

The Upper Room

Walking with Jesus through John 13–17

A Six-Week Bible Study Using the CASE Model

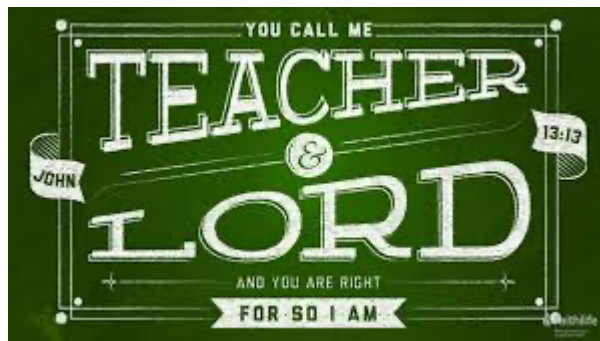
Jesus for me – Jesus in me – Jesus through me

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Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).
Participants are welcome to follow along in their preferred translation.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thank you for joining this study. This is Part II of a thirteen-week study. While it is not necessary to complete Part I before participating in Part II, doing so can be beneficial. Over the next six weeks, we are going to do something extraordinary: we are going to sit down at a table with Jesus and His disciples on one of the most important nights in human history.

John 13–17 is often called the **Upper Room Discourse** or the **Farewell Discourse**. Personally, I like to think of it as **Jesus' Legacy**. These five chapters record Jesus' most intimate teaching — the words He chose to speak to His closest friends on the night before His crucifixion. Think of that. Of all the things Jesus “could have said” in His final hours, He chose *these* words. He *washed their feet*. He *promised them the Holy Spirit*. He *called them friends*. He *prayed for them* — and *for us*. Every sentence is heavy with love, and every promise is meant to carry us through whatever comes next.

Why This Study Matters

The Upper Room Discourse is the theological heart of the Gospel of John. Here, Jesus reveals, in His own words, the meaning of His death, the coming of the Spirit, the nature of Christian community, and the mission of the Church. If you want to know what was on Jesus' heart the night before Calvary, this is where you go.

Woven throughout our six weeks is a single theological thread: Jesus **for** me. Jesus **in** me. Jesus **through** me. Week by week, we will move from receiving what Jesus has done **for** us (His servant love, His atoning work, His opening of the way to the Father), to experiencing His life **in** us (through the indwelling Holy Spirit and the abiding life of the Vine), to living His mission **through** us (as witnesses sent into the world, sanctified in the Word, united by His prayer). This is the shape of the Christian life: **received, inhabited, sent**.

How to Prepare

- **Bring your Bible.** We will read directly from Scripture each week. The ESV is our base text, but bring whatever translation you read and love.
- **Read the passage beforehand.** Each session lists the Scripture reading. Even ten minutes of preparation will enrich your experience.
- **Come with an open heart.** This is not a lecture — it is a conversation. The best sessions happen when participants are honest, curious, and willing to be surprised by the text.
- **Respect the group.** Listen generously. Share honestly. Maintain confidentiality. Pray for and encourage one another between sessions.
- **Expect the Holy Spirit.** Jesus promised that the Spirit would teach us all things and bring His words to remembrance. Trust that promise as we study together.

I am grateful for each of you. Let's enter the Upper Room together.

Serving In and through Christ and His love,

Bill Cullen

The CASE Model — A Participant's Guide

Each session in this study follows the same rhythm. We call it the **CASE model** as God in Scripture makes His CASE. Once you learn the pattern, you will find that it mirrors the way God's Word has always worked — moving us from understanding to conviction, from grace to growth, and from empowerment to action.

Here is how each session flows:

KNOW

We begin by grounding ourselves in the text. *What does the passage actually say?* We look at context, key details, cultural background, and the story Jesus is telling. Before the Word can work on us, we need to understand it on its own terms.

C — CONVICT

The text holds up a mirror. Where does it challenge our assumptions, habits, or blind spots? Where does the Law do its work — exposing our need, our self-sufficiency, our distance from God's design? *Conviction is not condemnation*; it is the honest recognition that we need a Savior.

A — ASSURE

The Gospel speaks. Where does this passage anchor us in God's grace, Christ's finished work, and the Father's love? This is the heart of Christian theology, particularly Lutheran theology: **assurance rests not in our performance but in Christ's promise and grace**. Here we hear the good news that silences the accuser and sets the captive free.

S — STRETCH

Now the text invites growth. How does it push us beyond our comfort zone into deeper trust, bolder faith, or new understanding? Stretching is not about guilt — it is about possibility and opportunity. The God who assures us also calls us forward.

E — EMPOWER

The Holy Spirit equips. What resources — the Word, the Sacraments, the community of faith, the Comforter Himself — does Jesus provide to sustain us? We are never sent out empty-handed. Empowerment is God's provision for everything He asks.

APPLY

We move from the Upper Room into the world. What concrete, specific step will you take this week to live out what you have received? Application makes the study personal and practical — faith taking shape in daily life as Jesus, through His Spirit, is formed in us.

A Note on the Pattern: The CASE movement — **Convict** → **Assure** → **Stretch** → **Empower** — follows the ancient rhythm of **Law and Gospel**. The Law convicts us of our sin and need; the Gospel assures us of Christ's grace and mercy. From that assurance, we are stretched toward maturity and empowered for mission. **Know** and **Apply** bookends this movement, grounding each session in Scripture and sending participants into their daily lives. This is not a formula — it is the heartbeat of how God's Word has always worked.

For Personal Reflection and Discussion: The front half of each lesson includes commentary and discussion questions. However, after the closing prayer and the Looking Ahead thought, there is a section entitled “*For Personal Reflection and Discussion.*” This section can be used in a couple of different ways: (1) It can be used for individual reflection on the lesson during the week, either (a) prior to the group meetings in preparation for the upcoming group meeting/discussion, or (b) it can be used for individual reflection during the week following the group meeting/discussion.

