



09

SESSION NINE

Jesus and John the Baptist

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will see how John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by pointing to Him and His kingdom, finding his greatest joy in Jesus' exaltation, warning others, and witnessing to the love and power of God. Because John recognized his purpose and his identity, he offered his heart with joyful gladness to the Messiah who was coming. From John, we learn how to find our identity in Christ and how our mission goes forward as people who "decrease" in order that Christ may receive all the glory.

SCRIPTURE

John 3:22-36

THE POINT

Humility is finding joy in Christ's significance, not our own.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Glow sticks. No matter how old you get there is always something mesmerizing about glow sticks. Whether as a kid outside on a summer's evening or walking through the night time streets of Disney World®, glow sticks have a way of adding excitement to any occasion.

Of course, one of the most interesting things about glow sticks is how to get them to work. Instead of an “on and off” switch or running on batteries, glow sticks need to be cracked before they come to life. They need to be broken. Once broken, glow sticks can fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

Glow sticks are much like followers of Christ—all throughout the Bible God used broken people to further His purposes. Brokenness—the bending of our will and the humbling of our hearts—is a prerequisite to being used by God. We won't glow with love for God until we're broken and humbled by God's love for us.

The Gospels teach us about one of the greatest men who ever lived—a man who was so humble that he knew he paled in comparison to the Man he was called to point to. This man was John the Baptist. John was the forerunner to the Messiah, and he humbly ran in his own lane, fulfilling his own call. He decreased so that the reputation and ministry of Jesus could increase. That's humility. And John provided an example for us of what it looks like to make less of ourselves so we can make more of Jesus.

- **Why is it necessary for people to be broken and humbled in order for God to work through them? Why must humility be present if we are to faithfully follow Jesus?**

Option 2

The 2016 Summer Olympics took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Over 200 countries competed, and 42 different athletic disciplines were represented, throughout 306 events that took place during a 19 day span.¹ Many people cheered on Michael Phelps as he won more Olympic gold, or Katie Ledecky as she set new world records. However, fewer people probably recognize the names David Boudia and Steele Johnson. These American men won the silver medal in the synchronized 10m platform dive, when they earned a 95.04 from the judges with their final dive.² When asked how the pressure of this dive affected them, these men pointed back to Christ, noting that their identity rested in Him no matter what results their dives yielded.³ They humbly acknowledged that their achievement wasn't as important as representing Christ well.

- **When have you been tempted to let your work, even your ministry, define you?**

As John the Baptist and these divers demonstrated, any significance we have is rooted in Christ, who we are in Him, and what purpose He gives our lives. We can humbly submit to God's will for our lives, knowing that our mission, and our joy, is all about Him and the significance of what Christ did for us.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Humility is finding joy in Christ's significance, not our own.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus** - the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **John the Baptist** - the forerunner to the Messiah; prepared the way for Jesus' earthly ministry

PLOT

An earlier session introduced the person and ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by pointing others to Him and His kingdom. But what would happen when John's ministry began to diminish in comparison to Jesus' ministry? Would he become bitter? Would he become jealous for the ministry recognition? No, it was quite the opposite. John gained joy in Jesus' exaltation, by warning others, and through witnessing about the love and power of God.

TIMELINE

THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

John the Baptist points others to Jesus.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.

HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.

JOHN'S MISSION WAS TO POINT TO JESUS

At this point in the Gospel storyline, John the Baptist's vibrant ministry was beginning to wane, and Jesus' ministry was just getting started. During this period of transition from John the Baptist to Jesus, there could have been major disputes, a falling out, or some sort of conflict between Jesus and John. Instead, John the Baptist handled his declining popularity and Jesus' rise with the kind of humility and confidence that is characteristic of someone who knew his mission.

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison). 25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'" (John 3:22-28)

Some of John's followers approached him with a problem on their minds. More and more people were going to see Jesus and His disciples to be baptized. Who was this man? Why were people going to Him and not John? Did Jesus' ministry mean that John's work was no longer effective? Perhaps John's disciples felt like Jesus' rising popularity was a threat to their own work. Whatever their motivations, they went to John with questions.

