

Session 8: John 7:1–52

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

God's purpose and timing may not align with our expectations, but his ways are always better than our plans.

Head Change

To know God's plan is not derailed by turbulent circumstances.

Heart Change

To feel optimistic and hopeful about God's plan for your life.

Life Change

To trust God's timing even when people and circumstances tell us not to.

OPEN

What is your plan for the weekend? Are you doing anything fun? How would you feel if something spoiled your plans?

We are all looking forward to something—a good time, a good meal, a good rest, a good reunion. If something were to derail our plans it would be frustrating, maybe even heartbreaking.

As Christians, we have great hope in God's future, but our hope may disrupt our day-to-day plans. Trusting God and his timing can be difficult when we focus on our plans. But when we focus on God's timing, how he is making us like Jesus, and his glorious future for us, his timing becomes a source of joy and hope.

READ

John 7:1–52 (If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to John 7:14–19, 28–43, 45–52.)

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is the importance of God's timing?

Why can't you be neutral about Jesus?

What happens when Jesus transforms your soul?

Show Session 8: *John 7:1–52* (9 minutes).

DISCUSS

Read John 7:1–13.

At this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus has become a controversial public figure. He has gained and lost disciples, made friends with Pharisees and Samaritans, and has authorities seeking to discredit him. **In what ways is Jesus’s reputation in these verses similar to his reputation today?**

Jesus is avoiding Judea, but his brothers encourage him to go to the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem. Even though they don’t believe he is the Messiah, they are worried about Jesus’s reputation and the size of his following. **According to verses 6–8, why did Jesus refuse their advice? In what ways can our concern for our reputation and following cause us to miss God’s timing?**

Note: To learn more about the Feast of Booths, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

In your own life, how have you seen your desires come into conflict with God’s timing? What has that conflict taught you?

In verses 10–13, Jesus covertly enters the Festival and hears what people are saying about him. But no one speaks openly about Jesus because they are afraid of the authorities, who are trying to find and kill him. **Does fear ever cause you to keep your thoughts and feelings about Jesus to yourself? What can you do to overcome that fear and to speak boldly about Jesus?**

Read John 7:14–44.

Jesus does not arrive with an entourage or to public acclaim. Instead, he waits for God’s timing to make himself known during the festival. **In what ways has the crowd’s opinion of Jesus changed from before the festival in verse 12 to after they hear Jesus teach in verses 30–31?**

It is possible to be amazed by Jesus’s teaching, to believe that he is a good man, and even to respect his actions all while not believing he is the Messiah. But, as Dr. Evans taught, Jesus doesn’t give us the option to think of him as just a good man. We either choose to trust him as the Son

of God or to reject him. **If we reject Jesus's message, who are we ultimately rejecting? Why do you think it can be tempting to stay neutral concerning Jesus and his message?**

How would you respond to someone who said Jesus was just a "good man"?

In verse 18, Jesus compares the behavior of someone who speaks to honor themselves to someone who speaks to honor the one who sent them. As Christians, we are always to speak God's message so that he might receive honor. **In today's culture, what pressure is there to honor yourself or to build a good self-image?**

In what ways could you be a countercultural force for Christ by seeking God's honor first and foremost?

In verses 25–27, the crowds deny their murderous intent, discount that Jesus is the Messiah, and even try to capture and hurt him. But all of these efforts backfire, as we see in verses 26 and 31. God can undo wicked plans and turn them to his ends, creating good where people intend evil. His providence should give us a kind of holy optimism about our circumstances: even in our worst circumstances God is in control and at work. **What can you do to infuse your perspective with holy optimism?**

Note: To think more deeply about holy optimism, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

This passage teaches us that God's provision is in his timing. Jesus acted on God's timing to remain silent, to speak, and even to avoid angry crowds. **What can make trusting God's timing difficult?**

When Jesus tells the crowds that he would go where they couldn't follow him in verse 34, the crowds misunderstand him, thinking he means to go to Gentile countries to teach Jews and Greeks. Jesus is talking about his Ascension but, ironically, the crowd's assumption is also true. In the book of Acts, Jesus's teaching went out to Jews across the Mediterranean and was offered to Gentiles. We tend to make assumptions about God's purposes, but we ultimately never know what God will do, when he will do it, or how he will do it. **What about your current circumstances causes you to doubt God? Instead of rushing to figure out what, when, or how God is going**

to fulfill his promises, what can you do to trust his timing?

