

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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SAVORING THE PEACE OF JESUS
IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

The Gospel of
JOHN

MELISSA SPOELSTRA

SAVORING THE PEACE OF JESUS
IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

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About the Author

Melissa Spoelstra is a women's conference speaker, Bible teacher, and author who is madly in love with Jesus and passionate about studying God's Word and helping women of all ages to seek Christ and know Him more intimately through serious Bible study. Melissa has a degree in Bible theology and is the author of the Bible studies *Isaiah: Striving Less and Trusting God More*; *Acts: Awakening to God in Everyday Life*; *The Names of God: His Character Revealed*; *Romans: Good News that Changes Everything*; *Elijah: Spiritual Stamina in Every Season*; *Numbers: Learning Contentment in a Culture of*

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SESSION
ONE

Introduction

TO THIS STUDY

Four of my immediate five family members are more than six feet tall. When our family is walking together, I often have to request a slower pace because I can't keep up with my tall tribe. I don't want to miss the conversation. I want to move at their pace so I can soak up their presence.

While I desire a close relationship with my family, I find the one running ahead in my relationship with God is often me. I can get moving pretty fast answering emails, making appointments, and checking off my to-do list. What about you? Is something preventing you from lingering with Jesus lately?

In the pages of the Gospel of John, we can slow down and savor the peace of Jesus in a chaotic world. When we look at the pace of Jesus during His early life and ministry, we realize the need to slow down and soak up His presence. Yet, in our culture teeming with noise, screens, and busy schedules, we can fail to embrace the gift of peace Jesus promised. I often find myself worried about yesterday's problems and fearful of future ones. I don't want to give chaos authority in my life when Jesus offers me peace—but I wonder what it looks like to embrace His gift in the midst of a hectic life.

Jesus warned us that the world cannot give the kind of peace of heart and mind He spoke about (John 14:27). This peace involves stillness of soul rather than circumstantial ease. In fact, the Greek word used in John's Gospel for "peace" is *eirēne*, which is "the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is."¹ But how do we receive this gift of peace? No exotic vacation, day at the spa, or Uber Eats® delivery can supply it.

Sometimes I think peace will appear when troubles disappear—when the house is clean, the car is fixed, the surgery is over, and so forth. Yet, Jesus doesn't define *peace* this way. He says we can have peace—that tranquil state of the soul—in the midst of the trials and difficulties we have in this world. Does that sound good to anyone else? Then I hope you'll meet me in the pages of John!

In this seven session Bible study in the Gospel of John, we will slow down to savor our relationship with Jesus. We won't just study Him—but spend time with Him and personally respond to what we are reading. Throughout the pages of the fourth Gospel, we will discover peace in the plan (1–3), power (4–6), patience (7–9), purposes (10–13), promises (14–17), and passion (18–21) of Jesus.

One of the things I love about John's Gospel is that he wrote it at the end of his life. We'll find editorial comments throughout his account helping us see what the disciples understood much more fully in the decades after Jesus left the earth. The Gospel of John was written much later than the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are referred to as synoptic because they contain a high percentage of overlapping content. John contains more than ninety percent unique material, recording stories, miracles, and details not found in the other Gospels.²

Omitting the formal teachings of Jesus, like the Sermon on the Mount and transfiguration, John's Gospel traces the informal relationship of Jesus to His disciples. As we turn John's pages, we'll take the posture of a learner—seeking to glean all that we can from Jesus's message and methods. At the end of each day of study, we'll take time for a Stop and Savor section to ask questions like, *What did Jesus say?* and *What did Jesus do?*

To explore how John's Gospel is set apart from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, check out the Digging Deeper article "John and the Synoptics" found online at lifeway.com/gospelofjohn.

Throughout our study we'll find mentions of the Jewish festivals, which were holy days meant for slowing down and remembering what God had done in the past. Our entire study will incorporate this concept of deceleration to appreciate the pace of our Savior. He never hurried, but completed all that the Father called Him to accomplish.

We will take a fresh look at Jesus's life and ministry so that we might grow in intimacy with Him. Together we will sit at a wedding in Cana, witness miraculous healings and feedings, and meet individuals of all different backgrounds who discovered peace in their own chaos by believing in Jesus.

John explicitly told us why he penned these pages. His goal was for people to believe in Jesus and that by believing they would have life in His name. He was talking about abundant life—enjoying the gift of peace of mind and heart that Jesus freely offers.

OPTIONS FOR STUDY

Any time we begin a new Bible study, it's important to set realistic expectations for ourselves based on our current season of life. I know in some seasons we have extra time for more in-depth study, Scripture memory work, and additional reading. Other times—such as when our faith is new, our schedule is packed, or our children are small—we don't want to bite off more than we can chew and feel frustrated for not meeting our goals. As we study the Gospel of John together, I hope you'll choose a study method that is realistic for you but also challenges you to grow in your spiritual rhythms. Consider the following options and prayerfully decide what will be the right fit for your current season and situation.

- 1. BASIC STUDY.** The basic study includes five days of content that combine study of Scripture with personal reflection and application. This includes looking up Scripture, reflecting, engaging in interactive activities, and answering questions. At the end of each day, you'll find a Stop and Savor portion featuring reflection questions and a prayer.

