Jesus' disciples, testifies to them about Jesus.
10. In what area of your life would you like to see more spiritual growth or fruit? Take positive steps toward growth and being more fruitful this coming week.

For Next Week: This week's lesson bring this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "**1717: Your Word Is Truth**" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.