



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

**LIFE GROUPS
LEADER GUIDE
JULY 2021**

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	JULY 4	21

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

JOHN 11:1-57

JULY 4, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 11:1-57. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: BECAUSE OF JESUS, OUR SADNESS IN THIS LIFE—EVEN OVER THE DEATH OF LOVED ONES—IS NEVER WITHOUT HOPE.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS ALONE HAS THE POWER OVER LIFE AND DEATH.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS DEFEATED DEATH THROUGH THE CROSS SO WE CAN HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 When someone you're not all that close to is sad or hurt, do you give them space or try to help? Why?

- 2 When someone you're close to is sad or hurt, what is something you do in your attempt to help them (i.e., make them dinner, tell them you'll pray for them, pray with them, try to make them laugh, etc.)?

- 3 When you are sad or hurt, are you more likely to reach out to others for love and support, or to withdraw? Why?

It's hard to know how to help yourself when you're sad or hurt, and sometimes it's even more difficult to know how to help someone else. Some of us do whatever we can to address the problem and move forward, while others withdraw into themselves for a time. Regardless of our personalities, ultimately we can know that Jesus is the Victor over death and the Giver of eternal life. We can trust in His never-changing, never-ending love for us and find great hope in the midst of our sadness.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:1-16.

- What did Jesus do after He received the message Lazarus was sick? Does that surprise you? Why or why not? Look at verses 5 and 6 again.
- Mary and Martha probably expected Jesus to come by the end of the second day. Instead, they had to wait two more days, not knowing when or if He would come at all. What might have been going through their minds during those long days? What might have they questioned about Jesus?
- Why did Jesus say He was glad they weren't present when Lazarus died? What did He want His disciples to learn from this event? How are God's plans sometimes different from our own?

Facing the sickness of their brother Lazarus, Mary and Martha turned to their beloved friend Jesus for help. Jesus loved this family, and because of this, His decision to delay may seem confusing to us as it certainly was to Mary, Martha, and the disciples. But there was a reason Jesus did things in the order He did them; Jesus delayed so that God would receive glory. Mary and Martha were dealing with a problem to which only Jesus had the solution. By delaying, Jesus provided Himself the opportunity to teach a lesson. Though God's order may not be our own, we find our best life when we embrace His order.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:17-37.

- Do you think Martha's first words to Jesus conveyed disappointment, criticism, or recognition of fact? How did Martha misunderstand Jesus' response?
- What does Martha's response to Jesus' questions indicate about her understanding of His power over death? In what way was her understanding incomplete?
- Can you think of a time when God's plans and timing turned out to be better than your own? What are the dangers of expecting and demanding that God act according to your own understanding?

Notes:

Everyone wants to see Jesus do something impossible, but very few people want to be in the place where something impossible needs to be done. Even though Martha knew God would eventually make all things right, it didn't necessarily help her in the moment of pain. We expect our path on the resurrection life to be easy, but very often it is filled with highs and lows. Looking to Jesus helps us persevere and allows us to experience more of God's grace.

- How was Mary's response different than Martha's? How did Jesus respond to each sister? What does that teach you about Jesus?
- What did Jesus know that Martha and Mary did not? When has God's purpose been better for you than the one you would have chosen on your own?

- Why is it important for us to trust Jesus when His plan doesn't make sense to us?

Notes:

Jesus had told His disciples (v. 4) and Mary (v. 23) that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead so that they would believe. But instead of going directly to the tomb, Jesus chose to seek out Mary and weep with her. This tells us something very important about Jesus and what He came to do. In weeping with Mary, Jesus demonstrated personal care for her. Jesus' response to each sister validated her pain and natural reaction to that pain. In other words, Jesus met them where they were and helped them come to where He was. Clearly, the sisters did not fully understand Jesus' plans, but Jesus showed them that He could be trusted with the heartache of their lives. Embracing God's purpose is not always easy or natural for us, but it is through His purpose we find resurrection and life.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:38-44.

- What shows us that Lazarus was really dead? Why was it important for everyone there to know that Lazarus was truly dead?
- How did this miracle point to the greater coming miracle of the cross and resurrection?
- What did Jesus do to raise Lazarus from the dead? Why was this significant?
- What did the disciples gain from the order in which Jesus decided to heal Lazarus? What would have been lost if He had gone when Lazarus was just sick?

- How did Jesus' waiting (vv. 5-6) demonstrate His love for this family?

Notes:

If we look back to the beginning of this situation in Jesus' ministry, the order is not one that really makes a lot of sense to us. However, when we see the end result, we know that Jesus' order was best for His disciples and this family. Jesus raised Lazarus through the power of His words. Though we may not always understand Jesus' words or His purpose, we can trust that they bring life. Because Jesus loved this family, He used them to demonstrate His incredible power and purpose. All of Jesus' plans are done out of love for us.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:45-57.

- Why might the events of John 11 have lead the Jewish leaders to move from discussion about stopping Jesus to making plans to forcibly stop Him, even if it meant killing Him?
- John 12:10 tells us that the leaders also sought to kill Lazarus. Why would the leaders want Lazarus dead?
- What was the ironic truth of Caiaphas's statement in John 11:50?

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus continually crossed paths with the Jewish leaders as He increasingly revealed His identity as the Messiah. In John 11, Jesus gave the most undeniable evidence of this reality. Every day that Lazarus lived after these events, He was a walking testimony to the reality of who Jesus is. The leaders made plans to kill Jesus, but they also sought to kill Lazarus to put a stop to this walking, talking evidence of Jesus' power and authority.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Where are you right now in terms of this story: hiding away at home instead of going to see Jesus; bitter at what might have been had Jesus been around; spiritually dead and in the tomb; alive, but bound by “grave clothes”; or alive, and free of “grave clothes”? Explain.
- What promise of God do you need to believe more fully in order to “see the glory of God”?
- How can we help one another maintain hope in God’s goodness, sovereignty, and love, even when our situations aren’t dramatically resolved on earth?

