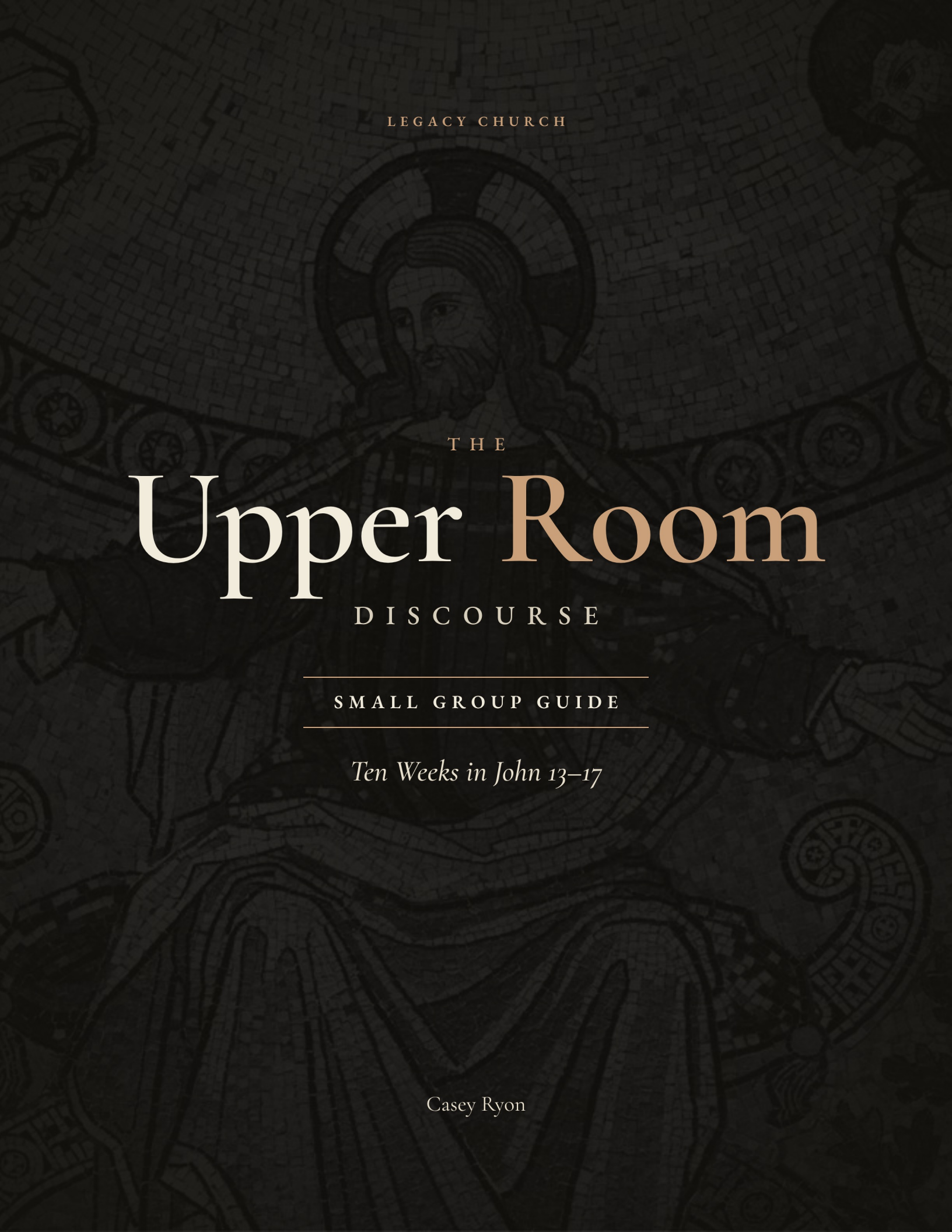

LEGACY CHURCH

THE

Upper Room

DISCOURSE

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Ten Weeks in John 13–17

Casey Ryon

TEN SESSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Before You Begin

John slows the camera down for one night. Roughly a quarter of his Gospel, chapters 13 through 17, takes place in a single evening, the last one before the cross. Jesus does not gather a crowd, perform a miracle, or defend His reputation. He gathers His friends, shares a meal, washes their feet, and tells them what they will need to know when He is gone.

