



**Last Supper – a night of important conversations**

# **Upper Room Conversations**

**Six Bible studies from John 13-16  
Jesus' last teachings before the cross**

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## Bible Studies in this series

<p><b>Creation and Fall</b> – 6 studies to look at the creation and fall of mankind. We will look at the perfection and plan of God’s creation and how man tarnished the creation with sin.</p>	<p><b>Jesus’ Miracles in John’s Gospel</b> – 7 studies on the miracles of Jesus in the gospel of John. Each miracle has a meaning that tells us something important about Jesus’ person and ministry.</p>
<p><b>Noah: Man and Mission</b> – 6 studies on the Flood. We will see the grace of God and the obedience and trust of Noah. God makes a new beginning in a fallen world.</p>	<p><b>Jesus’ parables in Luke</b> – 6 studies on the parables of Jesus in Luke. We will look at the meaning behind some of these familiar parables and see patterns for our lives.</p>
<p><b>Storm Shelter Psalms</b> – 6 studies on some of the psalms to turn to when life hits you hard. Wrestle with the psalmist as he learns to trust the Lord in difficult times.</p>	<p><b>Upper Room Conversations</b> – 6 studies on the conversation that Jesus had with the disciples around the last supper table. Learn what was so important to Jesus that He just had to share it with the disciples.</p>
<p><b>Revival in Nehemiah</b> – 6 studies on the second half of Nehemiah. The walls were rebuilt. Now it was time to rebuild a people who was down and distant from the Lord.</p>	<p><b>Galatians: Rules versus Grace</b> – 6 studies with Paul in the heart of the gospel. In an age when people want to force us to follow their rules, Paul wants us to see the power of grace.</p>
<p><b>Daniel: Godly Living in a Pagan World</b> – 6 studies to encourage us as we live in a world that has become harsh to God. It will make all the difference to keep our faith in tough times.</p>	<p><b>Paul’s first missionary journey</b> – 6 studies on the conversion and first journey of Paul. See Paul as he grows and learn what the life of the Christian was meant to be.</p>
<p><b>Power of Prayer</b> – 6 studies on the power and help that we receive in prayer. Follow the saints in their prayers and learn from them how valuable prayer can be for you.</p>	

## **Introduction**

If you had only hours to live, what would you want to tell your closest friends? The six conversations in this Bible study are part of the last words that Jesus said before He was arrested and crucified. He knew how stressful it would be, and so he talked about the Holy Spirit who would help them. Our Lord spoke about trusting the Father as they humbly served others in God's name. He spoke of how the world would hate them but how they would have joy amid the troubles. Jesus gave them the tools to survive and thrive in a harsh world and to bear fruit as they drew strength from Jesus Himself. He spent these last hours preparing them for the ministry that they would have after His resurrection and return to heaven.

As we do ministry in Jesus' name, we would do well to pull up a chair and listen to the conversation at the Last Supper table. He makes it clear that our purpose is to bear fruit as Christians. We can't do that by ourselves, but the Holy Spirit will empower us, and Jesus will continue to feed us so that we have what we need to be productive. We also will hear Jesus tell us what His disciples will be like in life. They will be humble and trust the Lord in everything. The world will hate them, but they will be transformed and find joy even in their pain. In these conversations are lessons that we need to thrive in a world that is becoming as hostile to the faith as the disciples faced in their day centuries ago. These messages are your survival kit for living as a Christian in a hostile age.

The temptation is often to adapt to the world so that the church can attract others, and the persecution is avoided. Jesus calls for us to stick closely to Him. He wants to be honest with us. We will face persecution and feel like we are swimming upstream against a hostile world. We will wish the pain would go away, but instead, Jesus will transform that pain and use it for our benefit. As we listen to these messages, we have insights that the world often misses. We have realized the great resources that we have in Jesus and the victory that comes through Him. We could keep doing things that will attract people on their terms, but Jesus wants us to learn from Him so that we have real success.

## **Table of Contents**

### **The chapter title, text, and theme**

- 1. Joyful service - John 13:1-17 Real happiness comes when serving others because of Jesus**
- 2. The way to God - John 14:1-14 Trust in God brings comfort to life**
- 3. Why are we here? - John 15:1-17 My purpose is to draw strength from Jesus so I can bear fruit**
- 4. Feeling out of sync with the world - John 15:18-27 Belonging to Jesus means swimming upstream**
- 5 Send in the cavalry! - John 16:5-15 The Holy Spirit empowers us to bring people closer to Jesus**
- 6. Be transformed with joy - John 16:16-33 God brings joy to life by transformation not substitution**

### **How to use this Bible study**

Each of the six chapters contains an introduction to help you get the big picture and is followed by thirteen questions to help you dig into the truth. The questions will help you understand what is going on and apply it to your own lives. The leader's guide provides answers for the questions that can be used in a Sunday Bible class or a small group. In a small group setting, you may find it helpful to copy the four-page leader's guide for each person. There are also student guides provided in the back of the book. In a large setting, it may be easier to copy those guides so that each of the members of the class has a student guide for personal use. Notice that there are also three questions at the end of each lesson that can either be discussed as you meet together or assigned for people to think about in the coming week.

My prayer is that you and the members of your group or class can grow through these studies. The answers in the leader's guide may challenge you to find deeper meaning and application for your lives. Life as a Christian can be difficult. It becomes even more difficult as we try to actively serve our Lord in ministry. The lessons that Jesus gave to help His disciples as they began the ministry of the new church are still important for us today. They can provide strength and help with our fears. As you study, realize that many of the questions have no single answer but are meant to help people find God's help in your trials. If you need to take more than one week per lessons, do so and enjoy the discussion and the learning.

### **Bibliography**

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May the Lord bless you as you learn and grow in His grace.

## **1. Joyful service**

### **John 13:1-17**

#### **Big idea: Real happiness comes when serving others because of Jesus**

Americans are all about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So often that happiness comes as a result of others serving us. It is a cruise ship where someone prepares gourmet meals for you, others entertain you, and your bed is made each night. It is a store that has just what you want at bargain prices. Such treatment is enjoyable for a time, but the joy soon wears off. When the world pursues such pleasure, it is always looking for bigger, better, and more luxurious. It is like chasing a shadow that keeps moving. It is always just beyond our reach. The real joy, according to Jesus, comes from service. It is the joy that happens because you helped someone and put a smile on their face and earned a place in their heart. It is a warm feeling that comes because you made a difference in your family, in your community, or among your friends.

Jesus had great joy in watching the disciples develop. These “children” had come a long way, yet there were valuable lessons that they needed to learn if they were to have children of their own. John 13 – 17 is our Lord’s farewell message. He knows that time is short. He knows that his disciples are still not ready for the things that they will experience in the next three days or the next thirty years. They will argue about who is the greatest around the last supper table and will fail Him in the garden. It is time for some lessons, and He will begin this farewell message with an object lesson on servant humility. Foot washing was the lesson of humble service that was needed even as they were confused and arguing among themselves.

Real happiness is not the result of others serving us but comes when we serve others in the name of Christ. Our acts of kindness are what we want our families to remember about us in our final hours. No one cares about a fancy house or expensive toys. The lasting memories come from all the wonderful things that we did for them. You want them to follow your example in life. They need to be servants not because of force or guilt. They need to see that your service bound them as a family and that their service will make an impact on the world. They will have joy because they know that helping others is the greatest thing that they can do. They put a smile on a face or made a new friend because they cared. Such joys are ones we seldom find tiring. They bring happiness to us and give life purpose.

#### **1. Describe a time when someone did something special to help you. What made that person's act of service so special?**

Let the class describe a time when someone did an extraordinary act of service. For my part, I remember my car breaking down in the middle of Wyoming and a single woman helping my family get to the nearest town to get a clogged fuel filter repaired. Her kindness to a stranger and willingness to help when it meant taking time from her life still says a lot. She was my “Good Samaritan.”

#### **Read John 13:1-17**

#### **2. Verse 1 What does Jesus know that has escaped the disciples’ attention? How does that knowledge lead Jesus to serve them in a particular way?**

Jesus knew that the time was short and that he would be on the cross within twenty-four hours. This evening was a chance to show them how much he loved them and what their love should be. He knew that before the evening, they would argue about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30). They would also display ignorance and let Him down in His great need in the garden. It meant taking drastic measures. Imagine how the disciples must have been shocked when Jesus rose from the table and began to wash their feet. It was an unforgettable lesson in humility that would rebuke their selfishness and pride and prepare them for the service that would be required of them after He had ascended into heaven.

### **3. Verse 3 How does Jesus' knowledge about himself give him the freedom to serve others?**

We often are forced to take a servant's role because someone else is stronger or more important than we are. Jesus knew that He was the Son of God and that He would soon be returning to heaven. He was confident of His power and His position and that allowed Him, even as He was quickly approaching the cross, to focus His attention on their needs and show them what it meant to be a servant. Weakness depends on positive feedback from others. The strong can serve others even if others don't understand or approve. Jesus did it because of His deep love for the disciples and because He didn't need to help to gain their support or respect.

### **4. Verse 3 How does Jesus's strength give you the freedom to help others? How do Jesus' actions define true humility for us and or others?**

Jesus' example flies in the face of what many people think makes you powerful. Influential people take charge and are served by others in our culture. Jesus was the greatest and highest of all. He had all things in his hands and yet he picked up a towel and began serving. It was what makes Him loved by us. He, though He is great, is willing to help you and me at any time. As we follow His example, we become greater in the eyes of God and of those around us. Humility does not mean to be downtrodden or abused. It means to think about your station in life so little that you are free to love and help others. Such humility is possible because we know of the value and worth that we have in Jesus and because we have felt His love for us and want to share that love with others.

### **5. Verse 5 Why was foot washing necessary in ancient Judah? Who usually washed the feet, and what does it say about the disciples that no one had clean feet?**

People traveled in sandals across dusty roads in Judah. When one entered a home, it was customary to wash one's feet, particularly before reclining on couches to eat food. Usually, the host had one of the servants wash the guest's feet. If that was not done, it was a breach of hospitality (Luke 7:44). The disciples had, on many occasions (Mark 9:33-34, Mark 10:35-44, Luke 22:24-30) argued about who was the greatest. One imagines that no one was going to take on the role of washing another's feet since that role belonged to a servant. For this reason, Jesus would take on this task as a visual lesson on humility, love, and service since it was to be a mark of the true disciple (John 13:34-35).

### **6. Verse 6 How does Peter respond to this service from Jesus? How does Jesus respond to Peter (v.8), and what does that mean?**

Service is not always received well. The disciples were probably at a U shaped table with Jesus and John at one end and Peter on the other end. Peter has watched Jesus wash the feet of all 11 of the other disciples. Now the master comes to him to wash his feet as well, and he is disturbed. Sadly, he doesn't wait for an explanation but tries to tell the Lord what to do. He refuses to have his feet washed at first and gives in only when he begins to realize that refusal would cost him fellowship with Jesus. Realize this was not an expression of arrogance but confusion. Peter felt he should be washing the Master's feet—not the other way around. Jesus looks to the cross where He will cleanse Peter of his sins. Without such washing, none of us can belong to Jesus. We must all accept Jesus' salvation and be willing to let Him teach us.

### **7. Verse 6 When is it difficult for you to take help from Jesus or to ask for help in prayer? Why should we be eager and open for his help?**

Answers may include pride or fear that God's answer may not be what we want. Many times we think that we don't need God's help but can do it ourselves. One wonders if pride was not the reason that Peter did not want his feet washed. It felt awkward to have the master help him. In our life, there may be times that we are afraid that Jesus is going to do things in a way that we don't want. He will expect us not to cut corners or to take a hard but better road instead of the easy and maybe sinful road that we have chosen. Let the class discuss what their reasons for trying to do things without Jesus' help are.