PRAY

Thank God for sending Jesus, whose death and resurrection overcame sin and death on our behalf. Ask Him to help us turn to Him in our sadness, knowing that He loves us and is the hope we need.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Has there ever been a time when God's order and timing only made sense to you in hindsight? What did God teach you through that experience?
 - Why is God's order best for us? How does the way God has ordered the church maximize our opportunities to serve Him?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize John 11:25.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 12:1-50.

JOHN 11:1-57

Dying with Jesus (11:1–16)

Lazarus was the brother of the sisters Mary and Martha. Mary had poured perfume on the feet of Jesus and wiped them dry with her hair (12:3). Jesus loved all three of them. His two-day delay was probably to ensure that the miracle He was about to bestow would be clearly understood to be a resurrection from the dead, not a resuscitation from a severe illness. His disciples urged Him not to go, for there were individuals there who desired to seize and kill Him. Thomas, often known as the doubter, here revealed the depth of his personal commitment to Jesus when he said to his fellow disciples: “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Notes:

Emotions of Jesus (11:17–37)

One of the most moving scenes in the life of Jesus is the death of Lazarus. Here we see not only the power of Jesus to raise the dead, but the emotions of Jesus moved by the grief of those around Him. Martha’s faith is evident as she approached Jesus, four days after the death of Lazarus, and professed belief that He could save her dead brother. When Mary came as well and Jesus saw her grief and the grief of those with her, he was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled.” Scripture then tells us that Jesus wept.

Resurrection and Life (11:38–44)

What could testify more to the divine nature of Jesus than to exhibit the power needed to raise someone from the dead? Wishing to teach an important truth about how God hears and answers the prayer of belief, Jesus prayed aloud. Note that the raising of Lazarus serves as something of a foreshadowing of the power to resurrect all believers one day to fellowship and eternal life in Christ. Unlike Lazarus, who was raised only to die again, Christians will be raised to eternal life.

One Man for the World (11:45–57)

The resurrection of Lazarus caused many to place their faith in Jesus. It also led to a meeting of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the high court of the Jews. In the New Testament period, it was composed of three groups: the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law. Its membership reached seventy-one, including the high priest, who served as the presiding officer. Under Roman jurisdiction the Sanhedrin was given great power, but it could not impose capital punishment (18:31).

Notes:

Their concern was self-preservation. If Jesus continued as He had, then people would continue to place their faith in Him as the Messiah. If the Romans then heard that a Messiah was being heralded by the Jews, they would come and destroy the threat, including the Sanhedrin. Therefore much of the opposition to Jesus was sociopolitical in nature.

The remark by Caiaphas about their ignorance was one of rudeness. He understood the political dimension more fully than the others, who were actually thinking in terms of guilt or innocence. For Caiaphas it did not matter whether Jesus was guilty or innocent of wrongdoing. What was important was that the death of one man was worth the viability of the Jewish nation under Roman rule. Historically, Caiaphas was in error; for despite the death of Jesus, the Jewish nation perished in a.d. 70.

The prophecy of Caiaphas was truer than he could have imagined. He prophesied the death of Jesus for the Jewish nation in order to alleviate political tensions, not knowing that Jesus' death would be for the spiritual salvation of the Jewish nation and for the world.

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	JULY 11	21

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

JOHN 12:1-50

JULY 11, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 12:1-50. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS CAME AS ONE GLORIFIED THROUGH SUFFERING, NOT AS A POLITICAL VICTOR.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: THOSE WHO PLACE THEIR FAITH IN HIM AS HE TRULY IS, AND NOT ONLY AS THEY DESIRE HIM TO BE, WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME BUT RECEIVE THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS SHOWED HIS TRUE PURPOSE AND POWER ON THE CROSS.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 When have you held high expectations for an event that turned out to be different than you expected?
- 2 What are some expectations you or others might have about Jesus? How do you respond when you realize that Jesus is not always as you expect Him to be?

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, He received a great reception, but the people misunderstood the purpose of His coming. In a few short days, many of those who cheered Him into the city would also jeer Him out toward the cross. It is important that we accept Jesus as He truly is and not only as we wish Him to be. The truth about Jesus is that He is glorified through what He suffered.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:1-11.

Jesus went back to Bethany with His disciples six days before the Passover and His death on the cross. During the meal in Bethany, an extraordinary thing happened. Mary took a pound of fragrant oil, valued at 300 denarii—the equivalent of a man's yearly wage—and used it to anoint Jesus' feet. Mary's heart was a place of complete, simple devotion.

- How did Mary give her best to Jesus?

- What message does Mary's example of extravagant love and unwavering devotion for Jesus hold for believers today?

Notes:

Mary's act of extravagant love was focused on Jesus. Believers, whether in the first century or the twenty-first, keep their focus on Jesus by giving Him the best of who they are and what they have rather than holding back for themselves. By doing so, we show our reverence to Him as Savior and Lord of our lives. Giving our very best to Jesus serves as a testament to the importance of His kingdom and values, not those of this world, our temporary home.

Mary humbled herself by wiping Jesus' feet and displayed great devotion to Him with the expensive fragrant oil. After a display of love came a display of selfishness. Mary's generosity was misunderstood and criticized. The other disciples present at the dinner and Judas voiced their objection to what they perceived as extravagant waste.