These five chapters are often called the Upper Room Discourse. They are the most intimate teaching Jesus ever gave, and they were spoken to people He knew were hours away from failing Him. That is worth remembering as you read. Everything in these chapters is said by a Savior who "loved them to the end."

What to listen for

Three themes run through the whole evening. **Love:** the new commandment and what it costs. **The Helper:** the promise that Jesus's leaving means the Spirit's coming. **Abiding:** life as a branch that stays connected to the Vine. Watch for them every week.

How to use this guide

Each session is built to fill about an hour with a group.

1. **Read** the passage out loud from your own Bible. This guide quotes the ESV.
2. **Open** with the warm-up question. It is meant to be easy.
3. **Study** the notes together. Read them aloud or summarize them.
4. **Discuss** the questions. You do not need to reach all of them.
5. **Practice** one thing before you meet again.
6. **Pray** for one another before you leave.

SESSION ONE

He Loved Them to the End

John 13:1–17

When time was short, Jesus chose love, and He showed it with a basin and a towel.

WARM UP

If you knew you had one evening left with the people closest to you, how would you spend it?

STUDY

What mattered most (v. 1). With less than twenty four hours before the cross, Jesus gathers His friends. This tells us what mattered most to Him. Not activity, productivity, or recognition. Love. We often live as though what counts is what we accomplish or accumulate. Jesus shows us that when everything else fades, people remain.

John says He loved them "to the end." That does not only mean until His death. It means to the fullest extent, without holding anything back. He loved them knowing one would betray Him, one would deny Him, and all would scatter. His love did not depend on their performance. It flowed from His character. That is the love that has been given to you.

The Lord on His knees (vv. 2–5). Notice what Jesus knows as He does this: "that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God." Knowing exactly who He is, He rises, lays aside His outer garments, and takes the place of the lowest servant in the house. Security is what frees a person to serve. People who are unsure of who they are need to protect their status. Jesus has nothing to prove.

Every set of feet (v. 11). He washed Peter's feet. He washed John's feet. And He washed Judas's feet. He knew what was forming in Judas's heart, and He knelt before him anyway. This is the foundation of the gospel: "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). Christians love their enemies because Christ loved His. That love may look like serving, or creating distance, or setting a boundary. In every case it refuses revenge and refuses to let someone else's sin turn your heart cold.

Clean, but still in need of cleansing (vv. 6–10). Peter refuses, then swings to the other extreme and asks to be washed all over. Jesus corrects him: "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet." When you came to Christ you were bathed. Completely forgiven. Not mostly clean. But you still walk through a broken world, and your feet get dirty. That does not undo your salvation. It disrupts your fellowship. The answer is not to be saved again but to be cleansed again. That is what confession is for.

Do as I have done (vv. 12–17). "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." And then a promise attached not to knowing but to doing: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *To the end* (*eis telos*): to the finish, and to the uttermost. Both in time and in degree.

DISCUSS

i. What does Jesus's choice of how to spend His last evening say about what matters?

ii. How does knowing who you are in God free you to take the low place?

iii. Jesus washed Judas's feet. What might loving an enemy look like for you: serving, distance, or a boundary?

iv. Do you lean toward doubting you are clean, or toward ignoring your dirty feet?

v. What role does confession play in your life right now?

vi. Whose feet is Jesus asking you to wash this week?

> PRACTICE
>
> Do one concrete, unseen act of service for someone in your home or church this week.
>
> PRAY
>
> Thank Jesus for loving you to the end. Confess what needs washing.

SESSION TWO

A New Commandment

John 13:18–38

The mark of a disciple is love for other believers, measured by the way Jesus has loved us.

WARM UP

Who has loved you well at a time when you were hard to love?

STUDY

The betrayer leaves (vv. 18–30). Jesus is "troubled in his spirit" and tells them one of them will betray Him. He hands Judas the morsel, and Judas goes out. John adds four heavy words: "And it was night."