Note: To study more about the Dispersion, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

In verses 37–39, Jesus again refers to himself as living water as he did in John 4. But this time he promises those who will believe in him will be overflowing sources of life. Not only does Jesus satisfy our thirst, but he also causes us to be sources of life for others. In other words, your faith should overflow into and influence the world around you. **What effect do you have on those around you? What does it look like to allow the “living water” of Jesus to flow through you?**

In verses 40–44, there’s a division between the people listening to Jesus. Everyone seems to have their own ideas about Jesus’s identity, as they still do today. But Dr. Evans reminded us that we only have three options when it comes to Jesus’s identity. He is either the greatest liar in history who knew he wasn’t the Son of God, a lunatic who falsely thought he was the Son of God, or he was who he proclaimed himself to be. **Who do you think Jesus is?**

Those who doubt Jesus in this passage note that he’s from Galilee, not Bethlehem, the prophesied home of the Messiah. We know what they did not: Jesus was a descendant of David born in Bethlehem. Doubt can cause us to reject Jesus before we look for answers to our questions. **What doubts do you have about Jesus? How might the Gospel of John answer your doubts? What can you do to seek answers to your questions about him?**

Read John 7:45–52.

The chief priests, or Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees see Jesus as a threat and fear some of their own leaders may have trusted in his teaching. As it happened, one of their own leaders, Nicodemus, had already befriended Jesus back in John 3. **How does Nicodemus respond to the anxious leaders? What wisdom is there in Nicodemus’s response?**

The Sanhedrin and Pharisees dismiss Nicodemus out of hand, completely uninterested in speaking to Jesus. Their dismissiveness reminds us of an important fact: people will reject Jesus for no good reason. Even in the face of

wisdom, people will choose to not hear Jesus for themselves. **How can you prepare to face rejection in your evangelism and apologetics? How might being ready for rejection change the way you pray for people who don't know Jesus?**

The religious leaders were sure Jesus could not be the Messiah. As a result, they refused to hear his teaching and misunderstood his purposes. When we don't recognize Jesus, we will miss what he is doing in the world around us. **What can you do this week to seek the true Jesus, the Son of God?**

LAST WORD

Faith in Jesus changes us. It causes us to trust in God's timing, even when other people tell us not to. It causes us to speak boldly about Jesus, even when the circumstances say it is foolish.

Instead of reacting to our circumstances out of fear or anxiety, faith in Jesus transforms us into messengers of God who are at peace in turbulent times. But that peace and confidence in God should not stay hidden within us. Instead, we should be like Jesus, trusting in God and his purposes for our lives. When we are living to honor God, our faith in Jesus will cause us to become overflowing sources of life to the world around us.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

1. Feast of Booths

The Feast of Booths, also known as the Festival of Tabernacles or Sukkot, was the seventh and final feast in the Jewish calendar. It was one of the biggest and most joyous celebrations of the year, taking place after the harvest in mid-autumn, five days after the somber Day of Atonement.

Jews from all over the known world would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the week-long festival, and everyone would leave their homes to live in a *sukkah*, meaning tabernacle or booth. These family tabernacles would remind Jews of the Exodus when God rescued his people out of slavery, brought them to the Holy Land, and dwelt with his people in the tabernacle.

But the festival was not just a celebration of the past; it also looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. So, when Jesus stood up to speak during the Festival of Booths, he was revealing himself as the fulfillment of the festival. Just as God brought his people out of slavery and dwelt among them, Jesus—Emmanuel, God with us—came to live with us to bring us out of slavery to sin.