John the Baptist's response was seasoned with humility. He attributed the growth of Jesus' ministry to God and nothing else. John recognized that Jesus' ministry was always designed to replace his own. That's why John reminded his followers that he was not the Messiah and that the Messiah's work would be greater than his. The remarkable thing about John's response is how content he seemed to be with those developments. He could be humble and confident because he knew his role—to point people to the Messiah!

JOHN DEMONSTRATED HUMILITY IN HIS MISSION

In the continuation of John the Baptist's response to his disciples, John revealed his own character and his joy at Jesus' arrival. Don't miss the connection between John's humility (v. 30) and joy (v. 29).

29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:29-30)

- **How does the idea that decreasing leads to an increase in joy apply to us today?** (*p. 67, PSG*)
- **What are some areas where you could decrease to make more of Jesus in your own life? Why will this increase your joy?** (*p. 67, PSG*)

As John the Baptist explained his reasons for being joyful, he turned to a common illustration of a wedding. John's analogy went something like this: "I am like the best man at a wedding feast, and Jesus is like the groom. As the groom's friend, I find great joy in the groom marrying His bride."

Like other friends of the groom, John was saying that his role was to prepare things for the wedding, to assist the Groom whenever possible, and to serve the Groom well. At a wedding, it is the groom's day to be in the spotlight, not the groomsmen.

John the Baptist found complete joy in his subordinate role to Jesus. He recognized Jesus was the groom, the center of attention, the long-awaited Messiah. John understood that his role was to make sure that the groom would be exalted and that no distractions would hinder him.

John the Baptist's words here give us a model for how we should find our joy. It should be our goal, drive, and practice to see Jesus lifted up and exalted above every one and everything. Our joy should come from the fact that Jesus is being made known. When God breaks us of the callous pride we have in our hearts, we are then able to find joy in humility. And we assume a humble posture that seeks to make much of Jesus, while making ourselves of no reputation.

JOHN'S MESSAGE WAS ONE OF WARNING AND GRACE

Next, we dig into John the Baptist's relation to Jesus. As the passage continues, we see how John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus—a witness who testified that Jesus was sent by the Father and warned that rejecting Jesus meant rejecting eternal life. Take a look:

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. (John 3:31-36)

John the Baptist saw Jesus as superior, in where He came from and in what He taught. John's witness to Christ focused first on Jesus' origin. Jesus is the Messiah who comes from heaven, while John was a witness from the earth. The point here is that John the Baptist was under Jesus' authority because Jesus came from heaven.

This passage also shows that Jesus' teaching is superior to John the Baptist's. Everything Jesus taught was and is true. Everything Jesus said about Himself being the Messiah, the promised One, was and is true. The point here is that John was a witness to Jesus, while Jesus spoke the very words of God. Not only that, but Jesus also had the power to give the Spirit to those who believed and accepted His testimony.

What we have here is a great summary of how John the Baptist pointed to Jesus' supremacy: Jesus is from heaven, while John was from earth. Jesus spoke the words of God, while John spoke about Jesus. Jesus gives the Spirit and life, while John affirmed Jesus' testimony.

However, John the Baptist not only witnessed to others about Jesus' identity; he also warned people of the consequences of rejecting Jesus. John taught that the wrath of God was the opposite of eternal life. Those who do not believe in Jesus or accept His testimony about Himself are under the wrath of God—God's good and righteous judgment against sin. Whether they realize it or not, they are on the road to destruction.

God is truthful when He declares that the day will come when those who persist in sin will face His just judgment. John the Baptist's witness was not merely about the glory of Christ; it was also about being saved from the wrath of God. We are saved for Jesus from the punishment our sin deserves. Faithful witnessing to the love of God means we call people to be saved from God's wrath.

TIMELINE

ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.

**Beginning Summer 2017*

THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

Jesus teaches on people's responses when hearing the Word.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Jesus teaches on forgiveness.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Evangelism (p. 67, PSG)

It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all thus rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle.