- How did Judas respond to the situation? Doesn't Jesus care about the poor and want us to do the same? Explain.
- What was Jesus' response to Mary's anointing Him with costly perfume? Why did Jesus respond in that way? What does this event teach us about approval?

Concern for the poor was not the real motive behind Judas' outburst; greed was. Mary's generosity was less about cost and more about the cross. Jesus' words about the poor did not mean His disciples should think of poverty as inevitable and therefore do nothing. Rather, Jesus meant that believers will always have opportunities to help poor people, but this was Mary's last opportunity to minister to Him before His death.

Mary did not likely realize that Jesus' death was near any more than the disciples did. However, Jesus viewed Mary's actions as a kind of pre-anointing for His death on the cross, His sacrifice that gave humanity a gift unsurpassed by all others.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:12-16.

- What did the people testify about Jesus in their praises?
- What do you think the crowds were expecting when they welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem with such fanfare? How did they misunderstand what God had planned for Jesus?
- Considering the fact the crowds and disciples didn't understand what Jesus was planning to do, how He would save them, and that Jesus knew they were all about to turn on Him, why do you think He allowed the celebration to continue as He entered Jerusalem?

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey was the deliberate display of Israel's king coming with God's offer of peace. He was the Son of David, chosen to sit on David's throne. He was the One of whom the prophet Zechariah had spoken. (See Zech. 9:9.) Yet it was no small irony that by using palm branches in their celebration, the people were heralding Jesus as a political king, not the humble Shepherd-King He was portraying Himself as. The palm branch was a significant symbol of military victory for the Jews, which means the people displayed them expecting Jesus to be their political or militaristic king. In chanting, "Hosanna" ("Save now") along with other phrases from Psalm 118, the Jews were using a common patriotic or nationalistic cheer—another affirmation that the Jews looked to Jesus as their political savior.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:27-36.

- Do you find it odd that Jesus, of all people, was troubled? Why should one who could heal the sick or raise the dead in any way be troubled?

Notes:

Jesus, alluding to His impending death on the cross, expressed the horror that was gripping His soul. Jesus underwent a crisis moment, but He quickly reminded Himself that it was for this very purpose He came. He knew it was His destiny. As horrible as the reality was in that moment, and as much as He longed to not endure it, He knew it was God's will for Him and He persevered in obedience.

- In what sense was Jesus's death on the cross an act of judgment of the world (v. 31a)?
- According to Jesus, how would His death on the cross affect Satan (v. 31b)? Read Revelation 12:11 for further insight.
- At the end of verse 32, Jesus gave a third impact of His death. What was that? What does it mean? What are the implications for us?

Jesus stated that through His death on the cross, not only would the world be judged and Satan defeated, but people would also be drawn to Him. That is, they would be saved. "All people" cannot mean "every person," since the judgment of others also takes place in the cross. Rather, as the surrounding context and the overall theological emphasis of the Gospel of John demonstrates, "all people" is a reference to all people groups.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:37-50.

- Based on this description, what do you think it would have been like to be in the crowd that heard this teaching from Jesus in Jerusalem?
- Why is it surprising that more people did not believe in Jesus? What did John say was the reason for the people's disbelief?
- Why do you think John chose to include the passages from the Book of Isaiah in his description of the people listening to Jesus?

Notes:

Isaiah knew what it was like to preach to an audience with hard hearts. Similar to the Israelites in the Old Testament, these people had rejected God's message and messenger. They had heard the voice of God but did not respond. Therefore, God had hardened their hearts and no longer called out to them.

- How would you summarize Jesus' point in verses 44-50? How is this connected to recognizing that Jesus is glorified through what He suffered?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- How have you been challenged by today's study regarding what it means to truly follow Jesus? What needs to change in your life?
- Who in your life might need to hear Jesus' warning this week? What are some ways you might humbly but truthfully extend that warning?
- How can Jesus' authority as seen in John 12 encourage you to boldly share the gospel and the warnings that come along with it?

PRAY

Lead your group in prayer thanking Jesus for His willingness to tell you the truth. Ask for the strength and courage to daily respond to His voice, even when that response requires you to be uncomfortably honest and forthright with those around you.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - When have you faced criticism for seeking Jesus' approval over the approval of people?
 - What does a believer's life look like when he or she is seeking Jesus' approval?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize John 12:13.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 13:1-38.

JOHN 12:1-50

Devotion or Death (12:1–11)

This portion of John's Gospel contains a host of important elements. First, there is the devotion of Mary. The perfume used was expensive, a luxury item for herself, selflessly given in devotion to Jesus. That she poured it on the feet of Jesus was an act of humility, for attending to the feet of another person was the work of a servant. Wiping the oil with her hair was also unusual, for respectable women did not unbraided their hair in public. Mary exhibited unrestrained love and devotion to Jesus that went against personal cost and concern for perception.

Second, is the deceit and corruption of Judas. This is the sole passage that reveals the wicked character of Judas prior to his betrayal of Jesus. While the author of this Gospel relates Judas's dishonesty in hindsight, at the time Judas must have been highly esteemed, for he was trusted with caring for the money bag. All too often individuals have been able to deceive people regarding their relationship with God, but never is God Himself deceived, for He sees into the very heart of every person.