2. IN-DEPTH STUDY. If you feel up to more study, here are a few ideas I recommend:

- **WATCH** the teaching videos that accompany each session. You have access to video teaching that provides additional content to help you better understand and apply what you just studied in the previous session. You'll find detailed information for how to access the teaching videos that accompany this study in the back of your Bible study book. You'll also find a Viewer Guide page at the end of each session, where you can follow along with the videos and take notes on the teaching.
- **DISCUSS** your study and the teaching videos with a group. If you're doing this study with a group, you can use the questions and prompts provided on the Group Session pages to help you review the previous five days of study and discuss the video teaching together.
- **MEMORIZE** the weekly Bible verses. It is helpful to recite these verses with a partner, so find a friend in your group who is also choosing an in-depth option.
- **READ** the Digging Deeper articles available online (lifeway.com/gospelofjohn) for deeper exploration of the text and themes. There's also a reading plan for the Gospel of John on page 180 to mark your progress throughout the study.
- **ADD** to your study by using a study Bible or any of these free commentaries:
studylight.org/commentaries
biblestudytools.com/commentaries
biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries
biblehub.com/commentaries
blueletterbible.org/study.cfm

3. KEEPING IT SIMPLE. Depending on your circumstances, you may want to modify your goals. Perhaps it will be a win if you attend group meetings, complete three out of five days of your study, or make some other modification to your plan. Our desire is not to check boxes but to savor the peace of Jesus in our own lives. Pray for guidance, and set your goal accordingly.

Take time now to decide which study option feels right for you, and check it below.

- 1. Basic Study**
- 2. In-Depth Study**
- 3. Keeping It Simple: I will _____.**

Be sure to let someone in your group know which option you have chosen so that you have some accountability and encouragement.

A NOTE FOR GROUP LEADERS

If you are leading a Bible study group through *The Gospel of John*, then first I want to say thank you! I have no doubt God will use you to encourage the women in your group as you walk through His Word together. In addition to the teaching videos, here are a few resources to aid you as you facilitate your group:

- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** are found on the Group Discussion Guide pages at the end of each week of study.
- **TEACHING VIDEOS** to watch at each group session. You'll find detailed information for how to access the teaching videos that accompany this study in the back of your Bible study book. At your first group meeting, watch the Session One video together, discuss the questions provided, and make sure all the women in your group have their Bible study book. When you gather for Session Two, you'll discuss what you studied during the week and then watch the Session Two teaching video together.
- **A LEADER VIDEO** and a leader guide are available for free at lifeway.com/gospelofjohn.
- Also don't miss the **FREE CHURCH PROMOTIONAL RESOURCES** found at lifeway.com/gospelofjohn—including a PowerPoint® template, promotional poster, and bulletin insert—to help you promote the study in your church or neighborhood.

A FINAL WORD

I can't wait to get started on this journey alongside you. I'm excited to slow down and linger with Jesus to receive the gift of peace He promised. I pray you'll join me in the pages of John's Gospel, and we can grow in our faith, find life, and savor peace together.

Melissa

SESSION ONE

Video Viewer Guide

Chaos around us often can _____ chaos within us.

Gospel of John background information:

- John contains _____% unique content from the other Gospels.
- John wrote his Gospel in his _____.
- The original audience of John's Gospel was likely _____.

Peace is a _____.

We need a fresh look at Jesus so the familiar doesn't fade our _____ with Him.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, _____ about everything.
Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6, NLT

ACTION STEP: Use this acronym (based on Philippians 4:6) in prayer over the course of our study.

Morning: P _____

Afternoon: A _____

Evening: T _____

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

LEADER: Before your first meeting, watch the Leader Video posted at lifeway.com/gospelofjohn. Use this guide to facilitate your group meeting. If your group members are watching the videos on their own, rather than together during your gathering, you'll want to select two or three questions from the days of personal study to add to your discussion time.

SHARE: Guide each group member to share her name and her favorite ice cream flavor.

WATCH the video “Session One: Savoring the Peace of Jesus in a Chaotic World” together and follow along with the viewer guide on the previous page.

VIDEO DISCUSSION

1. *Discuss:* From the background information in the introductory video, what is something new or something that caught your attention about the Gospel of John?
2. Turn in your Bibles to the following verses and ask volunteers to read them out loud: John 1:12; 5:24; 7:24; 10:10; 14:27; 20:31; and Philippians 4:6. Encourage participants to share what stood out to them from these passages.

STUDY DISCUSSION

1. *Ask:* How does savoring the peace of Jesus resonate in your life today?
2. Turn to page 7 and read aloud the section titled, “Options for Study.” Give women time to consider which level of study they will choose. Then ask women to share which option they marked.
3. *Ask:* What is something you are looking forward to or hoping to learn as we begin studying the Gospel of John?

REVIEW: Remind your group to complete the five days of personal study for “Session Two: Savoring Peace in the Plan of Jesus.” Take a moment to highlight the Big Idea for each day. These key points will be important to review at the end of the week of study.

PRAYER: Close your group meeting with a time of prayer.* Depending on the size of your group, consider breaking into smaller groups of two or three women and praying for each other. You might have extra time since this is the introductory week.

*Be sure to watch the leader video found at lifeway.com/gospelofjohn for some ideas for varying your prayer time together.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.



SESSION
TWO

PEACE IN THE
PLAN
OF JESUS

BUT TO ALL WHO BELIEVED

HIM AND ACCEPTED HIM,

HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO

BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.

John 1:12

Day One

A PRE-EXISTING PLAN

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

John 1:1-34

BIG IDEA

Circumstances can feel confusing, but we can savor peace knowing that God established a plan before the beginning of time.

Life is a key theme in John's Gospel. He uses the Greek word for "life," *zoe*, thirty-six times.¹

I searched everywhere, but I could not find my car key. I mentally retraced my steps and deduced that I must have locked it in the car. My helper husband attempted to get into the vehicle using a wire coat hanger with no success except to leave some permanent scratches. I then called a locksmith who charged a healthy sum to open the car door. Once inside, we discovered the key was nowhere to be found. Eventually, we found it on the bathroom floor. I'd like to tell you this all happened calmly with no worry, hurry, or frustration. But that's not how it went down. At the end of the incident, I reflected on how pointless the whole situation seemed—damage done, money spent, and nothing to show for it.

Have you encountered similar situations? If so, jot a few sentences about your experience.

Trying to make sense of small frustrations like lost keys or more significant issues like physical pain, financial loss, or relational strain can rob us of peace. As we open the pages of the Gospel of John, we remember life is not random. Despite confusing circumstances, we can savor peace, knowing that God established a plan before the beginning of time. He is "always working" (John 5:17). Even when we don't feel it or see it, we can believe it.

THE WORD

Matthew began his Gospel with a genealogy connecting Joseph to Abraham, and Luke recorded the lineage of Jesus, tracing Mary's family tree to Adam. John reached back even further to Jesus's role in creation.

READ JOHN 1:1-5 and answer the following questions:

Who is "the Word" John referred to and what do we find out about Him in these verses?

In your own words, summarize what is stated or implied about the Word’s relationship to God, His existence, and His work.

The Greek word *Logos* labeling Jesus as the Word was used exclusively by John. His opening words are reminiscent of the book of Genesis and reveal the Son of God’s role in creation. The Father accomplished His creative work through the Son (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). John’s wording also makes a statement about Jesus’s eternal existence. He was not created, nor born. There has never been a time when He did not exist in community with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus being referred to as the Word (*Logos*) indicates words matter. Author Rosario Butterfield referenced this passage when she wrote, “When we change the language, we change the logic. We want to frame our understanding of life through the lens of the Word made flesh—the One who gives life and light.”²

Take a moment to consider how you’re currently living out God’s purpose in your life. Write a short prayer asking God for peace as you begin this study.

John wrote in Revelation that Jesus is “Alpha” and “Omega”—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. (Rev. 1:8; 22:13). This was a definitive statement about Christ’s eternity. He sees and knows the beginning and the end.

DWELT AMONG US

The deeper we know Jesus, the more we experience peace in His plan. **READ JOHN 1:6-18** and record what Jesus did according to verse 14.

The Word “became human and made his home among us” (v. 14). Theologians refer to this action as the Incarnation. The verb used for “made his home” means “to pitch a tent, to dwell temporarily.”³ Jesus

existed before creation but stepped into time and became one of us. He temporarily tabernacled among us on earth to live the perfect life we couldn't live and ultimately die on our behalf as the atoning sacrifice.

God put on flesh and came to earth to restore our broken relationship with Him. He came near.

Take a moment to savor His nearness. Fill in the blanks:

**Jesus came to earth for _____ (your name)
and is near in the midst of _____
(a challenging circumstance) in my life.**

THE LAMB OF GOD

Jesus is the Word, the Life, the Light, and filled with grace and truth. His plan to redeem us meant He would lay down His life in exchange for ours.

READ JOHN 1:19-34 and summarize how John the Baptist described Jesus in the verses below:

Verse 29

John the Baptist and John, the author of this Gospel, are different individuals. John the Baptist was Jesus's cousin whose ministry preceded and prepared the way according to God's plan. John the author was the son of Zebedee and brother of James.

Verse 30

Verse 34

From the beginning of Jesus's ministry, John the Baptist called Him the Lamb of God. The first readers of John's Gospel would have been familiar with the use of lambs for Jewish sacrifices, as commanded in the Old Testament. Each family had to have one for Passover (Ex. 12:1-10). When John the Baptist spoke this title over Jesus, he was foreshadowing Christ's sacrificial death to pay the penalty for my sin and yours.

Take a moment to reflect on the price Jesus paid on your behalf and thank Him for the right He has given you to become a child of God by believing in His name (John 1:12). Remember, no one is physically born a child of God. It happens by grace through faith (Eph. 2:1-10).

If you've placed your faith in Christ, share about your experience. If you're not yet a follower of Christ, see page 181 for information on making that decision.

Whether your commitment to Christ began last week or decades ago, we all have days when ambiguity creeps into our complicated lives. Some moments may feel pointless and frustrating. Others filled with tumultuous circumstances threaten our peace with much greater force. Regardless, we can hold onto God's peace because He isn't stumbling through His calendar. His plan was conceived before time began—and that plan includes intimacy with Him!