(2) A second option, the questions can be a replacement for the front half with the commentary. This option allows the discussion to be less prompted and guided by commentary and more by the individual thoughts of those in the group.

Either way, the study guide uses the CASE model:

Know – Convict – Assure – Stretch – Empower – Apply

Note: The author’s preference would be for groups to choose “1 (a)” above. “1 (b)” would then serve as preparation for the group discussion of “1 (a).” As the author, to encourage accountability, I would further suggest that following the opening prayer, the group leader begin each lesson by asking two questions: (1) “What did you learn from the preparatory readings during the week?” And (2) “How has your ‘Apply’ been going during the week?”

Group Covenant

At the back of this study guide is a “Group Covenant” that group members may choose to make with one another. This covenant is not being made with God with Divine consequences. It is a group covenant (agreement/pledge) between group members for a period of six weeks. The intention of the covenant is to encourage members to support each other (both during group meetings and outside them) and to establish accountability to and for each other.

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THE SIX WEEKLY SESSIONS

Week 1: Love to the End

Scripture: John 13:1–17

Theme: Jesus serves — and redefines greatness — by washing His disciples' feet.

Arc: *Jesus FOR me — He stoops to serve those He loves.*

KNOW — Setting the Scene

It is the night before Passover. The room is prepared, the meal is set, and tension fills the air. John opens this scene with a breathtaking statement: *"Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* (13:1). That phrase — **"to the end"** (*eis telos*) — means not merely "until the end" but "to the uttermost," "to the fullest extent." This is love without limit.

And then the most astonishing thing happens. Jesus rises from the table, lays aside His outer garments, wraps a towel around His waist, and begins to wash the disciples' feet. In first-century Palestine, foot-washing was the job of the lowest household servant — a task so menial that Jewish masters were not even permitted to require it of Jewish slaves. Yet here is the Lord of glory, on His knees, with a basin and a towel.

Notice the details John provides. Jesus knows that the Father has given all things into His hands (v. 3). He knows He has come from God and is going back to God. It is precisely *because* He knows who He is that He is free to serve. True authority expresses itself not in grasping but in giving. And notice this: **He washes Judas's feet too.** The betrayer is at the table, and Jesus serves him. Grace precedes even the worst treachery.

Peter's protest — *"You shall never wash my feet!"* (v. 8) — is deeply human. It feels like humility, but Jesus names it as resistance. *"If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."* This is more than an object lesson in humility. This is a picture of the Gospel itself: you must receive before you can serve. You must be washed before you can be sent. The laying aside of garments and the taking them up again (vv. 4, 12) foreshadow Jesus' death and resurrection — He lays down His life and takes it up again.

1. What details in verses 1–5 tell us about Jesus' state of mind as He prepares to wash feet? What does He know, and how does that knowledge shape what He does?
2. Why is it significant that Jesus washed Judas's feet too? What does this tell us about the nature of grace?
3. What does Jesus mean when He tells Peter, *"If I do not wash you, you have no share with me"* (v. 8)? What is at stake in Peter's refusal?

C — CONVICT

Peter's reaction may feel noble — but it is actually a refusal of grace. And we do the same thing. We resist being served by Jesus. We prefer to earn our standing, to come to God on our own terms, to maintain the illusion that we have something to offer before we receive anything. We are proud, even in our piety. The foot-washing strips us of pretense and asks: *Will you let Jesus serve you? Will you receive what you cannot earn?*

I believe there was a second reason Peter objected. As we read the Gospels and get to know Peter, we can pretty safely assume that Peter viewed himself as Jesus' chief lieutenant, second in command, a position of influence and prestige. So when #1, Jesus, was washing feet, it was beginning to dawn on him what that meant for #2. Jesus reinforces this awakening understanding in vv. 12-17. Jesus says, *"I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you"* (v. 15).

1. In what areas of your life do you find it hardest to let Jesus serve you — to simply receive grace without earning it?
2. Where might pride or self-sufficiency be keeping you from the vulnerability that real community requires?
3. Where do we cling to status, comfort, or self-sufficiency rather than follow the pattern of taking the towel? Where do we expect to be served rather than to serve (see Mt. 20:25-28; Eph. 4:32; Phil. 2:3-8; 1 Jn. 3:16)?

A — ASSURE

Here is the Gospel in a towel: **Jesus does not wait for the disciples to be worthy.** He serves them knowing full well their failures — Peter's denial, Judas's betrayal, the others' desertion. His love is not reactive to their performance; it is proactive, deliberate, *"to the end."* This is the grace that comes *before* repentance, the love that seeks the lost before they know they are lost (see 1 Jn. 4:9-10).

The washing Jesus speaks of extends beyond the Upper Room to the cleansing we receive/experience in **Holy Baptism**. In Baptism, Christ washes us — not because we asked, not because we deserved it, but because He is the kind of Lord who picks up a towel. Our identity is not built on our grip on God but on His grip on us. *"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* — and that includes you and me.

1. How does it change your understanding of grace to know that Jesus served Judas — the one who would betray Him — at this very table (see Lk. 22:19-21)?
2. What does *"loved them to the end"* (v. 1) mean for your life today — especially on the days when you feel least lovable (see Ro. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 2:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:9-10)?

S — STRETCH

Jesus says, *"I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you"* (v. 15). The call is not merely to admire Jesus' humility but to *practice* it. Who in your life needs you to take up the towel? This stretches us beyond comfort into costly, status-surrendering service — the kind that nobody posts about, the kind that nobody applauds.

1. Who is someone in your life — at home, at work, in the congregation — whom Jesus might be calling you to serve in a way that costs you something?
2. What would it look like for our group to practice "towel ministry" in our community this week?

E — EMPOWER

Jesus empowers this service by His own example and His indwelling presence. We do not serve in our own strength. The same Lord who washed feet now lives in us by His Spirit. He provides the humility, the compassion, and the endurance we lack. At the **Sacrament of the Altar** — the meal we share at His table — continually refreshes and empowers us for the service He calls us to. We come to the Table empty and leave filled; we come tired and leave strengthened (see Jn. 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 3:4-6; 2 Pe. 1:3-4).

1. How does knowing that Jesus Himself empowers your service change the way you approach difficult acts of love?
2. What spiritual practices — Word, Sacrament, prayer, community — sustain you for humble service? Which of these might you need to lean into more?

APPLY

1. **Serve one person this week** in a concrete, practical way — and do it without being asked. It could be a household task, a handwritten note, a phone call, or an act of generosity. Let it cost you something: time, energy, or pride (see Mt. 25:34-40; Gal. 6:2,9-10).
2. **Reflect each evening this week:** *"Where did I see Jesus washing feet today — through me or through someone else?"*

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the King who kneels. You are the Master who serves. You washed the feet of friends who would fail You and a betrayer who would sell You — and You did it with love. Forgive us for the times we resist Your grace, preferring our own strength to Your tender mercy. Wash us again. Remind us that our worth comes not from what we do for You, but from what You have done for us. And now give us the courage and the joy to pick up the towel — to serve without counting the cost, to love without keeping score. We are Yours, Lord. Use us. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

Looking Ahead: Next week, we enter the heart of Jesus' promise: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." As we have been washed by His love, we now follow where He leads — through the troubled hearts of the disciples to the Father's house, where a place is being prepared for us.

For Personal Reflection & Discussion

KNOW

1. What stands out to you in this passage?

2. What do you notice about Jesus' actions and words?

3. What questions do you have?

4. What does Jesus know before He acts? (vv. 1–3)

5. What does Jesus actually do? (vv. 4–5)

6. How does Peter respond? Why?

7. What explanation does Jesus give? (vv. 12– 17)

CONVICT

1. What part of this passage challenges you? What part of this passage makes you uncomfortable?

2. Where do you see yourself in this story?

3. What needs to change in your life? Where do you resist receiving help, grace, or care?

4. Where do you expect to be served rather than serve?

ASSURE

1. Who does Jesus serve in this passage?

2. What does this reveal about His love?

3. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' grace? ...about His grace for you personally?

4. What promise speaks to you personally?

5. Where do you need to receive this truth?

6. Where do you need to receive His grace today?

Truth: My place with Jesus is received, not earned.

STRETCH

1. What is God calling you toward?

2. What step of faith feels uncomfortable?

3. What new way of thinking or living is emerging?

4. What kind of person does Jesus call you to become?

5. What fears keep you from serving like this?

EMPOWER

1. What feels hardest about living this way? What feels beyond your ability right now?

2. Where do you need Jesus' help this week?

3. What does God provide?

4. How can/will you rely on the Holy Spirit this week?

APPLY

1. What specific action will you take this week?

2. This week I will serve:

Person: _____

Action: _____

When: _____

Week 2: The Way Home

Scripture: John 13:31–14:14

Theme: In the shadow of departure, Jesus reveals Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Arc: Jesus **FOR** me — He goes to prepare a place and opens the way to the Father.

KNOW — Setting the Scene

Judas has just left the room. John notes it with chilling simplicity: *"And it was night"* (13:30). In the darkness of betrayal, Jesus begins to speak about glory. *"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him"* (13:31). This is a stunning reversal: the cross — the instrument of shame — is the place of glory. For Jesus, glorification does not mean a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns freely accepted in love (see Jn. 12:23-33).

Then comes the **new commandment**: *"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"* (13:34). What makes it "new" is not the concept of love — that is as old as the Torah (see Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18) — but the *standard*: "as I have loved you" (see Ro. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-10). The foot-washing has just defined what that looks like. This love is the badge of discipleship, the mark the world will recognize (13:35). ***NOTE:** It is from this new commandment that Maundy Thursday gets its name. Maundy stems from the Latin word *"Mandatum,"* meaning mandate and commandment.

The disciples are troubled. Jesus is leaving, and they do not understand where He is going. Into this anxiety, Jesus speaks some of the most comforting words in all of Scripture: *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms"* (14:1–2). The word for "rooms" (*monai*) means **dwelling places** — permanent residences, not temporary inns. Jesus is not describing a hotel; He is describing *home*. And the promise is personal: *"I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also"* (14:3).

Thomas, honest as always, asks the question we all want to ask: *"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"* (14:5). And Philip makes his own plea: *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us"* (14:8). These two questions draw out two of the most important declarations in Scripture. To Thomas: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (14:6). To Philip: *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"* (14:9). Jesus does not merely point the way — He **IS the Way**. He does not merely teach truth — He **IS the Truth**. He does not merely offer tips for living — He **IS the Life**.

1. What is the "new commandment" Jesus gives (13:34), and how is it different from the old command to love your neighbor as yourself (see Mt. 22:39)? What has changed? (see Ro. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 3:16)
2. What does Jesus mean by "many rooms" in His Father's house (14:2)? What does this image tell us about God's hospitality?
3. How do Thomas's and Philip's questions in 14:5–8 reflect struggles we still have today?

4. What does Jesus promise about prayer in verses 14:13–14 (see 1 Jn. 5:14-15), and why does He connect it to His departure?

C — CONVICT

We are confronted by our tendency to seek the Father apart from Christ — through moralism, mysticism, self-improvement, or sheer busyness (see Ro. 10:1-3; Col. 2:16-23). We build our own roads to God and wonder why they dead-end. We are also convicted by our troubled hearts: how quickly we default to anxiety rather than trust. Jesus says, "*Believe,*" and we reach for our phones, our plans, our control. The exclusivity of "*no one comes to the Father except through me*" (14:6; also Acts 4:12) challenges our culture's assumption that all spiritual paths lead to the same destination — and it challenges our own temptation to hedge our bets.

1. In what ways do you find yourself trying to reach God by a "way" other than Jesus — through performance, comparison, or control?
2. When has anxiety displaced trust in your life recently? What triggered it, and where did you turn first?

A — ASSURE

The promise of John 14:1–3 is not a theological abstraction — it is a deeply personal pledge. Jesus says, "*I will come again and will take you to myself.*" Not "I will send directions." Not "I hope you find your way." **He comes for us.** Our assurance rests not in our ability to find God but in Christ's finished work of reconciliation (see Heb. 10:10; 1 Jn. 2:1-2). He has done the finding. He has blazed the trail. He has opened the door. And He Himself is the door (see Jn. 10:7).

For Philip, who longed to see the Father, Jesus has the most astonishing answer: "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (14:9). If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus — Jesus washing feet, Jesus forgiving sinners, Jesus weeping at tombs, Jesus going to the cross (see Jn. 1:18; Heb. 12:2). That is the face of God. And that God is *for* you.

1. How does it change your confidence to know that Jesus doesn't just show the way but *is* the Way — and that He comes to take you to Himself?
2. What does the promise "*I will come again and take you to myself*" mean for you in a season of uncertainty or loss?

S — STRETCH

"*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father*" (14:12). This is a staggering promise. The "greater works" are not about outdoing Jesus' miracles but about the **scope of the Gospel's reach** after Pentecost. Through the Spirit, the Church will carry the message of salvation to every

nation, every language, every generation (see Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Are we dreaming big enough about what God can do through His people — through *us* (see Eph. 3:20)?

1. What might "greater works" look like in your daily life, your congregation, your community?
2. Where is God stretching your vision for what He can accomplish through you and through Mt. Olive?

E — EMPOWER

Prayer in Jesus' name (14:13–14) is the engine of empowerment. This is not a magic formula tacked onto the end of a wish list. To pray "**in Jesus' name**" is to pray in alignment with His character, His mission, and His will (see 1 Jn. 5:14-15). It is to come before the Father, not on the basis of our merit but on the basis of the Son's standing (see 2 Pe. 1:3). Jesus empowers us by inviting us into partnership with the Father through prayer — real partnership, where our asking and God's acting come together for the advancement of His kingdom.

1. What does it mean to pray "in Jesus' name" — beyond a closing formula? How would this understanding change the way you pray?
2. How might a deeper, more intentional prayer life empower your daily walk and your witness to others?
3. Prayer is more than talking to or yacking at God. The most important part of prayer comes in learning to listen to God. Personally, I view reading Scripture as prayer where God has the opportunity to get a word in edgewise (see Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). How do you most often listen to God and hear/experience Him speaking to you and guiding you?

APPLY

1. **This week, bring one specific anxiety to Jesus in prayer each day**, using the promise of 14:1: *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."* Write it down. Pray it out. Leave it with Him.
2. **Share with one person this week** how Jesus has been "the way" for you in a specific situation — a moment when He guided, provided, or simply showed up.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Way when we are lost, the Truth when we are confused, the Life when we are dying. Thank You for not leaving us to find our own way home — You come for us, You carry us, You bring us to the Father. Forgive us for the times we have trusted our own maps more than Your voice. Quiet our troubled hearts. Enlarge our vision. Teach us to pray in Your name — not as a formula but as an act of faith, trusting that the Father hears us because of You. Prepare us for what is ahead, and prepare a place for us where You are. We trust You, Lord. Amen.

Looking Ahead: Next week, Jesus introduces us to the One who will carry His presence into our hearts forever — the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. We will discover what it means to never be left alone.

For Personal Reflection & Discussion

KNOW

1. What stands out to you in this passage?

2. What do you notice about Jesus' actions and words?

3. What questions do you have?

What troubles the disciples in this passage?

What does Jesus promise about the future?

What is Jesus claiming in 14:6?

What questions do Thomas and Philip ask?

CONVICT

1. What part of this passage challenges you?

2. Where do you see yourself in this story?

3. What currently troubles your heart?

4. What needs to change in your life?

5. Where do you try to find your own "way" to God?

6. Where do you turn first when anxious?

ASSURE

1. What does Jesus promise in 14:1–3?

2. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' grace?

3. What promise speaks to you personally?

4. Where do you need to receive this truth?

5. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus *is* the Way?

6. What does it mean that He comes for you?

Truth: I don't find my way to God—Jesus brings me.

STRETCH

1. What is God calling you toward?

2. In what new way of thinking or living are these verses challenging you?

3. What step of faith feels uncomfortable?

4. What might “greater works” look like in your life (see Eph. 3:20)?

5. Where is God expanding your vision?

EMPOWER

1. What feels beyond your ability right now?

2. What does God provide?

3. How can you rely on the Holy Spirit this week?

4. What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”?

5. Where do you need to trust God more deeply?

APPLY

1. What specific action will you take this week?

2. This week I will:

☐ Bring one anxiety to Jesus daily

☐ Share one story of how Jesus has led me

Be specific: _____

Week 3: The Comforter Comes

Scripture: John 14:15–31

Theme: Jesus promises the Holy Spirit — the Helper who will dwell IN us and teach us all things.

Arc: *Jesus IN me — The Spirit takes up residence within the believer.*

KNOW — Setting the Scene

We are still in the Upper Room, and Jesus is preparing His friends for His departure. But He will not leave them comfortless. In this passage, He introduces the **Paraclete** — the *paraklētos* — a word rich with meaning. It has been translated as **Helper, Advocate, Counselor, and Comforter**. In the ancient world, a *paraklētos* was someone called to your side — a legal advocate, a trusted advisor, a friend who stands with you when the situation is dire. Jesus says He will ask the Father, and the Father will send "*another Helper*" (14:16) — another of the same kind. The Spirit is not a lesser replacement for Jesus; He is the continuing presence of Jesus Himself.

Three promises stand out. First, the Spirit "*will be with you forever*" (v. 16). Not temporarily. Not conditionally. **Forever**. Second, the Spirit "*will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*" (v. 26). The Spirit is the divine Teacher who illuminates Scripture and makes Christ's words alive in every generation. Third, Jesus says, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you*" (v. 27). The world's peace is fragile — dependent on circumstances. Jesus' peace is a Person, and that Person has taken up permanent residence.

At the center of this passage is one of the most tender statements Jesus ever makes: "*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you*" (v. 18). The word is *orphanos* — bereft, abandoned, fatherless. Jesus knows what His departure will feel like. And His answer is not a principle or a philosophy. His answer is a *presence*: the Holy Spirit, who makes the indwelling of the Father and the Son a living reality in every believer (vv. 20, 23).

Notice the beautiful trinitarian dynamic: the Father sends the Spirit at the Son's request (v. 16); the Spirit teaches what the Son has spoken (v. 26); the Son reveals the Father (v. 9). This is the Holy Trinity at work — not as an abstract doctrine but as a living communion into which we are drawn.

1. What does the title "Paraclete" (Helper / Advocate / Comforter) tell us about the Spirit's role in our lives? Which translation of this word speaks most to you, and why?
2. What does Jesus mean by "*I will not leave you as orphans*" (v. 18)? Why does He use that specific word?
3. How does the Spirit's ministry of teaching and reminding (v. 26) shape our understanding of how we read and hear Scripture?
4. What is the difference between the peace Jesus gives and the peace the world offers (v. 27)? Can you think of a time when you experienced the difference?

C — CONVICT

We are convicted by our **functional orphan-hood** — the way we live as though we are on our own, neglecting the Spirit's presence, relying on human wisdom and willpower rather than the Comforter. How often do we face a difficult decision, a relational conflict, or a season of grief and never once think to ask the Spirit for guidance? We have the most powerful Advocate in the universe living within us — and we ignore Him.

We are also challenged by verse 15: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* Love and obedience are inseparable in Jesus' teaching. This does not mean obedience *earns* love — it means love *produces* obedience (see 1 Jn. 5:3-5). When we find ourselves chronically resistant to God's Word, the question is not "Am I trying hard enough?" but "Am I trusting in and abiding in His love?" (see Jn. 15:9-11)

1. In what ways do you live as though you are spiritually "orphaned" — on your own, without the Spirit's guidance or comfort?
2. How does the connection between love and obedience (14:15) challenge your understanding of the Christian life? Does it comfort you or unsettle you — and why?

A — ASSURE

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (v. 18). Let that promise settle deep into your heart. The Spirit **is** the presence of Jesus with us — not a lesser substitute but the very life of Christ dwelling within. Through **Word and Sacrament**, the Spirit creates and sustains faith. Through Baptism, we are sealed as God's own (see 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14). Through the preached Word, the Spirit brings Christ's voice into our ears. Through the Lord's Supper, we receive Christ's body and blood for the strengthening of faith. **We are never alone.**

The peace Jesus gives is not the absence of trouble — it is the **presence of the Comforter in the midst of trouble**. The world cannot give this peace because the world cannot give you a Person. Jesus can. And He does — permanently, irrevocably, forever.

1. How does the promise of the Spirit's permanent indwelling (v. 16, "forever") speak to your deepest fears — fear of abandonment, fear of facing life alone?
2. When have you experienced the Spirit's peace in a season of difficulty (14:27 also Phil 4:7)? What did that peace feel like?
3. What three things tend to trouble you the most in your heart, your mind, your spirit? Consider them one at a time. As you think about each of them listen to and hear Jesus speak John 14:1 & 27 to you. For each troublesome thought, listen to Him speak John 14:1 & 27 three times.

S — STRETCH

The Spirit does not come to make us *comfortable* — He comes to make us *faithful*. He teaches, convicts, and leads us into all truth. He stretches our understanding, challenges our assumptions, and pushes us toward maturity. The Holy Spirit is not a warm feeling; He is a living Person with an agenda — and His agenda is to conform us to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; 1 Jn. 3:1-2). Are there areas where you sense the Spirit nudging you toward growth that you have been resisting?

1. Read Gal. 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit is Jesus and His character being formed in us (Gal. 4:19). As Jesus is increasingly formed in us we manifest/demonstrate His character in increasing measure. How have you seen Jesus and His character being formed in you? Where or how is the forming of His character being stretched?
2. How has the Spirit stretched your understanding of Scripture or your faith in the past year?
3. What area of your life might the Spirit be inviting you to grow in right now — an area you have been avoiding?

E — EMPOWER

The Spirit equips us for witness, for service, and for endurance. He is our Advocate before the Father, our Teacher in confusion, our Comforter in grief. And He does not work in a vacuum — He works through **the means of grace**. The Word of God, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are the Spirit's chief chosen instruments. These are not empty rituals; they are the channels through which the Spirit delivers Christ to us and strengthens Christ in us, week after week, day after day.

1. How do the means of grace — Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper — function as channels of the Spirit's power in your life (see Ro. 6:3-13; Ro. 10:17; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17)?
2. What would it look like to rely more intentionally on the Spirit's empowering this week — in a specific situation you are facing?

APPLY

1. **Each morning this week, begin with a simple prayer:** *"Come, Holy Spirit. Teach me, comfort me, and send me."* Say it before you check your phone. Say it before you start your day.
2. **Pay attention to one moment each day** when you sense the Spirit at work — in a conversation, a Scripture reading, a prompting to serve, or a quiet reassurance — and journal it. At the end of the week, review what you have written.

Closing Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Comforter. Come, Teacher. Come, Advocate. We thank You, Father, for not leaving us orphaned — for sending Your Spirit to dwell within us, to teach us, to remind us of

everything Jesus has said. Forgive us for ignoring the Guest who lives within us. Open our ears to His voice. Open our hearts to His leading. Fill us with the peace that the world cannot give — the peace that is not a feeling but a Person. We do not walk alone. We have never walked alone. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Looking Ahead: *Next week, Jesus paints one of His most beloved word pictures — the vine and the branches — and invites us into the deepest kind of intimacy: abiding. What does it mean to remain connected to the source of all life?*

For Personal Reflection & Discussion

KNOW

1. What stands out to you in this passage?

2. What do you notice about Jesus' actions and words?

3. What questions do you have?

4. What is the role of the Spirit?

5. What promises does Jesus make?

CONVICT

1. What part of this passage challenges you?

2. Where do you see yourself in this story?

3. What needs to change in your life?

4. Where do you live as if you are on my own?

5. Where do I ignore the Spirit (see Pr. 3:5-6)?

ASSURE

1. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' grace?

2. What promise speaks to you personally?

3. Where do you need to receive this truth?

4. "I will not leave you as orphans." What does this mean for you?

STRETCH

1. What is God calling you toward?

2. What new way of thinking or living is emerging?

3. What step of faith feels uncomfortable?

4. Where is the Spirit growing you?

EMPOWER

1. What feels beyond your ability right now?

2. What does God provide?

3. Where do you need the Spirit's help this week?

4. How can/will you rely on the Holy Spirit this week?

APPLY

1. What specific action will you take this week?

2. When will you do it?

3. Daily prayer:

"Come Holy Spirit..." (Track one moment each day where you notice His work.)

Week 4: Abide in Me

Scripture: John 15:1–17

Theme: Jesus is the true vine; we are the branches. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. In Him, we bear much fruit.

Arc: Jesus **IN** me — *Abiding is the secret of fruitfulness; His life flows through connected branches.*

KNOW — Setting the Scene

Jesus now gives us one of the most beautiful and important metaphors in all of Scripture: the vine and the branches. To understand its power, we need to know its Old Testament background. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, **Israel was described as God's vine** — planted, tended, and cultivated by the Lord Himself. But the vine failed. Isaiah 5 records God's lament over His vineyard that produced wild grapes instead of good fruit. Jeremiah calls Israel *"a degenerate and wild vine"* (Jeremiah 2:21). Psalm 80 pleads with God to restore the vine He brought out of Egypt.

Into this history of failure, Jesus makes a stunning claim: *"I am the true vine"* (15:1). **He** is the faithful Israel. He is the vine that does not fail. The Father is the **vinedresser** — the One who tends, prunes, and cultivates. And we are the **branches**.

The key word in this passage is **"abide"** (*menō*) — used eleven times in verses 1–11. It means to remain, to stay, to make your home. Abiding is not a one-time decision but a continuous posture — staying connected to the source of life. The branch does not strain to produce fruit; it simply stays attached to the vine, and the vine's life flows through it.

Jesus makes a critical distinction: branches that abide are **pruned** to bear more fruit (v. 2), while branches that do not abide wither and are gathered. Pruning is not punishment — it is the Father's loving discipline, cutting away what hinders growth so that fruitfulness increases. And what is the fruit? Read verses 12–17: the fruit is **love**. *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"* (v. 12). The fruit of the vine is the love of Christ flowing through connected branches into the world.

1. Why does Jesus call Himself the "true" vine? What does that metaphor imply? What contrast is He drawing with the Old Testament image of Israel as God's vine?
2. What does "abide" (*menō*) mean in practical terms? How is it different from simply "believing" or "attending church"?
3. What is the purpose of pruning (v. 2), and how does it differ from punishment? How can we tell the difference in our own lives?
4. What is the "fruit" Jesus has in mind (see vv. 12–17; see also Gal. 5:22–23)? How does this differ from what we often think of as "spiritual productivity"? How is this to the Father's glory (v. 8)?

C — CONVICT

"Apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5). This is a devastating word to our self-sufficiency. Not "apart from me you can do less." Not "apart from me you will struggle." **Nothing.** We are convicted by every attempt to bear fruit through sheer effort, willpower, programming, or organizational excellence rather than through connected intimacy with Christ. We can be frantically busy for God and utterly disconnected from God at the same time.

We are also convicted by the standard of love Jesus sets: *"as I have loved you"* (v. 12). This is not generic niceness. This is the love that washes feet, forgives betrayal, and goes to the cross (see Ro. 5:7-8; Phil. 2:3-8; 1 Jn. 3:16). Measured against that standard, our love looks thin.

1. Where in your life are you trying to "bear fruit" through effort alone — disconnected from abiding in Christ?
2. How does the standard of *"as I have loved you"* expose the limits of your own love?
3. What "branches" in your life might need the Father's pruning — habits, attachments, or priorities that are draining life rather than producing fruit?

A — ASSURE

The vinedresser is the **Father** — and His purpose is not destruction but fruitfulness. Pruning hurts, but it comes from the hand of a loving Father who is invested in our growth. He does not prune to diminish us but to free us for the life we were created to bear.

And then comes one of the most assuring verses in all of Scripture: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"* (v. 16). Our identity as branches is not based on our decision but on the Vine's sovereign choice. We are connected to Christ not by our grip on Him but by **His holding of us** — through Word and Sacrament, through the promises of Baptism, through the sustaining power of the Supper. You are chosen. You are appointed. You belong to the Vine.

1. How does knowing that the Father is the vinedresser — not an enemy, not an indifferent gardener — change the way you view difficult seasons of pruning (see Heb. 12:1-11)?
2. What does *"You did not choose me, but I chose you"* (v. 16) mean for your sense of identity and security in Christ?

S — STRETCH

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (v. 13). Jesus stretches us from consumer Christianity to **sacrificial love**. He calls us friends, not servants (v. 15) — and friends lay down their lives. This is the call to costly, cross-shaped community. Not a community where we consume spiritual goods and services, but a community where we pour ourselves out for one another (see Lk. 9:23; 1 Jn. 3:16-18).

1. What does it mean to move from being a "servant" to being a "friend" of Jesus (v. 15)? How does friendship with Jesus change your posture toward Him?
2. Where is Jesus calling you to lay down your life — your preferences, your comfort, your time — for the sake of another? Be specific.

E — EMPOWER

Abiding IS the empowerment. The branch does not strain to produce fruit — it stays connected to the vine, and the vine's life flows through it naturally, inevitably. Prayer in Jesus' name (v. 16) and the joy Jesus gives (v. 11) are the energy of fruitful living. And the community of believers — "*love one another*" — is the context in which fruitfulness happens. We bear fruit not in isolation but in connection: connection to the Vine and connection to one another.

1. What spiritual practices help you stay "connected to the vine" in daily life? What practices have you neglected that you need to return to?
2. How does Christian community — this small group, your congregation, your family of faith — function as a context for fruitfulness?

APPLY

1. **Choose one specific "abiding practice" to prioritize this week:** daily Scripture reading, morning prayer, evening examen (reviewing the day with God), or intentional participation in the Lord's Supper. Commit to it for seven days.
2. **Identify one relationship** where you will practice "laying down your life" in a small, concrete way this week — putting someone else's needs ahead of your own preferences.

Closing Prayer

Father, You are the vinedresser. Jesus, You are the true vine. And we — broken, distracted, prone to wander — are Your branches. Forgive us for trying to bear fruit on our own, apart from You. Forgive us for resisting Your pruning hand. Teach us to abide — to remain, to stay, to make our home in You. Cut away whatever needs cutting. Grow in us the fruit of love that looks like Yours — sacrificial, joyful, and free. We did not choose You; You chose us. Let that truth be the ground we stand on today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Looking Ahead: Next week, Jesus prepares us for life in a world that may not welcome His message. The tone shifts from intimacy to mission, from abiding to sending — and He promises the Spirit's power for the journey ahead.

For Personal Reflection & Discussion

KNOW

1. What stands out to you in this passage?

2. What do you notice about Jesus' actions and words?

3. What questions do you have?

4. What does "abide" mean in this passage?

5. What happens if we don't abide?

6. What is the fruit (see Gal. 5:22-23)?

CONVICT

1. What part of this passage challenges you?

2. Where do you see yourself in this story?

3. What needs to change in your life?

4. Where are you relying on yourself?

5. What "false vines" are you connected to?

ASSURE

1. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' grace?

2. What promise speaks to you personally?

3. Where do you need to receive this truth?

4. "You did not choose me...." What does this mean for your security?

STRETCH

1. What is God calling you toward?

2. What new way of thinking or living is emerging?

3. What step of faith feels uncomfortable?

4. What would change if you focused on connection, not performance?

EMPOWER

1. What feels beyond your ability right now?

2. What does God provide?

3. How can you rely on the Holy Spirit this week?

4. What keeps you from staying connected (see Heb. 12:1-2)?

APPLY

1. What specific action will you take this week?

2. Choose ONE:

☐ Daily Scripture time

☐ Morning prayer

☐ Midday pause

☐ Evening reflection

3. What relationship will you focus upon loving sacrificially: _____

Week 5: Sent into the World

Scripture: John 15:18–16:33

Theme: Jesus prepares His disciples for opposition, grief, and the Spirit's sustaining power as they are sent into the world.

Arc: Jesus **THROUGH** me — *The mission moves outward; the Spirit empowers witness in the face of resistance.*

KNOW — Setting the Scene

The tone shifts dramatically. After the warmth of the vine metaphor, Jesus now turns to the cold reality of the world's opposition. *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you"* (15:18). The word "world" (*kosmos*) here does not mean the physical earth or even the people God loves (John 3:16). It refers to **the human system organized in rebellion against God** — the values, powers, and structures that resist the Kingdom. Jesus is not being melodramatic; He is being honest. Following Him will cost something.

Why does the world hate the disciples? *"Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (15:19). The very thing that makes them chosen — their identity in Christ — is the thing that provokes hostility. Jesus does not promise a frictionless life (see 1 Pe. 4:12); He promises a *faithful* life, sustained by the Spirit.

And here the Spirit's role expands. The *paraklētos*, the Spirit of truth, *"will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness"* (15:26–27). In chapter 16, Jesus describes the Spirit's **threefold work of conviction**: He will convict the world concerning **sin** (because they do not believe in Jesus), concerning **righteousness** (because Jesus goes to the Father), and concerning **judgment** (because the ruler of this world is judged) (16:8–11). The Spirit is not passive — He is actively at work in the world, exposing falsehood and illuminating truth.

Then comes one of the most beautiful metaphors for the Christian experience: *"When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world"* (16:21). Suffering is real — but it is not the last word. It is labor pain, not death throes. It is producing something.

And the passage climaxes with one of the most quoted verses 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"* (16:33). Not "I will overcome." **"I have overcome."** The victory is already accomplished.

1. Why does Jesus say the world will hate His followers (15:18–19)? What does "the world" mean in this context — and what does it *not* mean?

2. What is the Spirit's threefold work of conviction described in 16:8–11? Why is each element important?
3. What does the childbirth metaphor (16:21–22) teach us about the relationship between suffering and joy?
4. How do you understand Jesus' promise in 16:33: "*I have overcome the world*"? What difference does the past tense make?

C — CONVICT

We are convicted by our tendency to **avoid the cost of discipleship** — to seek a comfortable faith that avoids friction with the surrounding culture. We want the vine without the thorns. We want Easter without Good Friday. We want to be loved by the world and loved by Jesus at the same time, and Jesus says that is not always possible.

We are also convicted by our **failure to bear witness**. Jesus says the Spirit bears witness — and "*you also will bear witness*" (15:27). That "also" is important. The Spirit does His work, and we do ours. Primarily, our work is to not resist the Spirit's work, the Spirit's promptings, and prodding (see 1 Th. 5:19). If we don't resist the Spirit, the Spirit will move us (see Gal. 5:25). Silence in the face of opportunity — choosing comfort over faithfulness, acceptance over truth — is a form of unfaithfulness. Not every silence is sin, but some silence is cowardice.