Third, is the judgment of Jesus on both Mary and the poor. Jesus affirmed Mary's act of devotion and linked it to His own burial. Mary did not intend for this to be the significance of her act, but it was perceived by Jesus in this manner, knowing of the growing shadow of the cross. In discussing the use of the expensive perfume on Himself rather than selling it to assist the poor, Jesus said, "You will always have the poor among you." Unfortunately, many throughout the centuries of Christian history have misinterpreted this statement by Jesus as an excuse to neglect the poor. This was far from the intent of Jesus, who exhibited care and concern for the poor throughout His ministry. The point Jesus was making was that Mary's act of devotion at that particular time and place was worthy of the cost.

Notes:

Praising the King (12:12–19)

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem coincided with the Passover Feast. The palm branches were symbolic and used in celebration of victory. The response of the crowds to Jesus was spectacular. The shout of “Hosanna!” is a Hebrew term meaning save which had become an expression of praise.

Notes:

The Gospel of John emphasizes the royalty of Jesus. Here is the only Gospel that records that the people also shouted, “Blessed is the King of Israel!” The crowd’s exultation, as well as Jesus’ riding a colt, was not seen by the disciples until after His death, burial, and resurrection as the fulfillment of prophecy. This moment, perhaps more than any other, was the high mark of Jesus’ popularity and influence. In only a matter of days, however, the “Hosanna!” would turn to “Crucify him!” (19:15).

The Hour Is Come (12:20–36)

The request of some Greeks to interview Jesus occasioned a lengthy response from Jesus regarding the road that lay before Him. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus had avoided situations that would hasten His death. But now the “hour” had come for “the Son of Man to be glorified.” Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection is what is in mind by the term “glorified.” Jesus presented Himself as a role model for our perspective on life. Life should not be loved from a temporal perspective but hated as that which represents our sinful separation from God our Creator. This is not, as the life of Jesus demonstrated, a rabid asceticism but an attitude that puts more importance on the world to come.

Jesus understood that His death would bring life to many. Nonetheless, Jesus’ heart was “troubled,” which is all John wrote in relation to the Gethsemane passages of Jesus’ final hours recorded in the Synoptics. Jesus’ troubled heart surely came more from the idea of bearing the weight of the sin of the world as a sinless Being than the mere physical and emotional agony that awaited Him. While Jesus contemplated praying to God for deliverance from that which awaited Him, He remained on the course God had willed for His life.

Not only would Jesus' death offer liberation to men and women from the bounds of sin, but it would bring judgment upon the world and drive the prince of the world from its midst. The cross achieved salvation for those who would believe, brought judgment upon the world for the refusal to believe, and defeated Satan's rebellion once and for all. The lifting up of Jesus on the cross would be the beacon that would draw all persons—meaning without regard to sex, race, social status, or nationality—to Himself for deliverance from sin.

Notes:

God or the World (12:37–50)

How could the Jews have witnessed so many miraculous deeds and remain in unbelief? The answer is found in prophecy. Jews both would not and could not believe. They would not believe when they should have according to what they had witnessed. They could not believe, not because they had freedom of choice removed from them, but because they had purposely rejected God and chosen evil. Thus God turned them over decisively to their choice. Those who had chosen to believe were afraid to make their decision public for fear of excommunication. Even these believers were indicted for caring more for the approval of others than for the approval of God.

What is Jesus' relation to those who reject Him? John made clear that it is not judgment (12:47). It is not that judgment for unbelief will not take place (12:48), only that the primary mission and role of Jesus was not judge but Savior (12:47b). Again, the close relationship between God and Jesus is clearly exhibited in regard to thought and deed (12:44–45, 49–50).

A word should be given regarding the difference between "last day" and "last days." The latter refers to the current period of time, begun when Christ entered the world (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Jude 18). The "last day" (singular), however, refers to the consummation of time and history when the great resurrection and judgment will occur of all persons (1 John 2:18).

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	JULY 18	21

SERVED BY THE KING

JOHN 13:1-38

JULY 18, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 13:1-38. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS HAS DEMONSTRATED FOR US HOW TO HUMBLY SERVE ONE ANOTHER SO THAT OUR SELFISHNESS MIGHT BE REPLACED WITH SELFLESSNESS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS CALLS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE HAS LOVED US.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS LOVED US BY GIVING HIMSELF UP FOR US COMPLETELY.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Who are some of the most influential leaders in your life? What led you to admire them as you do?
- 2 What traits do such influential leaders share? What traits are unique to them?

The list of qualities and characteristics that influential leaders possess is seemingly endless. Trustworthiness, charisma, and vision are among many others that come to mind when describing great leaders. Less often, however, do we use words like “dependent” or “modest.” Yet it is these and similar traits that Jesus insists must define great Christian leaders—they are to be defined by humility. Each one of us—not just leaders—are called to lives of humble service.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 13:1-11.

Prior to the Feast of the Passover—and in the presence of Judas who was to betray Him—Jesus took on the garb and posture of a slave and washed His disciples’ feet.

- How did Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet serve as an act of love “to the end” (v. 1)? Why do you think John chose to emphasize Judas’ presence in this foot-washing scene? Does it surprise you that Judas was there? Why or why not?

- Does the fact that Jesus washed even Judas' feet have any special impact on the significance of this event for you? Why or why not?

Notes:

Whether “to the end” means Jesus loved His disciples “to the uttermost” or “to the end of His life,” the emphasis is still the same. In washing His disciples' feet, Jesus displayed His unstoppable love for His own, and the washing of His disciples' feet, even the feet of Judas, would not be the most dramatic demonstration of that love. That would come at the cross.

- Why do you think John described Jesus in such powerful terms in verse 3?
- What is the relationship between Jesus as He is described in verse 3 and the role He took as a foot-washing slave in verses 4-5?
- What might have been going through the disciples' minds as their Lord removed His outer clothing and began to wash their feet? What might such an act have done to the dynamic of the room during a shared meal?

With the power to rule the universe, Jesus willingly chose to take on the form and function of a lowly slave, rather than use His power to thwart God's will for His life. He could have destroyed Judas, His betrayer, but He chose to serve him instead. He could have demanded that the disciples serve Him, yet He chose to model humble service for them and for us.

- How would you describe Peter's response to Jesus' actions? How do you think you would have responded? Why?

- Why are profound acts of humility frequently admired as much as they are despised?

Notes:

- What, if anything, was significant about Peter's request that Jesus wash his hands and head as well?

Though Peter initially responded with indignation, faith in and love for Jesus led him to submit to Jesus' humble act. Jesus' statement to Peter in verse 8 ("Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.") conveyed a powerful idea in its immediate context and foreshadowed the washing believers experience by Jesus' blood poured out on the cross. In both instances, the exalted Messiah King assumed the role of a despised servant for the good of others. While some theorize that Peter's reference to the washing of his hands may be a reference to ritual cleanliness and "head" as a reference to his perceived need for total cleansing, most scholars see no special significance in Peter's statement. True to his personality, Peter was verbally unrestrained in his enthusiasm.

> HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 13:12-17.

Having completed the act of washing His disciples' feet, Jesus conversed with them about the meaning of His actions. Jesus set an example of humble service to be reflected in their lives.

- Consider Jesus' question to His disciples in verse 12. Do you think they understood what He had just done and why? Do you understand?

- What excuses might the disciples have made for not wanting to follow Jesus' example? What excuses do we tend to make? What do these excuses reveal about our hearts?

No student has the right to think he is exempt from the same responsibilities his teacher willingly takes on. So it was for Jesus and His disciples. As He served them, so they must serve themselves and others.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 13:31-35.

- Does it surprise you that love is something Jesus had to command? Why or why not?
- Who is our “one another”? How do our love for God and our love for one another go hand in hand?
- Read Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:34-40. What was new about the commandment to “love one another,” which He gave in John 13?

The biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves is not a new commandment (Lev. 19:18). By the time Jesus spoke John 13:34-35, He had already cited love for neighbors as one of the two greatest commandments (Matt. 22:34-40). Jesus even taught us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). So what was new about the command in John 13:34? The answer is in Jesus’ words: “as I have loved you.” The disciples were to love one another according to Jesus’ model. But little did they know the depth of love Jesus was about to demonstrate.

- How might thinking deeply on what Christ has done for us cause us to truly love others?
- What are the ramifications of Jesus’ statement in this verse? What’s riding on our willingness to demonstrate love?

- What message do believers give to the world when they show love for one another? What message do they give when they fail to show love for one another?

- How does our love for one another glorify God?

Notes:

As followers of Christ, our motivation for expressing love is Jesus' example, which means our love must also be demonstrated through action. Loving one another through humble, sacrificial service can be a powerful witness to the world that we are His and that it is good to be His. Through our visible expressions of love, non-Christians should be able to see the love of an invisible God.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Read Philippians 2:4-11. What would it mean for you to have the attitude of Christ? What selfish attitudes would you need to sacrifice?
- Thinking about the relationships in your life, how can you practically “wash their feet?”
- Who serves you like this? What can you do to thank them this week?

PRAY

Praise God for Jesus’ work and example of service, love, and humility. Thank Him that Jesus was willing to humble Himself in love for you. Ask God to help you daily reflect His humility as you live out the gospel in your relationships, and that by doing so, others would be drawn to Jesus.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Why is it essential that we live in community with other Christians if we hope to cultivate Christlike love for others?
 - How might obeying these “one another” commands demonstrate Christ-like love for others?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize John 13:34.

- > The text for next week’s study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 14:1-14.

JOHN 13

13:1–17. With his crucifixion imminent, Jesus washed his disciples' feet as a final proof of his love and to give them an example of humility and service. In a striking demonstration of love for his enemies, Jesus washed all of his disciples' feet, including Judas's. Jesus's act is all the more remarkable because washing people's feet was considered a task so low it could be performed only by non-Jewish slaves. In a culture where people walked long distances on dusty roads in sandals, it was customary for the host to provide water for foot-washing. This was usually done upon arrival, not during the meal. The disciples probably felt guilty that none of them had thought to do this.

Notes:

13:1. References to Jewish religious festivals and the coming of Jesus's hour now converge. Jesus's own refers to the Twelve, the representatives of his new messianic community (1:11).

13:2–3. These verses show that Judas already was under Satan's influence and that Jesus had full knowledge of this before he washed the disciples' feet.

13:4–5. The practice of foot washing had a long OT tradition (Gn 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Jdg 19:21; 1Sm 25:41). Jesus's performance of this menial task exemplified his humility (Php 2:6–8).

13:6–11. What Peter failed to realize was the humiliating nature of Jesus's mission to be our Savior.

13:12–15. The phrase in 1Tm 5:10, "washed the saints' feet," shows that the disciples got Jesus's message.

13:18–30. Judas's betrayal of Jesus comes as no surprise to the alert reader. John repeatedly anticipated this treacherous act (vv. 10–11; 6:70–71; 12:4). It is shocking that one whom Jesus had chosen as an apostle would betray him. But far from indicating that Jesus made a mistake, the betrayal actually fulfilled Scripture (13:18, citing Ps 41:9). God's plan was right on track. This section

also contains the first mention of “the one Jesus loved” (13:23). He is frequently featured side by side with Peter in the second half of John’s Gospel.

Notes:

13:18. Judas’s treachery fulfilled OT typology. Jesus cited Ps 41:9, which dealt with Absalom’s rebellion against King David. Judas’s betrayal came as no surprise to Jesus (Jn 13:19). Eating someone’s bread indicated close fellowship, and yet Judas raised his heel against Jesus, an idiom that describes betrayal. Not only did Jesus’s public foes plot against him; even his own disciples could not be trusted.

13:19–20. Jesus’s statement is one of several references to his omniscience in this section (14:29; 16:1, 4, 32, 33). I am he, as in 6:35, 48, very likely had overtones of deity.

13:21–22. Jesus’s being troubled in his spirit (cp. 11:33; 12:27) parallels the emotions of David, who expressed anguish over the betrayal of a close friend (Ps 55:2–14; cp. Ps 31:9–10; 38:10).

13:23. The reference to one of his disciples, the one Jesus loved ... reclining close beside Jesus (Gk kolpos), echoes the description of Jesus as the one who is “at the Father’s side” (Gk kolpos) in 1:18. This disciple is mentioned again in 21:20. Clearly he was an integral member of Jesus’s group. Tradition identifies him as John, author of this Gospel.

13:24–28. See note at 13:18. On a human level, Jesus’s action of giving bread to Judas constituted an indication of friendship as well as a final appeal that Judas rejected.

13:29. The supposition that Jesus may have sent Judas to give something to the poor harks back to 12:5, where Judas presented himself as a champion of charity. Almsgiving was an important part of Jewish piety (Mt 6:2–4).

13:30. The phrase it was night strikes an ominous note. Compare Lk 22:53: “But this is your hour—and the dominion of darkness”; see Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17; 1Co 11:23.

13:31. This verse echoes Isaiah (Is 49:3; see note at Jn 2:4).

13:31–16:33. Jesus’s farewell discourse in John’s Gospel is patterned after Moses’s farewell discourse in Dt 31–33. Such discourses typically include predictions of a person’s death and departure; predictions of future challenges for his followers after his death; arrangements for succession; exhortations to moral behavior; a final commission; an affirmation and renewal of God’s covenant promises; and a closing doxology. While Jesus’s farewell discourse is generally true to this pattern, there are differences as well. Jesus’s farewell was only temporary (his followers will see him again after “a little while,” Jn 14:19), so his final words focused on the future rather than the past. Also, the vine allegory in Jn 15 is distinct from OT or second-temple farewell discourses. Overall, Jesus made provision for the Holy Spirit to continue his mission through the disciples. Jesus himself would continue to direct their mission from his exalted position with the Father.

Notes:

13:31–32. Looking through the eyes of faith, Jesus’s glorification refers to his death.

13:33. Jesus’s words repeated to the Jews and the disciples mean different things. The Jews would not be able to find him, but Jesus would prepare a place for his disciples.

13:34–35. Love must be the distinguishing mark of Jesus’s disciples. Jesus’s new command closely resembled the Mosaic commands to love the Lord (Dt 6:5) and one’s neighbor as oneself (Lv 19:18; cp. Mk 12:28–33). Elsewhere Jesus said we must love even our enemies (Mt 5:43–48). While the command to love God and one’s neighbor was thus not new, Jesus’s example (as I have loved you) was unparalleled, as was his insistence that we should love our enemies.

13:36–38. Peter would indeed deny Jesus three times (see 18:15–18, 25–27). After his resurrection, Jesus would ask Peter three times, “Do you love me?” (21:15–17).

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of John</i>
	JULY 25	21

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

JOHN 14:1-14

JULY 25, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 14:1-14. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS TOLD HIS FOLLOWERS THAT HE IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: IF WE TRULY BELIEVE JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD, WE WILL FAITHFULLY PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY TO A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Have you done the greatest thing you will ever do, or have you yet to do the greatest thing you will ever do? Explain.
- 2 What great things have you seen God do in the past? What do you hope to see Him do in the future?

In the first century, Jews likely thought their best days were behind them. A foreign government occupied their land. They had little authority, and yet they looked for a Messiah to redeem them. When Jesus came on the scene, He didn't fit neatly into their idea of who the Christ should be, so they kept looking. But Jesus came as the way, the truth, and the life, and He told them their best days were still ahead. There was more to be done.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 14:1.

The fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel continues what some Bible scholars designate as Jesus' farewell discourses or speeches. (See John 13–17.) Anticipating the sorrow His disciples would experience at His departure, Jesus offered a message of comfort and consolation to enable them to live confidently.

- What in Jesus' ministry might have caused His disciples' hearts to be "troubled"? What troubles your heart?

- What does it mean to trust Jesus? What strengthens your trust in Jesus?

Notes:

Trusting Jesus is far more than religious sentimentality. It is a radical confidence and dependence on Him regardless of our circumstances. One of the most important lessons we can learn is to trust Jesus no matter what troubles we encounter. For reasons known best to Him, the Lord chooses to develop His people's character in the university of adversity. He shapes and molds His followers in the valleys of affliction and in the lowlands of tribulation.

Jesus knew the disciples already were anxious and frightened. He previously had warned that Peter would deny Him. (See John 13:38.) A mood of uncertainty and worry filled the disciples' hearts. The statement, "Let not let your hearts be troubled" also could be translated, "Stop letting your hearts be agitated." The choice was either to remain in fear or to move forward in faith. Like these disciples, each one of us has the choice and the responsibility to rely on Jesus in tough times. Such reliance demonstrates a confident trust that He will fulfill His plan and purpose in each of our lives.

- What is the relationship between Jesus' first statement, "Let not your hearts be troubled," with the second, "Believe in God; believe also in me"?

The second statement Jesus made could also be translated, "Keep on believing in God! Keep on believing in Me!" Jesus made a direct connection between Himself and God the Father. Belief in One is necessary for belief in the Other. He wanted the disciples to see that faith in Him is indistinguishable from faith in God. To trust Jesus is to put our trust in God.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 14:2-7.

Jesus assured the anxious disciples with the promise of heaven. Notice that He identified heaven as “my Father’s house.” In the New Testament, heaven is variously described as a kingdom, a city, a country, and a home. Verse 2 emphasizes the intimate fellowship of being in the Father’s presence. The joy of heaven is not merely everlasting life but fellowship with the all-loving, all-wise, all-holy Father. How did Jesus know this? Because He is the way to the Father.

Notes:

- What did Jesus mean in referring to Himself as the way? The truth? The life?
- What are some other ways people look to find life and truth? Where else have you looked?
- How would these truths have encouraged His disciples at that moment? How do they encourage you?

Jesus is the way, meaning He is the way into a relationship with God that leads to eternal life. He not only taught the way, demonstrated the way, and provided the way, He Himself is the way—the only way. The way is not a philosophy or a principle, but a Person.

Jesus is the truth. The expression emphasizes Jesus’ complete dependability and the saving truth of the gospel. Jesus is the single reliable source of redemptive revelation. Apart from Him there is no means of knowing God. Jesus’ whole life defined the reality of truth.

Jesus also is the life. No real life exists apart from Him. Jesus claimed that individuals are dead without Him. He is the Source and Giver of life and the Conqueror of death. Through Jesus, the very life of God is available to us—abundant, everlasting

life. As Jesus' followers, we must share lovingly the reality that apart from Him there is no redemption, no everlasting life, no way to heaven. There is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ. (See Acts 4:12.)

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 14:8-14.

- What did Jesus mean by the phrase, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me"? Why did Jesus highlight His essential unity with the Father so many times in this passage?

Jesus' question to Philip recorded in verse 10 expected a "yes" answer. The essential unity between Jesus and the Father was so evident that Philip should have recognized that the words and works of the Son were the Father's. Father and Son are one in nature and essence, and the word "living" points to a permanent relationship.

Philip and the disciples were called to believe Jesus as well as to believe in Him. The grounds of belief are two-fold: first is Jesus' declaration, and second is the evidence of Jesus' power. There is a call to recognize the miracles as signs pointing to Jesus' deity. Believers have ample reason to be confident in Christ because His words reveal God's truth and His works reveal God's power.

- What did Jesus mean when He said His disciples would do "greater things" (v. 12)? What did He not mean?
- The disciples would have been shocked by what Jesus said in verse 12. In what ways do we not take Jesus at His word today and limit the works He can do through us?
- What "greater works" have you seen God do in your life or in our church?

Jesus made an astounding promise. His introductory statement, “Truly, truly, I say to you,” is an expression designed to draw attention to what follows. Jesus promised that the person who believes in Him would accomplish the same works and even greater ones. The term “greater” is a quantitative comparison. In other words, the disciples would accomplish things that were greater in scope than what Jesus accomplished.

Notes:

We should not think “greater” necessarily means more spectacular or more miraculous. After all, raising someone from the dead is about as spectacular and amazing as can be. During His ministry, Jesus restricted His travel to a small sector of the world. After His ascension, His disciples traveled throughout the Roman Empire spreading the gospel. Both in the number of conversions and the spread of the gospel, the early church did greater things through the power of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised would come following His return to the Father. (See Acts 1:4-8.)

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Where would you like to seek growth in your trust in Jesus?
- What is one thing you are praying that we would see Jesus do in our community? How can we join you in your desire to see these things come to pass?
- Who are some people who do not believe Jesus is the way? What would it look like to share the true and living way with them? More specifically, who would be most open to hearing about Jesus even this week?

PRAY

Pray that your trust in Jesus would lead you to see the Father in His life and ministry and follow Him as the one true way to know God. Thank Jesus for showing you the way and ask Him to multiply His work among us because we can do nothing without Him.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - How often do you share the gospel with others? Is this a regular practice in your life?
 - If not, what steps can you take to begin sharing the gospel with others more regularly?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize John 14:6.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 14:15-31.

JOHN 14:1-14

14:1. Troubled people need peace and affirmation. The problems of the disciples were as real as our problems. In fact, it is probably fair to say that most Christians are realists. From Scripture they recognize the reality of sin, the reality of evil in the world, the reality of deliverance from sin, and the reality of ultimate eternal life.

Notes:

These disciples, good Jews, had already trusted in God and now Jesus asked them to trust in him. They had watched him feed five thousand people and bring Lazarus back from the dead, but now they must trust him not just for food or miracles, but with their lives.

Some question exists about the grammatical nature of the verbs rendered trust in this verse. The NIV offers the preferred translation with the verbs appearing in what Greek scholars would call an imperative/imperative pattern. Rather than saying, “You have trusted in God so now trust in me,” or some similar phrase, both sections of the sentence offer a command.

14:2. Let us acknowledge at the beginning of this chapter that this portion of Scripture is not about huge buildings in heaven but about space. Lots of songs have been written to proclaim “mansions over the hilltop,” but Jesus simply told his disciples, “There’s room in heaven for you.”

But he also wanted to indicate that he would go ahead of them to do specific work—the preparation of heaven (14:2b). The New Testament teaches us we are pilgrims and wanderers in this world. We may own homes, and some of them may be huge and beautiful. But we do not belong here because we are not primarily citizens of this world. In heaven we will be where we really belong because Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us.

The promise “I will come back” (v. 3) has been variously understood by interpreters. But in the context of death, ascension, and heaven, it seems difficult to arrive at any conclusion other than the second coming of Jesus.

14:3-4. Forget the mansions; what this passage talks about is the personal touch of the Savior. Count the times he says I or me in these two short verses, and you will come up with five. He wanted the disciples to trust him personally. It was not just preparation of a place in focus here, but the personal return of Jesus to take his own to heaven. This passage does not speak about levels of reward or big buildings in heaven. It promises the second coming of Jesus Christ. Did they really know the way? They should have known; it has been obvious in this book since chapter 3.

Notes:

The setting of these verses centers on promise and peace. Jesus would take care of his disciples by making sure they could be with him in the Father's presence. By this point in his ministry, they were expected to know the way to the place where I am going.

14:5-7. Thomas was an honest follower though always the skeptic, so he was the first to ask, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus' response is the key verse of the passage, memorized by Christians all around the globe. Jesus is the way—reconciliation; Jesus is the truth—illumination; Jesus is the life—regeneration. This is the exclusive gospel. The New Testament knows nothing of universalism—the idea that God will find some way to save everybody. What could be clearer than Jesus' words in verse 6, No one comes to the Father except through me.

Why did the disciples need all this talk about trusting Jesus? Why do we need it? Because like them, we do not know Jesus well enough; so we struggle to understand the Father. Repeatedly Jesus emphasized the link between the heavenly Father and the Son, but right up to the end the disciples did not get it—and we struggle with the concept as well.

This is one of those places at which we would like to have audio aids for the Bible. What was Thomas' tone of voice when he said this? Is he still the skeptic? The pessimist? The negative thinker? It would appear so, but we admire

his openness and vulnerability. The impact of Jesus' answer echoes through the centuries to the present hour. He embodies the way to God, the truth about God, and the life in God. And if the disciples really knew him as they should, they would understand the inseparability between the Father and the Son.

Notes:

This announcement in John 14:6 prepares the way for the author of Hebrews to write, "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body" (Heb. 10:19-20).

14:8-11. Philip either did not understand his Old Testament well or he failed to link the Father and the Son. Or perhaps he was born in Missouri, the "show me" state. If Jesus could produce physical evidence of the Father, Philip claimed the disciples would finally be satisfied.

We must remember Jesus' response. There is no difference between the Father and the Son; they are both God—equally powerful. Here again we find the theme "believing is seeing" that surfaced so clearly in 11:40. Notice Jesus' emphasis on both words and work in verse 10. Jesus' words reflected his deity much more than his work did. The disciples had been fascinated by his work, but they had not listened carefully enough to his words. Almost in frustration, the Lord said, at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

What is God like? I once heard a sermon on this topic. The pastor talked on and on about God being like flowers, sunsets, the cry of a newborn baby, the beauty of a clear blue sky. Certainly, all those are part of God's natural revelation and therefore reflect him. But he never got to the bottom line: God is like Jesus Christ.

In actuality, Philip's confusion is typical of the disciples throughout the first four books of the New Testament. The depth of theology in these discussions overwhelmed the disciples, probably until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Even Christians today who hold the entire

Bible and enjoy the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit struggle with the doctrine of the Trinity and oneness of the Father and the Son.

14:12. This is one of the most interesting verses in the Bible. Interpreters have pondered what Jesus meant by telling his disciples that they would do greater things than he, the Son of God, had done. But perhaps the best way to understand the verse is to take it literally, exactly as Jesus said it. Jesus' earthly ministry was limited in time and space. He served the Father for three and one-half years and never outside the boundaries of Palestine. The disciples, on the other hand, as Acts clearly attests, carried out ministry that was greater geographically, in terms of numbers of people reached and long-lasting effect.

We find a leadership principle here as well. All parents should be able to say to their children; all pastors should be able to say to their staffs; all leaders should be able to say to their followers: "You have the potential to do greater things than I have done." To empower and develop followers whose ministry exceeds the impact of their mentors is to follow the model of Jesus.

14:13. In this verse we find one of the great prayer promises of the Bible that focuses first on the purpose of prayer. Jesus answers prayer in order to bring glory to the Father. Our praying, therefore, ought to be directed toward that goal and end. But we have to pause at the dramatic implications of words like whatever you ask and "ask me for anything" (v.14).

Perhaps a word of caution is in order here. No theology should be built from a single verse or even a handful of verses in the Bible. The Bible contains huge blocks of information on prayer, and this is one of them. Jesus had already taught the disciples much about prayer, and here we have only a final reminder, not everything that applies to the subject. Nevertheless, this promise of prayer we cannot ignore. In fact, what we see here is a New Testament formula of asking in the name of Jesus,

Notes:

something new to the disciples though they would hear it again before Jesus finished his teaching.

Notice the similarity between this teaching and chapter 16: “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete” (John 16:23-24).

Notes:

14:14. Obviously, just saying “in Jesus’ name” creates no magic potion for prayer. The culture in which these words were spoken took names very seriously, so much so that they equated one’s name with the character, spirit, and power of that person. That is why the Jews never spoke the name of Yahweh.

Imagine a child playing in the middle of the street when her father arrives home from work. When he scolds her and calls her back to the yard immediately, she says, “Mommy told me I could play in the street; I’m out here in mommy’s name.” A ridiculous illustration, but it points out how often Christians do strange things and then claim they are behaving “in Jesus’ name.” Since Jesus’ name is always connected in some way with our prayers even if we do not speak those words, if we cannot ask in his name we should not ask at all.