CHRIST CONNECTION

John the Baptist was a firsthand witness of the ministry of Jesus. Because of his humility, he was able to take joy in the fact that Jesus was becoming known, even more well known than he was at the time. John coupled his joyful expression with a timely warning that it wasn't enough to just acknowledge Jesus, or to crowd around Him while He was ministering. Rather, what God wanted was for the people to listen to Jesus' testimony and embrace Him as their Lord and Savior.

God is calling us to do work like John the Baptist. In God's hands, our brokenness can be used to humble us so we can be lights for His glory in the darkness of this world. The goal is to then turn people's attention and affection toward Jesus as we make Him known. Nothing should bring more joy and satisfaction to our hearts than to see people know and embrace Jesus as their Savior.

We must take on the humble posture of John the Baptist and see ourselves as a friend to the groom, pointing away from ourselves and to Jesus Christ—the One and only. We shine the spotlight on Him, not ourselves.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When have you felt like another person's success was a threat to you personally or a signal that you were inadequate? How did you respond? How do you think John's disciples expected him to respond to their questions?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does our mission today resemble that of John the Baptist? What are some differences between John's role and ours?** *Like John, we also call people to repentance and faith in Christ. John tried to draw the spotlight away from himself and toward Christ, and we do the same.*
- **When have you found great joy in helping someone who was in the spotlight or center of attention? What was that experience like?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some truths about Jesus that should be part of sharing the gospel? What do these truths communicate about Jesus?** *Central truths would involve who Jesus is—the divine Son of God who became flesh to save sinners and what He accomplished—He died a substitutionary death in our place so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The words of John the Baptist remind us of the sobering reality that even though God already knows all of our sin, He is still gracious and patient, offering us the gift of eternal life and calling us away from a life of wayward living. Like a gracious Father who cares for His children, it is God's desire that all would repent and turn to Him for forgiveness.

- **What role does speaking of God's judgment have in our witness to Jesus?** *It is difficult to speak of God's salvation without also saying something about God's righteous judgment against sin. The bad news of our condition apart from Jesus must come prior to the good news of His salvation.*
- **What happens when we minimize or neglect this part of our message?** *One thing that will happen from leaving out God's judgment against sin is that people will fail to grasp the weight of God's love and sacrifice to save them. If people know they owe a debt they can never repay, and then receive a call from the bank saying the debt has been cancelled, they will appreciate the mercy of the bank more than the person who never knew about the debt to begin with.*



HEART

Whenever our pride leads us to seek glory for ourselves, we fall into the trap of making ourselves more attractive in order to gain more followers. Then, instead of celebrating Jesus, we begin to compete with each other. Our zeal is no longer for the gospel and God's glory, but for the building of our own kingdoms. John the Baptist's ministry challenges us to find our ultimate purpose in bringing glory to Christ.

- **Why does pride and seeking glory for oneself eventually lead to a lack of joy in the end?** *Because the source of the pride, whatever it may be, will always fail in the end.*
- **How would you explain to someone that more joy comes from seeking God's glory rather than seeking it for ourselves?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Like John, we are called to point people to Jesus and away from ourselves. However, fulfilling our mission of pointing others to Christ is impossible unless we intentionally leverage the gifts God has given us for His glory, not as a distraction that brings attention to ourselves. Our mission is to point people to Jesus. We should do everything we can not to get in the way.

- **How have you been tempted to showcase your gifts and talents more for yourself and reputation rather than for God and His glory?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some intentional ways you can use your God-given talents and gifts this week to draw attention to the Giver, instead of to the gifts themselves?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #9, which contains an artistic quote poster of one of John the Baptist's sayings.

SOURCES

1. "Sports," *Rio 2016*, accessed August 25, 2016, <https://www.rio2016.com/en/sports>.
2. "David Boudia, Steele Johnson clinch silver with final dive," *NBC Video*, 1:37, August 8, 2016, <http://www.nbcolympics.com/video/david-boudia-steele-johnson-clinch-silver-final-dive>.
3. Jonah Hicap, "US diving duo David Boudia and Steele Johnson proclaim Christ on TV after bagging Olympic silver," *Christianity Today*, August 9, 2016, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/us.diving.duo.david.boudia.and.steele.johnson.proclaim.christ.on.tv.after.bagging.olympic.silver/92711.htm>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPRescueSpr17)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject