

HERSCHEL HOBBS

Commentary



MORE THAN ENOUGH: HOW JESUS MEETS OUR DEEPEST NEEDS

BEAUTY FROM ASHES: REDEEMING YOUR BROKEN MOMENTS

Spring 2016

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

Spring Fever

The weather warms up and pleasant temperatures drive us outside. Nature begins to turn green again and everything seems to bloom and become full of life—including us. Many of us experience renewed energy after a dreary winter. Shakespeare expressed it well: “April hath put a spirit of youth in everything.”

Unfortunately, it doesn't last. Spring quickly passes, and the rising heat of summer drains us. Then autumn chills to winter and all the springtime beauty fades into memory. The new life of spring dies.

We're like that too. In spite of our best efforts to hold on to our vitality and life, we still fade and die. Unlike the spring flowers, though, we don't simply come back to life when the seasons change. Death is permanent.

But it doesn't have to be. God created us for eternal life. Even though we sinned against Him and brought death upon ourselves, God comes to us with an opportunity for a new life—a renewed life, eternal life.

Eternal life is available through Jesus Christ. He came to earth to live the sinless life we could not. When Jesus died on the cross, He died our death. He took our sin and our punishment, and He defeated death. God approved the sacrifice of His Son and raised Him from the dead. Jesus not only defeated death, but we can have a new life in Him. We may still experience physical death, but Jesus made it possible for us to be spiritually alive and raised to a new physical life with Him in heaven.

If you would like to live forever in Christ, repent of your sins and put your faith in Him. Admit to God that you are a sinner. Turn from the sin that has kept you from God and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying something like this:

Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive my sins. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

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Dedicated to

***Red Hill Baptist Church
Speedwell, Tennessee***

*For over 114 years
“holding forth the word of life”
to the Red Hill Community.*

Ronald K. Brown

author of the Bible expositions for these sessions,
former editor of *The Herschel Hobbs Commentary*,
retired curriculum manager from LifeWay.
M.Div., D.Min., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

BEAUTY FROM ASHES: REDEEMING YOUR BROKEN MOMENTS

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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

The Herschel Hobbs Commentary

SPRING 2016

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ERIC GEIGER

Vice President, Church Resources

RONNIE FLOYD

General Editor

LYNN H. PRYOR

Team Leader

ROSS H. McLAREN

Content Editor

KEN BRADY

*Manager, Adult Ongoing
Bible Studies*

MICHAEL KELLEY

Director, Groups Ministry

Send questions/comments to:

Editor, *The Hobbs Commentary*

One LifeWay Plaza

Nashville, TN 37234-0175

Or make comments on the Web at
www.lifeway.com

Acknowledgments—We believe the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. The 2000 statement of The Baptist Faith and Message is our doctrinal guideline.

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MORE THAN ENOUGH: HOW JESUS MEETS OUR DEEPEST NEEDS

Why This Study Is Important:

Everything we need is found in Jesus. He gives us far more than we could ever expect. He doesn't provide for us in a way that is "just enough"; He gives us more than enough because He gives us Himself. Jesus made seven "I Am" statements about Himself recorded in the Gospel of John, and this study shows us how, because of who Jesus is, He is able to meet our greatest needs.

This study connects to Christ because Jesus made an undeniable connection between Himself and God the Father, the great "I Am." Jesus is God. Jesus is the source of everything we need for this life and for eternity. Jesus' death and resurrection made a relationship with God possible, and it is through that relationship we experience contentment, direction, protection, hope, peace, and purpose.

This study connects to community for when we follow Jesus as our Shepherd, we are a part of His fold. We are part of a community of fellow believers. A daily commitment to walk in the light of Christ is an encouragement for other believers to do the same.

This study connects to culture because we can point others to Jesus as the only way to life, hope, and peace. Your contentment in Christ points others to something the world cannot offer them.

SESSION 1

OUR NEED FOR CONTENTMENT

THE PASSAGE

John 6:26-27,35-40

THE POINT

Jesus is the bread of life who gives us true satisfaction.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Advertisements are created on the premise that a particular product will meet a need or provide some sense of contentment in an area of dissatisfaction. Some ads may have an element of truth to them, but even so, the need is rarely met permanently and the satisfaction or contentment is short-lived. For example, even though you may enjoy a great meal at a fine restaurant, in time you will be hungry again. Jesus addressed the greatest need of our lives; the need for spiritual satisfaction and contentment. What He provides is not temporary but permanent.

THE SETTING

Jesus' miracle of taking a small lunch of fish and bread to feed a multitude of 5,000 clearly was significant to the early believers, for each of the four Gospel writers included it in his narrative. In fact, Mark also recorded another instance in which Jesus fed 4,000 people. In John's Gospel, Jesus used the occasion of the miraculous feeding as the backdrop for declaring Himself as the Bread of Life. Many who witnessed the event, however, missed the spiritual message. They were focused only on the material or tangible elements. Thus, Jesus

offered a corrective to their flawed thinking and a challenge to find true satisfaction and contentment in what God was making known to them through Him.

GET INTO THE STUDY

Some Insights You Might Miss Without a Commentary

- ▶ That the verses in this session are set against the backdrop of the feeding of 5,000
- ▶ The meaning and significance of **Verily, verily**, and other ways to state this exhortation
- ▶ Alternate words in the New Testament rendered **miracles**; the word John preferred; and its significance in reference to Jesus
- ▶ An explanation for Jesus' saying, **Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles**, when in fact, they had not only seen the miracle, they benefited from it
- ▶ The meaning of the analogy **labor not for the meat**
- ▶ The meanings of **perisheth** and **endureth**
- ▶ The meaning of **everlasting life**
- ▶ Jesus' use of the term **Son of man** in reference to Himself
- ▶ The meaning and significance of **for him hath God the Father sealed**
- ▶ That **bread** was a dietary staple
- ▶ That the "I Am" statements identify Jesus as one with the Father
- ▶ The spiritual meaning of **cometh**
- ▶ The meaning of **believeth**
- ▶ The use of the Greek strong double negative in the word **never**
- ▶ The relationship of the phrases **all that the Father giveth me, ... him that cometh to me**, and **every one which ... believeth on him** to our understanding of salvation
- ▶ That **in no wise cast out** is another rendering of a Greek strong double negative
- ▶ The meaning of **will**
- ▶ The meaning of **at the last day**

STUDY THE BIBLE

John included seven “I Am” statements of Jesus in his Gospel account (John 6:35; 9:5; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Each emphasized some element of Jesus’ identity and mission, especially in His relationship to humankind. These statements remind us of the personal name Yahweh that God had revealed to Moses in his encounter at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 3:15). Therefore, through the “I Am” declarations Jesus identified Himself as one in existence with the Father. In the verses for this session, Jesus declared He was **the bread of life**—truly satisfying and capable of making one fully and eternally content.

John 6:26-27

*What is the setting for these verses? What was the rebuff Jesus offered to those who sought Him? For what true purpose should they have been seeking Jesus? What is another word for **miracles** and what does it mean in reference to Jesus in John’s Gospel? Explain the meaning of the analogy behind **labor not for the meat**. Who is the source of **everlasting life**? What does it mean to us that Jesus **the Son of man** has been **sealed by God the Father**?*

²⁶**Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. ²⁷Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.**

Dissatisfied. Following the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus sent His disciples across the Lake of Galilee to Capernaum. Jesus retreated alone to a mountain to pray. Perhaps His need for time alone with His Father was in response to the intentions of some to make Him a king. Obviously, they misunderstood His identity and the nature of His mission.

Later in the evening, Jesus came walking on the water to His disciples, who were struggling to control their ship on the choppy waves of the stormy lake. With Jesus in the boat, they arrived at Capernaum, an important port town located on the northern shore of the lake.

The next morning the mass of people, who still were in the region on the western side of the lake, awoke to realize Jesus was no longer in the area. They were puzzled by His absence because they knew He had not gotten in the boat with His disciples. They apparently were aware that Jesus' disciples had sailed toward Capernaum, so as many as could, filled boats that had come from Tiberias and sailed in search of Jesus.

When they found Jesus, they quizzed Him about *when* He had gotten there (v. 25). The question may have implied they also wondered *how* He got there. Nevertheless, Jesus did not answer their question directly, for the important issue was not *how* or *when* He got there but *why* they were so determined to find Him.

Jesus frequently introduced important sayings with **verily, verily**. **Verily**—transliterated into English as *amen*—means “surely,” “truly,” or “of a truth.” Repeated, as here, the words serve first to get the attention of the listener and then to affirm the veracity of what follows. Other renderings included “Truly, truly” (NASB, ESV), “Very truly” (NIV), “I assure you” (HCSB), and “I tell you the truth” (NLT). **I say unto you** is part of the introductory idiom, but it also suggests this was a personal word directed to them.

Jesus confronted them directly, revealing the intent of their hearts, which in itself testified to Jesus' ability and divine insight. Of course, it was good that they sought Him. The problem was their motivation for doing so: **Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles**. To **seek** is “to search until what is being sought is found.” Jesus knew why they had been so persistent in their search. However, we may be puzzled by what Jesus said. They *had* witnessed the miraculous feeding, had they not? They had been the recipients of it. Isn't that why they came looking for Him? They wanted more of what they saw.

A clue to understanding Jesus' comment can be found by considering the word translated **miracles**. Jesus used miracles to teach and illustrate truth. They were living parables. Two words are rendered “miracle” in the New Testament. One word (*dynamis*) essentially means “power,” but it can denote “acts of power,” thus “miracles.” However, the Greek word predominately rendered “miracle,” and the word John used exclusively in his Gospel, is the word for “sign” (*semeion*), a deed that marks or distinguishes something; a miraculous indicator of a great truth. In John's Gospel, a “sign” reveals something about Jesus' identity and God's saving activity through Him.

The people did not seek Jesus because they saw a divine sign. No, they sought for Jesus **because** they **did eat of the loaves, and were filled**. They were intrigued by the prospect of free food that filled their stomachs. They had enjoyed the dinner the previous day and were disappointed that breakfast wasn't served the next morning! Because they were hungry again, they came looking to have their hunger satisfied once more. "They thought more of their stomachs than they did of their souls."¹

Jesus offered this wise counsel: **Labor not for the meat which perisheth**. **Labor** means "to work for," "to earn by working," or "to acquire." **Meat** can be understood literally or as a way to speak of anything that is eaten as food. It also could be understood figuratively to mean anything material. **Perisheth** comes from a word that means "to destroy" or "to lose." "Don't work for the food that perishes" (HCSB; ESV); "Don't be so concerned about perishable things like food" (NLT).

Rather, Jesus exhorted, work **for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life**. Just as Jesus spoke of "living water" to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well to represent eternal life (John 4:10), here Jesus used the word **meat** to speak of that which sustains for eternity. **Endureth** comes from a word when used in reference to time means "to continue to be," "not to perish," or "to last." Notice that it is the opposite of **perisheth**. **Everlasting** refers to that "without beginning and end; that which always has been and always will be." **Life** is the word that refers to the absolute fullness of life, which belongs to God. It is life real and genuine and comes to those who put their trust in Jesus as Christ.

This kind of life is that **which the Son of man shall give unto you**. **Son of man** is a messianic term Jesus used to designate Himself as the head of the human family, the one who both furnished the pattern of the perfect man and acted as Savior on behalf of all humankind. It denotes humility in contrast to the exaltation more often associated with the view of the messiah as one coming with royal splendor. **Give** is "to supply or grant something to someone of one's own accord."

He is the One who **shall give** everlasting life **unto you for** [because] **him hath God the Father sealed**. **Everlasting life** is a gift of **God the Father** delivered through **the Son**. **Sealed** means "to have set a seal upon." A seal or mark was a sign of security, confirmation, and approval by one in authority. "God the Father has set His seal of

approval on Him” (HCSB). God the Father attested that the Son is who He claimed to be and is authorized to give everlasting life.

What are some lasting truths from John 6:26-27?

1. Jesus is to be listened to, for He declares truth.
2. The wonderful things Jesus does for us are signs of who He is as God’s revelation of Himself to us.
3. We act foolishly when we spend all our energy and effort to acquire things that do not last.
4. We are admonished to focus our attention, our efforts, and our energy on that which Jesus gives to us—that is, everlasting life.