Love one another (vv. 31–35). Jesus waits until Judas has left before He gives the command. What remains in the room are His true disciples, and it is to them that He says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

They had always been taught to love their neighbor as themselves. Jesus changes both the subject and the standard. The subject is one another, fellow believers. The standard is no longer your own preferences or your threshold for patience. It is the way He has loved you. And He ties the church's witness to it: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Your ability to love other believers is tied to how clearly you see the love shown to you. When you lose sight of how much you have been forgiven and how patient Christ has been with you, your capacity to extend the same grace begins to shrink.

Not everyone who hurts you is Judas. John sets Peter's coming denial right beside Judas's betrayal, and that is no accident. Both men fail Jesus. Both cause real pain. But one is a wolf and the other is weak. One hates Jesus and the other loves Him. We tend to collapse those categories. Someone disappoints us or sins against us, and we file them under Judas. Many times they are

Peter. And the church is full of Peters: imperfect followers who sometimes misrepresent the Christ they love. Jesus does not distance Himself from them. You cannot love the Head and hate the body.

The illusion of strength (vv. 36–38). Peter skips right past the command. He is stuck on one thing: Jesus is leaving. His pain is louder than the truth being spoken to him. Then he answers with bold confidence: "I will lay down my life for you." He is not trying to deceive Jesus. He is deceived about himself. That is what pride does. It takes what God has done through you and convinces you it came from you. It says, "I would never." And Jesus, in His kindness, tells him the truth: before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. It is a mercy when God exposes our weakness before it destroys us.

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *New* (*kainos*): new in kind, not merely recent. The command to love was old. The standard, "as I have loved you," was new.

DISCUSS

i. Why does Jesus wait until Judas leaves to give this command?

ii. How is "as I have loved you" a higher standard than "as yourself"?

iii. When outsiders look at your church, what do they see in how believers treat each other?

iv. Is there someone you have treated as a Judas who may be a Peter?

v. When has your pain been so loud that you could not hear what God was saying?

vi. Where are you most likely to say, "I would never"?

> PRACTICE
>
> Think of one believer who is hard for you to love. Pray for them by name each day, and take one step toward them.
>
> PRAY
>
> Ask God to show you how much you have been loved, so that you can love.

SESSION THREE

The Way to the Father

John 14:1–14

The goal of the Christian life is not a place. It is a Person, and Jesus is the way to Him.

WARM UP

Where is the place that feels most like home to you?

STUDY

Comfort before the fall (vv. 1–3). Jesus has just told Peter he is going to fail. And the very next thing He does is comfort him. He does not tell him to try harder or hand him a strategy. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." Then He lifts their eyes past the night ahead to a home: "In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you."

The picture would have been familiar: a bridegroom preparing a place in his father's house, promising to return for his bride. This is where everything has been heading. Not only forgiveness. Not only escaping judgment. The end of the story is to be with Him. And Jesus says all of this to Peter before Peter fails, which means Peter's future does not rest on Peter's performance. It rests on Jesus.

The way is a Person (vv. 4–7). Thomas asks an honest question: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus does not give directions or a map. He points to Himself. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Notice He does not say He is the way to heaven. He says He is the way to the Father. Home is where the Father is. Salvation is not only about being forgiven. It is about being brought near. And only Jesus deals with the thing that stood in the way. Not morality, sincerity, or religion. It is possible to agree with all of this and still live at a distance from the Father, knowing about Him without walking with Him.

Clarity is kindness. Jesus does not soften His words or leave room for other routes. In a world that prizes vagueness, that sounds sharp. But He loves people too much to leave them confused. If a doctor knows the cure and will not say it plainly, people suffer. If we believe Jesus is the only way and will not say so clearly, we are not being loving. We are being unhelpful.

Show us the Father (vv. 8–11). Philip asks to see the Father. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

Greater works and prayer in His name (vv. 12–14). Two statements here are often misread. "Greater works" does not mean greater spectacle but greater scope. Jesus ministered in one region. After the Spirit comes, the gospel goes to the world. And asking "in my name" is not a phrase attached to a request to make it work. A name stood for a person's authority and character. To pray in His name is to ask in line with who He is and what He wants. Prayer is not getting God to align with your will. It is your will coming into line with His.

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *Father's house:* temple language and family language together. The place where God dwells with His people.

DISCUSS

i. What does it tell you that Jesus comforts Peter right after predicting his failure?

ii. How is "the way to the Father" different from "the way to heaven"? Why does it matter?

iii. Do you live near the Father or only believe that you could?

iv. Why is the exclusiveness of verse 6 hard to say today? How can we say it with both clarity and kindness?

v. Where in your relationships do you hide behind vague words when something needs to be said plainly?

vi. How does "in my name" change the way you pray?

> PRACTICE
>
> Each day this week, before you ask God for anything, spend two minutes simply being with the Father.
>
> PRAY
>
> Bring your troubled heart to Him. Pray for someone who does not yet know the way.

SESSION FOUR

Another Helper

John 14:15–31

Jesus's leaving does not leave us orphans. He sends a Helper just like Himself, and the Helper stays.

WARM UP

Who is someone whose presence makes hard things easier for you?

STUDY

Another, of the same kind (vv. 15–17). Jesus knows what is about to break His friends. So He hands them a promise. The Father will give "another Helper." The word "another" means another of the same kind. The Spirit who is coming is exactly like Jesus: the same heart, the same nearness, the same care.

Notice where Jesus places this promise. Not in a sermon about power or signs. In a sentence about love: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper." The first thing the Spirit is sent to help us do is love. Many of us were handed a smaller story, that the Spirit shows up mainly for dramatic moments. Jesus presents Him as the constant companion who helps us obey the hardest command of all.

The Spirit of truth. Of all the titles Jesus could have led with, He chooses this one. Not Spirit of power or of miracles. Spirit of truth. The Spirit does give power and gifts. None of that is in question. But a foundation has to go down first. If you build your understanding of the Spirit on experiences and never anchor it in truth, you will eventually misuse the very power you prize. A person can operate in impressive gifts and still not be honest. The Spirit of truth anchors you in reality and keeps you from deception.

With you forever. The disciples carried an Old Testament picture of the Spirit that came with an expiration date. He rushed upon Samson, came upon Saul, filled a prophet for a task, and then lifted. So imagine hearing one small word: "forever." Not until you finish the assignment. Not until you fail. Under the old covenant the Spirit visited. Under the new, He moves in. So much of our anxiety with God is the quiet fear that He is about to leave. Jesus says "forever" to a room full of men He knows are about to scatter.

You are the temple now. For the disciples, God's presence had an address: behind a veil, in a room, in a building in Jerusalem. When Jesus says the Spirit "dwells with you and will be in you," He is relocating the dwelling place of God. "Do you not know that you are God's temple?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). That is a comfort and a calling. If your body is the temple, your life is holy ground, and you stand at the door. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30).

He brings it back to mind (vv. 25–27). The Helper "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." When a word of Jesus rises in your mind in the moment of temptation, that is not coincidence. That is the Helper. And with Him comes a gift: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *Helper* (*paraklētos*): one called alongside. Advocate, counselor, comforter. "Another" (*allos*) means another of the same kind.

DISCUSS

i. How were you taught to think about the Holy Spirit? How does this passage add to or correct that?

ii. Why does it matter that the Spirit is introduced in a sentence about love and obedience?

iii. Why must truth come before power? What happens when the order is reversed?

iv. Do you live with a fear that God is about to leave? What does "forever" say to it?

v. If you are God's temple, what needs guarding at the door?

vi. When has the Spirit brought the right word of Jesus to mind at the right moment?

> PRACTICE
>
> Pray this each morning: "Holy Spirit, teach me, and bring to my mind what Jesus has said." Notice when He does.
>
> PRAY
>
> Thank the Father for the gift of the Helper. Ask for His peace over what troubles you.

SESSION FIVE

Abide in Me

John 15:1–11

A branch has one job: stay connected to the Vine.

WARM UP

Have you ever tried to keep a plant alive? How did it go?

STUDY

The whole arrangement in one picture (vv. 1, 5). "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." We are the branches. The life of the Vine flows into the branch and produces the fruit.

