

Session 1: John 12:1–50

SESSION GOALS

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

Main Idea

To honor God we must honor his Son, Jesus, the one whom the Father sent to redeem us.

Head Change

To know that Jesus is the Son of God, the prophesied Messiah who fulfilled Scripture and came so that we might know the Father.

Heart Change

To feel a desire to know Jesus and obey his commands.

Life Change

To put your faith in Jesus, the light of the world.

OPEN

Imagine that all of the lights in your home were turned off. How well do you think you could navigate your home—including cleaning, cooking, and hosting friends—without any light?

Most of us would struggle without light. If we were deprived of our sense of sight, our world would become much more difficult to navigate. Simple tasks would be complicated and potentially dangerous. In the same way, living apart from Jesus deprives us of spiritual light—God’s wisdom and guidance.

In this study, Dr. Tony Evans will guide us through the second half of the Gospel of John, showing us who Jesus is and how our lives can radically change when we turn to him. In our passage today, Jesus says that he is the light of the world. Through him, we can know the Father and see the path of obedience he’s called us to.

READ

Read John 12:1–50. If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to John 12:1–8, 12–19, 44–50.

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 kind of deliverance were the Jewish people looking for?

What was the result for those who followed Jesus secretly?

What did Jesus say about those who rejected him but still wanted the Father?

Show Session 1: *John 12:1–50* (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

John 12 highlights two types of people—those who celebrated Jesus and those who were outraged by him. The reaction to Jesus today is the same: Jesus may be denied or loved, but he cannot be ignored.

Read John 12:1–8.

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary hosted Jesus and his disciples for dinner not long after he had raised Lazarus from the grave. Mary anointed his feet with expensive perfume, a generous and expensive gift. While some people scoffed at her gift, Jesus defended her extravagance. **What can Mary’s boldness, and Jesus’s reaction, teach you about how God sees your humble acts of worship? What do you think would be an extravagant act of worship, like Mary’s perfume, in today’s culture?**

Judas, the treasurer of the disciples, objected to Mary “wasting” a valuable asset. But we learn that Judas’s motives for objecting were not as pure as they sounded—he was a thief, more inclined to steal than to give. **How would you describe Mary’s and Judas’s attitudes toward money? Toward Jesus?**

Mary behaved more like a true disciple than Judas, even though he was one of Jesus’s twelve disciples. Jesus saw that Mary was offering her gift in faith and rebuked Judas directly: “Leave her alone.” **What happens to you when your act of faith is encouraged and praised? If you observe someone stepping out in faith contrary to cultural norms, what could you do to defend and encourage them?**

When a dead man walks out of his grave, word gets around. Read John 12:9–11.

Lazarus’s resurrection became big news in Judea, which drew crowds of people to Jesus and angered Jewish leaders. Factions and jealousy among church leaders remain a troubling reality today. **In what ways have you observed religious leaders’ feuds and arguments take attention away from Jesus?**

What part can you play in online or in-person conversations to keep the focus on Jesus rather than “winning” an argument?

Some of the chief priests were Sadducees, a Jewish sect that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Lazarus was a walking contradiction of their beliefs. Despite living, breathing proof that resurrection did and could happen, they were unable to admit they were wrong. **Have you ever struggled to change your position on certain aspects of your faith even when the evidence suggested you were wrong?**

What steps can you take to seek truth above preference or tradition?

***Note:** To learn more about the different Jewish sects during Jesus's lifetime, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Read John 12:12–19.

The day after Mary anointed Jesus with oil, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, welcomed by eager crowds as the long-awaited king of Israel. As Dr. Evans said, the people expected political deliverance, but Jesus offered spiritual deliverance. The people were not looking for a spiritual savior and, as a result, misunderstood what Jesus came to do. **In what ways can we misunderstand Jesus?**

When we are focused on a particular need, as the people of Jerusalem were focused on political liberation, we can miss what Jesus is doing in our lives. **As you go about your day, how can you prepare your heart for God to do unexpected work in your life?**

***Note:** To learn more about Messianic allusions during Jesus's final days before his crucifixion, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

Read John 12:20–26.

The raising of Lazarus caught the attention of virtually everyone, including the Greeks—non-Jews who were visiting or living in Jerusalem. They, too, wanted to meet Jesus. **How did you first hear about Jesus? What is it about him that makes him irresistible to you?**

When Jesus was told that the Greeks wanted to meet him, he replied with an enigmatic metaphor about grains of wheat. Then he said that following him requires that we “hate” our life in this world. Dr. Evans explained these

confusing passages saying, “If you give up your life for [Jesus], you gain your life and the productivity it was designed to produce.” **What results, or “fruit,” have you seen after you committed to following Jesus? Which aspects of your life have you feared giving up or giving over to God?**

As Jesus’s followers, we are called to give up our ambitions, selfish desires, and independence if we want to be used by God to further his kingdom. Jesus said that to serve him, we must follow him. **What could it look like for you to follow Jesus more faithfully? In what ways can your allegiance be pulled from him to other people, accomplishments, or acclaim?**

Read John 12:27–36.

Jesus submitted himself to the Father’s will despite being troubled by the suffering he knew was coming. If Jesus could admit that his soul was troubled, we should feel the freedom to do the same. But, many times, we hide our struggles and try to endure them alone. **What can prevent us from acknowledging our burdens and difficult circumstances to one another? To God?**

How can Jesus’s vulnerability encourage us to confess our struggles and seek the Father’s comfort?

God used the cross, a symbol of oppression, to bring freedom and eternal life to all who would accept it. He turns death into life. **What negative event or circumstance in your life has God used for good? How does remembering his power encourage you in any current difficulties?**

Dr. Evans reminded us that light helps us see where we’re going—only by sticking with Jesus’s perspective, truth, and goodness can we navigate a dark world full of evil and tragedy. **What hope has your faith given you during hard circumstances? How has God’s Word guided you through challenging decisions?**

Note: *To learn more about how light is used throughout the Bible to describe God, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

Read John 12:37–43.

In this passage, John explains why Jesus was not completely accepted by quoting the prophet Isaiah, who predicted the people's willful blindness toward the Messiah. **Have you ever scoffed at how people who encountered miracles in the Bible still rejected Jesus? How realistic is it to think we would be any different if we had been alive to see Jesus?**

In verse 42, we learn that some who believed in Jesus did so secretly. We all face the same temptation to seek people's approval over God's. **In what circumstances have you been tempted to keep your faith quiet? What happened when you stayed silent? On the other hand, in what ways have you been blessed when you spoke up or acted on your faith?**

Jesus equated himself with the Father: whoever believes in him believes in the one who sent him. But to reject Jesus is to reject God. Jesus's words were radical and likely as difficult for many to accept then as they are now. **In what ways do people today respect Jesus as a teacher, but not as God? How can Jesus's words help clarify his identity as fully God when you tell others about him?**

Jesus emphasized that the Father sent him to save the world. But our own decision to reject or accept him is what judges us before the Father. Jesus's words show us both his role as savior and our responsibility to respond to him. **Who do you think Jesus is? Have you accepted him, rejected him, or are you still curious about him? Explain your answer.**

No matter how you answered the previous question, stay open to learning from Jesus in this study. Examine his claims. Watch his behavior. When we see Jesus, we see the Father, the true light of the world. **What could you do to learn more about Jesus in the Gospel of John?**

LAST WORD

As Jesus approaches his last days, anticipating his coming suffering and death, he is more and more willing to reveal his identity. He challenges his followers with real-world truth about the cost of identifying with him. It won't be easy for him or them, but he assures his listeners that they can trust him. He has come from the Father to save them, if only they would listen and believe.

Are we listening? Do we love our lives too much, or are we willing to lose our lives for his sake? Jesus is telling us that giving ourselves to him is worth the cost. Are we willing to see the world through the light of Jesus's life?

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 and deepen your study of the Gospel of John.

1. Religious Groups in Jesus's Day

During his visits to Jerusalem, Jesus was repeatedly confronted by a contingent of religious leaders who questioned his teachings, attempted to trap him into saying something heretical, and plotted to kill him. But who were they, and why did they consider Jesus a threat?

There were two primary Jewish groups in Jesus's day: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Members of each group could have been priests or members of the Sanhedrin, the authoritative religious council for Jews.

The Pharisees were a large group of spiritual leaders who demanded exacting obedience to the Mosaic law. But, in their zeal to honor God's Word, many of them did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Their desire to maintain Jewish religious identity and purity while under foreign oppression led them to develop additional rules and traditions to the law.

Read Mark 7:1–8.

Verses 3 and 4 explain the extra rules and traditions the Pharisees insisted everyone follow. **What were Jesus's disciples doing that upset the Pharisees? In what way did the Pharisees' extra rules take away from the intent of the original law?**

When following rules—and appearing to be more holy than the people around us—becomes more important than loving God and our neighbors, we've traded true devotion for a mask of spirituality. **In what ways was the Pharisees' zeal to do "right" things actually an empty ritual that missed the point of the law?**

It is very easy to vilify the Pharisees, but their legalism and judgmental hearts are not so different than our own. **How have you seen a tendency in yourself to rely on habits, rituals, and man-made rules to prove your spirituality?**

In what ways is it easy to judge people whom you do not perceive as very spiritual?

Jesus's insightful interpretations of the law and his willingness to call out those who were righteous in their own eyes angered the Pharisees. As Jesus's ministry progressed, the religious leaders felt increasingly threatened by his popularity, leading to their repeated attempts to trap or kill him. In the end, they succeeded.

Mentioned less often in the Gospels, the Sadducees were another group of Jewish leaders. Contrary to the Pharisees, they valued the supreme authority of Scripture to the exclusion of oral traditions from former generations. They tended to be wealthy, aristocratic, and elitist, often siding with Romans to keep regional peace. They also denied the resurrection (see Mark 12:18; Acts 23:6–8) and the existence of fate. Jesus consistently warned against their focus on the letter of the law rather than the intention behind it.

Read Luke 20:27–40.

The Sadducees asked Jesus what Scripture taught about a highly unlikely scenario. Their focus on details and hypotheses caused them to miss the rich truth Scripture revealed about God himself. Jesus's answer pointed out that they were focused on lesser things, like marriage, when they should have been rejoicing that the very words they used revealed the reality of the resurrection.

We are not all that different. Sometimes we are so busy bolstering our own positions that we miss the main revelation of the Bible—the person and love of God himself. **What topics or points of contention in the church can distract us from our purpose and calling?**

What steps can you take to keep God at the center of your study of his Word?

2. Old Testament Prophecies Alluding to Jesus

One of the big questions in the Gospels is the identity of Jesus—was he the long-awaited Messiah? Jesus often asked people not to say anything or refused to answer the question when asked. But the Gospel writers clearly understood that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies in the Scriptures. Scholars have found dozens of predictions that were accomplished by Jesus. We will examine just a few here.

Read the prophecy from the Old Testament and the way Jesus fulfilled that prophecy in the Gospels. Then, consider the questions that follow.

Zechariah 9:9 and John 12:13–15

By embodying the prophecy so specifically—riding a donkey into Jerusalem, allowing them to call him king of Israel—Jesus was accepting the crowd’s acclamation. The people thought he was the coming king, and he was. But they wanted him to lead a military revolution, a return to Israel’s independent glory days. **What kind of salvation was he bringing instead?**

Psalm 69:9 and John 2:14–17

After Jesus cleared the temple of the moneychangers, the disciples recognized that he was fulfilling Psalm 69:9. **Why was Jesus upset with the moneychangers? How did his attitude and action honor God?**

Isaiah 53:1 and John 12:37–38

Despite all the miracles Jesus had performed, some people refused to be convinced he was the Messiah they’d been waiting for. He did not meet their preconceived notions of who the Messiah would be. Has Jesus ever disappointed you? What do you expect him to do or do differently? How do you reconcile your disappointment with God’s plan?

Isaiah 42:1–4 and Matthew 12:15–21

Jesus delighted his Father as he taught about justice and brought healing to the crowds who followed him. We are among “the nations” mentioned in this prophecy, people who live half a world away from Israel and look to Jesus as our hope. His mission to save humanity includes us. **How does seeing Jesus fulfill Isaiah’s words help you worship him more?**

In his grand scheme of salvation, God placed hints and predictions about the hopeful future he had in store for his people. From his birth to his death and resurrection,

Jesus fulfilled every prophecy and proved that he was the Messiah. But only those whose hearts were aligned with the Father's could see and understand what Jesus was doing. If you feel like you struggle to know Jesus, be encouraged—even the disciples, men who were with Jesus every day, needed a lot of time before they grasped just how amazing Jesus was. Take heart, he'll be patient with us too.

3. Metaphor of Light

In John 8:12, Jesus proclaimed that he was the light of the world. In John 12, he revisits the metaphor of light, contrasting himself with the darkness that inevitably overtakes any who reject him. Without the light, how are we to see through and push back the darkness? He pleads, "Believe in the light so that you may become children of light" (John 12:36).

Biblical authors consistently use the theme of light versus darkness to picture ethical dualism. Together, the words describe the opposite ends of the good–evil battle. Light is a symbol always connected with the presence of God, while darkness represents all that opposes God.

In Genesis 1:3, God created literal light. Light established the boundary to darkness and brought order and function to the chaotic void (Gen 1:2). Throughout the rest of Scripture, light is associated with God's presence, truth, and order.

Read Psalm 119:105 and Proverbs 6:23. The psalmist describes God's Word as light to illuminate one's path. Similarly, in the proverb, wise advice is compared to a lamp, a light, a way to life. To walk in the light is to follow God and choose wisdom. **To what extent do you rely on God's Word to guide your decisions and actions?**

Walking in the light requires that we follow God's ways, looking to him for guidance on what is good. As we walk in the light, we also gain fellowship with him and other believers. Read 1 John 1:5–10.

"God is light." Therefore, we must be honest about when we fail. His goodness overflows into forgiveness, so we don't need to hide from him when we sin. **What has repentance looked like in your life? What would it look**

like for you to turn to God first when you sin so that you can “walk in the light”?

Light and dark are not equal powers. Though darkness can impact us, we know that God will prevail over evil. His ways of wisdom and justice are always better than selfishness and hate. The ultimate darkness is death, and Jesus has conquered it, giving us bright hope for an eternity with the light of the world. **How do you allow the hope of God’s victory over evil impact your daily life? What can you do to keep the hope of a living future with God central to your thinking?**