**8. When and why do you find it difficult to allow others to serve you? Why is it important to let Jesus and other Christians help you?**

Some people who serve find it hard to be served. I think of Martha in the Bible who served graciously but found it hard to sit at Jesus' feet and served. Being served may make you feel vulnerable or inadequate. It is often a matter of control. We need to let others serve us because it is an act of love for Jesus. We need to let others use their gifts to help us in places where we are not as capable or gifted as them. It opens up opportunities for us to serve them and builds friendships that we need in life. If I help you by leading a Bible study for you and others in my home, I need to let you help me balance my checkbook or paint my living room. God made us part of a community that uses the gifts he has given to improve one another. To serve but not allow others to help us often cuts down on our ability to serve as Christ has served us.

**9. Verse 12- 14 how does Jesus challenge the idea of what it means to be a disciple? Does this humble us or raise us?**

Jesus was their master and could have commanded them to serve him. He sets the pattern of service here and is honored for it. We love Jesus not because our Lord is a powerful God who could destroy us. We praise Jesus because of all the ways that he serves us from the cross to curing us of a common cold. The disciples would follow that pattern of healing, preaching, and helping others. It would lift others out of the gutter and cause these simple men to be honored by their peers and called saints by us. Their humble service makes them important to us. It is impressive how service elevates us before others. You showed yourself, by your service, to be someone who cares and who is concerned about others and not just yourself. You will make friends with those who you help. You will gain the respect of both those you help and those around you. In the end, you may even have people who will be willing to help you when you are in your time of need. Service changes how people see you and how you see them.

**10. How does Jesus define what it means to be his follower by His actions on the night before He dies? Why is it necessary for all of us to be servants if the church is to flourish?**

The disciples would soon be sent out as planters of the Christian church and leaders in that church. If they were to spread the gospel, they needed to be servants to the people that they taught. There would be problems and struggles as they built the new church. They needed to learn to work together and take the lowest role so that the church could be built. If everyone wanted the spots of greatness or importance, the church would never have grown. People have to have God's heart and be willing to do whatever is necessary to make the church grow. Discuss what tasks never seem to get done at your church and which ones you could take on as your own.

**11. Verse 17 What does Jesus promise to those who serve? What do you think that He means by that?**

Jesus promises that they will be blessed by serving others. Just think of a family where each person knows their job and works together. The task goes smoother, and everyone develops an appreciation and love for each other. Such is the joy of a church family where everyone gladly serves each other. The church family develops a closeness as they use their gifts for each other. People don't count the cost or worry about how much each person is contributing. They enjoy what the family as a whole can do. The lesson is that real happiness comes when we serve each other because of Jesus. It binds us into a family and makes serving one another a joy. Contrast that to a church where a few do all the work and soon are burnt out. It would be hard serving in such a place, and soon you would want to quit.

**12. Verse 17 Why isn't just knowing the truth enough for happiness?**

We are happy not just because we know what Jesus is saying but because we follow His example. The theory of being a humble servant is not worth much if we do not practice it. If humbleness leads us to not think of ourselves, but we are willing to serve others, then we will find real joy. We will have a purpose for our lives and will be thought of well by others. There is a sequence here: humbleness, holiness, and then happiness. When we humbly serve others, we walk in Jesus' path of holiness, and we enjoy happiness. The simple truth is that we were put here on this earth to be servants of God, not for God and others to serve us.

**13. In what ways can you demonstrate the same attitude of foot washing that Jesus shows here? What do you think that would look like to others?**

Foot washing is an example of being a servant. It shows that we should not be upset at taking a lesser role or worry about our rights or privileges. It means that we need to be as concerned about the needs of others as we are about our own needs. Have the group imagine what it would be like in a church if everyone found a job that no one was doing or that others didn't want to do and took it on as their ministry. Imagine how you would be served in that church and what needs you would have met that are not being done now.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What is one meaningful way that Jesus could serve you today? Why would this service be so valuable to you?

Deep 2 Who do you know who could use help and what is one way that you could make their life better?

Deep 3 What changes would occur at your church if everyone had the humble servanthood described here by Jesus? How could you model servanthood in your church or family?



## 2. The way to God

### John 14:1-14

#### Big idea: Trust in God brings comfort to life

The Last Supper was a very stressful meal. Jesus had announced to them that one of them was a betrayer. He had warned Peter that he was going to deny his lord three times. The heaviest blow was the announcement that he would leave them. It should have been a time of celebration, and yet, Jesus made it a downer. Questions filled the disciple's minds. A lot of people tell you that if you believe in Jesus that everything will be rosy in life. Don't accept a word of it. The comfort of Jesus is not that life going to be easy, but that He will be with us to help us through the troubles of life. "Trust me" Jesus keeps telling us. Trust me enough to follow me because you know that I will help.

When we face trouble like the disciples, we are often overwhelmed by fear, doubt, grief, and inner conflict. Our strength evaporates, and we know that we are in trouble. We often deny our frailty and think that we can go out and make it on our own just because we are strong. It is at those times that we can push on and fail, give in and be afraid, or we can turn to the Lord and trust Him to help. Jesus is trying to tell us that real success comes when we realize our weakness. We need to turn to someone who can help us instead of just denying our faults or giving in to them. In this passage, Jesus gives us promises to lay hold of and make our very own that will bring comfort in our stress.

God can be trusted. We know it, but we don't always live as we believe it. Jesus is saying to the disciples and us, "Calm down, haven't I helped you in the past?" "Is there anything that could happen to you that I cannot deal with?" We have terror because we are not looking at God. God has the present covered. Jesus walks beside you, teaching and comforting you every time you open up His word. He is also ready to hear all your prayers and to work miracles in your life if you let him. God has the future covered. We know where we will be on the last day. It is not up to us. Jesus has the future all locked in by the cross. When we trust God, we live in His strength and not our weakness.

#### **1. What are you looking forward to in heaven? How is it comforting to know that Jesus has things covered whether you are ill right now or if you are in a car accident tomorrow?**

The younger the people in the group are, the less that they have thought about this question. In your twenties, you don't think of dying but are more concerned with living. Older adults may have illnesses or bad knees that they are looking forward to being rid of in heaven. If your group is older, let them share their hopes for eternal life. If the group is younger, let them talk about the comfort that comes from knowing that Jesus has things covered if they were to be in a car accident tomorrow.

#### **Read John 14:1-14**

#### **2. Verse 1 How did Jesus want the disciples to respond to His parting from them?**

Peter had asked in John 13:36 where the Lord was going. He spoke for all the disciples who were all feeling shaky after Jesus had made predictions of His betrayal, denial, and departure. Jesus wanted the disciples to trust the Father and trust Him through the next couple of days as they saw Jesus arrested, tried, and crucified. He had given them a glimpse of what was to come so that they knew that He was firmly in control. They had seen Him handle the Pharisees and Sadducees before. They had seen Him walk through a crowd in Nazareth that was going to kill Him. They could trust Him now and always.

#### **3. Verse 1. What does it mean to trust in Jesus? Why should we trust Him enough to bring everything in life to Him?**

When we face troubling times, we often feel overwhelmed by fear and doubt. Our resources are stretched thin, and we often find ourselves faced with failure. Trusting Jesus and placing our lives and future in his

hands allows us to be calm and filled with hope. Believing is not a recipe of things that we do, but a relationship with Jesus. We look at His power and ability and see that it is stronger than our problems. We have confidence that Jesus will help and that He will not fail us. We can have that trust because we know that He speaks the truth. We can have that trust because we have been helped by Him many times in our lives and we have no reason to doubt that He will help us again. Jesus is faithful, and we can believe in Him and count on Him to be there.

**4. What troubles your heart right now? How do you usually handle worries that bother you? How does Jesus want you to deal with your fears?**

This question is to open a frank discussion on worry and God's comfort. Let the group describe how they deal with their problems and if it works. Usually, we fret and get upset, or we make a to-do list and try to tackle the problem ourselves. The first will get us nowhere but sick. The second is a good idea, but we should pray first. Jesus tells the disciples to "trust." They have seen Jesus in action for three years and need to trust that Jesus will help. Prayer gives the problem to God and will often give us the direction of what we can do and what we have to leave up to the Lord. In the text, Jesus is talking about eternal life and the reason He is going. That is something that we have to leave totally up to Jesus. We will tackle those problems we can do something about better if we let the Lord comfort us and direct us first.

**5. Verse 2. How does Jesus have the future covered for the disciples and us?**

Jesus wants them to see that He is going so that they have a future. He is preparing a place for all those who believe and who trust in Him. It is a place where they can be with God and with Jesus forever without any worry about being separated from Him again. Heaven is a place that brings us comfort. A long car ride or a train ride with transfers can seem tedious at best. If you know that at the end of the journey that you will be home, you keep thinking of the joy of home and the trip does not seem so bad. Life has its problems and its tough days. As a person thinks of the place that Jesus prepared for them, they make it through the journey. You don't mind the drive when it leads you home to a place where you can stay. The future is safe with Jesus. It gives us peace every day of the journey.

**6. Verse 6-7. What does Jesus mean when he says that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life?**

The disciple's question in verse 5 shows that they are thinking that Jesus is going to a place. We often make the same mistake. Jesus is not talking of a physical location but a person. He is going to the Father, and He (Jesus) is the only way to get there because the cross is the necessary payment for our sin. He is the truth for Jesus is the only one with an intimate knowledge of God. Those who travel to the Father must live by the truths that Jesus taught. He is also the only life. Through the resurrection, He has given us life right now and in heaven. As we follow Jesus and trust in Him, life will be different. Joy and service to God and others fill our lives. We will live while others following the ways of the world will not have the happiness and joy in life.

**7. Verse 6. How can Jesus say that He is the only way? Aren't there other ways to heaven and different ways that bring comfort to life?**

Many in our world are shocked that Jesus claims to be the only way. People often don't want to accept the authority of Jesus and prefer to do things their way. They refuse to see that they are lost and need Jesus to show them the way. Finally, they don't know where they are going and are convinced that every way out of life will work just as well. Jesus doesn't exclude anyone. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16). Everyone is invited, but few take up the invitation. Other ways will not take you to heaven, for they are not based on the cross and resurrection. They bring doubt and worry for they are based on what you and I do and we will always wonder if we have done enough. Only faith in Jesus brings comfort for we know from scripture that He did it all.

**8. Why is it crucial for our focus to be on Jesus himself? How can you do that in your life?**

Let the group discuss where our focus often is and why it is better to focus on Jesus. Jesus is a better focus because He is the only one who can help. When we worry about the future, we don't know what is coming and have no tools to handle what may happen. Jesus knows our future and is willing to prepare us for it. Our part is in doing the little things like being in Bible study so that he can teach us and prayer so that we can give our concerns to him. Focusing on Jesus is usually about time. We have to take the time to be with Him and to let Him mentor and comfort us. When the trouble is on us, it is often too late to get prepared or to minimize the damage.

**9. Verse 9. How have the disciples been close to the Father through these past three years? What does that say to us about having God's presence and protection in our daily lives?**

It was probably a surprise for the disciples to realize that Jesus was God. Here was their friend to whom they had committed their lives. As they walked with Him and came to know Him and His message, they had a closer relationship with God than anyone had been able to have since Moses. They had eaten with Jesus, heard his teachings, and watched his miracles. While we can't see Jesus in the flesh as they did, we can know Him in ways that the disciples could not know until after Pentecost. We can come to have a deep relationship with Him in Bible study and prayer. We don't need to seek God for Jesus is with us each day. We give our lives to Him as we build a relationship with Him and let Him take care of our lives as we trust Him each day.