Two cuts (v. 2). There are two cuts in this verse, and they are not the same. The first falls on the branch that bears no fruit at all. Jesus is sober about it, and we should not soften the warning. A lifetime of fruitlessness is not a personality type. It is evidence.

The second cut is the one most of us are feeling. The branch that does bear fruit is pruned "that it may bear more fruit." The Vinedresser comes with the knife not to punish but to multiply. Here is what we rarely admit: being pruned feels a lot like being cut off. When the Father removes a comfort, narrows a path, or lets a hard season do its slow work, it can feel like rejection. It is the opposite. Pruning is reserved for branches He intends to make fruitful. Trust the Gardener.

One job (vv. 4–5). Notice how little the branch is asked to do. A branch does not strain to manufacture grapes. It has one job: remain. "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." This is where many of us go wrong. We detach from the Vine and then try to produce its fruit by effort. We want patience without prayer, love without communion, peace without His presence. A branch on the ground does not bear fruit. It withers.

How do you abide? Three habits help. Come to Him honestly, with no performance and no pretending. Turn your inner conversation toward Him through the whole day, not only in a morning appointment. And stay joined to His people, because you cannot abide in the Vine while cutting yourself off from the other branches.

Measured by fruit (v. 8). "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit." The most important thing to measure in your life is not your gifting, your impact, or your success. It is fruit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). We often get this backward. We assume the Spirit-filled person is the one with the impressive gift, not the one who keeps their peace in tragedy or is patient with a difficult spouse. A gift can be seen from across the room. Fruit can only be seen up close.

That your joy may be full (vv. 9–11). Abiding is not grim duty. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." He says all this "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

WORDS TO KNOW

Abide (*menō*): to remain, stay, make your home. Jesus uses it again and again in these verses.

Prune (*kathairō*): to cleanse. The same root as "clean" in verse 3 and in the foot washing.

DISCUSS

i. What in your life right now feels like being cut? Could it be pruning?

ii. How can you tell the difference between pruning and punishment?

iii. Where are you trying to produce fruit by effort while disconnected from the Vine?

iv. Which of the three habits (honest communion, all-day fellowship, staying joined to His people) is weakest for you?

v. Why are we more impressed by gifts than by fruit? What fruit would those closest to you say is growing?

vi. Does your walk with Jesus feel like duty or joy at the moment?

PRACTICE

Choose three fixed moments in your day (for example morning, lunch, and bedtime) to stop for one minute and turn your attention to Jesus.

PRAY

Ask the Father to prune what He needs to, and for grace to trust Him while He does.

SESSION SIX

No Longer Servants

John 15:12–17

Jesus calls us friends, chose us before we chose Him, and sends us to love the way He does.

WARM UP

What makes someone a true friend and not only an acquaintance?

STUDY

The command again (v. 12). "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." It is the second time in one evening. When Jesus repeats Himself on the last night of His life, we should pay attention. This is also what abiding produces. The branch that stays in the Vine bears the fruit of the Vine, and the first fruit is love.

The measure of love (v. 13). "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Within hours He will do exactly that. The cross is the reference point for everything He asks of us. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16). This is not a sentimental love. It is a love shaped by the gospel. Most of us will not be asked to die for another believer. We will be asked to lay down our time, our preferences, our right to be right, and our grudges. Those are the smaller deaths that make up a life of love.

Friends (vv. 14–15). "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." A servant is told what to do. A friend is told why. Jesus opens His heart and His Father's purposes to us.

This friendship is not casual, and it does not make us His equals. "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Obedience is not how we earn the friendship. It is how the friendship is lived.

Chosen (v. 16). "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." Think about who is in the room when He says it. Men who are about to run. A man who is about to deny Him. He chose them knowing all of

it. That is very good news for anyone who wonders whether Jesus regrets them. He did not choose you because of what He hoped you would become on your best day. He chose you with full knowledge of your worst.

And the choosing has a purpose. He appointed us to "go." Friendship with Jesus is not a place to settle. It sends us out to bear fruit that lasts, and the fruit that lasts is people.

So that you will love (v. 17). He ends where He began. "These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *Friend* (*philos*): one who is loved and trusted, brought into confidence. In Scripture, Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23).

DISCUSS

i. Why do you think Jesus repeats the command to love one another?

ii. What "smaller deaths" is love asking of you right now?

iii. Do you relate to Jesus more as a servant taking orders or as a friend brought into confidence? What would change?

iv. How do friendship with Jesus and obedience to Jesus fit together?

v. How does "I chose you" speak to shame or the fear that God regrets you?

vi. What lasting fruit do you want your life to leave behind? Who are the people?

> PRACTICE
>
> Lay down one thing for another believer this week: an evening, a preference, or a grudge.
>
> PRAY
>
> Thank Jesus for calling you His friend. Ask Him where He is sending you to bear fruit.

SESSION SEVEN

Hated by the World

John 15:18–16:4

Opposition is not a sign that something has gone wrong. It is a sign of whose you are.

WARM UP

Have you ever been left out or disliked because of what you believe? How did you handle it?

STUDY

It hated me first (15:18–21). Jesus offers His friends a strange comfort. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." Follow His logic. "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own." The world is generous toward those who reflect it. "But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." The friction you feel is the friction of not belonging.

This reframes a great deal. We tend to assume that if we were truly walking with God, life would get smoother. Jesus says nearly the opposite. "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." There is something dignifying in that. When rejection comes for righteousness' sake, and not for our own foolishness or rudeness, it puts us in the company of Jesus.

Without excuse (15:22–25). His words and works removed every excuse. To see what He did and hear what He said, and still reject Him, is to reject the Father. "They hated me without a cause."

Two witnesses (15:26–27). In the same breath as the warning, Jesus gives the assignment. "The Spirit of truth… will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." Two witnesses, working together. That takes the pressure off and puts it in the right place. We often treat witness as though everything depends on our cleverness and our ability to win the room. But the primary witness is the Spirit. He convicts, opens blind eyes, and makes the truth land. Our part is to be faithful with what we have seen and heard.

Notice the qualification: "because you have been with me." Witness flows from nearness. The disciples were not certified by a course. They were qualified by time spent with Jesus.

When the hardest hits come from inside (16:1–4). Jesus names the source of the coming suffering, and it is not who we would expect. He does not say Rome. He says, "They will put you out of the synagogues." That is the religious community. "Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you

will think he is offering service to God." It was not pagans who arranged His arrest. It was the most religious people in the city, convinced they were serving God. The fiercest opposition often comes from those sure they see clearly.

Why does He tell them? "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." A warning given in advance is a mercy. When it happens, you will remember that He told you, and you will not conclude that He has lost control.

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *World* (*kosmos*): in John, usually not the planet or its people as such, but human society organized in resistance to God.

DISCUSS

i. Do you expect following Jesus to make life smoother? Where did that expectation come from?

ii. How can you tell the difference between suffering for righteousness and suffering for being difficult?

iii. Where are you tempted to soften your faith so that the world will love you?

iv. How does it change your approach to sharing your faith to know the Spirit is the primary witness?

v. "Because you have been with me." How does time with Jesus shape what you have to say about Him?

vi. Have you been hurt by religious people? How does Jesus's warning help you make sense of it without becoming bitter toward His church?

PRACTICE

Pray daily this week for believers who are persecuted for their faith, and for one person who opposes yours.

PRAY

Ask for courage to belong to Jesus openly, and for love toward those who do not understand.

SESSION EIGHT

The Work of the Spirit

John 16:5–15

It was better for us that Jesus went away, because of what the Spirit came to do.

WARM UP

Has losing something ever turned out to be the way you gained something better?

STUDY

To your advantage (vv. 5–7). Sorrow has filled the disciples' hearts. And Jesus says something they could not have believed in the moment: "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."

Think about what He is claiming. Most of us imagine nothing could be better than having Jesus physically beside us. He says there is something better. In the flesh, He was in one place with a few people. By the Spirit, He is with every believer, in every place, at once, and not only beside us but within us. His leaving was not a loss to be endured. It was a gift to be received.