John 6:35

*How did Jesus use the conversation about bread to teach the people something about who He is? Why was **bread** a fitting metaphor for Jesus to use to identify Himself in relationship to humankind? Even though everlasting life is a gift, what are we to do to obtain it? What words indicate that Jesus satisfies completely?*

³⁵And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

Complete Satisfaction. The content of the exchange between Jesus and the people continued in verses 28-34. Jesus clarified that the work of which He spoke was the work of believing on Him. Then the people asked for a sign that would prove He was worthy of their believing. To have asked such a question suggests they had their heads in the sand—at least spiritually speaking. They missed what had been given to them in the miracle of the day before. To support their call for a sign, they cited Moses and his giving of manna; to which Jesus reminded them that Moses didn’t give the manna, God did. Moreover, again they were focused on physical food and not on the spiritual nourishment of which Jesus spoke.

Even when they did seem to have some insight into what Jesus was saying, they made a request that proved they didn’t: “Lord, evermore, give us this bread” (v. 34). In response, Jesus declared the first of the seven “I am” statements recorded in John’s Gospel: **I am the bread of**

life. They need not look for another sign; neither were they to seek for another source. The sign had been given in the miraculous feeding. The source was the very one who stood before them.

I is another use of a Greek emphatic, a grammatical construction that doubles the personal pronoun; thus, it may be understood as “I and I alone.” Similar to His use of “meat” (and “water” to the Samaritan women), He used **bread** analogously to represent spiritual nourishment. It was a common food and a staple of the Jews’ diet. **Life** is the same word used in verse 27 to speak of the true essence of life. In declaring He is **the bread of life**, Jesus declared He is the source of true life, spiritual vitality, and spiritual sustenance.

As he had stated earlier, this spiritual life was offered as a gift. The one receiving it **shall never hunger**. And in what becomes a mixture of metaphors, Jesus also asserted the recipient **shall never thirst**. “Hunger and thirst are the two most demanding of physical needs. Jesus transfers them to the spiritual sphere, and promises the complete, abiding satisfaction of both.”² **Never** is a double negative in Greek, which doubles the negative intensity of the statement. Thus, the recipient shall “never ever,” “certainly not,” “by no means” **hunger** or **thirst**. “No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry ... will ever be thirsty again” (HCSB).

How is this gift of everlasting life received? Jesus established two principles for receiving the gift. **He that cometh to me ... and he that believeth on me.** In essence, **cometh** and **believeth** are synonymous. **Cometh** means “to come from one place to another.” The people to whom Jesus spoke already had come to Him physically; with some effort they had journeyed a considerable distance to find Him. So He must have meant more than that. Jesus used the concept of coming figuratively to indicate a spiritual experience of coming to be in spiritual relationship with Him. We find everlasting life when in our spirit we **come** to Jesus so that we are joined with Him.

Believeth is another favorite word of John’s in reference to Jesus, none more well-known than its use in John 3:16. It includes intellectual assent but much more. *To believe* is to know about, yes, but also to trust in that which is known. Clearly, **me** is Jesus, the Son of man who has been affirmed by God the Father (v. 27).

What are some lasting truths from John 6:35?

1. Jesus is what we need and all we need to have eternal life.
2. In Jesus, we find complete spiritual satisfaction.

3. We receive the gift of life when we come to Jesus and believe fully on Him.

John 6:36-40

*What was the critical issue with which Jesus confronted the people? What is the relationship between the phrases **the Father giveth me** and **him that cometh to me**? Why did Jesus come **from heaven** to earth? What was **the Father's will** that would be accomplished through the Incarnate Christ? Why are believers secure in Christ?*

³⁶But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. ³⁷All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. ³⁸For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ³⁹And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

True Contentment. In another assessment that only one with divine insight could offer, Jesus declared that even though they had seen Him with their eyes, He knew they did not perceive who He was; thus, they did not believe Him (**ye ... believe not**). Until the issue of belief was settled, they could not receive the gift He had to offer. Such is still true. Only by believing with trust in Jesus can we have the kind of life that only He can provide.

Verse 37 is an important statement about the issue of election and free will in relation to salvation: **All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.** Does this imply that some are not given? If it did, it would stand in contradiction to the broader message of Scripture and even the rest of what Jesus says. **Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.** “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (ESV) or “drive away” (NIV). God chooses us and we choose Him. God summons all to salvation by the power of His Spirit who brings spiritual conviction through His witness to Christ as Savior. Having

been invited to salvation by this grace-work of God who acted in His sovereign will and power—meaning He didn't have to do what He did in Christ—we choose whether to accept the invitation to **come** and the accompanying gift of salvation. He will not refuse anyone. **In no wise** is a rendering of another double negative intensifying the truth that “the one who comes to Me I will never cast out” (HCSB).

Jesus affirmed He was on a divine mission under divine appointment. **I came down from heaven** is another statement of the miracle of incarnation, a subject that John had addressed eloquently in chapter 1. Jesus as Incarnate God **came ... not to do His own will, but the will of him that sent Him**. **Will** means “what one wishes or has determined shall be done.”

Verse 39 specifies the identity of the One who **sent** Jesus and clarifies what His **will** is. Jesus said He came to do **the Father's will which hath sent me**. He descended from heaven to dwell on earth in response to the purpose and plan of God the Father, which was to bring blessing upon all humankind who believe in Jesus. What Jesus did, He did at the pleasure of the Father, according to His plan and purpose.

One element of that **will** or desire of the Father is **that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing**. Is there a stronger statement of the security of those who are in Christ? Our eternal security does not reside in our activity but in the ability of Christ who acted to bring fulfillment to the will of God. Those who respond in faith to the Lord's invitation to salvation will not be lost. Indeed, the promise is extended to say He **should raise it up again at the last day**, a promise of the resurrection to everlasting life. **At the last day** refers to the great day of the consummation of human history, when life as we know it on earth has ended, God's eternal judgment has been rendered, and the unending age of eternity in heaven becomes reality.

Verse 40 repeats, thus reinforces, what Jesus had just said. **The will of God is that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day**. Jesus died that those who believe may be saved; He was resurrected from the dead, thus assuring us that believers will be raised to live forever with Him and all others who believe. Nothing could bring greater contentment than that promise and its fulfillment.

What are some lasting truths from John 6:36-40?

1. Salvation is at the initiative of God in Christ.
2. Salvation becomes real for us when we respond to God's initiative by believing in Christ.
3. In Christ, we are forever secure; nothing can take us away from Him.
4. In Christ, we have the promise of the resurrection to eternal life.

LIVE IT OUT

Beware of the culture's message. Personal worth is measured in dollars and cents. Therefore, the more you accumulate, the more valuable you are. Satisfaction and contentment are tied to certain practices and products that someone is eager to make available to you—at a price, of course. So we fall into the trap of trying to prove our worth by what we possess, at the same time spending what we have to get the things that promise us satisfaction and contentment. Alas, we soon discover those things fail us. Jesus challenged such thinking. Rather than waste time securing that which won't last, turn to Him, for He is good for eternity—satisfaction guaranteed!

What are some things you relied on to bring satisfaction and contentment that during a time of testing proved to be insufficient?

Record a time when you were encouraged by the satisfaction and contentment that came because of your believing in Jesus.

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Feed me, Lord, with the Bread of Life, for only then can I know satisfaction and contentment fully sufficient even to eternity. Amen.

¹Herschel H. Hobbs *An Exposition of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968], 130.

²Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 131.

SESSION 2

OUR NEED FOR DIRECTION

THE PASSAGE

John 8:12-19

THE POINT

Jesus is the light who reveals the way we should go.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We like to think we live in an enlightened society, but the truth is, we live in darkness. Society in general is selective about what it considers to be wrong or sinful—if at all. In society’s “enlightened” thinking what was once considered sin is no longer acknowledged as such. Just as light reveals darkness, Jesus reveals sin and overwhelms its darkness. He invites us to come to Him and walk in His light.

THE SETTING

The verses in this session are part of a conversation Jesus had with some Pharisee opponents. As it appears in the King James Version, the conversation came on the heels of the encounter with the adulterous woman the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus for judgment. However, those accusers departed (8:9), so the words **then spake Jesus again unto them** would appear not to fit the setting. Some see it as a continuation of the events described in John 7. However, that chapter seems to end in a private conversation among the Pharisees. Perhaps what is recorded beginning in John 8:12 is a follow-up conversation to what had occurred in chapter 7. In that case the Pharisees to which Jesus spoke were not necessarily the group that brought the woman

to him but another group who had confronted Him in chapter 7 at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles.

GET INTO THE STUDY

Some Insights You Might Miss Without a Commentary

- ▶ The possible setting and the audience to whom Jesus spoke
- ▶ Why **light** is a fitting metaphor for this “I am” statement
- ▶ A spiritual application of **followeth**
- ▶ The meaning of **walk** as a Hebraism
- ▶ The spiritual implications of **darkness**
- ▶ That John’s Gospel has a strong emphasis on Jesus as **light** and **life**
- ▶ The identity and some characteristics of **the Pharisees**
- ▶ The meaning of **record**
- ▶ The fuller meaning of **true** (vv. 14,16,17)
- ▶ The meaning of **judge**
- ▶ The meaning of **flesh**
- ▶ The sense in which Jesus said **I judge no man**
- ▶ The reason Jesus spoke of the Mosaic law as **your law**
- ▶ The Old Testament background that supports the requirement of two witnesses to verify something as true
- ▶ Possible explanation for asking, **Where is thy Father** instead of Who is thy Father (v. 19)

STUDY THE BIBLE

This study session focuses on the second of Jesus’ seven “I Am” declarations recorded in John’s Gospel. In these verses Jesus declared He was **the light of the world**, making known holy truth, manifesting the presence of God the Father, and revealing the way we should live as those who follow Jesus.

John 8:12

*In what setting might Jesus have been speaking that led Him to use **light** as His second “I am” statement? Why is light a fitting*

metaphor for Jesus? To what does light stand in contrast? What is impossible for the person who follows Jesus to do? What is a benefit that comes to the one who follows Jesus?

¹²Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Jesus Is the Light of the World. As indicated in the “Setting,” views vary on the occasion and the audience to whom Jesus spoke in these verses. The identity of **them** becomes clearer by the reference to Pharisees in verse 13. Whatever the setting, it became an opportunity for Jesus to make another great declaration concerning Himself: **I am the light of the world.** To students of John’s Gospel, this statement may bring to mind the Prologue of the Gospel in which John declared concerning the Word, “in him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (1:4-5).

James L. Sullivan wrote some excellent comments stating why light is such a fitting metaphor, especially when contrasted with darkness.

As darkness conceals, so light reveals. Darkness is the symbol of error and evil; light is the symbol of goodness and truth. In darkness man cannot see, and he falters. In light man sees, so he can know security. In darkness man despairs. ... Worse than any midnight is the moral darkness of unbelieving man.

Light shines in the darkness; it cannot go unseen. Light does not work by isolation, but by penetration. Its beam can be as slender as the finger of light from an airport beacon or as encompassing as the rays of the sun.

Light is gentle and warm. It does not work like a bulldozer, a marching army, or a fire siren. It works quietly like gravity, but it is effective.”¹

In John 6, Jesus had pronounced that He is an inexhaustible source of spiritual nourishment. He also is an inextinguishable **light** revealing truth and providing direction to those who walk with Him. That truth and direction leads to salvation and eternal life.

Some Bible expositors suggest that Jesus drew His illustration from the great candlesticks—the Menorah—that were lighted during

feasts, such as the Feast of the Tabernacle, also known as the Festival of Lights. This particular feast was a time to commemorate the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that provided guidance to Israel in the wilderness. Light is also an oft-found motif in the Old Testament representing the presence of God. Hence, this “I am” statement is another reference to Jesus’ deity and support for His claim that He had come to bring deliverance and provide guidance in the ways of God.

The radiance of the light from a Menorah, though bright, still would have been limited to a small area; in this case, the Court of Women where this conversation may have taken place (8:20). In contrast, the scope of His radiance and brilliance was unlimited. Jesus was not just light of deliverance to a few people or to a certain people, but **the light of the world**. **World** is the Greek word *kosmos*, which refers to an aggregate of all things earthly, including its inhabitants, institutions, governments, and systems.

Furthermore, at the end of the feast, the candlesticks would be extinguished and the light diminished into darkness. Not so with Jesus. Herschel Hobbs suggested that a literal reading could be, “I always am the light of the world.”² The word structure also can suggest “I, and I alone.” Jesus was the only true light that would continue to shine ever brightly.

Even though Jesus is **the light of the world**, His next statement indicated that experiencing that light has an individual element to it: **He that followeth me**. **He** also can be rendered “whoever” (NIV, ESV) or “anyone” (HCSB). **Followeth** can be understood to mean “to be on the same road with” but the word also has a deeper meaning that likely applies here. It can mean “to accompany as a disciple,” or “to join one as a disciple.” Of course, the pronoun **me** is Jesus; no one else; nothing else. To follow Jesus is to make a commitment to Him just as a disciple does to a master.

Whoever makes the decision to follow Jesus **shall not walk in darkness**. **Walk**, as often seen in the New Testament, is a Hebraism that refers to how one “lives” or “conducts one’s self.” **Darkness** implies absence of light. Metaphorically, the word is used to refer to an ignorance of divine things and is usually associated with wickedness. **Not** is a double negative in Greek that can be rendered “will never” (HCSB).

Instead, the one who follows Jesus **shall have the light of life**. We already have noted that John’s Gospel presents a vital relationship

between **light** and **life**. As in other instances, the Greek word for **life** refers to “the absolute fullness of life that belongs to and comes from God.” It is genuine life, not temporary life such as characterizes physical existence. “The world lies in darkness and death because it has rebelled against God and thus broken contact with the one source of light and life. Jesus claims to be the light that brings light and life back to the world and sets it free from its bondage to sin.”³

What are some lasting truths from John 8:12?

1. Jesus is the inexhaustible and inextinguishable light who illuminates humankind in spiritual matters and reveals the way of salvation.
2. Jesus makes known the truth of God that leads to life.
3. Those who follow Jesus receive life.
4. Those who follow Jesus cannot also live in darkness.

John 8:13-15

Who were Jesus’ opponents in this situation? What was their response to Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world? How did Jesus validate His claim? Why could the Pharisees not understand who Jesus was? What did Jesus not come to do?

¹³The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true. ¹⁴Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. ¹⁵Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

Jesus’ Word About Himself Is True and Trustworthy.

Those to whom Jesus spoke, in this situation **the Pharisees**, not only were unimpressed with what Jesus had to say, they were offended by it. They felt compelled to challenge Him. The Pharisees were the most influential religious group, politically and religiously, in Israel in New Testament times. The name Pharisee means “separated ones,” perhaps a name they acquired because of their “separatist” attitude. They were the force behind the oral traditions and were convinced the way to God was through obedience to the Mosaic law. Hence,

most people—perhaps none more than the Pharisees themselves—considered them to be the model of righteousness and ritual purity because of their strict adherence to the law and their seemingly impeccable religious practices.

Their charge was, **Thou bearest record of thyself. Record** comes from a word that means “witness,” or “testimony.” “Here you are, appearing as your own witness” (NIV). “You are testifying about Yourself” (HCSB). One view understands this in context of a legal proceeding where more than one witness was required to verify something as true. The Pharisees refuted Jesus’ claim by arguing that His own self-defense was not sufficient or admissible evidence to prove anything.

Another view is that by their response the Pharisees simply were calling Him a boaster, a self-promoter. If that is the sense, they would know what they were talking about because some Pharisees were the masters of self-adulation and self-promotion (see Luke 18:9-12). “You are making those claims about yourself!” (NLT).

Whichever view prevails, the conclusion was the same: **Thy record is not true.** To them Jesus’ claims were false: “Your testimony is not true” (NASB, ESV) or “valid” (NIV, HCSB). Thus, as far as they were concerned, Jesus was a pretender at best and nothing less than a liar.

Jesus answered them directly: **Though I bear record of myself—“even if I testify about Myself” (HCSB)—my record is true—“My testimony is valid” (HCSB).** He knew what He knew.

Jesus defended Himself at three points; the first found in verse 14b: **I know whence I came, and whither I go**, a reference to His divine, heavenly origin and eventual destination. He was no ordinary man. What He claimed for Himself was based on His perfect awareness of who He was as One who had been sent by God. And He was confident that He would one day be united with the Father again. Continuing, He said about them, **ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.** “But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going” (NIV). In a sense, Jesus was saying to them, “You don’t really know what you are talking about, but I do. I know the facts about myself; facts that you are missing completely.”

Jesus’ second point of defense was, **Ye judge after the flesh.** “You judge according to the flesh” (ESV). **Judge** comes from a word that means “to consider or decide” but it has a variety of nuances.

It can refer to making a simple distinction between things, situations, or persons, but it also can be used with negative implications in the sense of passing judgment on someone to gain control or exert influence. **Flesh** denotes mere human nature.

They did not—they could not—see Him for who He was because they were evaluating Him using a false standard, “human standards” (NIV, HCSB, NLT). The ordinary or common ways of assessing human personality do not apply to Jesus. Thus, they did not see the Light of the World, for all they could see was a countryman from Galilee. “It is as though they are trying to evaluate the straightness of a line and their only tool is a crooked yardstick, or as if they are in an art gallery trying to evaluate the paintings when they have been blind from birth, never having seen shape nor color.”⁴

Jesus added, **I judge no man**. “I pass judgment on no one” (NIV). Contrary to even contemporary popular opinion, Jesus did not come as judge or to condemn; He came as Savior to bring release (John 3:17-19). Individuals judge or condemn themselves by choosing darkness over light; by rejecting the Savior and choosing bondage in sin. This is not to say that Jesus did not have the credentials or the right to judge, but it is not why He came. We may note, that one day He will come as the eternal judge (Rev. 19:11-18).

What are some lasting truths from John 8:13-15?

1. Jesus is the Light of the World sent from God, and who, when His work was completed, returned to the Father.
2. Jesus is not to be evaluated by the standards of this world for He is not of this world.
3. Jesus came to save, not to condemn.

John 8:16-19

Why should the judgments of Jesus be accepted as valid and true? To what did Jesus appeal in these verses to support His claim He is the Light of the World? Who are the two witnesses Jesus cited? Why did Jesus say to His opponents that in spite of what they claimed, they truly did not know the Father?

¹⁶And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. ¹⁷It is also written in your

law, that the testimony of two men is true. ¹⁸**I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.** ¹⁹**Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.**

Jesus Makes Known God the Father. Jesus continued His comment about His role as judge. Though He did not come to judge, He went on to say, **And yet if I judge, my judgment is true.** “But if I do judge, my decisions are true” (NIV). **True** means more than true in facts alone but in the perfect conception of what truth is. His judgment or decisions could be counted on to be genuine and soundly based.

Any judgment Jesus might render is not His alone—**For I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.** Jesus claimed again to be at one with the Father. Thus, His judgment would not be the mere judgment of a man but of God; again an implication of His deity. By these words, Jesus once more asserted He was on a divine mission. The statement also was a witness to the source of His authority. His authority was from God the Father.

That having been said, Jesus moved to offer the third point of His personal defense that He began in verse 14. They had challenged the validity of His witness by saying His only witness was Himself. He turned their argument back on them by pointing out their charge was not true. **It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true.** “Even in your law it is written that the witness of two men is valid” (HCSB). They were using the law as support for their argument against Him. Jesus referred to it as **your law** because as religious leaders they had claimed possession of it and considered themselves the ultimate authorities on what it meant.

The Mosaic regulation about two witnesses can be found in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15. The witness of two is not considered true simply because the two agree, unless what each says is true in fact separately. The word true in this case means more than what is legally valid; it is by and in its very essence absolute and entirely reliable. Jesus declared that there was perfect agreement between His testimony about Himself and the affirmation from the Father.

Thus, He ended His defense: **I am one that bear witness of myself.** But there is a second witness: **the Father that sent me**

beareth witness of me. The claim of the Son and the testimony of the Father, each standing alone, is thoroughly reliable and in agreement. Therefore, because both are in complete agreement, the claim must be regarded completely true and beyond challenge—unless they wanted to call God the Father a liar too. (See 5:31-38 for a similar argument.)

Some Bible expositors suggest Jesus used the law in a non-legal way since the requirement of two witnesses did not include the accused. Jesus did so to point to His relationship to the Father. Jesus, as the Son, bore witness to who Jesus is as the Light of the World, a claim also affirmed by the Father.

Essentially, that was just what these Pharisees were doing. They rejected Jesus' appeal to the Father by calling into question who His Father was. **Where is thy Father?** Some Bible teachers think this further proves they completely missed the point Jesus was making. They wanted to speak to Jesus' father, thinking in earthly terms. The question also may suggest they wanted to see some kind of proof. They were not willing to accept what Jesus was saying. Jesus already had suggested they lacked spiritual discernment (v. 15). Sadly, they took the dangerous steps of closing their eyes to what was being revealed to them and hardening their hearts to the truth being declared to them. Such steps lead to damnation.

Remember, Jesus was speaking to experts in the Law and the most orthodox of practitioners. They should have known better. "The tragedy was that the whole history of Israel had been designed so that the Jews should recognize the Son of God when He came; but they had become so involved with their own ideas, so intent on their own way, so sure of their own conception of what religion was that they had become blind to God."⁵

Thus, **Jesus answered**, stating that it was evident that **ye neither know me, nor my Father; if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.** Jesus did not hesitate to declare that He had come to make known the Father and that, as the Son, He was the one and only way to the Father (14:6).

What are some lasting truths from John 8:16-19?

1. The judgment of the Lord is faithful and true.
2. Jesus, the Son, is one with the Father.
3. God the Father bears witness that Jesus is His Son.

4. Jesus came as the faithful Son on mission from the Father.
5. Jesus reveals the Father and is Himself the only way to Him.

LIVE IT OUT

Perhaps you have had the experience of being a tourist visiting a cave attraction. Once inside the cave many guides may illustrate how pervasive the darkness is by shutting off all the artificial lighting. Sometimes the group lets out a collective gasp at how dark it becomes. Little children hold tightly to their parents' hands. You really can't see your hand in front of your face! Then the guide turns on a small light source that begins to dispel the darkness and then the full lighting is restored. What a relief!

We once stood in the darkness of sin. The darkness was so great, we were overwhelmed by it. Jesus came as the guide and as the light. In Him, we saw life as it was intended to be. We saw clearly the way to live. What a relief!

What is your personal testimony of how Jesus brought light and life into your life? _____

To whom will you share the testimony that would encourage that person to allow Jesus to shine as light in the darkness of his or her life? _____

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

O Light of the World, shine into my life to dispel the darkness and show me the way to live as one who has eternal life. Amen.

¹James L. Sullivan, *John's Witness to Jesus* [Nashville: Convention Press, 1965], 64.

²Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968], 152.

³Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, in The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 4 [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999], 212.

⁴Whitacre, *John*, 212.

⁵William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, Revised Edition, in The Daily Study Bible Series [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975], 15.

SESSION 3

OUR NEED FOR PROTECTION

THE PASSAGE

John 10:7-15,27-30

THE POINT

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who can offer us ultimate protection.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Home security is big business. Burglaries occur every 15 seconds. Homes with security systems are three times less likely to be broken into and three-fourths of those burglaries are never completed because of the alarm system. Unfortunately, we don't always give the same attention to our spiritual lives. No matter how much protection we wrap around things, they can still be removed or destroyed by force or by natural disaster. However, we can have a life secure in Christ that nothing or no one can take from us or destroy.

THE SETTING

The content in John 10 flows naturally from the events described in chapter 9, the healing of the blind man and his subsequent challenge and rejection by the Pharisees. The Pharisees represent those who stand in opposition to the Lord and people of faith as well as inadequate and ineffective religious leaders who care more about themselves than they do those they lead. Whereas Jesus offers Himself as a door of entrance into the kingdom and protection from that which would destroy as well as leading out of a loving relationship those who follow Him and are in His care. In Him, all who believe are safe and secure—eternally.

GET INTO THE STUDY

Some Insights You Might Miss Without a Commentary

- ▶ The meaning of **verily** and the significance of it being said twice
- ▶ How Jesus' **I am** statements support His deity
- ▶ To whom **thieves and robbers** may refer
- ▶ The meaning of **lays down his life**
- ▶ The meaning of **more abundantly**
- ▶ The cultural background of the **good shepherd** analogy
- ▶ The shift in imagery from **thieves and robbers** to **an hireling**
- ▶ The differences between **an hireling** and a **shepherd**
- ▶ The meaning of **voice**
- ▶ The meaning of **eternal life**
- ▶ The meaning of **pluck**
- ▶ The meaning of **hand** in Scripture as applied to God
- ▶ That **man** in verse 28 was supplied by the translators and that Jesus was declaring that no one or no thing could break the grip the Father had on those who believe
- ▶ How Jesus and the **Father are one** and the implications of that truth

STUDY THE BIBLE

In this session, we are introduced to two more of the “I Am” statements: “I am the door” and “I am the Good Shepherd.” These images remind us that Jesus is the One through whom we enter the kingdom, the One who protects us against that which would threaten us, and the One who by His own sacrificial death secures us for eternity.

John 10:7-10

*How does this “I Am” statement of Jesus support His claim to be divine? In what two ways is He **the door**?*

⁷Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All that ever came before me

are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Jesus: The Door Who Protects and the Entryway to Abundant Life. First, let's identify to whom Jesus was speaking. To whom do the pronouns **them** and **you** in verse 7 refer, since His audience often included followers, curiosity seekers, and opponents? In this setting, His primary audience was the Pharisees to whom He had been speaking in John 9:40-41 and to whom He continued speaking in 10:1. They didn't understand what Jesus meant by saying they were "blind" (9:40). Neither did they understand the "parable" He used in verses 1-5. Thus, beginning in verse 7, He gave **them** an explanation. As in many other instances, Jesus introduced what He was about to say with **verily, verily**, also rendered as "Truly, truly" (NASB, ESV), "Very truly" (NIV), "I assure you," (HCSB), or "I tell you the truth" (NLT). **I say unto you**, along with the double use of **verily**, is another element of the introductory expression. It may also indicate this word was directly for them.

I is another use of a Greek emphatic, a grammatical construction that doubles the personal pronoun; thus, it may be understood as "I and I alone." What did Jesus mean in saying **I am the door of the sheep**? He is **the door** in two senses. First, **the door** is that which offered protection to the sheep from dangerous intruders. A shepherd did not leave his sheep out in the fields unattended where they could easily fall prey to wild animals or thieves and robbers. The shepherd constructed a "sheepfold" (v. 1) or pen to contain the sheep at night. In some cases, it might be a community sheep pen; a place where several families kept their sheep.

Even though most of the shepherds would retreat to their own shelter for the night, someone remained with the sheep to guard the entrance way. If the pen included a gate, he was the keeper of the gate. If the pen did not have a gate, the shepherd might lay across the opening where a gate or "door" might ordinarily have been placed. In that sense, he became like a "door" into the pen. He would be awakened if one of his sheep attempted to leave the pen; likewise, he would be

aware if some outside threat tried to enter the pen. The sheep was shielded by the shepherd from the predator—human or animal.

The phrase **all that ever came before me** is a general reference to previous spiritual leaders. He characterized them as **thieves and robbers**. The word **all** needs to be understood in context. Obviously, God had called out faithful leaders in the past to “shepherd” His people—men such as Moses, David, or the faithful prophets. But Israel’s history also was dotted with ungodly, selfish leaders, both in the political and religious arenas, who cared far more about themselves than those they led or the things of the God they claimed to serve (see Ezek. 34). In this saying, therefore, “Jesus refers to the false Messiahs and self-appointed leaders who made havoc of the flock. These are the thieves and robbers, not the prophets and sincere teachers of old.”¹ **The sheep did not hear them**. While some always fell into the trap of deceit, generally or eventually, people saw through the deceit because they came to know the voice of the true Shepherd (v. 27).

Jesus repeated this **I am** statement in verse 9, but with a different emphasis. He presented Himself as **the door** in the sense of being an entryway. **If any man enter in** the place of rest and safety from evil predators, **he shall be saved**, meaning “delivered,” “protected,” or “kept safe and sound.” He **shall go in**, where it is safe, but he shall also **go out, and find pasture**, meaning this person would enjoy the blessing of a dynamic relationship of protection and provision. The entryway is Jesus alone, Jesus only. “One can call this narrow intolerance, if he will, but it is the narrowness of truth. ... It is as unpalatable to the religious dogmatists before him as it is to the liberal dogmatists today.”²

Jesus contrasted the thief’s intentions with His own purpose. **The thief**, the deceitful teacher and uncaring leader, came **to steal** for his own benefit, and if it served his purpose, **to kill, and to destroy**. Jesus, on the other hand, came **that they might have life**. The pronoun **they** refers to the sheep in the illustration, which in turn means people who believed or followed Jesus. **Life** is the Greek word (*zoe*) John usually used when speaking about eternal life or the kind of vitality that only comes from God. The Greek language also had two other words that could be rendered “life.” *Psyche*, used in verse 11, referred to the general life principle of human beings. *Bios* denoted the categories of animals or the manner and substances that tend to define life for human beings.

The kind of life Jesus gives is not apportioned stingily—**that they might have it more abundantly**. **Abundantly** translates a word that means “‘overflowing all the edges around.’ The picture is that of a container with a pipe fitted in the bottom. From an inexhaustible spring, the water flows into the container. The water rises to the top, but still continues to come, so the container can only overflow.”³ The kind of life Jesus gives is constant, unending, and overflowing.

What are some lasting truths from John 10:7-10?

1. Jesus is the only way to enter eternal life.
2. Beware of false leaders, teachers, and preachers who promise more than they can deliver.
3. Eternal life in quantity is unending and in quality is the kind of life that comes from God.

John 10:11-13

*What “I Am” statement is the focus of these verses? What does **the good shepherd** do for His sheep? What character trait distinguishes **the good shepherd** from **the hireling**?*

¹¹**I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.** ¹²**But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.** ¹³**The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.**

Jesus: The Good Shepherd Who Cares for Us. Jesus makes a direct shift in imagery via another “I Am” statement: **I am the good shepherd**. The shepherd-sheep imagery is prominent in Scripture as a fitting metaphor for spiritual truth. The helpless nature and dependency of sheep pointed to their need for a shepherd and thus informed the qualities required of a good shepherd. The good shepherd provided guidance, provision, protection, and companionship for his sheep.

Just as in verse 7, **I** is an emphatic, meaning “I and I alone.” The word translated **good** is a comprehensive term that in addition to moral and ethical overtones includes the concepts of beauty, genuineness, appropriateness, worthiness, nobleness, and other similar

admirable and desirable qualities. **The good shepherd** stands in stark contrast to the “thief” both in character and purpose. The thief, moved by his own selfish disposition, came “to destroy.” **The good shepherd**, marked by selflessness, **giveth his life for the sheep**. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (HCSB, ESV). His was a sacrificial act wherein he willingly died for his sheep. In this case, **life** is the word for the human life principle (*psyche*). Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, would make the image a reality on the cross where He willingly gave His life **for** (meaning “on behalf of, instead of”) all humankind.

In another shift in imagery, Jesus spoke about the unqualified spiritual leaders and false messiahs as like **an hireling**. **An hireling** (“hired hand” NIV, ESV) was a day laborer who worked for wages. That was his primary interest—getting paid for his services rather than actually caring about the sheep under his watch. Spiritually speaking, **an hireling** lacked the necessary motivation to be an earnest and reliable spiritual leader.

Because **an hireling** was **not the shepherd** and **whose own the sheep are not** (“doesn’t own the sheep,” HCSB), his devotion to the sheep and commitment to caring for them was limited. One of the greatest predators of sheep was **the wolf**. Even if **an hireling** were to attempt to protect the sheep, he would not risk his life for them. Rather, upon seeing the threat posed by a wolf, the hired hand **leaveth the sheep, and fleeth**. Self preservation exceeded saving sheep, especially sheep that were owned by someone else. As a result, **the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep**. The word for **catcheth** also can be rendered “attacks” (NIV) or “snatches” (HCSB, ESV). The reason the hireling forsakes the sheep is clear: **he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep**. He cares more for himself and his wages than he does for the sheep. As we shall soon see, that is not the case with Jesus.

What are a couple of lasting truths from John 10:11-13?

1. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave Himself willingly and completely for us.
2. Beware of false teachers and leaders who focus only on themselves, who have no genuine concern for those under their care, and who would forsake and lead those under their care astray.

John 10:14-15,27-30

*How did Jesus describe the intimate relationship between **the good shepherd** and His **sheep**? To what other relationship did Jesus compare the relationship that existed between the Good Shepherd and His sheep? What blessing does the Good Shepherd give to those who follow Him? On what basis are all who believe secure? How did Jesus describe His relationship to the **Father**?*

¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. ¹⁵As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

.....
²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and my Father are one.

Jesus: The Good Shepherd Who Secures Us Eternally. Perhaps for clarity and emphasis Jesus repeated His claim: **I am the good shepherd.** Then He added, **I ... know my sheep.** Jesus cares about His sheep because He knows each one individually and personally. His knowledge is not superficial. The Greek word for **know** used in this instance means “to understand, perceive.” It is also used to refer to sexual intimacy, what should be the most trusting kind of knowledge between two people. Jesus knows us individually by name and personally in the deepest kind of way. He understands us better than anyone can, for He is able to probe the core of our being. Furthermore, Jesus said, **I ... am known of mine.** He invites and allows His own to know Him personally and with deep trust as well.

The way the statement **as the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father** is rendered in the King James Version, Jesus seems to be speaking only about His relationship to the Father. Other English translations connect this statement to verse 14. “I know My own sheep, and they know me, as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father” (HCSB; similarly NIV, ESV). Thus, Jesus was comparing His relationship to His

sheep as being like the relationship He has with the Father. While we do not have perfect knowledge as the Son and the Father have for one another, we are bound to Him in the same kind of way.

Because of the depth of the relationship the Good Shepherd has with His sheep, Jesus declared, **I lay down my life for the sheep.** He had made a similar statement in verse 11 using a third person pronoun. In this verse He used a first person pronoun, perhaps to clarify and to give emphasis to His character and His mission. The imagery was being given a direct application. He used the phrase **lay down** in reference to giving His life three more times in this discourse (vv. 17-18), a total of five times in eight verses (vv. 11-18).

Jesus' words sparked a debate among the Jewish leaders with some claiming He was to be ignored as "a devil" or a "mad" man (vv. 19-20). Others argued that His words and miracles could not be those of "a devil"; thus, implying they thought Him to be something more (v. 21).

Eventually (perhaps as long as three months later considering the reference to the Feast of Dedication and that it was winter), some of the Jews approached Him again seeking clarification on His identity (vv. 22-24). He said His words and actions should have been sufficient evidence of who He was. The problem was not with the adequacy of the revelation but the unwillingness to believe what had been made known (vv. 25-26). He again used the analogy of sheep in relationship to their shepherd (vv. 26-30).

The shepherd and his sheep coexisted in a meaningful relationship, perhaps like that which we may develop with a pet dog or cat. The sheep were primarily raised for their wool, so the shepherd enjoyed a long association with them. In that sense, the sheep got used to the shepherd's voice, came to rely on his protective presence, and confidently followed him.

Thus, Jesus' analogy expressed deep and tender truth about His relationship with those who believed, and they with Him. They would **hear** ("listen to," NIV, NLT) His **voice**—a word that captures both vocal sound and the speech uttered—and be comforted by it. His saying **I know them** was a way of assuring them of the depth of their relationship with Him (see v. 14). Therefore, they would gladly **follow** Him as a disciple follows a master.

Their relationship is marked by blessing. **I give unto them;** thus, the blessing was at His initiative. Foremost, He gives them **eternal**

life, which means life that is endless as to time and God-given as to quality. Because it is God's own kind of life, only He can give it. Therefore, **they shall never perish**.

Furthermore, they are blessed with security: **Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand**. **Man** was supplied by the translators. The Greek pronoun would allow an understanding that no one person, no one thing, no one event, and not even Satan could take them from Him. **Pluck** suggests an act of force. It is rendered "snatch" in several other English translations. (NASB, NIV, HCSB, ESV). Those who believe are in the clutch of His **hand**. **Hand** is frequently used in Scripture as a symbol of God's might, activity, and power in creation, in preserving and protecting His people, and in determining and controlling human destiny. The believers' security is not dependent on the believers' ability to hold on but on the ability of the Good Shepherd, who has an eternally firm grip on them. Thus, Jesus declared, "No one will snatch them out of my hand" (ESV).

In the prior verses, Jesus affirmed the depth of His relationship to the Father. In verse 29, He referred to Him as **My Father**. Those who are under the care of the Good Shepherd are those the Father had entrusted to Him. The relationship of the sheep to the Good Shepherd was by divine origin and through divine power. Because the Father **is greater than all; no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand**. Therefore, those who believe are secure in the hands of both the Father and the Son. "For God our Savior not only saves, but safeguards."⁴

In verse 24, the Jews had requested of Jesus, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." So here was His answer: **I and my Father are one**. He declared His deity, His equality, and His unity with God in every way, something John had asserted in the prologue to his Gospel. Jesus was not claiming to be the messiah as the Jews popularly understood the term, but He was from the Father as no other had ever been or would be. Because that is true, "there can be no greater security, no safer shelter, no more sure salvation, and no more clear signature than this relationship to the God of the Bible through His Son the Good Shepherd."⁵

What are some lasting truths from John 10:14-15,27-30?

1. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows us and enables us to know Him personally and intimately.
2. Jesus freely gave His life for us.

3. Jesus blesses those who believe in Him with eternal life.
4. No one or no thing can separate us from Jesus.
5. We are eternally secure in Jesus.

LIVE IT OUT

Our national leaders make promises, our government sets policies in place, and our law enforcement and military personnel put their lives on the line to make us secure as a people and nation. Even so, the truth is, our world is an insecure place. We live in an era of threats generated by people with hearts filled with hate.

Only one source of security is certain. We can only be secure in Jesus. Even those who may threaten and take the body cannot touch the soul (Matt. 10:28). All who trust in Jesus are protected and safe in Him. We take hope in that wonderful truth.

*When have you experienced the protection of Jesus as **the door** and **the Good Shepherd** from that which sought to harm or destroy you?* _____

How does knowing you are eternally safe in the Lord help you face difficult or even threatening times? _____

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Good Shepherd, I live today and face tomorrow believing I am eternally secure in Your hands. Amen.

¹A. T. Robertson, "The Fourth Gospel," in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5 [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932], 176.

²Robertson, "The Fourth Gospel," 177.

³Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Gospel of John: Invitation to Life* [Nashville: Convention Press, 1988], 63-64.

⁴Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968], 170.

⁵Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, in the Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000], 201.

SESSION 4

OUR NEED FOR HOPE

THE PASSAGE

John 11:17-27

THE POINT

Jesus is the resurrection who gives us life now and forever.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The moment we are born, our physical bodies are on a road that leads to death. We can eat right, exercise, and make healthy choices, but our bodies still wear out and die. A physical death, though, does not need to mean the end of life. Jesus offers us a life that never ends. Jesus died and rose again, conquering death. He is the resurrection and offers us a resurrected life.

THE SETTING

Because of intense opposition in Jerusalem, Jesus retreated eastward into the region beyond the Jordan River. While there, a messenger arrived with a word from dear friends Martha and Mary that their brother Lazarus was gravely ill. Jesus waited a couple of days before traveling to Bethany. Once He arrived, He was met by Martha. The verses in this session describe their conversation concerning the resurrection of the dead.

GET INTO THE STUDY

Some Insights You Might Miss Without a Commentary

- ▶ The setting for the verses to be studied in this session
- ▶ Some insight into burial and grieving customs in first-century Jewish society
- ▶ Various options for determining the timing of the **four days** in which Lazarus had been in the grave and their significance in the narrative
- ▶ The proximity of **Bethany** to **Jerusalem**
- ▶ Why it was a dangerous decision for Jesus to return to Bethany
- ▶ An explanation why Martha went to meet Jesus upon His arrival but Mary remained in the house
- ▶ Two views on Martha's tone of voice and attitude in her greeting of Jesus in verse 21
- ▶ Evidence that Martha was a person of faith in God and recognized something out of the ordinary about Jesus
- ▶ The meaning of **resurrection** and that it was a view held by many first-century Jews
- ▶ The meaning of **the last day**
- ▶ The fuller meaning of **believeth** as used in John's Gospel
- ▶ That Jesus used the words **dead** and **die** and **live** and **liveth** with physical and spiritual meanings
- ▶ The antecedent for **this** in verse 26
- ▶ The meanings of **the Christ** and **the Son of God** as applied to Jesus in verse 27

STUDY THE BIBLE

John 11 includes perhaps the most significant claim Jesus made about Himself. In the fifth of the seven "I Am" statements Jesus declared, **I am the resurrection and the life**. In this session, we are assured that because what Jesus said is true, if we believe in Him we can have sure hope in the face of death and receive new life for eternity.

This is the Evangelism Session for this quarter.

John 11:17-24

*How do you account for the **four days** from Lazarus's death until Jesus' arrival in Bethany? What in Martha's words upon Jesus' arrival suggest she was a woman with faith convictions? What hope did Jesus give her?*

¹⁷Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. ¹⁸Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: ¹⁹And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. ²⁰Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. ²¹Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ²²But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. ²³Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. ²⁴Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

A Sure Hope. One of the great obligations of Jewish culture during a time of death was to mourn with those who mourned. Mourning with others was—and still is—a way of identifying with the grieving ones and sharing in the pain of their loss. Even in our day, having others mourn with us brings comfort because we realize we do not stand alone in our sorrow. Mary and Martha—as was Lazarus—were Jesus' friends. Thus, Jesus did what a friend does for His friends, He came to them.

When Jesus arrived in **Bethany**, Jesus **found that he** [Lazarus] **had lain in the grave four days already.** In that culture, at death, burial took place quickly—usually the same day but at least within 24 hours—for they did not have the means to preserve bodies, and, for a Jew, being exposed to the dead rendered one ritually unclean. Embalming was not practiced by the Jews, but they did wrap corpses with cloth strips layered with perfumes and spices before sealing off the tomb. Tombs were cave-like places hewn out of rock, although some graves were dug into the ground. A rock tomb would be sealed by placing a large round rock in a stone trough at the tomb's opening. This would allow the rock to be moved more easily when the tomb was reopened to bury other family members.

That Lazarus had been **in the grave four days** probably means he had died four days prior. Jesus had waited two days after receiving word of Lazarus illness before journeying to Bethany (v. 6). Using simple math, this would suggest Jesus traveled two days to arrive in Bethany. Another option is that the four days consist of one day's travel by the messenger to Jesus, the two-day delay, and one day's journey from across the Jordan to the village of Bethany. In either scenario, Lazarus had died by the time Jesus had received the message from the sisters; thus, there was no reason for Jesus to rush to Bethany. Moreover, Jesus had something else in mind (vv. 4,15).

The **four days** could have other significance as well. Some Jewish sources describe a popular belief that the soul of the deceased hovered over the body for three days, hoping to reenter the body. After three days, the soul gave up and departed. Whether this belief was in the minds of those who gathered with Mary and Martha, we don't know, but that Jesus came and acted on the fourth day eliminated the possibility that some might claim that Jesus had nothing to do with Lazarus's restoration to life.

John included a detail about Bethany, perhaps to identify which Bethany he meant. He wrote, **now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off** or "about two miles away" (HCSB). The village was located east of the Mount of Olives and was the final stop before entering Jerusalem when traveling the primary east-west road coming from Jericho. A survey of the Gospels indicates that Jesus visited the village often. The proximity of the village to Jerusalem could explain why many others were able to gather at the family's home so quickly. And since Jesus had retreated from Jerusalem because of opposition, His willingness to return to an area so close to Jerusalem was a tribute to His friendship with the three siblings (notice Thomas's statement in v. 16).

As noted, Jesus and His disciples were not the first to arrive to lend support to the grieving sisters. **Many of the Jews came** the short distance from Jerusalem **to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother**. That others came from Jerusalem may suggest that the three siblings were well-known and highly regarded. Some of those who gathered could have been professional mourners, those who practiced specific techniques that were part of the culture's grieving process, such as loud weeping and wailing or dirges played

on flutes. The mourning period was extensive, broken down by some Bible commentators as including three days of very heavy mourning, four days of heavy mourning, and 23 days of light mourning, for a total of 30 days. Friends would be in and out during the whole time.

Word came that Jesus was approaching the village. **Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him.** Notice that Martha is oft named first in references to the two sisters. This leads some to believe she was the older of the two and maybe the more prominent one. She is portrayed as active and the consummate hostess. She may have gone out to greet Jesus because that is what a good hostess would do or maybe she went out to meet Him simply because, as the more aggressive one, she could not wait for Him to arrive. **Mary**, true to the way she appears in the Gospels, **sat still in the house.** “Mary remained seated in the house” (HCSB), which actually was the common practice for the grieving.

Views differ on how Martha’s initial comment to Jesus is to be understood. **Lord, if thou hast been here, my brother had not died.** Many read it as a mild rebuff, expressing her disappointment in Jesus because He had not arrived in time. However, there is another option. In light of the time frame described above, she too could have calculated that by the time Jesus got word of Lazarus’s illness that he already had died. Therefore, her statement was not a rebuff but a revelation of her faith that she truly believed that had Jesus been able to get there on time, He could have healed Lazarus of his sickness and he would not have died.

That Martha’s initial greeting was an expression of faith is supported by what she said next. She believed Jesus could have made a difference had He been there; she believed even in her grief, that He still could make a difference: **But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.** **Know** is the word that means “to perceive with understanding.” Just how much Martha understood about who Jesus was may not be clear, she apparently knew He was more than ordinary. His relationship to God was evident to her. She believed He had God’s ear, so to speak. Perhaps her statement included a subtle suggestion that if He asked, God would restore Lazarus to her and her sister; however, she did not demand Jesus do so.

In response, Jesus offered a word of encouragement and hope: **Thy brother shall rise again.** In Jewish culture, this was a common message to the grieving, much as it is in our day. But from Jesus, this

was more than a customary comment. His words were intended to assure her that death was not the end. Martha already knew that, saying, **I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.** **Know** is the same word used in verse 22. Many Jews, especially the Pharisees, in that era believed in a final resurrection.

Resurrection comes from a word that means literally “to stand up.” It came to mean “to rise up.” The concept of resurrection has roots in the Old Testament but became a major element of Jesus’ teaching and preaching. Of course, we cannot expect that Martha had a full understanding of the Christian doctrine of resurrection.

The last day comes from the belief that a final day would come in which God would act in judgment on the wicked and vindication of the righteous. That concept takes on a new meaning in light of Christ. In Him, the last days already have arrived. We only are waiting for their consummation when Christ comes again.

What are some lasting truths from John 11:17-24?

1. Jesus comes to us in our time of grief to comfort and strengthen us.
2. People of faith are to reach out to one another in difficult times.
3. Jesus makes a difference in our lives, even during our darkest moments.
4. Through Jesus, we have access to the Father.
5. The resurrection gives us hope that death is not the end of life.

John 11:25-26a

What did Jesus declare Himself to be? To whom does He personally become resurrection and life? What is the promised benefit that comes to the one who believes in Jesus? How can one who is dead, still have life? What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

²⁵Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

^{26a}And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

A New Life. Martha heard what Jesus said and she affirmed her belief in a future resurrection, but perhaps she also thought, *But I need help now.* “In one sense Martha stood in the presence of death, physical death. In another sense she stood in the presence of life,

everlasting spiritual life. Martha thought of a future resurrection. Jesus spoke of a present life.”¹

Jesus wanted Martha to move beyond belief in a theological concept to believing in a Person. He wanted her to believe He was more than one capable of healing; He was one capable of vanquishing death. Thus comes another great “I Am” declaration: **I am the resurrection, and the life.** The personal pronoun **I** is emphatic, as if to say, “I, and I alone.” **Am** is a present verb; thus Jesus declared what He is now. It is also a reminder of God’s personal name, Yahweh, that He revealed to Moses (Ex. 3:13-15). It further serves to remind us that Jesus Himself is divine.

Life ... live ... liveth are all derived from the word that John used in his Gospel when writing about eternal life, God’s kind of life manifested in Jesus—the Word, the Son of God, the Christ. Eternal life is not defined just in quantitative terms; neither is it life that begins only at death. Eternal life is the highest quality of life—because it’s God’s kind of life—that begins the moment one believes.