**10. If Jesus is the only way to heaven, what does that mean for those we love who do not know Christ? What does that mean for us?**

It is time that we Christians admit that not everyone will be saved. There are people we all know who have rejected Jesus outright or who are too busy to bother with faith and church. , and none of the non-Christian religions of the world will get anyone to heaven. Jesus is the only way, and many will be surprised that their "good" life or their alternative faith were not good enough on the last day. That is why it is imperative for every Christian to be sharing their faith. Not all will accept the gospel but some will. If we keep quiet, we are holding back on the message that can change their life. Some of the people that we love will not get to share eternity with us in heaven, and that will be on us. God wants all people to have salvation, but there is only one way for that to happen, and it is the cross.

**11. Verse 12 Can we give Jesus' comfort away? If so, what impact can we have on the world around us, and how is that possible?**

The promise here is that the disciples will have a more significant impact than even Jesus did. He was one person, and they are twelve. They will build upon his foundation. Peter will preach on Pentecost and 3000 will be added in one day. Paul will reach easily 100,000 with his ministry. The comfort of Jesus will spread. Ordinary people like us can change the world, bringing glory to the Lord and encouragement to people by bringing the message of Jesus to them. Not only will Jesus comfort the disciples, but He will bring comfort through them. Think of what this stress-filled world could be like if people trusted in Jesus and brought his comfort into the lives of others. Think of all the stress related illnesses that would decrease. Think of all the pain and suffering that would be taken away from so many people. If each Christian touched three people and they reached three people we could change the world.

**12. Verse 13. What is the promise of verse 13? How is this a comfort?**

I am sure that the disciples were afraid that if Jesus left, they would not be able to talk to Him or depend on Him. They had enjoyed three years of being able to speak with Him about anything. Jesus is telling them that they will still be able to talk to him after he has left (ascended) and look to Him for help. Through prayer, Jesus would always be there. Some people worry instead of praying. Here is a promise we can claim through faith. We trust Him and know that he hears us even when we don't see Him. We

also know that because he walked the earth that he understands the problems that we face and that our Lord can help because He successfully dealt with the same kind of issues in his life. With Jesus, we are never alone.

**13. Verse 13-14. What does it mean to ask in Jesus' name? How is it more than just tacking those words on the end of a prayer?**

Asking in Jesus name is not just a set of words; it is an attitude and shows that we have the same desires as Jesus did. It is asking that what happens gives God glory so that others will know how great a God we have. It sees things in the big picture so that our desires are not for our benefit while others are hurt. It is basing our requests on what Jesus would want so that what we are asking allows us to do what God is calling His people to do in life. Finally, it is an acceptance of Jesus' timetable and His desires for His church. Praying in Jesus' name is asking that what we want is in line with what Jesus wants. It asks that God not give us what we are asking for if it is not in line with His will.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How comfortable are you with your faith journey right now? In what ways do you need Jesus' comfort and direction?

Deep 2 How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is preparing a place for you in heaven right now? How are you preparing your life to be with Jesus?

Deep 3 What should be our motivation when we make requests from Jesus? What is wrong with asking for something that benefits only us?

### **3. Why are we here? – Vine and branches**

**John 15:1-17**

**Big idea: My purpose is to draw strength from Jesus so I can bear fruit**

They had followed Jesus for three years, and now, the end was near. Thursday was the last night that they would all see Him before He died on the cross. What did Jesus expect of them for the future? What does Jesus expect of us as His people? Our parents had expectations as they sent us to school, and as they raised us in their home. Our spouse had expectations when they said “I do” on our wedding day. The teaching of the vine and the branches gets to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It shows God’s expectations for us when we are baptized and when we commit our lives to Him. It defines our relationship with Him and the path and purpose of our lives.

Many in the church say that it doesn’t satisfy them anymore. They go through the motions by attending church on Sunday but is that enough to satisfy them or God? Jesus answers that question by showing the rights and responsibilities of being a Christian. We have the privilege of abiding with Him and drawing on His resources. We have the responsibility of bearing fruit so that people might see His love and be touched by His values. Sitting in a pew is not enough. We have a purpose for our lives from God and are given the resources to do that task well. Church will not be boring if we are making a difference in the lives of others just as God has filled our lives with His love.

When you are connected to the vine, you are different. God will change your character and give you joy and satisfaction in the ministry that you do for others. You will be able to do amazing things because you have the power and wisdom of Jesus. The disciples didn’t have to work at miracles in the book of Acts. The power of Jesus flowed in them. Power will flow from Jesus through you as well. When the Christian abides in Jesus, amazing things happen. He is alive and nourished by Christ. He naturally bears the fruit of service and love to others. In Christ, you have a purpose that will change the world and change you with it. Nothing is boring about that.

#### **1. Who is your greatest encourager or supporter? What would life look like if they were suddenly gone?**

Let the class share who has supported them over the years and how they have made an influence on their lives. It might be a parent or a spouse. It might be a grandparent that they could always talk to and who shared those pearls of wisdom that shaped their life. It could be a special friend at school or our job. Such a person is invaluable for they become a source of strength when life turns sour and become a place of joy throughout our life. We mourn when such a person is taken from us because they move or someone passes away. We were not meant to live alone. We were meant to be a big help to one another.

#### **Read John 15:1-17**

#### **2. Verse 2 How does the gardener make a plant more fruitful? Why is that necessary for the health and fruitfulness of the plant?**

I have read grape vines are pruned for three to five years to train them before they are allowed to produce a crop. It is essential to cut off branches that want to go in odd ways or produce more leaves than fruit. If you prune a vine right, one plant can produce 80 pounds of grapes in a season. Such pruning may seem harsh, but the gardener knows that sometimes even healthy branches must be sacrificed so that the plant can produce better fruit. Vines increase and can even be over twelve feet long. It is pruning that channels the energy and growth of the plant so that the growth has an objective instead of producing vines that fail their purpose with little fruit.

**3. Verse 2 Why is pruning necessary for the Christian? What kind of things often need to be pruned from a Christian's life if they are to be healthy and grow in faith?**

It may seem difficult thinking of the Lord pruning a Christian's life for there can be pain involved. Let them explore what kind of things need to be removed from our lives which hold us back. It may be sinful actions that destroy our lives and are like a diseased branch on a plant. It may be pruning off activities in life so that we can focus on one or two things that will produce fruit and joy in our lives. We may think that it would be nice if God just left us alone, but that would be cruel if He left us with things that can hurt us. The loving thing is to take away the dead or dying parts of our life and weed away all the distractions so that we can find the joy and happiness that come from a life filled with purpose and with His blessings.

**4. What needs to be pruned from your life? How would such pruning be beneficial? In what ways might it be painful?**

This question calls for some honest discussion that your group may or may not be comfortable doing. If so, talk in generalities and not items specific to your group. What are some bad habits that people would be better without like smoking, drinking, or too much food or television? Talk about how such things hurt us and how our lives would be better without them. Be sure to talk about all the good things that keep us from doing better things. Life has gotten so busy with social media and other activities that we often don't have time for the things that we need to do. Our problem may not be sinful activities but just having too many events that keep us from the important. Be sure to discuss the pain of giving up harmful habits or the pain of giving up activities we may enjoy so that we can do something better. Ask God for wisdom concerning what needs to be pruned and what does not.

**5. Verse 4. What did Jesus say a branch must do to bear fruit? Why is it vital that they "remain" connected to Jesus?**

The branch must stay connected to the vine so that it can continue to draw nourishment and strength from the vine. It will remain healthy only if it remains attached to the source of life. The key word is to remain. Only those who reside in fellowship with Jesus will be healthy and produce fruit. Many get excited about their faith and then get too busy to continue this close relationship. Healthy Christians draw strength from Him. We need the nourishment that Jesus provides us and the power that only can come from him. We need to cultivate a deeper relationship with Jesus. You long for Bible study and devotional time and have it often. You pray for more than the meals and even ask questions of God that you expect answers. You know that you do not have the strength to thrive in the world without Him. You thrive on His power and not your own.

**6. Verse 7 What privileges are given to the branches that remain connected to the vine?**

A healthy vine produces healthy branches. The branch of grapes is only as good as the vine which whom they are connected. Even today, individual branches are grafted into a vigorous, productive vine. Then they are cared for with water and fertilizer. They will only produce if they get the right nutrients. Otherwise, they will be a leafy spindle. Healthy Christians find comfort and direction in scripture. It feeds them daily so that they are strong enough to handle the crisis that comes in everyday life. Their prayer life connects them to Jesus so that they are giving him their guilt and their worries instead of letting problems eat them from the inside out. Jesus provides plenty of nourishment for those who are connected to Him. People building a relationship with Him will flourish while others around them struggle.

**7. Verse 6-7 When does it become difficult for Christians to maintain a personal relationship with Jesus? What happens if we don't stay connected to Jesus?**

Busy times make for lives that can't stay focused. Bible study and worship is haphazard. Prayer is ritualistic or non-existent. They are like a branch barely connected to the vine. Nourishment is there, but they are not getting it. Others get overwhelmed by the troubles of the world. They blame Jesus for not

protecting them instead of trusting Him when things get rough. They may try to do what is right but will find that their efforts are not working without the wisdom and strength of Jesus. Life will go in a downward spiral as they try one thing after another to make life work by their abilities. Have the group discuss times that they have found it hard and who Jesus can help them.

**8. Verse 8 Is fruit optional to the gardener? How does that connect with the life of the Christian?**

If the plants in your garden don't produce any vegetables, why bother with the garden at all. Grape vines are grown for their fruit, and that is why the vineyard owner spends the time and effort on them. Some years the conditions are right for a bumper crop. Other years, the harvest may not be as plentiful, but there will still be grapes on the branch because he cared for it and nourished it. God expects a crop from the church and from His people whom he sustained. The fruit is not an option. There are times in our lives when that fruit will be abundant because everything has been ideal. Opportunities for ministry are all around us, and we see great things happening. Other times, the fruit will be less, but there will be fruit from our service to God. God will help us to have the most fruit at all times. What is necessary is that we bear fruit even when times are tough.

**9. Verse 8 What does fruit look like in a Christian's life?**

The fruit is something that "feeds others." Remember that a grapevine does not produce fruit to feed itself. Others eat the fruit. Sometimes that fruit is the fruit of character so that a Christian is loving and teaches others by their lifestyle. Sometimes people's lives are changed by someone honest and generous in life. God wants a good looking crop that others can see, and that brings honor to God and admiration from the world. Other times, the fruit is actions. We produce works that will use our spiritual gifts so that we teach, encourage, help, and provide for others so that God nourishes them through us as God has sustained us. Our actions and our character impact others and feed their faith and love for the Lord.

**10. Verse 11 Why did Jesus bring up the topic of the vine and the branches? What does He want for your life?**

Often people look at the concept of service and think that it is just the dull life of obeying his commands and having no fun as we wait to someday go to heaven. What Jesus is wanting is a joyful life for us that is filled with purpose and with close relationships with others. A life that is built on a more intimate relationship with Jesus will be a life that has less worry and more opportunities. God will share His wisdom with you and take your burdens in prayer. You will also make a difference in people's lives and open up the possibilities of friendship and help from others in your time of need. In John 10:10, Jesus says that He has come so that we may have life and have it to the fullest. That only happens if we are connected to Him and bearing fruit.

**11. Verse 12. How are Christians to be different from others? What is the inspiration for this difference?**

Jesus wants His disciples to be loving in an unloving world. In the book of Acts, the Sanhedrin is amazed at the character and power of these unschooled fishermen. They acted with greater integrity and produced miracles that the Pharisees could not do. They didn't have to work at miracles or character. It flowed from Jesus in them. Peter would heal a crippled beggar days after Pentecost, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." He knew where the power originated. By Jesus' authority, he changed his world. We can love and change the world because God has poured himself into us so that we can bring His love into the world by our actions and our character. Our motivation, according to Jesus, is that Jesus has loved us. We don't have to scrape our way through this world trying to find what we need or to feel loved. Jesus has provided for us so that we are free to give and love others. When you are connected to the vine, everything is different.

**12. What does this passage say about the privileges and responsibilities of being a Christian?**

The question above is worth discussing in your group. Ask them what privileges they see in being a Christian and what this passage says that God expects from them. Lately, I have sensed in America that we are all about privilege but struggle with responsibility. We want the good stuff in life but are not willing to do what it takes to change our lives. I see that in the church, too, as people need encouragement before coming to church on Sunday but get mad at God if He is not serving them. Jesus shows us in this passage that there are both privileges and responsibilities of being a Christian. As branches, we have the opportunity of abiding with Him and drawing on His resources and the responsibility of bearing fruit. God pours himself into us so that we might bring his love into our world with our character, our values, and our service. God gives an abundance of resources so that we might pass them on to others.

**13. How close is your life to Jesus? Is He a distant acquaintance, a master, or an exceptional friend? How is your relationship with Jesus affecting your ability to be a blessing to others and to have real joy?**

This question may be hard for the group to discuss, but it is an important question. Wait for honest answers. The simple truth of the vine and the branches is that there is a cause and effect. If we are close to the Lord, we will have the resources that we need to be a blessing to others. If we are close to the Lord, we will be filled with His joy and life will be better. If God is distant, both of those things will be difficult for us. The challenge for many Christians today is that they are not close to the Lord. The disciples did miracles and changed hundreds of lives all because of the Christ in them. The church will never accomplish much of value without a close relationship to Jesus.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 As a branch on Christ's vine, how would you describe the health of your branch and the fruit that you produce? Is it grade A, a little weak or bitter, or just plain wormy?

Deep 2 When do you struggle with loving others the way that Jesus loved you? Why do you think that is hard? How strongly do you feel the love of Jesus in your life?

Deep 3 Why are you here? What fruit do you think that God wants you to produce in your life? Where does He want you to serve in the church or the community? Who does the Lord want you to help so that they feel nourished by Jesus?



## **4. Feeling out of sync with the world**

**John 15:18-27**

**Big idea: Belonging to Jesus means swimming upstream**

The Jewish nation was marching headlong toward destruction. Human logic had become the guiding light of the Jews, and they hated being wrong. Jesus came into the world and showed love to the brokenhearted and shared the message of the Father. His words and actions clashed with the leaders and revealed to the people how shallow that they had become. They didn't want to hear it and thought that they could change the outcome if they could silence Jesus and anyone who reminded them of Jesus. Having spoken of the love that He has for people, Jesus now talks about the hate that the world will show people who love Him. As we walk in the truth, we will face their resistance. They will want us to march toward destruction with them and will hate us if we don't.

Swimming upstream is always harder. I have always been intrigued by salmon fighting up the streams to spawn. The water and dams resist them. Bears scoop them up for food. It would just be easier to spawn in the ocean, but they will not give up on their mission. It is easier to give in to the current of our culture and forgo the hate that we will get. That would mean that we would have to lose Jesus for He will not just float with the crowds. That would mean that we belong to them and not to Jesus. Christians are to speak the truth in love and to live as people who are kind and caring. In short, they are to act and talk like Jesus, even if the world doesn't always like it because we are convinced that living like Jesus is the way to avoid the destruction that is coming.

The great blessing is that we have help when we swim upstream. Jesus promises that He will send the Holy Spirit. He wants us to move forward like geese and not salmon. Instead of going against the current by ourselves, we have the Holy Spirit to lead the way and cut the air resistance. He will remind us of how the alternate lifestyles bring a lot of pain and damage. He will show us the benefits of living a moral life with a healthy marriage and loving families. He will teach you and give you the strength when you are tempted to compromise or take the easy way. He will even show you the impact that you can have with others. Like the geese, the Spirit leads the way, but others are right behind you in your wake as well. You will bask in the love of Jesus and live a life filled with blessings even when the world hates you because your life is good, and theirs is destined for destruction.

### **1. What is one area where you see that the world doesn't agree with the Bible? How have some Christians dealt with this conflict?**

There are many possible answers to this question. The world doesn't like the church's stance on abortion, capital punishment, homosexuality, or the claim that Jesus is the only way to name just a few. It is essential to realize that the world is going against what God says and not the church. If there is the time, you might discuss how some denominations have softened their beliefs to be more in tune with the culture at the expense of what the Bible says.

**Read John 15:18-27**

### **2. Verse 18-19. How is the relationship of the disciples to the world like Jesus' relationship to the world?**

Jesus had taken the disciples out of the world and changed their attitudes and values. They were no longer trapped in Satan's lies and had become a group that cared for each other and who were willing to lift others by serving them. The world works by conformity. If you follow the teachings and fads of the world, you will get along with others. Jesus didn't live according to the world's values. He lived according to the teachings of the Bible and heaven. When our Lord taught, many in the world struggled with what He said. When He showed kindness to those who were of lower standing or whose lives were

not perfect, He felt the anger of the leaders in His day. As we follow Jesus' example, we will find that we will be treated just as He was. People in our world do not like people who do not conform. Our lives show the culture and its values as hollow and flawed. That brings resistance and hatred to God's people.

### **3. Verse 18. How is holding onto Jesus like swimming upstream in our culture?**

Let the group focus on how the world wants us to conform to them. Everyone accepts that sports activities should be on Sundays to make it convenient for people who work Monday to Friday. Our society looks down on us or even tries to censor us if we speak out against the sins that are entirely accepted or speak out against sinful lifestyles. This moment might be a good time to talk about ways that the world wants you to act that are not in line with your Christian beliefs. It also may be time to talk about activities that Christians have to choose between if they are going to worship or serve the Lord.

### **4. How have you felt out of sync with the world as you practice your faith?**

My family had felt that conflict when our son was in boy scouts. Sunday morning was the time to finish merit badges and miss church. We also felt conflict when our daughter was asked to be on a traveling softball team on the weekends. In both cases, the leaders of those groups thought that it was no big deal for our children to miss church most weeks. We have also noticed how people take vacations from God when they go somewhere for a summer vacation. Worship services at National Park campgrounds are lucky to have 30 people at the Sunday service out of a packed campground with 600 spaces. Let the group discuss their experiences.

### **5. Verse 20. What did Jesus want the disciples to remember when they faced persecution? In what ways specifically did they persecute Jesus?**

Jesus reminds us that a servant is not above the master. If the master is mistreated for His beliefs and actions, disciples who behave the same way will face difficulties as well. That is because every believer is a witness for Jesus. People see Jesus' values in us and make judgments about Jesus because of us. It is important to remember that the hatred that the church and its people often gets is not because we are doing something terrible. It is because we are doing something right. We are loving people and caring for people as Jesus did. It is also winning some over who will change their ways and become a child of God as well. The world doesn't like that either. It is the reason that people tried to stop Jesus from teaching and why they had Him crucified.

### **6. Verse 21 What kind of treatment can we expect because we remind others of Jesus?**

When you act like Jesus, you can expect the reaction that the world gave Him. The disciples would be taken before the Sanhedrin and put on trial for speaking about Jesus and healing people. Face it, their words and caring actions make the religious leaders look bad. Paul will be stripped, beaten, and thrown in prison for casting the demon out of a slave girl. Kindness was rewarded with accusations and physical abuse. If you live like Jesus with his values and ideas, be sure that the world will not approve of you. They will legislate making Christian acts illegal and will slander people who speak out for Christian values. The world still doesn't like it when Christians make them look bad as we imitate the love and values of Jesus.

### **7. What is the price that many pay for being a Christian?**

One of the things I have noticed is that the world asks that churches and Christians help those in natural disasters and provide food or shelter for the poor in our country. They want our money and our time but do not want us to speak about Jesus as we serve. They want to dictate how we help. They want to contain the witness of Jesus and will speak out against you if you try to share the scripture with them. They may also attack you for your good deeds to others. We have not yet come to the point where we are killed for

our faith. Ironically, 10 of the 11 disciples present would be put to death for witnessing to Jesus. There can be a high price to pay for witness and for doing what is right.

**8. Verse 24 What did Jesus do that caused the world to hate Him so much? How does that make them accountable for their actions?**

He told the truth and did miracles. His witness was straight out of the Old Testament but did not match the mangled reality of the Pharisees and their scribes. His miracles challenged them because, like the Old Testament prophets, He was wielding the power of God in the lives of people. Tens of thousands of lives were touched and changed by Jesus. He did everything that the Old Testament said the Messiah would do and yet they rejected Him in spite of the proof. They will be doubly judged for the religious leaders claimed to know and follow the Lord but refused to believe the Old Testament testimony about Jesus.

**9. Verse 24. Jesus spent three years healing the sick and raising the dead. You would have expected that everyone loved Him. Why do you think that the religious leaders and the people hated Him so much?**

Let the group wrestle with the people's hate for one who was so kind and did so much. Many have said that it was jealousy. Jesus drew big crowds and "stole" people from the religious leaders of the day. He did miracles that they could not do, and that may have made people question their abilities. He also did not recognize their positions or accept what they said without question. They refused to learn, and their pride refused to believe the one who succeeded in places they failed. They may have even hoped that if they got rid of Jesus, the people would have no choice but to love and follow them once again. It was a simple case of not wanting to hear the truth and being angry that His ministry made them look bad.

**10. Verse 26 How will the Holy Spirit help those who are hated for their love for Jesus?**

The Holy Spirit will encourage and help those who are hated because of Jesus. We might be tempted to give up on Jesus to get along with others, but the Spirit will show us that such actions are not wise. He will show us that those who turn away from Jesus are headed for a lot of pain and broken lives. He will remind us of the truth about Jesus and what He said. He will also tell us of the many benefits of following Jesus. We will look at healthy marriages and families. We will see the benefits of moral life. He will show us how we are better liked because we do not give in to anger or foul language. The Spirit will even help us to live according to the values of Jesus by dwelling in us throughout our life. We are not alone as we try to live in this world.

**11. Verse 26-27. How will the counselor help us continue the ministry that Jesus began here on earth?**

The Holy Spirit will give us both the words to say and the power to show the world who God is. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible to believers who are hated and are starting to want to give up. He witnesses to us during times of persecution and brings us joy when we draw close to Him in prayer. The Spirit will help us to see what works and what will keep us from the ministry that the Lord has given to us. He will not let us make concessions to the culture as we live or serve. He will guide us like a personal counselor who knows the best in what we are to do.

**12. Verse 27 Why must every Christian testify about Jesus and His love?**

Those who speak out for Jesus can have a powerful impact. Our words can lead others to follow Jesus and to "swim" against the tide of our world. As we keep telling others about the benefits of following Jesus and His values, we encourage others to live moral lives so that they can have the same benefits that we do. In a world where so many people live in broken families, it will be a great blessing to speak to them about loving each other and making commitments to their spouse and their children. Only if the children of God talk about the message of the Lord will the world hear the truth among all the selfish words that the world

proclaims. How will the world know it is the truth? They will see the fruits of faith in the lives of Christians. They will see what living in God's love instead of the world's hate can bring. By your witness, you can change lives and change the destiny of families for the Lord.

### **13. How do you see the Holy Spirit working in your life and the life of the church?**

Let the group give examples from their own lives if they can. They may provide examples of people's lives who have changed because of their words or ministry. They may even be able to give examples of changes in people in their family. Let the focus be upon the simple fact that the Holy Spirit does work and works mightily in the church. He helps us do what we can't do by ourselves. He also takes what we can do and makes it better.

#### **For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 When have you experienced the world's hate for speaking or acting like Jesus?

Deep 2 How are you a part of the world but not a part of the world? How do you balance that conflict in your life?