Reread John 7:14–44. **Now that you know about the festival, what new insights do you have when you read this passage?**

You may not celebrate Sukkot in your home, but you can still celebrate in the spirit of the Festival of Booths. We can celebrate as we look back at God rescuing us from slavery to sin and forward in hope of his return and final victory. **How can you bring the spirit of the celebration of the Festival of Booths into your own life?**

2. Holy Optimism

In John 7, we saw how God's timing always leads to his promised results. God is in control of all things and, even when the present seems dark and the future unsure, he is at work. God's sovereignty should give us confidence, a God-focused optimism in every situation. We see a powerful example of holy optimism in the story of Joseph (see Genesis 37, 39–50).

Joseph had a difficult life: he was sold into slavery, wrongly convicted of a crime, and forgotten in prison for years. He had every reason to wonder, "Where is God right now?" He had every circumstantial reason to doubt God's promises.

What are you walking through right now? Where does it seem like God is right now?

But Joseph didn't give up on God; he held on to God's promises, even when life looked bleakest and most unfair. He was faithful when everything around him said he should give up.

But why, *how*, could Joseph live with that kind of hope? Because he knew God is faithful, never far away, and will fulfill his promises, even in seemingly impossible situations.

At the end of the story, Joseph forgives his brothers. Read Genesis 50:20.

What circumstances in your life appear to be meant for evil? Can you imagine how God could mean them for good?

While we may have an idea of what we want our future to look like, God is the one working the threads of our lives together in ways we never expect. In his hands, evil comes undone like a loose braid and those threads are reworked for our good.

When we trust God's plan, especially in difficult times, it gives us assured hope that God will not leave or abandon us. This assured hope should cause us to be optimists who trust God and look forward to what he will do in every situation. But trusting God can be difficult while we are in difficult situations.

Read Philippians 4:6–9.

First, pray. Take your anxiety and thanks to God. **What are you anxious about? What do you have to be thankful for?**

Second, fill your mind with truth. **What true, just, pure, lovely, or commendable things can you meditate on today? What Bible verses can you think about as you go through your day?**

And finally, live faithfully as Joseph lived faithfully. **What can you do to faithfully live out what you have “learned and received and heard and seen” from Jesus?**

In all times, with holy optimism, may the peace of God guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

3. The Dispersion

Some of the people in the crowd thought Jesus was going to leave Jerusalem and visit “the Dispersion.” While the Dispersion is only specifically mentioned a few times in the New Testament (see also James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1–2), they play a very important role in the early church.

The Dispersion, or Diaspora, is the catch-all name for Jews who had left Palestine to live throughout the Mediterranean region. The first Diaspora Jews were the exiles in Babylon who refused to return to the Promised Land with Ezra and Nehemiah. For this reason, Jews who lived outside of Palestine were called *galut*, meaning “the exiled” and were seen in a negative light.

In Diaspora, Jews would form tight-knit communities in their new homelands with other Jews centered around common meeting areas called synagogues. From the moment Paul came to know Christ, he proclaimed the gospel in diaspora synagogues. During his missionary journeys, Paul would always stop first in local synagogues to open the Scriptures with fellow Jews and talk about Jesus.

Read Acts 17:1–14.

This passage shows us the full range of the Dispersion’s reactions to Paul’s message. In Thessalonica—some believe and others riot. In Berea, the Jews in the synagogue search the Scriptures and reason with Paul.

What do you admire about the Bereans? What could today's church learn from their example?

The Dispersion were seen as exiles, unfortunate or unfaithful Jews who would rather live with Gentiles than near God's temple. But God used these communities to build his church. Paul felt they were the most important people he could visit. If you ever feel outside of God's plan, if you live in a place that is far from the action, let the Dispersion encourage you. You are not beyond God's plan.

How has God strategically placed you to build his church in your community?

What fresh opportunities has God given you to share the gospel?