As we walk through this study, we want to grow in experiencing God's peace. To help us do that, we'll wrap up each day by savoring what God revealed through John's Gospel about Jesus.

STOP AND SAVOR

Today we focused on this truth: *Circumstances can feel confusing, but we can savor peace knowing that God established a plan before the beginning of time.*

Summarize your personal takeaway from today's lesson.

As you reflect on today's passage, record a few words or phrases about Jesus that stood out to you.

Consider your life circumstances and complete the following sentence:

Because Jesus is Creator, the Word, Life, Light, full of grace and truth, and the Lamb of God who takes away my sin, I can experience peace in _____

_____.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for revealing Your Son to me through John's Gospel. When my plans are frustrated, help me to lean into Yours. Give me eyes to see where You are at work all around me. You are my Creator, my Life, my Light, the Living Word, and I'm so grateful that You are the Lamb of God who takes away my sin. Align my plans to Your grace and truth today, and give me Your peace. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Day Two

COME AND SEE

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

John 1:35-51

BIG IDEA

We can savor peace when we respond to Jesus's invitation to come and see.

At restaurants I am often the first person at the table to decide what I want. As soon as I identify something that sounds good, I stop looking at the other choices. While this saves me from analysis paralysis, it also means I sometimes make hasty decisions.

Following Jesus means slowing down and considering our actions and decisions in light of His plan. We can't afford to choose our morality or devotion from the world's menu. Instead, we need to accept Jesus's invitation for us to come and see His plan for living.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

The first followers of Jesus came to Him through the ministry of His cousin, John the Baptist.

READ JOHN 1:35-39 and draw a line to the person who said each statement:

"Look! There is the Lamb of God!" (v. 36).	Jesus
"What do you want?" (v. 38).	John's two disciples
"Rabbi, . . . where are you staying?" (v. 38).	John the Baptist
"Come and see" (v. 39).	

What stands out to you from this dialogue?

It's interesting that Jesus started the conversation by asking the two men following Him what they wanted. I mean, He's God—He knows everything. But His question helped them clarify their desires. They weren't looking for an address when they responded by asking where Jesus was staying. They called Him "Rabbi," which was a term of respect given to Jewish teachers that literally means, "Master."⁴ Embedded in their question was a desire to be with Jesus and listen to His message.

Jesus didn't give them a detailed sermon about His incarnation. Instead, He invited them to "come and see"—not just so they could check out His lodging, but to spend time with Him. He extends the same invitation to us, to be in a relationship with Him. We do that through the power of His Spirit, by obeying His Word, and in community with His people. He leads us as we make a myriad of decisions about our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. Understanding His purpose, instead of just leaning on our own understanding, helps us make sense of our circumstances.

**Take a moment to respond to the words of Jesus from this passage.
How do they resonate in your life?**

What do you want?

Come and see.

RESPONDING TO JESUS

READ JOHN 1:40-51 and record information given about the following people:

Andrew (vv. 40-42,44)

Peter (vv. 40-42,44)

Like Andrew and Peter, Philip was from Galilee and likely a fisherman. His hometown of Bethsaida literally means “house of fishing.”⁵

Philip (vv. 43-45)

Nathanael (vv. 45-49)

What are some patterns or repeated phrases in the text?

Once people discovered Jesus, they wanted to bring their friends and relatives to Him. Philip even used Jesus’s words in answering Nathanael’s objections: “come and see.”

Jesus didn’t start His ministry with a big tent revival. He called individuals who then told others, who in turn told more people. Scholars surmise Nathanael was a student of Jewish law since Philip appealed to him by referencing Moses and the prophets. Jesus seemed to confirm that by stating He saw Nathanael under the fig tree. The fig tree phrase was used in rabbinic literature to describe meditation on the law.⁶ In verse 51, Jesus referred to Jacob’s vision of seeing a ladder (Gen. 28:10-17). He knew Nathanael, as a student of the Scriptures, was familiar with the story. Jesus was pointing to Himself as that stairway—the mediator between God and man.

Jesus didn’t rush to accomplish His plan, revealing a portion at a time. He responded to seekers and sought out others, inviting them to come and see.

COME AND SEE

When it comes to following Jesus, we often want the whole plan laid out. Yet Jesus just says “Come and see.” He invites us into a deeper relationship—to know Him and learn from Him. Often, His words prompt me to respond similarly to King David’s words in Psalm 27:8: “My heart has heard you say, ‘Come and talk with me.’ And my heart

responds, ‘LORD, I am coming.’” Other times my heart responds, but not with an eagerness to join Him. I’m busy, distracted, or overwhelmed.

What are some ways you might fill in this blank:

My heart responds, Lord, I am _____.

Today, I’ve intentionally left some extra time to respond like King David. Use the next few minutes to think about Jesus’s invitation to follow Him. Consider the following questions. Feel free to write responses or just think through them silently:

What helps you follow Jesus more closely?

What hinders you from following Him?

Where have you been too focused on your own plans?

How would your day be different if you consistently and intentionally sought the plan of Jesus?

Is there anyone the Lord is prompting you to invite to “come and see”?

Now take some time to envision Jesus as the stairway between you and God. Write a prayer below, thanking Christ for being your mediator and asking Him to help you connect with Him more intimately through our study of the Gospel of John.

PRAYER

Jesus, You are the stairway to heaven. Thank You for inviting me to come and see. Thank You for the Gospel of John that allows me to know You more deeply. Help me to follow You more closely so I might walk according to Your plans instead of mine. In Jesus's name, Amen.

STOP AND SAVOR

Today we focused on this truth: *We can savor peace when we respond to Jesus's invitation to come and see.*

Summarize your personal takeaway from today's lesson.

What did you notice about the plan and pace of Jesus in this passage?

How are you responding to Jesus's invitation to come and see?

Day Three

DO WHAT HE SAYS

As a pastor, my husband has officiated many weddings where things went wrong. Once he forgot to have the audience sit down, and they stood for the entire ceremony. Another time, a truck ran over the water main at the reception hall, leaving them with no water at the reception. These examples reveal that no matter how much you plan, unexpected things can and will happen!

I wonder if you have attended a wedding or other special event where something went wrong. If something comes to mind, jot it below.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

John 2:1-22

BIG IDEA

If we desire the peace of Jesus, then we must do what He says.

THE PROBLEM

READ JOHN 2:1-3 and describe the problem that surfaced at the wedding in Cana.

Running out of food or beverages at a wedding today would be embarrassing for the hosts. In biblical times, it was catastrophic. A groom could face a lawsuit over this lapse in hospitality.⁷ And this kind of social embarrassment could have been joked about by people in their community for years.⁸ I love how Mary chose to get involved, bringing the situation to Jesus.

I usually seek logical solutions in difficult situations. Often, I'll call a friend or mentor for advice. Other times I look to Google® or YouTube® for answers.

Cana was about nine miles north of Nazareth where Jesus grew up, so it's possible His mother was a friend of the wedding family. Since there is no mention of Joseph, many scholars believe he had already died.⁹

What are some ways you typically approach problems?

Like Mary, we need to bring the sticky situations we encounter directly to Jesus.

THE PLAN

READ JOHN 2:4-12 and answer the following questions:

What was Jesus’s initial response to His mother’s plea?

How did Mary instruct the servants?

What did Jesus reveal for the first time at this event (v. 11)?

While the other Gospel writers recorded more than forty miracles, John chose only seven to highlight. He referred to them as signs because they pointed to something significant.

Jesus referring to His mom as “woman” (v. 4) sounds almost rude through our cultural filters. But in His day this was a title of respect—like saying ma’am or madam.¹⁰ Mary was His earthly mother, but He was shifting into public ministry and to His heavenly Father’s business.

Jesus’s response to Mary that His hour had not yet come is interesting. In ancient sources, one’s hour or time referred to one’s death. Scholar Craig Keener wrote, “Jesus may be saying, ‘Once I begin performing signs, I start toward the cross.’”¹¹

Even though Jesus initially pushed back, He did perform His first miracle, or sign, as John called it. This act has less application in debates about alcoholic beverages and more to teach us about Jesus’s identity. He revealed His glory.

What stands out to you as significant in this passage?

You may have written any number of things, but I noticed that Jesus's first miracle recorded in John was high in quantity and quality. Each of the six stone jars filled with water for ritual cleansing held twenty to thirty gallons. So Jesus made up to 180 gallons of wine. Most commentators agree that "this large amount is a sign of the abundance of God's grace."¹² To use the stone jars for wine would have violated custom, but Jesus valued people over customs. Also note that Jesus replaced Old Testament law (water for ceremonial cleansing) with abundant grace (high quality wine) ultimately pictured in the communion supper where wine represents His blood.

Jesus brought fullness where there was emptiness and joy where there was disappointment. He longs to do that in our lives as well.

Are emptiness and disappointment words that describe your current circumstances? If so, explain.

The first step to discovering the fullness and joy evidenced in Jesus's first sign is to do what He says. Obedience places us on the path to God's peace.

Where has God's Word been nudging you toward obedience? Make a few notes below.

Moses's first miracle turned water into blood, which was a plague of judgment. Jesus's first miracle recorded in John turned water into wine, which was a blessing of grace.

Moses's final plague was the death of firstborn sons. Jesus's final sign in John's Gospel is the raising of Lazarus.

For additional insights into Jewish weddings and funerals during the time of Jesus, check out the Digging Deeper article "Weddings and Funerals" found online at lifeway.com/gospelofjohn.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) placed the cleansing of the temple much closer to Jesus's death chronologically, whereas John set it at the beginning of His ministry. Scholars suggest that either Jesus cleared the temple twice or, in the practice of ancient biography, John rearranged the sequence to clarify his teaching point.¹³

John established Jesus's divinity in the beginning of this Gospel and now shows us His glory. Jesus's disciples believed in Him. We can choose to do the same. If we want God's peace, then we must live according to His plan.

THE PASSION

Once Jesus began His ministry, He traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with His disciples. There He continued to reveal Himself as the Son of God.

READ JOHN 2:13-22 and record the order of Jesus's actions (1 through 6):

- Poured out (or scattered) coins on the floor
- Made a whip (or scourge)
- Drove out everyone with sheep and cattle
- Turned over tables
- Told them to stop turning His Father's House into a marketplace (or house of trade, business, merchandise, market)
- Chased out money changers

What statement was Jesus making with His actions in the temple courts?

Jesus offers us abundant grace but desires His people to follow the Father's plan. In Jesus's day, that didn't include using the temple for profit. The condition of the temple was a vivid indication of the spiritual condition of the nation. The people were manipulating religion for money. Jesus knew there was no peace to be found in that practice, then or now.

He spoke boldly about abuses. The religious leaders asked for a sign. Jesus responded with prophetic words about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days. This confounded the leaders because Herod's

temple, which was started in 20 BC, was not completed at the time of this encounter. However, Jesus wasn't talking about a building, but His body. This kind of misunderstanding of spiritual truth, where hearers misinterpreted Jesus's words, is found throughout John's Gospel.¹⁴

Jesus is full of grace, but also full of truth. Peace in following Him is not always found in the path of least resistance. Sometimes doing what He says means doing hard things.

STOP AND SAVOR

Today we focused on this truth: *If we desire the peace of Jesus, then we must do what He says.*

Summarize your personal takeaway from today's lesson.

What stood out to you from Jesus's words and actions?

How have you noticed a connection between obedience and peace in your life?

PRAYER

Jesus, I long to do what You say. I understand that peace is found in obedience to You. Empower me through Your grace to obey. In Jesus's name, Amen.



Day Four

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

John 2:23–3:21

BIG IDEA

Jesus makes a distinction between sincere and superficial belief.

My first child made his appearance into the world eight days after my expected due date. After Zach was delivered, I reflected in awe on the process of labor that every mother goes through to deliver her baby. I was overwhelmed by it.

What stories regarding a baby coming into the world stand out to you?

SINCERE BELIEF

In our study of John today, Jesus will discuss the process of spiritual birth with a seeker.

READ JOHN 2:23-25 to set the stage for that conversation. Describe what you discover about Jesus.

The Greek word translated “believed” or “trusted” is *pisteuo*, which means “to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in.”¹⁵ We will encounter this word eighty-five times in the book of John.¹⁶

Our English translations sometimes miss the play on words used in the original Greek. In John 2:23, Jesus essentially said some people believed in Him, but He didn’t believe in them. What we discover in this passage is that belief can be superficial. Jesus knew those who had sincere belief and those just momentarily awed by miracles.

Signs could be the place where faith starts. John recorded miracles in his Gospel for that purpose (John 20:30-31). But genuine belief was necessary for spiritual rebirth. Attractional activities that pique an interest in the gospel message aren’t bad, they just aren’t enough. A person must move from superficial to sincere belief. Jesus revealed in these verses that people who want to experience His works without submitting to His Word will not share His life.

BORN AGAIN

One man who saw Jesus's miraculous signs wasn't easily convinced; he asked questions to delve deeper into Jesus's teaching.

READ JOHN 3:1-12 and record the questions Nicodemus asked.

VERSE 4	VERSE 9

Nicodemus belonged to a group called the Pharisees whose focus was strict obedience to the law. He also was one of the seventy-one members of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus approached Jesus using the term of respect—*Rabbi*—assuming Jesus was a teacher who came from God. What he didn't realize was that He was God who had come to teach!

Scholars have debated why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. What might be a possible reason?

The Sanhedrin functioned as a Jewish governing body who made laws and enforced them. Imagine the supreme court and senate rolled into one.

Since the text doesn't tell us, we can only speculate.

- *Perhaps he feared what colleagues might think of him and didn't want to be seen with Jesus.*
- *Maybe he wanted undisturbed time with Jesus away from the crowd.*
- *As one with ruling authority, he might have been busy during the day with pressing responsibilities.*

Regardless of the reason for this encounter, we can find an application for our own lives. Public worship and study gatherings are important, but there are things we can't get from Jesus with the crowd. We need personal, intimate meetings with our Savior.

What spiritual rhythms have you established for private meetings with Jesus?

How do you think your life would be different if you had more personal time with the Lord each day?

Nicodemus acknowledged the signs Jesus performed but struggled with Jesus's teaching regarding spiritual rebirth. He couldn't move what Jesus was saying out of the realm of physical birth: "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" (v. 4). But Jesus stated this was a different kind of birth, one "of water and the Spirit" (v. 5).

What do you think He meant by water and Spirit?

Scholars do not agree on the exact meaning of Jesus's statement regarding water and Spirit. Some have latched onto this statement to assert baptism as a requirement for salvation. Water baptism is an important step of obedience for a Christian, but Jesus wasn't referencing it directly in this conversation. Some say both elements, water and spirit, point to a picture of life and together they refer to spiritual birth. Others say being "born of water" references physical birth, as during childbirth, a mother's amniotic sac breaks, releasing a watery substance. I lean toward this interpretation. So, Jesus was saying a person can't enter the kingdom of God without being born physically (water) and spiritually (Spirit).

Using the birth analogy, Jesus revealed that just as you cannot manufacture babies, you cannot manufacture Christians.¹⁷ Yes, spiritual birth is a mystery, but it is necessary and observable. Jesus used the wind to illustrate. You don't know the origin of the wind, but

its effects are evident. In the same way, spiritual birth can't be seen, but the transformation is unmistakable.

If you have experienced spiritual birth as Jesus described, what's been the effect on your life?

Spiritual birth occurs at the moment of sincere belief. I believed in Jesus when I was nine years old. The transformation wasn't hugely evident in the following days and months, but over the course of forty years the wind of God's Spirit has altered everything.

Jesus made a play on words in the Greek. *Wind* is *pneuma* in Greek, which "can mean *wind, breath, or spirit*. He said, 'You have to be born of the Spirit, and it's like the wind.' In other words, the *pneuma* is like the *pneuma*."¹⁸

LIFTED UP

READ JOHN 3:13-21 and record below the benefits associated with belief in these verses.

VERSE 15	VERSE 16	VERSE 18

"Lifting up" is a term used in Scripture for both "exaltation and execution."¹⁹

Those who believe in Jesus ("the Son") receive eternal life and have no judgment against them, because Jesus came not to condemn but to save. This is good news!

Jesus foreshadowed how salvation would be accomplished with an Old Testament reference. In Numbers 21:4-9, the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people of Israel because of their complaining. Many people were bitten and died. When Moses interceded for the people, God instructed him to make a bronze replica of a snake and attach it to a pole. The people were to look at it to be healed.

As the snake replica was lifted up on a pole and the Israelites found healing, Jesus would be lifted up on a cross so we could, by faith, find salvation in Him. As pastor R. C. Sproul said, “It is the good news that snake-bitten people, people infected by a poison that goes to the depth of their souls, can look to the cross and find salvation.”²⁰

Jesus used several illustrations to help explain salvation—birth, wind, the serpent on a pole, light and darkness. Which is the most helpful to you in wrapping your mind around what it means to be a Christian?

God loved us so much He sent Jesus to save us from sin. Yet we must believe in Him. This belief must move beyond a superficial longing for His works to a sincere faith that trusts His Word.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for giving Your life for mine. I long to come to You privately more often to work through my questions and doubts. Reveal Yourself to me and give me eyes to see the effects of Your spiritual wind around me. Thank You for loving me so much. I believe in You, Jesus. Help my faith to grow deeper. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

STOP AND SAVOR

Today we focused on this truth: *Jesus makes a distinction between sincere and superficial belief.*

Summarize your personal takeaway from today’s lesson.

What stood out to you about what Jesus said?

Meditate for a moment about eternal life—living forever with Jesus. Savor this gift as it relates to your past, present, and future.

Day Five

HE MUST INCREASE

When some friends left our church, I took it way too personally. Even though I knew they had prayed about it and had good reasons to leave, it stung. They had attended the small group led by my husband and me. *Were we not enough? What did they find more appealing about their new church? Why hadn't they shared their concerns about our church with us?* Others in the group wanted to “process” our mutual friends’ exit as well. The temptation for gossip and self-protection presented itself often over the coming days and weeks.

Can you relate to the struggle that takes place when someone leaves your church or ministry? If so, jot some thoughts about it below.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

John 3:22-36

BIG IDEA

Seek God-connection over self-protection.

I’ve heard it said that there is no pain like church pain. When any sort of ministry conflict arises, self-protection is my default. I want to defend my position, shield my reputation, and rally people to my side. However, John the Baptist showed us another way. He revealed that peace comes in following God’s plan.

SEE OURSELVES CLEARLY

READ JOHN 3:22-30 and circle the letter that best answers the following questions:

What were both Jesus and John the Baptist doing?

- A. Sleeping
- B. Baptizing
- C. Healing

Warren Wiersbe noted that four prominent men in the Bible addressed the problem of comparison and competition: Moses (Num. 11:26-30), John the Baptist (John 3:26-30), Jesus (Luke 9:46-50), and Paul (Phil. 1:15-18). Wiersbe stated: "A leader often suffers more from his zealous disciples than from his critics!"²¹

What did John the Baptist's disciples complain about?

- A. The Jew who debated with them over ceremonial cleansing**
- B. The temperature of the baptismal waters**
- C. People leaving their ministry for another**

How did John the Baptist respond to their complaints?

- A. No one receives anything unless God gives it.**
- B. I have told you plainly I am not the Messiah.**
- C. Jesus must increase, and I must decrease.**
- D. All of the above.**

In college, I wrote a paper on C. S. Lewis's novel, *Till We Have Faces*. The main character Orual struggled with insecurity and jealousy, which caused her to hate the supernatural. My thesis for the paper has stuck with me over three decades: "Sometimes we tell lies about ourselves that cause us to tell lies about God." Consider the following questions in light of that truth:

How did John the Baptist see himself according to these verses?

How did he see Jesus?

John the Baptist gave an honest assessment. He didn't discount his ministry or purpose; he leaned into his high calling from God to prepare the way for Jesus. For a season this meant greater visibility and recognition. However, he trusted God's plan—realizing the time had come for a decrease in his baptisms, preaching, and popularity. Commentator D. A. Carson said, "Both John and Jesus were given their roles by heaven (v. 27), and John was entirely content with his."²² When we see ourselves clearly, we will be content with God's plan for our lives and express genuine joy for the success of others.

(Answers: B, A, D)

Take a few minutes to reflect and thoughtfully answer the questions below:
How is this message landing in your soul today? Can you identify any lies you might be telling yourself?

What does it mean for Christ to increase and you to decrease?
Where is this needing to happen in your life?

Are you content in your current calling? Are you able to celebrate the success of others in similar roles? Explain.

John the Baptist's words remind me that I have blind spots. I need to see myself clearly so that I can see God more clearly. This means I take time to reflect, ask the Lord to reveal weaknesses, and give trusted friends permission to speak corrective words when needed.

KEEP THE CHATTER VERTICAL

Scholars are uncertain who is speaking the words in verses 31-36. It could be Jesus, John the Gospel writer, or John the Baptist. I tend to see this as John the Baptist. I believe he kept the chatter vertical by pointing to Jesus.

READ JOHN 3:31-35 and record below any words or phrases used to describe Jesus.

Here are some that stood out to me:

- Greater than anyone else
- Testifies about what He has seen and heard

- Speaks God's words
- Given the Spirit without limit
- Loved by the Father

Rather than strategize attractional ways to win back the crowd, John the Baptist made Jesus the focus of discussion. His heart was for his followers to be followers of Jesus.

John the Baptist highlighted the eternal plan above earthly priorities. This resonates strongly with me because I constantly get caught up in the stuff of earth—emails to answer, projects to finish, dishes to wash.

What earthly stuff has been consuming your focus lately?

Those things matter, but they aren't primary. What's challenging is helping friends caught up in temporal pursuits. I want to keep the chatter vertical to help them see beyond horizontal implications, but there's tension here. How do I listen to people's concerns, validate their feelings, yet at the same time point them toward God without seeming preachy or hyper-spiritual?

What are practical ways you have directed a conversation toward God in these situations?

I asked some godly women this question. Here are some of their ideas:

- Pray with the person right away.
- Be a listener and not a fixer.
- Redirect gossip or complaining with positive insights.
- Text a Bible verse or biblical principle God has used in your life.
- Ask good questions (like Jesus often did).

John's mention of the Holy Spirit in verse 34 reminds me that inviting the Spirit to guide us is another practical way to seek God-connection over self-protection in sticky situations.

How would our lives change if we talked to God first when problems arise in our marriages, friendships, families, and churches?

I experience more peace when I bring frustrations to the Lord. He also helps me work through emotions as I pray so I can respond rather than react to conflict. When our small group friends left the church, a wise advisor reminded my husband that we aren't competing for sheep. Instead, we ask the Lord to use us to seek and save the lost. That was a good encouragement to keep our focus on Jesus.

GOD CONNECTION

READ JOHN 3:36. What separates those who receive eternal life from those who receive eternal judgment?

Sincere belief in God's Son connects us to the Father. Jesus is the plan. We can savor peace when we savor Jesus.

STOP AND SAVOR

Today we focused on this truth: *Seek God-connection over self-protection.*

Summarize your personal takeaway from today's lesson.

What qualities of Jesus stood out to you in today's verses?

What do you need to apply from John the Baptist's testimony and teaching?

PRAYER

Jesus, help me to see myself clearly so that I can see You clearly. You must increase and I must decrease. This is so counter-intuitive to what my flesh and the world tell me about myself. Help me to lift others up toward You rather than be dragged down into gossip and comparison. Renew my mind with Your truth so that I can find peace in Your plan for me. In Jesus's name, Amen.

SESSION TWO

Video Viewer Guide

Our plans may fail, but we can savor peace in God's _____ plan.

God sent a _____ (John 1:1-5).

God set the _____ (John 1:14-18,29).

What are three things currently stealing your peace?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

When it comes to worry and concern, only one is _____.

Serenity Prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference, living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is not as I would have it. Trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will, that I might be reasonable happy in this world and supremely happy with You in the next.

God loves the _____ (John 3:15-21).

God gets the _____.

CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK: Pray at noon each day this week, asking God for peace for someone across the globe.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

SHARE: What are some plans coming up on your calendar, like parties, meetings, vacations, and so forth?

WATCH the video “Session Two: Savoring Peace in the Plan of Jesus” together and follow along with the viewer guide on the previous page.

MEMORY VERSE: Review John 1:12 and provide time for group members to recite it aloud.

VIDEO DISCUSSION

1. *Ask:* How did the Old Testament references in John 1 give you additional insight into John’s Prologue?
2. *Discuss:* How does reviewing God’s plan in John 1–3 bring you peace today? Share practical examples from your own life.

STUDY DISCUSSION

1. Encourage participants to share responses from their answers to the questions in the Stop and Savor section for Day One on page 17.
2. *Ask:* How do these words of Jesus—*What do you want?* and *Come and see.*—resonate in your life? (p. 19)
3. Call on a volunteer to read aloud John 2:4-12. Ask women to share any fresh insights they discovered from Jesus’s miracle as well as any nudges toward obedience they identified on page 25.
4. Discuss answers to this question on page 30: *How do you think your life would be different if you had more personal time with the Lord each day?*
5. *Ask:* How did you summarize your personal takeaway to the big idea for Day 5: *Seek God-connection over self-protection.* (p. 37)?

REVIEW the Big Idea for each of the five days of study. Ask for final thoughts or questions regarding the study of God’s plan this week.

PRAYER: To provide an opportunity for each woman to be prayed for during the week, lead each member of the group to write a prayer request on a provided note card, then pass that card to the woman on her right.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.