Moreover, by this declaration “Jesus does not merely say that He will bring about the resurrection or that He will be the cause of the resurrection (both of which are true), but something much stronger. ... Resurrection from the dead and genuine eternal life in fellowship with God are so closely tied to Jesus that they are embodied in Him and can be found only in relationship to Him.”² Therefore, in Him the future hope of which Martha spoke was a present reality.

Jesus also announced how such powerful vitality becomes effective in someone’s life: **he that believeth in me. Believeth** is a key word throughout John’s Gospel. Although John used the word in the sense of intellectual acceptance of a fact or truth, he did not stop there. John also used the word to refer to the conviction, commitment, trust, and full reliance to which a person is impelled by the truth to which he or she has given assent. In this case, it is belief in Jesus (**me**) and what He said—but more so, in who He is.

The benefit of believing seems illogical and impossible from a human or physical perspective. The words themselves seem contradictory—**though he were dead, yet shall he live.** “Though he die, yet shall he live” (ESV). How can that be, for death and life are such opposites? How can one who has died be alive? If that were not confusing enough, Jesus added, **and whosoever liveth and believeth**

in me shall never die. “Whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (NIV). **Never** is a strong double negative that can be rendered “will never ever die” (NLT).

Jesus used death and life in two different senses. He embodied the resurrected life that could overcome death. The one who believes in Jesus has eternal life even though he or she has died physically. Eternal life is not negatively affected by physical death. The one who is spiritually alive by believing in Jesus will die physically, but he or she will not die spiritually. Physical death is the means of transition from the old life of this world to the fullness of new life in eternity.

What lasting truths come from John 11:25-26a?

1. Jesus embodies within Himself the power to bring the dead to life.
2. Those who believe in, trust, and are committed to Jesus have the promise of eternal life.
3. The one who believes in Jesus already has eternal life.

John 11:26b-27

*What question did Jesus pose to Martha? Why do you think He asked if she believed? What was Martha's response? What does it mean to call Jesus **the Christ, the Son of God**?*

^{26b}Believest thou this? ²⁷She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

Only Believe. Enough discussion. Next, came a test of faith: **Believest thou this? This** refers to all Martha and Jesus had been discussing. Given the situation of Lazarus's death, could Martha move beyond theological concepts to practical application? Did she believe that even though she knew her brother had died and been buried for four days, that life still was a reality for him, if not in the flesh then in his spirit? Did she believe that Jesus alone was the resurrection and the life? Was her faith conviction about the reality of spiritual life so strong that even though Lazarus physically was dead, she could return to living her own life in the peace of knowing he lived?

Martha's answer was emphatic: **Yea, Lord: I believe.** But note what she believed: **that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which**

should come into the world. Perhaps she couldn't comprehend all the thoughts still racing through her mind. Maybe she wouldn't have known how to answer the questions posed in the paragraph above. But she did trust that Jesus was **the Christ**, the Messiah, which made up for what she didn't know or understand.

Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Both words mean "anointed one." In the Old Testament, the word often was applied to kings, but eventually the word took on an eschatological nuance to refer to the Anointed One who would appear in the last days. The New Testament declares that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this holy and divine Anointed One, **which should come into the world**. Other renderings are "who comes into the world" (HCSB); "who is coming into the world" (ESV); or "who has come into the world from God" (NLT). The verb tenses differ, but the intent behind the statement is the same.

Son of God is another way of speaking of the unique relationship of Jesus to God as His Father. As God's Son, Jesus enjoyed His supreme love, was united to Him with unparalleled intimacy, privy to His purposes, and obedient to His will in all things and ways, even to death on a cross for the salvation of the world.

The story does not end in verse 27, so we must not either. Following a brief exchange with Mary, Jesus asked to be taken to Lazarus's tomb (vv. 28-38). He ordered the rock to be removed from the opening. Some gasped because by this time decay had set in since Lazarus had been dead four days. Jesus reminded Martha that He had promised her that if she believed she would witness the glory of God (vv. 39-42).

After the stone was removed, Jesus prayed. Then "he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth" (v. 43), and he did! Lazarus stood there as a proof that Jesus holds sway over death and the grave. He indeed is the Resurrection and the Life!

What are some lasting truths from John 11:26b-27?

1. Our inability to understand completely the things of God is to be anchored in an unquestioned faith in Jesus and conviction that what He says is true and can be trusted.
2. Each person is confronted with a decision to declare who Jesus is.
3. Jesus is God's anointed Son who came into the world to do the Father's will and fulfil His plan for salvation.

LIVE IT OUT

This is Easter week. We remember the life and death of Jesus. Even though we reflect on the days of sorrow and grief, the story ends with celebration as we declare the message of His resurrection. Gloriously, we cry out, “Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!” We do not worship a martyr; we worship the Risen Lord.

By His own resurrection Jesus gave validity to His claim that He is “the resurrection, and the life.” Both are centered in Him, and Him alone. Thus, we claim the hope; we receive the new life; and we invite friends, neighbors, family members, and yes, all the inhabitants of the world to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Recall a time when Jesus’ claim to be the resurrection and the life brought comfort and hope to you in a time of sorrow and grief.

How have you been encouraged to reenter life because of your belief that a love one who died is alive in Christ? _____

Who do you know for whom this is the first Easter since the death of a loved one? _____

How can you reach out to give the ministry of encouragement and hope to that person during these days? _____

What opportunity might you have this week to share your own testimony with a friend or family member and affirm your belief in Jesus as the resurrection and the life? _____

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Lord, I too believe You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is the Resurrection and the Life. Amen.

¹Herschel H. Hobbs, “Everlasting Life,” in *Studying Adult Life and Work Lessons*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January–March 1991 [Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1990], 48.

²*The ESV Study Bible*, Study Note on John 11:25 [Wheaton: Crossway Books, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, 2001], 2045-2046.

SESSION 5

OUR NEED FOR PEACE

THE PASSAGE

John 14:1-7

THE POINT

Jesus is the way to the Father, therefore, we can live in peace.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We must be on our guard not to let the daily news and world events overwhelm us. Nations are at odds, groups within our nation fight among themselves, economies are on the brink of collapse, and nothing feels safe or secure. Any one of these issues would be cause for anxiety. But Jesus offers us something beyond the turbulent, insecure world we live in. Jesus is the way to the Father and an eternal home with Him.

THE SETTING

These few verses from John 14 are part of an extended conversation Jesus had with His disciples earlier on the evening of His arrest. Jesus' intent was to prepare them for what was about to unfold not just in the next several hours but even beyond. Troubled as they were, Jesus instructed them on how to know peace—peace that could only come from the Father. He declared He was the only way to the Father.

GET INTO THE STUDY

Some Insights You Might Miss Without a Commentary

- ▶ Two ways **believe** in John 14:1 is rendered in major English translations
- ▶ The meaning of **believe**—beyond merely indicating intellectual assent
- ▶ Possible imagery behind **Father's house**
- ▶ What Jesus meant by **mansions**
- ▶ Alternate punctuation and rendering of verse 2
- ▶ The meaning of **receive**
- ▶ Alternate rendering of verse 4
- ▶ The various meanings of **way** as applied to Jesus
- ▶ The meaning of **truth** as applied to Jesus
- ▶ The meaning of **life** as applied to Jesus
- ▶ The interpretation that considers **way ... truth ... life** as absolutes
- ▶ An interpretation that understands **truth** and **life** to describe why Jesus is the only **way**
- ▶ That by His statement in verse 7 Jesus once more acknowledged His unique relationship to God the Father
- ▶ An explanation for the difference in the verb tense for **had known** (v. 7) and that found in other English translations

STUDY THE BIBLE

Jesus acknowledged that His disciples were troubled. We would say they had cause to be. Jesus had told them one of their associates would betray Him and another would deny Him three times before morning. If that were not enough, He began to talk about leaving them. The fact that He just had spoken of the meal they had observed as a memorial, certainly suggested death. Yet, Jesus called on His disciples to believe in God and in Him. He was going away, but only to prepare a place for them. He promised He would come back for them so they could be with Him. Through another “I Am” statement, Jesus declared He is the way to the Father, the essence of truth, and the embodiment of divine life. Thus in Him, they (and we) could find peace for their troubled hearts.

John 14:1

*What corrective did Jesus offer for the disciples' **troubled** hearts? How are we to understand the word **believe**? Was Jesus affirming their belief or calling for them to believe?*

¹Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

The Remedy for a Troubled Heart. Jesus sought to allay His disciples' troubled spirits: **Let not your heart be troubled.** “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (NIV, NASB, similarly NLT). Of course, **heart** is not the internal body organ but refers to the seat or center of one's being that includes emotion, intellect, spirit, and will. The verb for **be troubled** “is used of an ocean caught in the teeth of a storm.”¹ The disciples were **troubled** in their **heart** like waves surging and being tossed about by a storm's fury. “Jesus told His apostles to stop letting the storm trouble them.”² Apparently, they bore some responsibility for what they allowed to trouble and control them—a truth that ought not to be lost on us. Even so, what could they—and we—do?

Jesus admonished His friends to deal with their troubles with an attitude of trust. While John used the word **believe** in his Gospel in the sense of intellectual acceptance of a truth, he did not stop there. The Greek word for **believe** also includes trusting, being committed to, and relying on to the highest degree.

In this verse both uses of **believe** are the same Greek verb form, but it can be rendered two different ways—as illustrated in the King James Version's rendering—as a second person plural present active indicative, that is, as a statement of fact (**ye believe**), in the first instance, and as a present active imperative, a command, (**believe**), in the second instance. Thus, are we to understand the words as indicatives, as imperatives, or as a combination of the two (as in the KJV)? In other words, was Jesus stating a fact, issuing a command, or doing both?

The rendering in the King James Version (and the New King James Version) is a combination of the indicative and the imperative. By saying, **ye believe in God** Jesus was affirming their belief—trust, commitment, reliance—in God. When He said, **believe also in me** He

was enjoining them to **believe** (trust, commit, rely on) in Him in the same way as they believed in God. Therefore, Jesus was identifying Himself as being on the same level with God; thus, another statement of His divine nature. The New International Version follows this same pattern: “You believe in God; believe also in me.” *The Message* paraphrase does as well: “You trust God, don’t you? Trust me.”

Several other contemporary English translations render both phrases as present active imperatives: “Believe in God; believe also in me” (NASB, NRSV, HCSB, ESV, similarly NLT). A more literal translation based on the present tense of the verb could be “keep on believing in God, and keep on believing in Me.” If they were to overcome their troubled feelings, it would come at the point of exercising unwavering trust in God and in the Son who was making Him known, for can one truly believe in God if he or she does not believe in Jesus, His Son?

What are some lasting truths from John 14:1?

1. Believers do not have to live in fear if they live by faith.
2. Troubled hearts can be overcome by trust.
3. True belief in God includes believing in Jesus.

John 14:2-4

*What is the intent of the word **mansions**? In what way did Jesus model telling truth? What promises of assurance do you see in these verses? What joyous experience of heaven gives believers hope and peace during troubled times?*

²In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. ⁴And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

An Eternal Place of Peace. The disciples were troubled by the thought of being separated from Jesus or being excluded from His presence. Jesus addressed this concern in verses 2-4. He acknowledged His imminent departure, but His leaving would be for their benefit: **I go to prepare a place for you.** It was customary that when guests and friends were to be received for a meal that someone would

go ahead of time to make things ready. For example, Jesus had sent Peter and John ahead to prepare for the Passover meal they had just observed. In the same sense, Jesus' leaving was only to make things ready for them to come to Him later. His preparation for them would include His death, resurrection, ascension, and advocacy on their behalf before the Father.

Where was Jesus going to make such preparations? **In my Father's house.** Note again Jesus identified and associated Himself with God the Father. Sometimes the temple in Jerusalem was referred to as the **Father's house**, for it represented the place of His presence. Perhaps drawing on that imagery, Jesus declared that He was going to the abode of the Father, meaning heaven, God's everlasting habitation. Lest the disciples wondered if there was a place or room for them there, Jesus assured them there was ample space in a place prepared with them in mind: **In my Father's house are many mansions.**

The reference to **mansions** has been variously understood, or perhaps misunderstood. The Greek word for **mansions** (*monai*) has roots in the word that means "to abide, to remain." Therefore, originally *monai* meant a "dwelling place." In early usage, the English word *mansion* also meant "a dwelling place," but in time, it evolved into a reference to a larger dwelling such as the manor house of a feudal lord. Thus, the word took on certain socioeconomic implications that, unfortunately, have contributed to our thinking of heaven from a materialistic viewpoint wherein individuals looked forward to a heavenly **mansion**.

Jesus' point was not intended to feed the view of heaven in which the value and beauty of heaven is measured by earthly standards. His emphasis was on there being a place for each one of His followers, ample space for all people of God. "In my Father's house are many rooms" (ESV). *Rooms* would be consistent with the reference to **my Father's house**. The disciples had no reason to be troubled that they would be excluded; the Father had a room for them in His house. If they truly believed Him, they would know Jesus was telling them the truth. However, truth is not only saying what is but also what is not. Therefore, Jesus continued, **if it were not so, I would have told you.** They could count on Him to tell the truth either way.

Some translations punctuate verse 2 differently than that found in the King James Version, though it has minimal effect on the meaning.

For example, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (ESV; similarly NIV). The Holman Christian Standard Bible follows the pattern of the King James Version: “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you.” Nevertheless, the facts are the same. There is room in the dwelling place of God for all who believe. We are assured of that because Jesus has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us.

And if I go—which He would—**and prepare a place for you**—which He also would—**I will come again**. Most interpreters agree **come again** is an allusion to the Second Coming of Jesus. **I will** expresses a promise, for Jesus offered more than a possibility. His promise to return would be supported by the words of the angels to those gathered as Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11) and by a multitude of other New Testament passages, especially from the pens of Paul and Peter, that anticipate the return of Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Pet. 3:8-10). Subsequently, John himself would write a book to describe the meaning of Jesus’ coming again as the consummation of history and the glorification of the saints in the presence of the Eternal God and His Victorious Son (Rev. 1:7-8; 22:7,20).

Jesus’ coming again is associated with His plan to **receive** His followers unto Himself. To **receive** is “to take to,” “to take to one’s self.” “I will come again and will take you to myself” (ESV). “And when all things are ready, He will come for us to welcome us into the Father’s house. In one sense this coming again may be seen as the death of the individual Christian. But in the greater, inclusive sense it refers to His return at the end of the age.”³

The great Day of the Lord throughout Scripture was considered a day of judgment on the wicked. However, it also represents a day of victory for the faithful. The conditional sentence that begins with **if I** (v. 3) concludes with a purpose clause beginning with **that—that where I am, there ye may be also**. The purpose of Jesus’ leaving—an allusion to His death—and His return—the Second Coming—is that the disciples, and all believers, would be with Him forever. It is a promise of eternal fellowship. Whatever else we may think heaven to be or to be like, one thing is certain: heaven is heaven because we will be where Jesus is. Therein is hope and peace for troubled hearts.

In verse 4, Jesus began to transition toward the next element of His instruction concerning peace for their troubled hearts. Once more, we encounter some differences in translation. According to the King James Version, Jesus affirmed that they knew where He was going: **Whither I go ye know**. In addition, He affirmed they knew the way to get there: **and the way ye know**. However, Thomas's question in verse 5 suggests they did not know *the where* or *the way*.

Verse 4 could be rendered as a question: "You know the way to where I am going, don't you?" Even so, most newer translations render it as a statement with the focus being on *the way* not *the where*—for example, "You know the way to where I am going" (HCSB). The important matter is *the way*. How sad to spend excessive time speculating on *what the place is like* but miss *how to get there*.

What are some lasting truths from John 14:2-4?

1. Jesus has prepared a place in heaven for all who believe in Him.
2. Believers can live in anticipation that Jesus will come again.
3. Heaven is the abode of God, where we will live eternally with Jesus.
4. We will not know what heaven is like if we do not know the way to get there.

John 14:5-7

*In what ways did Thomas's question indicate he (and the others) still did not understand what Jesus had been saying to them? What is the "I Am" statement Jesus used to answer Thomas? How do you understand Jesus as **the way, the truth, and the life**? How can we **know** what God the Father is like?*

⁵Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ⁶Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. ⁷If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

The Only Way to the Father. The events and conversation of the evening had generated several questions in the minds of Jesus' disciples. Peter often was the one to voice the question (13:6,36-37) or

to suggest someone else do so (vv. 23-25). In this instance, however, **Thomas** was the one to raise a question in response to Jesus' statement in verse 4. We popularly call Thomas the Doubter; it might be more accurate to think of Him as a serious inquirer and concrete thinker who wanted to be certain he understood what was taking place.

Probably voicing what the others were thinking, Thomas was bold enough to say he didn't know the destination of which Jesus spoke—**We know not whither thou goest**. Peter had asked that question earlier (13:36). Jesus' words in 14:1-3 were in some sense an answer to the where question, but, as was often the case, the disciples did not have full understanding. Therefore, Thomas added, **and how can we know the way?** Since they did not know where Jesus was going, how could they know the way to get there? Literally, **the way** referred to a road or highway; figuratively it referred to the mode, manner, or means by which something is accomplished. Apparently, Thomas thought Jesus used **the way** in terms of geography; Jesus used **the way** theologically. Nevertheless, **the way**—that is just what Jesus wanted to talk about and the truth He wanted them to grasp.

Jesus saith unto him, but in truth, Jesus' answer was not only for Thomas but for all of the apostles and for all humankind. **I am the way**. Here is another of Jesus' "I Am" statements. **I** is emphatic: "I and I alone." **Am** is another reminder of His identity with the God (Ex. 3:13-15). Jesus is **the way, the truth, and the life**. **Truth** is that which is true in fact, in reality, and in certainty; not partially but absolutely. **Life** is the Greek word *zoe* that John usually used when speaking about eternal life or the kind of vitality that only comes from God. It is life in all its fullness; life that is real and genuine. That each word is accompanied by the definite article **the** suggests that each is to be understood as an absolute. Jesus is not one way, some truth, or an element of life. He is the only way, all truth, and the complete source of life. However, some Bible teachers understand **truth** and **life** to explain **way**. Thus, Jesus is the way because He is the revealer of truth and the giver of life.

Still the question: **the way** to where? **Truth** about what? **Life** from where? Jesus further explained, **No man cometh unto the Father, but by me**. Jesus made possible access to the Father; He is the true revelation of the Father; He is the source of the kind of life only the Father gives—eternal life. Some reject the exclusivity of this

statement, but obviously, Jesus had no hesitation in making the claim. He is who He said He is. Being confronted with His claim, we are left to decide whether we believe Him.

Jesus continued to point to His unique relationship to the Father and hence to His own deity: **If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.** Not just *the* Father, but *my* Father. Jesus had brought to them a full revelation of His Father (recall 1:18). The word rendered **known** in this verse is from a different word for “know” than that used in verses 5-6. The Greek word Jesus used in verse 7 generally means “to know by experience” as opposed to knowing by perception. Thus, if they had known, or knew by experience, Jesus, they should have known by experience His Father also. The rendering in the King James Version could be understood as a slight rebuke. Some newer translations, relying on different manuscripts, render the verse as a promise: “If you know Me, you will also know My Father” (HCSB; similarly NRSV, NIV).

Even if they had not recognized the Father in the Son earlier, they now were without excuse: **from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.** “From now on you do know Him, and have seen Him” (HCSB; very similarly, NASB). Jesus clearly had revealed to them that He is the way, truth, and the life through whom they could know by experience the Father.

What are some lasting truths from John 14:5-7?

1. Jesus is the only access to the Father, His true and faithful revelation, and the center of the life He gives.
2. If Jesus is the incarnate Son of God—and He is—then what He says about Himself and the promises He extends are without doubt to be accepted as true.
3. We know God the Father through our faith experience with Jesus the Son.

LIVE IT OUT

New Testament expositor William Barclay suggested this analogy. Suppose you are in a strange town looking for a particular location. You stop for directions. The person clearly knows the place you are seeking, but his directions are complicated by the fact you do not know the layout of the streets and are not familiar with the sites he identifies

to mark where you are to turn. Try as you may to follow what he said, you get lost before you are anywhere near the location you are seeking. “But suppose the person we ask says: ‘Come. I’ll take you there.’ In that case the person to us *is* the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us; He strengthens us and guides us personally every day. He does not tell us about the way; He is the Way.”⁴

If we are looking for peace, Jesus shows us the way. If we are seeking the Father, Jesus reveals the truth about Him. If we are longing for fullness of life, in Jesus we find it. He is present with us even in the midst of troubled times. But even greater, He gives us the promised hope of life eternally in the place He has prepared just with us in mind.

Recall a time when you were troubled but found peace because of your trust in the Father made known through the Son. How did that experience encourage you at other times when your heart was troubled? _____

How does Jesus’ promise that He is preparing a permanent place for you in heaven give you peace in times of trouble and anxiety?

How does Jesus’ claim that He is the only way to the Father encourage you so you do not need to worry but can have peace?

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Dear Jesus, thank You for being the way into the presence of the Father wherein I find peace for my troubled heart. Amen.

¹Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Gospel of John: Invitation to Life* [Nashville: Convention Press, 1988], 81.

²Hobbs, *The Gospel of John: Invitation to Life*, 81.

³Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968], 219.

⁴William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, Revised Edition, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975], 157.

SESSION 6

OUR NEED FOR PURPOSE

THE PASSAGE

John 15:1-8

THE POINT

Jesus is the vine who empowers us to live productive lives for God.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We tend to fill our lives with a multitude of activities: work responsibilities, religious functions, sporting events, and community projects. Some people like to boast about how busy they are. But the question underlying all this busyness is: What's the purpose? Why do all you do? For some people, being busy—no matter what they are doing—gives them a sense of worth; it masks feelings of inadequacy and purposelessness. However, when a person is in a right relationship with Jesus and abides in Him, such a person discovers a sense of worth and purpose that glorifies God.

THE SETTING

John 15 is a continuation of Jesus' farewell discourse to His disciples the evening of His arrest. Perhaps the discussion took place as He and His disciples walked along the way from the room where they had observed the Passover toward the Garden of Gethsemane. Along the pathway they may have passed some grapevines, some branches alive and heavy with fruit; other branches barren because they were dead. Here was the perfect image for teaching His disciples the nature of a relationship with Him. Thus, Jesus declared, **I am the true vine.**

Like branches attached to a vine, Jesus' followers are to abide or remain in Him to produce spiritual fruit for God.

GET INTO THE STUDY

Some Insights You Might Miss Without a Commentary

- ▶ The frequent use of the vine-branch-vineyard imagery in the Old Testament
- ▶ The meaning of **true**
- ▶ The significance of **my Father is the husbandman**
- ▶ The meaning of **taketh away**
- ▶ To whom **every branch that beareth not fruit** refers
- ▶ To whom **every branch that beareth fruit** refers
- ▶ Synonyms of **purgeth**
- ▶ The benefit of pruning in providing for the healthy and productivity of the vine
- ▶ The specific audience addressed in verse 3
- ▶ The meaning of **clean** and that it comes from the same root as **purgeth**
- ▶ How the **word** Jesus has **spoken** cleans
- ▶ Options for understanding those who are **cast forth ... withered ... cast into the fire ... are burned**
- ▶ The conditions that are to affect the substance of our prayers and God's response to them
- ▶ The meaning of **glorified**
- ▶ A possible intent of Jesus' reference to producing **more fruit** and **much fruit**

STUDY THE BIBLE

Generally, Jesus' "I Am" statements were an invitation to come to Him to receive eternal life. This final "I Am"—**I am the true vine**—is addressed to those who already had done so. Having heeded the call to come to Him, Jesus urged them to remain or abide in Him. Only then could they live life in all its fullness and bear fruit that brought glory, honor, and pleasure to God.

John 15:1-3

*What is the seventh and final of Jesus' "I Am" statements found in John's Gospel? Who is **the husbandman**? What two actions does the husbandman take? What is the husbandman's purpose for taking those actions? To whom was Jesus referring in verse 3? How had they been cleansed?*

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ²Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ³Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

God Prunes Our Lives to Make Us Productive for Him.

The imagery of the vine and branches or the vineyard is rooted in the Old Testament and was common to the Mediterranean world because of the abundance of vineyards in the region. Isaiah used the image in 5:1-10 and 27:2-6. Another less developed use can be found in Jeremiah 6:9. Some historians document that the temple in Jerusalem was marked with images of a vine with grape clusters hanging from it and that a vine was used to represent Jerusalem on some ancient coins. Thus, the vineyard or vine became a symbol for Israel.

The theme of judgment is associated with virtually every use of the imagery of the vineyard in the Old Testament. For example, in Isaiah 5:1-10 Israel is compared to a vineyard, which though it had been given proper care by the vineyard keeper, produced only "wild grapes." Therefore, the vineyard eventually was destroyed. The image was used to warn Israel that their nation would be subject to judgment because God looked for justice and righteousness but all He saw was injustice and wretchedness.

Whereas Israel was lacking in its ability to produce fruit pleasing to God because it failed in its mission as God's chosen people, Jesus declared, **I am the true vine**. **True** refers to that which not only has the name of being something or just looks like a particular thing but *is* that thing and has a nature that fully corresponds to it. Therefore, Jesus declared Himself to be what a vine is expected to be by the vinedresser—a vine that produces fruit that is pleasing to the

vinedresser or owner. Although Israel, and especially the religious leaders of the people, claimed to be the faithful people of God, their refusal to accept Jesus as God's Son proved they were not and subjected them to being cut off from Him and the Father.

Jesus, as God's Son, was the faithful and true vine, who stood in right relationship to the Father and whose only desire was to produce that which resulted in God's glory. He is the true vine through whom the Father would accomplish His redemptive purpose. "Israel's place as the people of God is now taken by Jesus and His disciples, the vine and the branches. This is not a rejection of Judaism as such, but its fulfillment in its Messiah. The identification of the people of God with a particular nation is now replaced with a particular man who incorporates in Himself the new people of God composed of Jews and non-Jews."¹

My Father is the husbandman—"gardener" (NIV, NLT), "vineyard keeper" (HCSB), or "vinedresser" (NASB, ESV). By this imagery, Jesus acknowledged God the Father as the sovereign one. Thus, as He always did, Jesus declared His dependence on and His subordination to the Father, just as a vine is under the authority of the gardener.

Verse 2 is a summary of the vinedresser's work in tending to the branches. **Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.** The fruitless or dead branches are broken off, for dead wood can be diseased and infect other branches. **And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it.** The productive branches are purged or pruned of their shoots. An untrimmed vine with long shoots loses its ability to produce fruit, for the strength of the vine is given more to producing shoots than to producing fruit. Therefore, the vineyard keeper trims the shoots so the branches **may bring forth more fruit.** Pruning the branches of these shoots proves to be in the best interest of the branches' health and productivity.

The image pictures how God deals with those who claim a connection with Jesus. He removes those in whom the life of Christ does not truly exist. They only have, as A. T. Robertson and Herschel Hobbs described it, a cosmic connection that bears no fruit. They say they are God's people, but in reality they are not. Yet, those who have a vital spiritual connection, who truly have life in Christ, He cleanses and disciplines, so they may be prepared for and enabled to engage in more fruitful activity.

Jesus moved from the general instruction of verse 2 to a specific word in verse 3 directed to the faithful men who stood before Him—**Now ye are clean.** **Now** may be rendered “already” (NASB, HCSB, ESV), suggesting something had occurred in the past with significance in the present. **Clean** comes from the same root as the word **purgeth**. The cleansing had occurred **through the word which I have spoken unto you.** “Because of the word” (HCSB) or “message” (NLT) Jesus had spoken to them as His disciples—a message that condemned sin and called for holy living and spiritual productivity—and their response to it, they had undergone a purging or pruning process that freed them from the destructiveness of their sin and conditioned them that they might keep on serving Him.

What are some lasting truths from John 15:1-3?

1. Jesus is the faithful and true one through whom God accomplishes His redemptive purpose.
2. God is Father, or Sovereign, over all creation.
3. God acts in our lives in ways that ultimately bring glory and pleasure to Him.
4. Those who only pretend to be His will be cut off.
5. Those who are truly His will be cleansed and disciplined so they will be able to accomplish that which pleases and glorifies God.

John 15:4-7

*What is essential if one is to be spiritually effective, or fruitful? How did Jesus describe the relationship between Himself and believers? What did He say that makes it clear believers are completely dependent on Him? Whom do you think the **withered** branches represent? What is to shape our praying so we receive a positive response from the Lord?*

⁴**Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If ye abide in**

me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

We Bear Spiritual Fruit When We Remain in Him. The spiritual vitality and productivity of a follower of Jesus is dependent on abiding in Him, and He in them. Thus, Jesus said, **Abide in me, and I in you.** **Abide** means “to remain or stay where you are.” “Remain in me, as I also remain in you” (NIV). These words suggest ongoing mutual fellowship. The imperative verb form denotes this relationship is an absolute necessity.

The reason abiding is a necessity is because **the branch cannot bear fruit of itself.** Productivity or fruitfulness is impossible **except it** [the branch] **abide in the vine** or “unless it remains on the vine” (HCSB). “The branch gets its life from the vine. At the same time it is evident that grapes grow on the branches, not on the vine itself. However, apart from the vine there would be no branches to bear fruit. They need each other, and they must be vitally connected.”²

Jesus then made the application: **No more can ye, except ye abide in me.** “And you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me” (NLT). Christians cannot bear fruit nor do that which is pleasing to the Father apart from being in fellowship with Christ and drawing life from Him.

The natural and oft-asked question is, *What is the fruit of which Jesus spoke?* Some Bible interpreters strongly believe Jesus was referring to leading another person to become a Christian. Thus the reference is to an evangelistic outcome. Others think the fruit is godly, righteous living. Thus, the fruit is faithful discipleship. It may well be both. If we live faithful, godly lives, we will be engaged in influencing others to come to Christ; it is the natural outcome. If our evangelistic action is not supported by godly living, our witness is negated and our spiritual productivity will be ineffective.

Jesus expanded on what He had just said: **I am the vine, ye are the branches.** The pronouns **I** and **ye** are emphatic, emphasizing the role of each, as if to say, “I and I alone” and “you and you alone.” Nevertheless, the two belong together. The **vine** is the main trunk; the **branches** are the off shoots from the vine. Therefore, Jesus is the primary One to whom His disciples are connected. Furthermore, they are completely dependent on Him: **He that abideth in me, and I in**

him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. In fact, **without** Him they have no life and no promise of productivity. They **can do nothing**. “For apart from me you can do nothing” (ESV).

Jesus returns to speaking about the fruitless branches. **If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.** **Withered** means “dead and dry.” **Men gather** such branches **and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.** “He is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (ESV).

Verse 6 proves troubling to some, especially to those who are concerned Jesus was suggesting that some professed believers lose their connection to Him or are severed from Him and destroyed. However, that view would be in conflict with the greater message of Scripture on the security of the redeemed.

Other Bible teachers see verse 6 as referring to those who, like the reference in verse 2, have only a cosmic or nominal connection to Christ but not a faithful, vital one. In simple terms, they were not true believers. You cannot lose what you do not have. An example existed among Jesus’ own camp. Judas was a nominal follower of Jesus at best and a false follower in truth; he had a surface relationship with Jesus, but Judas proved he did not truly believe in Jesus.

The relationship between Jesus and His disciples is anything but superficial, especially on His side, as verse 7 shows. Jesus responds to His disciples in their time of need. However, the promise He offers is not a blank check. Note the condition. **If** introduces a conditional clause. The promise will be met when the condition is met. **If ye abide in me** defines the relationship that must exist; the same relationship spoken of in the previous verses. **If ... my words abide in you** defines the obedience that is expected. If His word truly has been received and accepted as true, then we will act upon it. This is more than intellectual memorization; this is absorption in the heart, meaning the center of our being.

Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. We may ask, *Doesn’t that sound like an open promise?* Not in the context of the first words of the verse. Believers who are in right relationship with the Lord and who know, accept, and obey His word will not be focused on self and pray only selfish prayers. To be in right relationship with Him and to be committed to His word will so shape

believers' lives, wants and desires, longings, and thinking that they will be searching for God's will and have a genuine concern for others as well. This does not mean believers never ask for anything for themselves, but even then, they ask for those things that will strengthen their relationship with Him, be true to His word, and that will enable them to be spiritually productive in ways that honor His will and bring Him glory. When those conditions are met, believers will be in agreement with the Lord; therefore, **it** [what you ask] **shall be done unto you**, meaning His followers.

What are some lasting truths from John 15:4-7?

1. True believers are those who live in right relationship with Jesus, abiding in Him and allowing Him to abide in them.
2. We have no ability or power to do anything of eternal significance apart from being in an abiding relationship with Christ.
3. Those who are not true believers are subject to the judgment and punishment of God.
4. Those who are true believers will seek the Lord's will and ask Him for that which fulfills His purpose and brings Him glory; they will not ask from purely selfish motives and for selfish ends.

John 15:8

*How is the Father **glorified**? How does one offer proof he or she is a true disciple of Jesus?*

⁸Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

God Is Glorified When We Bear Fruit for Him. The believer's greatest desire is to bring glory to the Father. How is that accomplished? That is the focus of verse 8. In the words **herein is my Father glorified**, **herein** can be rendered "by this" (NASB, HCSB, ESV). **Glorified** comes from a word meaning "praised," "magnified," or "honored." It is to lift up the Father so He is made known and acknowledged as sovereign God. Jesus' reference to the Father as **my Father** suggests this was a major concern to Jesus, the Son. That becomes a reason why followers of Jesus desire to bring glory to the Father: it matters to Jesus and it was the focus of His own life (17:4).

So, what is covered by the word **herein** or “this,” which will bring glory to God? **That ye bear much fruit.** We have identified possible options for the meaning of **fruit** in the discussion on verse 4. Notice in verse 2 the reference was to “more fruit,” in verse 5 “much fruit,” and again “much fruit” in verse 8. The point is not that we get caught up in measuring success and becoming competitive with one another. The emphasis is on doing the best we can do. As believers, we are not to grow satisfied with where we are in our service to the Lord but to strive to do more of what pleases Him and to do as much as we can to bring Him glory.

Such is the mark of discipleship: **So shall ye be my disciples. So** refers to fruit-bearing. “You bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (NASB, ESV). “You bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (NIV). **Disciples** are learners devoted to their master or teacher. If we are learners of Christ; if He is our Master, then we strive to be more like Him by obeying His instruction and living like Him.

Once more, we may conclude, those who profess to believe but who do not obey His Word, continue to learn from Him, or live lives that reflect Him raise serious questions as to whether they are truly His disciples.

“If branches do not bear [fruit], they bring disappointment. How much they are like church members who profess but who do not practice. If professing Christians do not produce fruit, does not their barrenness suggest that they have no actual connection with the vine?”³

What are some lasting truths from John 15:8?

1. True believers desire to glorify their Heavenly Father.
2. Believers bring glory to the Father by their spiritual fruit, meaning the quality and the effectiveness of their lives lived for Christ.
3. Our spiritual productivity is a proof that we are true disciples.

LIVE IT OUT

What stands out in this portion of Jesus’ teaching His disciples is that He had expectations for them; they were to be about something; they were to be spiritually productive; they were to make a difference to others; they were to bring glory to the Father. A disciple of Christ is

not a passive believer who rests in spiritual security until Jesus comes again to take him or her to heaven. Yes, believers are secure, Jesus will come again, and heaven is to be gained. But, as Peter framed it in his second letter, “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11). We may paraphrase it to say, “What shall we be and what shall we do while we wait?”

Jesus urged His disciples to live like they were His disciples. He expected them to do those things that demonstrated they were His disciples. They could only be and do what He expected by staying connected to Him and acting in His power. Discipleship is anything but passive. It is acting for the Lord according to His power for God’s glory.

How has God worked in your life, even through difficult circumstances, to prepare you to be a more effective disciple rendering productive service for Him? _____

What kinds of spiritual disciplines do you need to strengthen your relationship with Jesus? _____

In what ways do you believe you are living a life that brings glory to God and gives evidence to others that you are a disciple of Jesus? _____

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Dear Lord Jesus, I am grateful for my salvation, but help me not to live passively in that assurance. May I demonstrate to You and others that I am a true child of God who is connected through Christ by living in ways that bring You glory. Amen.

¹Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, in The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 4 [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999], 372.

²Herschel H. Hobbs, “Fruitfulness,” in *Studying Adult Life and Work Lessons*, January–March 1991, Vol. 24, No. 1 [Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1990], 75.

³James L. Sullivan, *John’s Witness to Jesus* [Nashville: Convention Press, 1965], 69.