Deep 3 What help would you like from the Holy Spirit so that you can be more like Jesus or can encourage others to be more like Him?

## **5 Send in the cavalry!**

**John 16:5-15**

**Big idea: The Holy Spirit empowers us to bring people closer to Jesus**

Panic must have filled their hearts. It was one thing to help Jesus do the ministry. It is another to have Him leave and proclaim that the ministry belongs to you. How would they cast out demons or preach the message of the gospel in such a hostile world? It seemed like they were destined to fail. Jesus was going on vacation or something, and they felt that they were left holding the bag. These verses let them know that He was sending help. They would not be on their own with such an important task. He was giving a counselor to them whom we know as the Holy Spirit. It will be the Holy Spirit who empowers us to continue the mission that Jesus started. It is the Holy Spirit who will convert the hearts of people through our witness. All we need is the courage to let Him work through us.

The Holy Spirit is the cavalry sent into the battle to help us bring people to salvation. Like the disciples, we are sent into a world that isn't convinced that they need a savior. The first task that the Christian has is often convincing people that they need the help and salvation that Jesus can give. The Holy Spirit opens the hearts of people around us so that they see that what they are doing is not working. It is causing them pain. The second task that the Holy Spirit helps us do is show people the Savior. When the heart is hurting, people will be ready to see that Jesus has the answers. The Holy Spirit gives us the words to say and the courage to speak. Finally, it is the Spirit who judges those who refuse to hear the message of salvation. He will bring down the false gods of wealth, power, and fame that people have as their lords. He will show how they give no hope or help.

We often feel overwhelmed when Jesus says that the ministry is now ours. It is a daunting task, but we have an even more powerful helper. The Spirit is our guide, our navigator, and our trailblazer. He will teach us what we need to know, just as He did the disciples. He will give us courage through our times of word and prayer. He will provide opportunities to change the lives of others around us and will open up hearts. Our part in this endeavor is just to let others know how good it is to be a Christian and to live as caring and loving people. The love you show will draw people, and the Bible stories of people's lives who were changed by Jesus will show them that they can be loved by Him, too. The Spirit will do the rest. People need to see that Jesus is worth knowing and trusting. It is the task that Jesus gave to us.

### **1. How would you feel if your best friend moved away? What would you miss most about losing them?**

In our mobile society, this is something that has happened to most of us. A friend moves when they change jobs or moves away to be closer to the family. There is a hole in our heart at their loss, and we may try to keep up with phone calls and emails, but it is not the same. Let the group share someone that they miss. Be sure to take time to talk about what you miss because they are gone.

### **Read John 16:5-15**

### **2. Verse 5-6 Jesus has announced that He was going (14:2) yet no one wants to discuss where He is going and why He must leave. What does the text tell us were the emotions and feelings of the disciples?**

The disciples probably felt pure panic. It had been a joy to work with Jesus on the sidelines as He healed the sick, battled demons, and opened the scriptures. He was powerful, and they had ringside seats at the Messiah's battle with evil. I am sure that they thought it would continue for years. Now He was announcing that He was going to leave them and they didn't want to hear it. They were filled with grief at what was usually a celebration of Passover. Even Peter's question in John 13:36 about his departure seems to be more about Peter than about Jesus. Peter is worried about what will happen to them if Jesus is

gone. Fortunately, Jesus understands their fear and is ready to deal with it as He talks about the comforter who is to come and help.

**3. Verse 5 The disciples have just been put in charge of the ministry because Jesus says He is going away. How do you feel when you are given an important ministry, and Jesus feels far away?**

There are a lot of times that I have felt inadequate in ministry and wished that I could hand it over to Jesus and stand back and watch. In particular, the task of witnessing to others seems complicated. Let the group share times that they felt overwhelmed by the ministries that they were supposed to do in church or community service. Jesus is often by our side, but our fears and pure panic make Him feel like He is miles away. We feel inadequate and need the help that the Holy Spirit can give.

**4. Verse 7. Who is Jesus sending to help us with our mission? Why is it a blessing that Jesus is going away?**

The Holy Spirit is the counselor that the Lord is sending to empower the church for our witness and to help us with our lives. It is important to note that the Holy Spirit is sent to help us. He comes to help us bring salvation to the world. We may have all prayed that the Holy Spirit would go and convert someone. It doesn't work that way. God sends us to share the message, and the Holy Spirit helps us by giving us the words and empowering us so that the gospel power is unleashed. The Spirit is helping us communicate Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus had to leave them and die on the cross; otherwise, we would have no message, and the gospel would have no power.

**5. What advantage do we have because Jesus physically left the earth and went to heaven?**

Jesus' presence on earth was limited to one place at a time during His earthly ministry. By leaving the world, he could minister in many places at the same time through His people and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would send workers across the world to bring the message of salvation to people on every continent. Jesus can intercede for us in heaven with the Father and send the Holy Spirit to assist our ministry at any time and any place even as the Spirit is helping others minister on another continent at the same time.

**6. Verse 9 What is the first task of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to the gospel?**

The disciples were being sent out into a world that did not believe in Jesus. They would tell the truth and would be attacked for their faith. It is the Holy Spirit who will convict, that is to bring to light or expose, people in the sin of unbelief. He will bring the power of the law into the lives of people who have rejected Jesus or don't know Him so that they will be weighed down with their guilt and hopelessness. The Spirit's purpose is not to condemn people but rather to open them up to the message of salvation by helping them to stop relying on themselves and on other ideas that they think will save them. By assisting people in seeing how helpless they are, He drives them to the message of the gospel in Jesus Christ. The Spirit won't make it easy. He will even bring trials so that people see that they need God.

**7. Verses 9-10 What role has Jesus given every Christian in this ministry of bringing people to salvation? How does our work dovetail with the work of the Holy Spirit?**

We must never be shy about talking about Jesus. We must speak about Him in our homes, among our friends, and even when strangers ask why our life is so blessed. Our lives and words should show the difference between those who live with Jesus and those who don't know Him. Our goal is not to attack the non-Christian but to share how Jesus helps, comforts, and cares for us and let them know that He will do the same for them. We can't convict them in their heart, for that is the work of the Holy Spirit. He will take the words that we say and expose the ways of the world to be inferior and show them how Jesus is the only way of salvation and the only way for joy in our lives. We speak and live out our faith, and the Spirit brings power to those words and actions so that they change lives.

**8. Verse 10 What is a second task that the Holy Spirit does here on earth?**

Having seen how hopeless that they are, the Holy Spirit points all men to the resurrected Jesus. He is the only place of righteousness. Jesus can do what the gods of the world can't. He can take away the fear of death and replace it with the joy and anticipation of heaven. He can take away our sin so that we no longer have to hide from our guilt but can have it completely taken away. As we speak the message of salvation to others and tell them about Jesus, the Holy Spirit convinces people that they don't have to create their righteousness by great deeds or by lying to themselves. They can throw themselves on the mercy of the cross and receive the forgiveness that will cover their sins.

**9. Verse 11. Some still want to cling to the ways of the world. What is the third task of the Holy Spirit, and how will He show that adhering to Satan and the ways of the world are hopeless?**

The Holy Spirit has the task of showing that Satan and all the false gods are doomed. Rome and her gods seemed to rule the world, and so many flocked to it. The Holy Spirit was to show that Satan is doomed for the Lord has judged him. He cannot deliver what he has promised to the world. The Roman Empire would fall. Many in our culture think that all the gods are alike. It doesn't matter if you worship the true God or Allah or Buddha. All will get you to heaven. The Spirit convicts people and shows them that Jesus is the only way to heaven. He also helps people to see that wealth or technology will fail as well. The Holy Spirit will bring down all the other gods so that people can see that only the true God can help them.

**10. Why is it important that people see that Satan and his false religions are condemned and can't help them?**

Let the group ponder what would happen if the world was allowed to think that every religion and opinion in our culture was considered as good or better than the faith and values of the Lord. Sadly, those who build their life on Satan's false truths will find that life will crumble. Satan's ways do not bring joy or happiness. They enslave us to sin and lead us in directions away from God so that we find our life collapsing in all directions. Satan is judged, and he is going down. Those who have pinned their hopes and dreams on him will find that their life will be judged and destroyed as well. As the Spirit shows people how bad Satan's ways are, He helps people see the glory of God's ways.

**11. Verse 13 The ministry has been given to us. We are to show people their sin and show them their savior. How can we do that in light of the power of evil in our world?**

The answer is that the Holy Spirit will help us. He is our guide and our trailblazer. He is the one who has the power to change the hearts of men if we speak the truth that the Lord has given us. The disciples were not ready for all that Jesus wanted to teach them (v.12), but the Holy Spirit would teach them once they had witnessed the Easter resurrection and had received the power on Pentecost. He would also continue to teach them and us as we spend time in Bible study and prayer. The fearful would become fearless. The confused would become confident as the Holy Spirit leads us into opportunities for ministry and gives us the words to share with others. You will change the world because the Holy Spirit is working through you.

**12. Verse 13 What things does the Spirit teach us that we can't know by ourselves? What do you want Him to show you so that you can be a better witness for Jesus?**

The Spirit has the role of guiding us into truth. We live in a world with lots of opinions that are later shown to be completely false. The Holy Spirit will help you dig out of scripture the truth so that you can build your life on it and so you can communicate it to others who need that truth as well. He will help us understand all the things that Jesus said and all the truth in the Bible. It will not come at once but comes little by little as we mature enough to understand it. He will also give you knowledge of what is yet to come. Christians can be sure of what happens after death and can be confident that God will help them

with the future. The rest of the world makes wild predictions. We know the future and can build our priorities on what will last and what is valuable. Let the group discuss what they would like to know so that they can have that confidence and communicate God's word and will with others.

**13. How exactly does the Holy Spirit work through us? What is our part in this ministry, and what has God the Spirit promised to do for us?**

Many of us want to serve the Lord but are unsure how. We often strive to work hard and spend a lot of time in ministry, thinking that it is all up to us. I want to suggest that the group talk about a change in tactics. The disciples didn't have great programs or spend time arguing doctrine. They just told the stories about Jesus so that others could see how God was working in the lives of His people. Our job is not to win people for Jesus. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. He works through our witness about Jesus to convince the hearts of men that what we say is true. We need to tell people what Jesus did in the Bible so that they can see His love. We need to tell people what Jesus is doing in our life so that people can see the joy we have because Jesus is part of our lives. People need to know that Jesus still brings love and joy into lives and that He wants to bring those blessings into their lives. Let the group talk about how we go about sharing that message.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What benefits come into your life because Jesus was willing to leave and go to the cross? How has the cross impacted your life?

Deep 2 What truths has Jesus shared with you that run counter to what the world is teaching? How will the beliefs of the world lead only to harm for those who follow it?

Deep 3 What are two blessings of being a Christian that you could share with someone else who is wondering if it is worth the bother of following Jesus?



## **6. Be transformed with joy**

**John 16:16-33**

### **Big Idea: God brings joy to life by transformation not substitution**

On a night in which their minds were filled with questions, and their hearts were heavy with sorrow, Jesus concludes the last supper with teaching on joy. He had told the disciples much more than they really could handle, and so He turns from knowledge to their emotions. As they concluded the last supper, they were sad, confused, and afraid. Somehow it is comforting to know that the disciples were real men with real passions. Here are the men that Jesus will use to begin His church with, yet they show their emotions and their vulnerabilities. Amid their sadness, Jesus brings a simple principle. God brings joy to our lives by transformation and not a substitution. He doesn't take the sorrow away. He transforms trials into triumphs and sorrows into joy.

Our world continually looks for happiness and joy. We will work extra hours to afford the perfect vacation or a beautiful car. Such pleasure doesn't last. Soon, the vacation ends or the car breaks down. Then we are looking for something else to make us happy. It is a never-ending pursuit of an elusive joy which can never fully satisfy. The joy of Jesus is different. It is transformational. He puts His joy into our lives so that we are happy in all circumstances. The example that Jesus uses is that of a mother having a baby. There is a great deal of pain in childbirth, but all that pain doesn't matter the moment that she holds her newborn child in her arms. The pain of pregnancy transforms into the joy of motherhood. The time of grief that Christians often have in life is turned into a celebration as we witness what Jesus can bring out of the pain.

The disciples are facing three difficult days as they witness Jesus's death on the cross and his burial. His resurrection will follow these days. At that time, their sorrow will be transformed, and they will understand why His pain and theirs was necessary. Finally, they will have a joy that will never be taken away. God takes seemingly impossible situations, adds the miracle of His grace, and transforms the worst days of our life into times that lead us to joy and blessings that we could not have had otherwise experienced. I think of Paul in prison or Daniel in the lion's den where terrible troubles were followed by a time of witness and miracles. We want God to take away all pain. God wants to work good things through our pain. He wants to transform and strengthen us by the difficulties we face and not just keep us from all suffering.

#### **1. What painful experiences have you had that ended in joy? Was the pain necessary for you to receive the benefit?**

We sometimes must lose a mediocre job to be free to accept a position we love. Sometimes we need to lose a baseball game to get us serious about winning the championship. Let the class discuss losses that ended in joy or times when painful times turned out OK. In my experience, pain can be a great teacher. Pain often helps us focus on what we want and teaches us lessons about how to do things better. Let the group talk about lessons that troubles have taught them.

#### **Read John 16:16-33**

#### **2. Verse 19-20. What event is Jesus talking about in these verses? How will this event bring joy to the disciples and sorrow to others?**

Jesus was referring to His death, which was only a few hours away, and His resurrection, which was just three days away. Their lives would change drastically in these few days, but they still didn't understand. Matthew 16:21 records Jesus witness about his suffering, death, and resurrection. He had told them plainly about the events that were to come, but they struggled to believe it. I think it is essential to understand how difficult it would be to understand that Jesus was going to rise from the dead, never to die again. His resurrection would bring them great joy as they saw their friend and understood what the

resurrection meant for them. Others would have sorrow because they thought they were rid of Jesus, and yet He triumphed.

**3. Verse 20 What is the difference between the joy of the world and the joy that Jesus gives?**

Our world is continually seeking joy and happiness. People will try to find it in a perfect vacation, job, or possession. The problem is that such joy doesn't last and so they have to go looking for the next joy after it. The joy of Jesus is different. It transforms us because the joy is not in external things. It is a joy that Jesus puts in our hearts with the relationship that we have with him. The disciples would understand the drastic change that the resurrection meant for them. They would realize that the relationship that we have with God because of the cross is one that keeps giving every day of our life. It never gets old, and it never decays. It is not based on things. It is based on a person, and that person is never leaving us.

**4. Verse 21 What example does Jesus give from everyday life in which sorrow turns to joy?**

**Describe a time that you experienced this joy or another like it?**

Jesus uses the example of a woman in childbirth. Having watched my wife in childbirth, I know the pain she went through with each child. As soon as that healthy baby was put in her arms, the sorrow turned to joy. It is a joy that has lasted and makes the sorrow all but forgotten. Women are often ready to have a second or third child and go through all that pain just because of the joy of having another child. The disciples will see Him betrayed, tried, and one will see Him dying on a cross. Easter will come, and the joy will overtake the grief. Let the group describe a time that they felt sorrow that led to happiness. It might be a loss of a job that led to a better job or a complicated move that landed them in a better place.

**5. Verse 21 Why can't anyone take this joy away from us? How is the joy of Jesus able to last even in times of pain or sadness?**

The joy can't be taken away because Jesus will never leave us. In rising from the dead, Jesus conquered all those who could try to bring sorrow into our lives. When we understand the resurrection, it will have a powerful impact on our lives. It means that our future is changed and that we will never have to live without Jesus. I think of Paul singing in prison (Acts 16:25) and Stephen, who saw the glory of Jesus even as they are stoning him to death (Acts 7:54). The joy of Jesus is often greater in the midst of troubles and pain. We cling to Jesus in tough times, knowing that He will never leave us. In those moments, the peace of Christ will see us through times that destroy others around us.

**6. Verse 23-24 What promise does Jesus make in these verses? Why have they not yet experienced this joy?**

After the resurrection, they will no longer have to go through Jesus to make their requests. They can go straight to the Father. Up till now, they had always approached Jesus for answers to their questions and had also received power to do miracles through Jesus. It was much like how the Jewish people approached God through the priests. In the future, the cross will have taken away the barrier of sin that separated man from God, and any believer can approach God directly. The promise is that God will answer our requests made in the name of Jesus, which are requests that are in line with the ministry of Jesus. God will not give us a flashy car just because we ask, but He will provide us with the words to say when we witness to another person or give us the resources we need for ministry.

**7. Verse 24 How does an active prayer life bring joy into your life? How is prayer the answer to sorrow and a pipeline to lasting happiness?**

Having someone to rely on through the difficult times in life is such a blessing. While others are struggling, you have God's wisdom in scripture. While others are panicking, you have the opportunity to talk to God in prayer and ask for help in times of trouble knowing that God will give you the best answer even when you don't have a clue what the solution is. Those who pray have a direct pipeline to the one

who has the power to help in any situation. We pray with faith, believing that God can do anything. No problem is too big for Him. No enemy can stop God from using His almighty power and answering the needs of His people. We have joy because God cares about us and helps us in every situation.

**8. Verse 26-27 How has the disciples' relationship with God changed? What benefit have they received because they have loved and followed Jesus?**

As Jesus dies and rises again, He will provide direct personal access to the Father. Jesus still makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34), but Jesus wants them to know they have access and use that access that they have to the Father. The key is that the Father loves them. I have never heard a Muslim, Hindu, or any other religion talk about how their god loves them. Satan and his minions do not love for it is not in their nature. The Father loves those who love Jesus and follow Him. Our relationship with Jesus through the cross opens up a relationship with the Father because we have been faithful to the son. We no longer have to be afraid of God or go through someone else to get to God. We have access to Him with an assurance that because He loves us, He will do what is best for us when we need help.

**9. Where will you seek joy in life? Why is God the best answer for those who seek happiness in sorrow?**

Many will try to find joy in the world. It doesn't exist here for the pleasures of the world are fleeting and do not satisfy. Many will seek comfort in false gods, but such gods never seem to care about people and never show love. They make demands about how you need to help yourself or serve the false god, and he may give you happiness. We have a God who loves us. We have a God who we can see in scripture enjoys bringing blessings into the lives of His children. The God of the universe wants you to be His child. He wants to build a relationship of love with you and give you more than you could ever give Him in return. That is the relationship that we should all seek to develop and develop deeply. The closer you are to the Lord, the more that your life can be filled with His blessings.

**10. Verse 29 What have the disciples finally come to understand?**

It would seem that the repeated predictions of His death and resurrection finally sunk in. Jesus had always seemed to know everything about the future. He even seemed to know the questions on their minds before they asked him (verse 19). Now they were willing to accept that Jesus had been speaking of His departure to the Father. They were not claiming to understand but confessed that Jesus knew the answers. Believing that what Jesus says is true even when you don't understand, it is part of faith. There are still many things in scripture like the nature of the Trinity that we can't fully explain but must accept because Jesus has said it is true.

**11. Verse 33 What brings the peace and joy that the disciples seek?**

This verse is the climax of everything Jesus talked about that night. Jesus knew that the disciples would face struggles in the months and years ahead. He wanted them to see that He had conquered everything and that He would walk beside them as their friend and helper. As they lived in Him, they would overcome the world as well. They would stand up to demons and evil leaders of the world. They would overcome the odds and start a movement that is still going strong in the world. It is Jesus's movement, and it defeats the evil in the world. Despite the struggles that they would face, they would not be alone. Jesus would not abandon them. He would be with them throughout their entire life.

**12. How does the joy that comes from Jesus give us confidence in the future?**

Jesus knew that life would be hard for the disciples and that it can be hard for us. One of the joys that all Christians have is that we know that Jesus will be there to help us with our problems. He has overcome the world. There would be no problem that the disciples would face as they shared the faith that Jesus could not handle. He would release some from prison. Our Lord would be there as they faced the

Sanhedrin, and as they met kings. He would even be there when death came to take them to be with Him in heaven. We can have confidence in the future because Jesus is stronger than the future. It doesn't mean that we will not face troubles. It means that we will have someone to help us with the difficulties while those without Jesus will be trying to deal with all those troubles on their own.

**13. How does the joy that Jesus gives transform our lives? Why is that better than just substituting good for bad?**

We live in a fallen world in which we will always have to face tough days and problems. We can't just get rid of bad things by filling our lives with good or pretending that the bad doesn't exist. People that try to do so are chasing after the wind. What we have from Jesus is a joy that changes our lives. No matter what the world does, it can't change the fact that we get to go to heaven. Our outcome is certain because of Jesus. No matter what the world does, it can't take the love and friendship of Jesus away from us. The future is uncertain, but the love of Jesus is something that gives confidence. That changes the focus of our life and our view of the future. Like Paul, we can sing in troubles. Like so many of the saints, we can pray and be sure that the Lord has the future in His hands. Jesus in us gives us a strength that the world cannot take away.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How does the knowledge that Jesus has your future in His hands change your attitude about the future and give you joy?

Deep 2 How would a stronger prayer life change your perspective of life? Why is it a powerful weapon when life brings sorrow or pain?

Deep 3 What grief or sorrow do you need to entrust to the Lord right now? What difference would trusting Jesus make?

## **1. Joyful service**

### **John 13:1-17**

#### **Big idea: Real happiness comes when serving others because of Jesus**

Americans are all about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So often that happiness comes as a result of others serving us. It is a cruise ship where someone prepares gourmet meals for you, others entertain you, and your bed is made each night. It is a store that has just what you want at bargain prices. Such treatment is enjoyable for a time, but the joy soon wears off. When the world pursues such pleasure, it is always looking for bigger, better, and more luxurious. It is like chasing a shadow that keeps moving. It is always just beyond our reach. The real joy, according to Jesus, comes from service. It is the joy that happens because you helped someone and put a smile on their face and earned a place in their heart. It is a warm feeling that comes because you made a difference in your family, in your community, or among your friends.

Jesus had great joy in watching the disciples develop. These “children” had come a long way, yet there were valuable lessons that they needed to learn if they were to have children of their own. John 13 – 17 is our Lord’s farewell message. He knows that time is short. He knows that his disciples are still not ready for the things that they will experience in the next three days or the next thirty years. They will argue about who is the greatest around the last supper table and will fail Him in the garden. It is time for some lessons, and He will begin this farewell message with an object lesson on servant humility. Foot washing was the lesson of humble service that was needed even as they were confused and arguing among themselves.

Real happiness is not the result of others serving us but comes when we serve others in the name of Christ. Our acts of kindness are what we want our families to remember about us in our final hours. No one cares about a fancy house or expensive toys. The lasting memories come from all the wonderful things that we did for them. You want them to follow your example in life. They need to be servants not because of force or guilt. They need to see that your service bound them as a family and that their service will make an impact on the world. They will have joy because they know that helping others is the greatest thing that they can do. They put a smile on a face or made a new friend because they cared. Such joys are ones we seldom find tiring. They bring happiness to us and give life purpose.

**1. Describe a time when someone did something special to help you. What made that person's act of service so special?**

**Read John 13:1-17**

**2. Verse 1 What does Jesus know that has escaped the disciples’ attention? How does that knowledge lead Jesus to serve them in a particular way?**

**3. Verse 3 How does Jesus’ knowledge about himself give him the freedom to serve others?**

**4. Verse 3 How does Jesus’s strength give you the freedom to help others? How do Jesus’ actions define true humility for us and or others?**

**5. Verse 5 Why was foot washing necessary in ancient Judah? Who usually washed the feet, and what does it say about the disciples that no one had clean feet?**

**6. Verse 6 How does Peter respond to this service from Jesus? How does Jesus respond to Peter (v.8), and what does that mean?**

**7. Verse 6 When is it difficult for you to take help from Jesus or to ask for help in prayer? Why should we be eager and open for his help?**

**8. When and why do you find it difficult to allow others to serve you? Why is it important to let Jesus and other Christians help you?**

**9. Verse 12- 14 How does Jesus challenge the idea of what it means to be a disciple? Does this humble us or raise us?**

**10. How does Jesus define what it means to be his follower by His actions on the night before He dies? Why is it necessary for all of us to be servants if the church is to flourish?**

**11. Verse 17 What does Jesus promise to those who serve? What do you think that He means by that?**

**12. Verse 17 Why isn't just knowing the truth enough for happiness?**

**13. In what ways can you demonstrate the same attitude of foot washing that Jesus shows here? What do you think that would look like to others?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What is one meaningful way that Jesus could serve you today? Why would this service be so valuable to you?

Deep 2 Who do you know who could use help and what is one way that you could make their life better?

Deep 3 What changes would occur at your church if everyone had the humble servanthood described here by Jesus? How could you model servanthood in your church or family?

## **2. The way to God**

### **John 14:1-14**

#### **Big idea: Trust in God brings comfort to life**

The Last Supper was a very stressful meal. Jesus had announced to them that one of them was a betrayer. He had warned Peter that he was going to deny his lord three times. The heaviest blow was the announcement that he would leave them. It should have been a time of celebration, and yet, Jesus made it a downer. Questions filled the disciple's minds. A lot of people tell you that if you believe in Jesus that everything will be rosy in life. Don't accept a word of it. The comfort of Jesus is not that life going to be easy, but that He will be with us to help us through the troubles of life. "Trust me" Jesus keeps telling us. Trust me enough to follow me because you know that I will help.

When we face trouble like the disciples, we are often overwhelmed by fear, doubt, grief, and inner conflict. Our strength evaporates, and we know that we are in trouble. We often deny our frailty and think that we can go out and make it on our own just because we are strong. It is at those times that we can push on and fail, give in and be afraid, or we can turn to the Lord and trust Him to help. Jesus is trying to tell us that real success comes when we realize our weakness. We need to turn to someone who can help us instead of just denying our faults or giving in to them. In this passage, Jesus gives us promises to lay hold of and make our very own that will bring comfort in our stress.

God can be trusted. We know it, but we don't always live as we believe it. Jesus is saying to the disciples and us, "Calm down, haven't I helped you in the past?" "Is there anything that could happen to you that I cannot deal with?" We have terror because we are not looking at God. God has the present covered. Jesus walks beside you, teaching and comforting you every time you open up His word. He is also ready to hear all your prayers and to work miracles in your life if you let him. God has the future covered. We know where we will be on the last day. It is not up to us. Jesus has the future all locked in by the cross. When we trust God, we live in His strength and not our weakness.

**1. What are you looking forward to in heaven? How is it comforting to know that Jesus has things covered whether you are ill right now or if you are in a car accident tomorrow?**

**Read John 14:1-14**

**2. Verse 1 How did Jesus want the disciples to respond to His parting from them?**

**3. Verse 1. What does it mean to trust in Jesus? Why should we trust Him enough to bring everything in life to Him?**

**4. What troubles your heart right now? How do you usually handle worries that bother you? How does Jesus want you to deal with your fears?**

**5. Verse 2. How does Jesus have the future covered for the disciples and us?**

**6. Verse 6-7. What does Jesus mean when he says that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life?**

**7. Verse 6. How can Jesus say that He is the only way? Aren't there other ways to heaven and different ways that bring comfort to life?**

**8. Why is it crucial for our focus to be on Jesus himself? How can you do that in your life?**

**9. Verse 9. How have the disciples been close to the Father through these past three years? What does that say to us about having God's presence and protection in our daily lives?**

**10. If Jesus is the only way to heaven, what does that mean for those we love who do not know Christ? What does that mean for us?**

**11. Verse 12 Can we give Jesus' comfort away? If so, what impact can we have on the world around us, and how is that possible?**

**12. Verse 13. What is the promise of verse 13? How is this a comfort?**

**13. Verse 13-14. What does it mean to ask in Jesus' name? How is it more than just tacking those words on the end of a prayer?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How comfortable are you with your faith journey right now? In what ways do you need Jesus' comfort and direction?

Deep 2 How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is preparing a place for you in heaven right now? How are you preparing your life to be with Jesus?

Deep 3 What should be our motivation when we make requests from Jesus? What is wrong with asking for something that benefits only us?



### **3. Why are we here? – Vine and branches**

**John 15:1-17**

**Big idea: My purpose is to draw strength from Jesus so I can bear fruit**

They had followed Jesus for three years, and now, the end was near. Thursday was the last night that they would all see Him before He died on the cross. What did Jesus expect of them for the future? What does Jesus expect of us as His people? Our parents had expectations as they sent us to school, and as they raised us in their home. Our spouse had expectations when they said “I do” on our wedding day. The teaching of the vine and the branches gets to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It shows God’s expectations for us when we are baptized and when we commit our lives to Him. It defines our relationship with Him and the path and purpose of our lives.

Many in the church say that it doesn’t satisfy them anymore. They go through the motions by attending church on Sunday but is that enough to satisfy them or God? Jesus answers that question by showing the rights and responsibilities of being a Christian. We have the privilege of abiding with Him and drawing on His resources. We have the responsibility of bearing fruit so that people might see His love and be touched by His values. Sitting in a pew is not enough. We have a purpose for our lives from God and are given the resources to do that task well. Church will not be boring if we are making a difference in the lives of others just as God has filled our lives with His love.

When you are connected to the vine, you are different. God will change your character and give you joy and satisfaction in the ministry that you do for others. You will be able to do amazing things because you have the power and wisdom of Jesus. The disciples didn’t have to work at miracles in the book of Acts. The power of Jesus flowed in them. Power will flow from Jesus through you as well. When the Christian abides in Jesus, amazing things happen. He is alive and nourished by Christ. He naturally bears the fruit of service and love to others. In Christ, you have a purpose that will change the world and change you with it. Nothing is boring about that.

**1. Who is your greatest encourager or supporter? What would life look like if they were suddenly gone?**

**Read John 15:1-17**

**2. Verse 2 How does the gardener make a plant more fruitful? Why is that necessary for the health and fruitfulness of the plant?**

**3. Verse 2 Why is pruning necessary for the Christian? What kind of things often need to be pruned from a Christian’s life if they are to be healthy and grow in faith?**

**4. What needs to be pruned from your life? How would such pruning be beneficial? In what ways might it be painful?**

**5. Verse 4. What did Jesus say a branch must do to bear fruit? Why is it vital that they “remain” connected to Jesus?**

- 6. Verse 7 What privileges are given to the branches that remain connected to the vine?**
  
- 7. Verse 6-7 When does it become difficult for Christians to maintain a personal relationship with Jesus? What happens if we don't stay connected to Jesus?**
  
- 8. Verse 8 Is fruit optional to the gardener? How does that connect with the life of the Christian?**
  
- 9. Verse 8 What does fruit look like in a Christian's life?**
  
- 10. Verse 11 Why did Jesus bring up the topic of the vine and the branches? What does He want for your life?**
  
- 11. Verse 12. How are Christians to be different from others? What is the inspiration for this difference?**
  
- 12. What does this passage say about the privileges and responsibilities of being a Christian?**
  
- 13. How close is your life to Jesus? Is He a distant acquaintance, a master, or an exceptional friend? How is your relationship with Jesus affecting your ability to be a blessing to others and to have real joy?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 As a branch on Christ's vine, how would you describe the health of your branch and the fruit that you produce? Is it grade A, a little weak or bitter, or just plain wormy?

Deep 2 When do you struggle with loving others the way that Jesus loved you? Why do you think that is hard? How strongly do you feel the love of Jesus in your life?

Deep 3 Why are you here? What fruit do you think that God wants you to produce in your life? Where does He want you to serve in the church or the community? Who does the Lord want you to help so that they feel nourished by Jesus?

#### **4. Feeling out of sync with the world**

**John 15:18-27**

**Big idea: Belonging to Jesus means swimming upstream**

The Jewish nation was marching headlong toward destruction. Human logic had become the guiding light of the Jews, and they hated being wrong. Jesus came into the world and showed love to the brokenhearted and shared the message of the Father. His words and actions clashed with the leaders and revealed to the people how shallow that they had become. They didn't want to hear it and thought that they could change the outcome if they could silence Jesus and anyone who reminded them of Jesus. Having spoken of the love that He has for people, Jesus now talks about the hate that the world will show people who love Him. As we walk in the truth, we will face their resistance. They will want us to march toward destruction with them and will hate us if we don't.

Swimming upstream is always harder. I have always been intrigued by salmon fighting up the streams to spawn. The water and dams resist them. Bears scoop them up for food. It would just be easier to spawn in the ocean, but they will not give up on their mission. It is easier to give in to the current of our culture and forgo the hate that we will get. That would mean that we would have to lose Jesus for He will not just float with the crowds. That would mean that we belong to them and not to Jesus. Christians are to speak the truth in love and to live as people who are kind and caring. In short, they are to act and talk like Jesus, even if the world doesn't always like it because we are convinced that living like Jesus is the way to avoid the destruction that is coming.

The great blessing is that we have help when we swim upstream. Jesus promises that He will send the Holy Spirit. He wants us to move forward like geese and not salmon. Instead of going against the current by ourselves, we have the Holy Spirit to lead the way and cut the air resistance. He will remind us of how the alternate lifestyles bring a lot of pain and damage. He will show us the benefits of living a moral life with a healthy marriage and loving families. He will teach you and give you the strength when you are tempted to compromise or take the easy way. He will even show you the impact that you can have with others. Like the geese, the Spirit leads the way, but others are right behind you in your wake as well. You will bask in the love of Jesus and live a life filled with blessings even when the world hates you because your life is good, and theirs is destined for destruction.

**1. What is one area where you see that the world doesn't agree with the Bible? How have some Christians dealt with this conflict?**

**Read John 15:18-27**

**2. Verse 18-19. How is the relationship of the disciples to the world like Jesus' relationship to the world?**

**3. Verse 18. How is holding onto Jesus like swimming upstream in our culture?**

**4. How have you felt out of sync with the world as you practice your faith?**

- 5. Verse 20. What did Jesus want the disciples to remember when they faced persecution? In what ways specifically did they persecute Jesus?**
- 6. Verse 21 What kind of treatment can we expect because we remind others of Jesus?**
- 7. What is the price that many pay for being a Christian?**
- 8. Verse 24 What did Jesus do that caused the world to hate Him so much? How does that make them accountable for their actions?**
- 9. Verse 24. Jesus spent three years healing the sick and raising the dead. You would have expected that everyone loved Him. Why do you think that the religious leaders and the people hated Him so much?**
- 10. Verse 26 How will the Holy Spirit help those who are hated for their love for Jesus?**
- 11. Verse 26-27. How will the counselor help us continue the ministry that Jesus began here on earth?**
- 12. Verse 27 Why must every Christian testify about Jesus and His love?**
- 13. How do you see the Holy Spirit working in your life and the life of the church?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 When have you experienced the world's hate for speaking or acting like Jesus?

Deep 2 How are you a part of the world but not a part of the world? How do you balance that conflict in your life?

Deep 3 What help would you like from the Holy Spirit so that you can be more like Jesus or can encourage others to be more like Him?

## **5 Send in the cavalry!**

### **John 16:5-15**

#### **Big idea: The Holy Spirit empowers us to bring people closer to Jesus**

Panic must have filled their hearts. It was one thing to help Jesus do the ministry. It is another to have Him leave and proclaim that the ministry belongs to you. How would they cast out demons or preach the message of the gospel in such a hostile world? It seemed like they were destined to fail. Jesus was going on vacation or something, and they felt that they were left holding the bag. These verses let them know that He was sending help. They would not be on their own with such an important task. He was giving a counselor to them whom we know as the Holy Spirit. It will be the Holy Spirit who empowers us to continue the mission that Jesus started. It is the Holy Spirit who will convert the hearts of people through our witness. All we need is the courage to let Him work through us.

The Holy Spirit is the cavalry sent into the battle to help us bring people to salvation. Like the disciples, we are sent into a world that isn't convinced that they need a savior. The first task that the Christian has is often convincing people that they need the help and salvation that Jesus can give. The Holy Spirit opens the hearts of people around us so that they see that what they are doing is not working. It is causing them pain. The second task that the Holy Spirit helps us do is show people the Savior. When the heart is hurting, people will be ready to see that Jesus has the answers. The Holy Spirit gives us the words to say and the courage to speak. Finally, it is the Spirit who judges those who refuse to hear the message of salvation. He will bring down the false gods of wealth, power, and fame that people have as their lords. He will show how they give no hope or help.

We often feel overwhelmed when Jesus says that the ministry is now ours. It is a daunting task, but we have an even more powerful helper. The Spirit is our guide, our navigator, and our trailblazer. He will teach us what we need to know, just as He did the disciples. He will give us courage through our times of word and prayer. He will provide opportunities to change the lives of others around us and will open up hearts. Our part in this endeavor is just to let others know how good it is to be a Christian and to live as caring and loving people. The love you show will draw people, and the Bible stories of people's lives who were changed by Jesus will show them that they can be loved by Him, too. The Spirit will do the rest. People need to see that Jesus is worth knowing and trusting. It is the task that Jesus gave to us.

**1. How would you feel if your best friend moved away? What would you miss most about losing them?**

**Read John 16:5-15**

**2. Verse 5-6 Jesus has announced that He was going (14:2) yet no one wants to discuss where He is going and why He must leave. What does the text tell us were the emotions and feelings of the disciples?**

**3. Verse 5 The disciples have just been put in charge of the ministry because Jesus says He is going away. How do you feel when you are given an important ministry, and Jesus feels far away?**

**4. Verse 7. Who is Jesus sending to help us with our mission? Why is it a blessing that Jesus is going away?**

- 5. What advantage do we have because Jesus physically left the earth and went to heaven?**
- 6. Verse 9 What is the first task of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to the gospel?**
- 7. Verses 9-10 What role has Jesus given every Christian in this ministry of bringing people to salvation? How does our work dovetail with the work of the Holy Spirit?**
- 8. Verse 10 What is a second task that the Holy Spirit does here on earth?**
- 9. Verse 11. Some still want to cling to the ways of the world. What is the third task of the Holy Spirit, and how will He show that adhering to Satan and the ways of the world are hopeless?**
- 10. Why is it important that people see that Satan and his false religions are condemned and can't help them?**
- 11. Verse 13 The ministry has been given to us. We are to show people their sin and show them their savior. How can we do that in light of the power of evil in our world?**
- 12. Verse 13 What things does the Spirit teach us that we can't know by ourselves? What do you want Him to show you so that you can be a better witness for Jesus?**
- 13. How exactly does the Holy Spirit work through us? What is our part in this ministry, and what has God the Spirit promised to do for us?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What benefits come into your life because Jesus was willing to leave and go to the cross? How has the cross impacted your life?

Deep 2 What truths has Jesus shared with you that run counter to what the world is teaching? How will the beliefs of the world lead only to harm for those who follow it?

Deep 3 What are two blessings of being a Christian that you could share with someone else who is wondering if it is worth the bother of following Jesus?

## **6. Be transformed with joy**

**John 16:16-33**

### **Big Idea: God brings joy to life by transformation not substitution**

On a night in which their minds were filled with questions, and their hearts were heavy with sorrow, Jesus concludes the last supper with teaching on joy. He had told the disciples much more than they really could handle, and so He turns from knowledge to their emotions. As they concluded the last supper, they were sad, confused, and afraid. Somehow it is comforting to know that the disciples were real men with real passions. Here are the men that Jesus will use to begin His church with, yet they show their emotions and their vulnerabilities. Amid their sadness, Jesus brings a simple principle. God brings joy to our lives by transformation and not a substitution. He doesn't take the sorrow away. He transforms trials into triumphs and sorrows into joy.

Our world continually looks for happiness and joy. We will work extra hours to afford the perfect vacation or a beautiful car. Such pleasure doesn't last. Soon, the vacation ends or the car breaks down. Then we are looking for something else to make us happy. It is a never-ending pursuit of an elusive joy which can never fully satisfy. The joy of Jesus is different. It is transformational. He puts His joy into our lives so that we are happy in all circumstances. The example that Jesus uses is that of a mother having a baby. There is a great deal of pain in childbirth, but all that pain doesn't matter the moment that she holds her newborn child in her arms. The pain of pregnancy transforms into the joy of motherhood. The time of grief that Christians often have in life is turned into a celebration as we witness what Jesus can bring out of the pain.

The disciples are facing three difficult days as they witness Jesus's death on the cross and his burial. His resurrection will follow these days. At that time, their sorrow will be transformed, and they will understand why His pain and theirs was necessary. Finally, they will have a joy that will never be taken away. God takes seemingly impossible situations, adds the miracle of His grace, and transforms the worst days of our life into times that lead us to joy and blessings that we could not have had otherwise experienced. I think of Paul in prison or Daniel in the lion's den where terrible troubles were followed by a time of witness and miracles. We want God to take away all pain. God wants to work good things through our pain. He wants to transform and strengthen us by the difficulties we face and not just keep us from all suffering.

**1. What painful experiences have you had that ended in joy? Was the pain necessary for you to receive the benefit?**

**Read John 16:16-33**

**2. Verse 19-20. What event is Jesus talking about in these verses? How will this event bring joy to the disciples and sorrow to others?**

**3. Verse 20 What is the difference between the joy of the world and the joy that Jesus gives?**

**4. Verse 21 What example does Jesus give from everyday life in which sorrow turns to joy? Describe a time that you experienced this joy or another like it?**

**5. Verse 21 Why can't anyone take this joy away from us? How is the joy of Jesus able to last even in times of pain or sadness?**

**6. Verse 23-24 What promise does Jesus make in these verses? Why have they not yet experienced this joy?**

**7. Verse 24 How does an active prayer life bring joy into your life? How is prayer the answer to sorrow and a pipeline to lasting happiness?**

**8. Verse 26-27 How has the disciples' relationship with God changed? What benefit have they received because they have loved and followed Jesus?**

**9. Where will you seek joy in life? Why is God the best answer for those who seek happiness in sorrow?**

**10. Verse 29 What have the disciples finally come to understand?**

**11. Verse 33 What brings the peace and joy that the disciples seek?**

**12. How does the joy that comes from Jesus give us confidence in the future?**

**13. How does the joy that Jesus gives transform our lives? Why is that better than just substituting good for bad?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

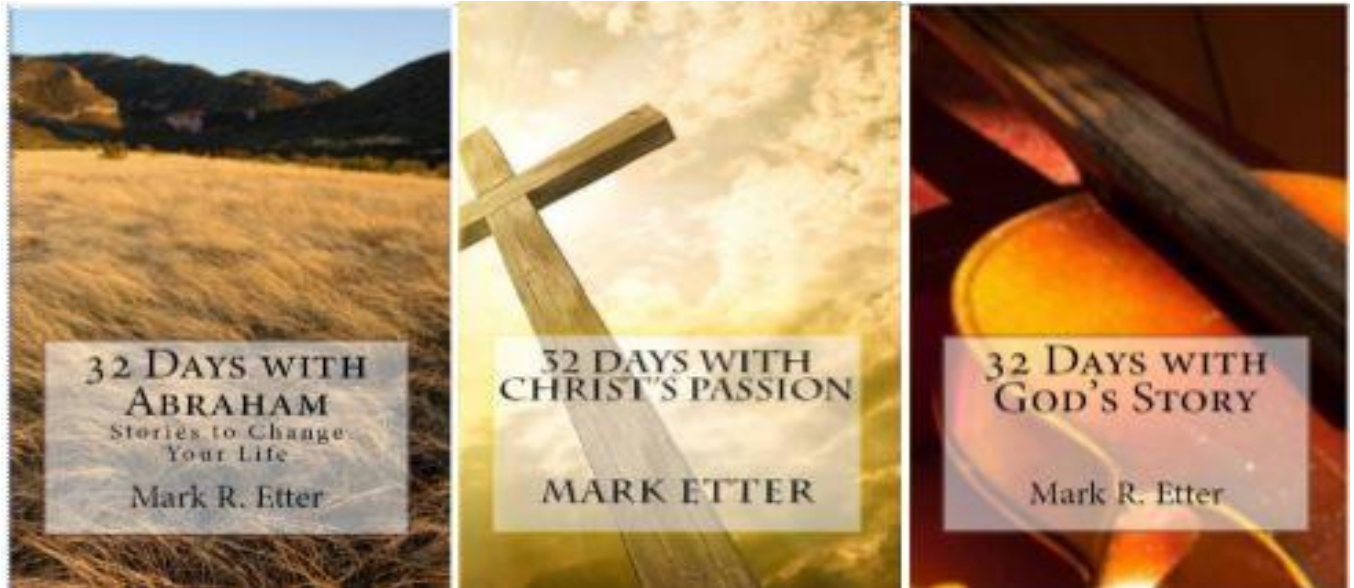
Deep 1 How does the knowledge that Jesus has your future in His hands change your attitude about the future and give you joy?

Deep 2 How would a stronger prayer life change your perspective of life? Why is it a powerful weapon when life brings sorrow or pain?

Deep 3 What grief or sorrow do you need to entrust to the Lord right now? What difference would trusting Jesus make?



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### **About the author**

Rev. Mark Etter has been a pastor for over thirty five years and is currently the pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Erlanger, KY. Rev. Etter has published several books of Adult Bible studies and numerous devotions and youth studies with Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis. He has been active in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod as an LWML counselor, evangelism chairman, coach for pastors and circuit counselor. He and his wife, Joan, have three grown children and two grandchildren. .

# Did you know?

*How well do you know the messages of the upper room? Here are seven questions that are answered in this study. The page and question number in this study is given after each question.*

1. Why isn't knowing the truth enough for real happiness? (Page 7, Question 12)
2. What does it mean when Jesus says "I am the way, the truth and the life"? (Page 9, Question 6)
3. What might need to be pruned if a Christian is to grow? (Page 13, Question 3)
4. What does fruit look like in the life of a Christian? (Page 14, Question 9)
5. How is holding onto Jesus like swimming upstream in our culture? (Page 17, Question 3)
6. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian? (Page 22, Question 12)
7. What is the difference between worldly joy and the joy of Jesus? (Page 25, Question 3)

Studies are reproducible so that only one copy of the study is needed by the class or small group. You have flexibility when the class you thought was going to be 15 suddenly becomes 25. You are free to copy and distribute the two page student guides for a large formal class or the four page leader's guide for a small group. The focus is to get deep into the text and apply the lessons to your life. Each of the six chapters contains an introduction to help you get the big picture and is followed by thirteen questions to help you dig into the truth. Look for the other studies in the series and may the Lord bless your time in the word.