He convicts the world (vv. 8–11). "When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." This is the Spirit's work toward those who do not yet believe, and it should shape how we think about witness.

Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me. The root sin is unbelief, the refusal to trust the One God sent. *Concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father.* The world judged Jesus a criminal. The Father's verdict was to raise Him and receive Him. The Spirit shows people who was right. *Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.* The cross was not Satan's victory. It was his sentence.

Conviction is the Spirit's job, not ours. We cannot argue anyone into seeing their need. We speak the truth in love, and He does what only He can do. That frees us from both silence and pressure.

He guides into truth (vv. 12–13). "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." Jesus is patient. He does not give us everything at once. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." This promise was given first to the apostles, and

through them we have the New Testament. The same Spirit now opens that Word to us and leads us in it. He never guides anyone away from what He inspired.

He glorifies Jesus (vv. 14–15). "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Here is a simple test for anything that claims to be a work of the Spirit. Does it make much of Jesus? The Spirit does not draw attention to Himself, or to the gifted person, or to the experience. He shines the light on Christ. Where Jesus is being seen, loved, and obeyed, the Spirit is at work.

WORD TO KNOW

Convict (*elenchō*): to expose, to bring to light, to convince of the truth. A courtroom word.

DISCUSS

i. Do you believe it is better to have the Spirit within you than Jesus beside you? Why is that hard to believe?

ii. Why does Jesus define sin first as not believing in Him?

iii. How does it relieve pressure to know that conviction is the Spirit's work?

iv. When has the Spirit convicted you? How was it different from condemnation or shame?

v. How does the Spirit guide you into truth in practice? What part does Scripture play?

vi. Apply the test: does this make much of Jesus? How does it help you weigh teachings, experiences, and ministries?

PRACTICE

Before you open your Bible each day this week, pray: "Spirit of truth, guide me, and show me Jesus."

PRAY

Pray for specific people who do not believe, asking the Spirit to do what you cannot.

SESSION NINE

Sorrow Into Joy

John 16:16–33

Jesus does not promise a life without sorrow. He promises that sorrow will not have the last word.

WARM UP

What is something painful you went through that later became a source of gratitude or strength?

STUDY

A little while (vv. 16–19). "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." The disciples are confused. Within hours He will be taken from them, and three days later they will see Him alive. But they cannot see that yet. Much of the Christian life is lived in "a little while," between a promise made and a promise kept.

Labor, not only loss (vv. 20–22). Jesus is far too honest to promise a life without grief. "You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy."

The picture He reaches for is childbirth. A woman in labor is in real anguish. No one stands beside her downplaying it. But the pain is pointed somewhere. It is the pain of something being born. Jesus is not asking them to fake joy through gritted teeth while their Lord is crucified. He is telling them the truth about the shape of their grief. It has a direction.

Notice also that He does not say their sorrow will be replaced by joy. He says it will turn into joy. The very thing that broke their hearts, the cross, became the reason for their gladness. "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." Joy that depends on circumstances can be taken. Joy that rests on a risen Christ cannot.

Ask (vv. 23–24). "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Because of what Jesus is about to do, they will have direct access to the Father.

The Father himself loves you (vv. 25–28). Many believers carry a quiet, unspoken theology: Jesus loves me, and Jesus is working hard to talk the Father into loving me too. We picture the Son as warm and the Father as reluctant. Jesus dismantles that in one sentence. "The Father himself

loves you." Not grudgingly. Not because His arm was twisted. Himself. The cross did not persuade the Father to love us. The cross is what the Father's love did.

Take heart (vv. 29–33). The disciples declare that now they believe. Jesus answers gently and truthfully: you will be scattered and leave me alone. Then He gives the last line of His teaching before He prays, and it is one of the most realistic and hopeful sentences in Scripture. "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Two locations, two experiences. In the world: tribulation. In Him: peace. He does not promise we will be taken out of the first. He promises we can live in the second at the same time. And notice the tense. Not "I will overcome." He says it before the cross as though it were already done.

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *Tribulation* (*thlipsis*): pressure, crushing, affliction. The word was used for pressing grapes and olives.

DISCUSS

i. Where are you living in "a little while," between promise and fulfillment?

ii. How does it help to think of your sorrow as labor and not only loss?

iii. Can you name a sorrow in your life that God turned into joy, not merely replaced?

iv. What is the difference between joy that can be taken and joy that cannot?

v. Have you pictured the Father as reluctant? How does verse 27 correct that?

vi. What would it look like this week to have peace in Him while having trouble in the world?

PRACTICE

Memorize John 16:33. Say it aloud each time anxiety rises this week.

PRAY

Name your tribulations honestly before God. Then thank Him aloud that Jesus has overcome the world.

SESSION TEN

The Prayer of Jesus

John 17

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed for you, and you get to be the answer.

WARM UP

Has someone ever told you they pray for you regularly? What did it mean to you?

STUDY

Everything Jesus has taught this evening, He now turns into prayer. John 17 is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus, and we are allowed to overhear it.

For Himself (vv. 1–5). "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you." The hour He has spoken of throughout the Gospel is here. His request is that the cross would display the Father's glory. And in the middle of it He defines eternal life: "this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Eternal life is not mainly a length of time or a place. It is a relationship. It begins the moment you know Him.

For His disciples (vv. 6–19). He prays for the men in the room. "Holy Father, keep them in your name." He does not ask that they be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from the evil one. They are in the world, not of it, and sent into it. He prays that they would have His joy "fulfilled in themselves." And He prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." We are made holy not by withdrawing from the world but by being shaped by the Word while living in it.

For us (vv. 20–23). Then, astonishingly, He prays for you. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." That is us. We are named in the prayer of Jesus on the night He was betrayed.

And what does He ask? "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you… so that the world may believe that you have sent me." This is not unity at the expense of truth. He has just prayed that we be sanctified in the truth. It is the unity of people who share one Lord and love one another as He commanded earlier that same evening. And He ties the world's belief to it. A divided, bitter church makes the gospel harder to believe. A church that loves across its differences is evidence that the Father sent the Son.

To be with Him (vv. 24–26). "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory." This is where the evening began: "I go to prepare a place for you." The deepest desire of Jesus for His people is that we would be with Him. And His last request is that "the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

The answer to His prayer. Here is the thought to carry out of this study. Jesus asked the Father for these things over us: that we would know Him, be kept, be filled with joy, be made holy by the truth, be one, and be with Him. We get to be the answer to His prayer. When you walk in joy, when you hold to His Word, when you love another believer who is hard to love, when you refuse to break the unity of His church, you are answering the prayer of Jesus. Let your life be the yes.

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *Sanctify* (*hagiazō*): to set apart as holy, for God's own use.

DISCUSS

i. How does Jesus's definition of eternal life differ from the way people usually think of it?

ii. Why does Jesus ask that we be kept in the world and not taken out of it?

iii. What part does the Word play in making you holy? How is that going?

iv. How does it affect you to know Jesus prayed for you by description that night?

v. Why is the unity of believers so tied to the world's belief? Where is it under strain in your church or relationships?

vi. Looking back over this study of the upper room: which request of Jesus do you most want your life to answer?

PRACTICE

Pray John 17 for your own church this week, one section a day: that they would know Him, be kept, have joy, be sanctified in truth, and be one.

PRAY

Thank Jesus that He prays for you still (Hebrews 7:25). Ask the Father to make you an answer.

APPENDIX

For Leaders

Your job is not to teach the passage a second time. It is to help people sit in the room with Jesus and hear what He said. A few suggestions:

- **Read the passage aloud first, every time.** These are the words of Jesus to His friends. Let them be heard.
- **Remember the setting.** Every week, remind the group that this is the night before the cross, and that Jesus is speaking to people about to fail Him.
- **Go first.** A group will only be as honest as its leader. Answer the hardest question yourself before you ask anyone else to.
- **Keep the three threads in view.** Love, the Helper, and abiding. Ask which one showed up in the passage.
- **Follow up on the practice.** Begin each session by asking how last week's practice went.
- **Protect the room.** What is shared in the group stays in the group.

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Soli Deo Gloria