1. Where have you chosen comfort or silence over faithful witness? What were you afraid of?
2. In what ways does fear of the world's disapproval shape your decisions more than love for Christ?

A — ASSURE

"*I have overcome the world*" (16:33). This is not merely a future hope — it is a **present reality**. The victory is already won. The cross and the empty tomb have settled the question. The world may rage, but its ruler is already judged (16:11). The Spirit who convicts the world also sustains the believer. The sorrow of the cross gives way to the joy of the resurrection — and "*no one will take your joy from you*" (16:22).

Lutheran theology has a name for this pattern: **the theology of the cross**. God works *through* suffering, not around it. The cross is not a detour on the way to glory; it *is* the way to glory. This does not make suffering good, but it makes suffering meaningful. And the God who works through crosses is the God who accompanies us in ours.

1. How does the promise "*I have overcome the world*" strengthen you for the challenges you face right now — at work, in your family, in the culture?
2. When have you experienced joy emerging from a season of sorrow — the "childbirth" pattern Jesus describes?

S — STRETCH

Jesus sends us *into* the world — not into a monastery, not into a bunker, not into a Christian subculture. The mission is **outward, public, and unavoidably relational**. This stretches all of us. Introverts are stretched to speak. Extroverts are stretched to listen. The timid are stretched to risk. The bold are stretched to be patient (see 2 Tim. 1:6-7). And the witness is not just verbal but embodied: *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (13:35). Our love for each other **is** the testimony.

1. Who in your life is God placing before you as someone who needs to hear or see the Gospel? What is holding you back?
2. What would it look like for your small group or for Mt. Olive to be more intentionally "sent" into the Rockford community?

E — EMPOWER

The Spirit of truth (15:26; 16:13) empowers our witness. **We do not testify alone** — the Spirit testifies alongside us and through us. Jesus also promises that our sorrow will be turned to joy (16:20) and that whatever we ask in His name, the Father will give (16:23–24). We are sent with resources: the Spirit's presence, the Father's ear, the community's support, and the unshakable promise that the battle has already been won.

1. How does the Spirit's presence change the way you think about sharing your faith — knowing that He is at work before, during, and after every conversation?
2. What role does your faith community play in sustaining you for mission? Where do you need more support?

APPLY

1. **Pray for courage this week** to share one aspect of your faith with someone who does not yet know Jesus. It might be a word of testimony, an invitation to worship, a simple act of compassion, or an honest conversation. Ask the Spirit to open the door — and then walk through it.
2. **When you face opposition or difficulty this week**, return to 16:33 and say it aloud: *"Take heart; He has overcome the world."* Let it become a refrain.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have overcome the world — and You send us into it anyway, not as victims but as witnesses, not in our own strength but in the power of Your Spirit. Forgive us for our cowardice, our silence, our preference for comfort over faithfulness. Give us courage that does not depend on circumstances. Give us joy that no one can take away. When the world pushes back, remind us that

You pushed back first — and won. Send us out, Lord. We are ready. Or rather, make us ready, because readiness is also Your gift. In Your victorious name. Amen.

Looking Ahead: *Next week, we enter the most sacred prayer in all of Scripture — Jesus' prayer for us — and discover what it means to be sent, sanctified, and united in His love. This is the culmination of everything we have studied.*

For Personal Reflection & Discussion

KNOW

1. What stands out to you in this passage?

2. What do you notice about Jesus' actions and words?

3. What questions do you have?

4. Why does the world resist believers?

5. What is the Spirit's role?

CONVICT

1. What part of this passage challenges you?

2. Where do you see yourself in this story?

3. What needs to change in your life?

4. Where do I avoid witness?

5. Where do I choose comfort over faithfulness?

ASSURE

1. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' grace?

2. What promise speaks to you personally?

3. Where do you need to receive this truth?

4. "I have overcome the world." What does this mean for me today?

STRETCH

1. What is God calling you toward?

2. What new way of thinking or living is emerging?

3. What step of faith feels uncomfortable?

4. Who is God placing in my life to reach?

EMPOWER

1. What feels beyond your ability right now?

2. What does God provide?

3. How can you rely on the Holy Spirit this week?

4. How does the Spirit help me witness?

APPLY

1. What specific action will you take this week?

2. This week I will:
 - Pray for one person daily
 - Take one step toward sharing faith

Person: _____

Step: _____

Week 6: That They May Be One

Scripture: John 17:1–26

Theme: Jesus prays for His disciples — and for us — asking the Father for glory, protection, sanctification, and unity.

Arc: Jesus **THROUGH** me — *The prayer that sends us into the world as a unified, sanctified, sent people.*

KNOW — Setting the Scene

We have arrived at what theologians call the **High Priestly Prayer** — the longest recorded prayer of Jesus and the most intimate glimpse we have into the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is holy ground. Jesus is about to go to the cross, and His final act before entering Gethsemane is to pray — not for Himself alone, but for His disciples and for all who would ever believe through their testimony. **That includes you.**

The prayer has three movements. First, **Jesus prays for Himself** (vv. 1–5): *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."* The "hour" is the cross — and Jesus calls it glorification. In the economy of God, the lowest point of humiliation is the highest act of glory, because the cross reveals the depth of God's love. Jesus defines eternal life not as endless existence but as relationship: *"This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (v. 3).

Second, **Jesus prays for His disciples** (vv. 6–19). He asks the Father to **protect** them (*"keep them in your name,"* v. 11), to fill them with **joy** (v. 13), and to **sanctify** them — to set them apart for holy purpose — *"in the truth; your word is truth"* (v. 17). Sanctification is not withdrawal from the world but **commissioning into it**: *"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world"* (v. 18). To be sanctified is to be made ready for mission.

Third, **Jesus prays for all future believers** — for every person in every generation who would come to faith through the apostles' witness (vv. 20–26). And His prayer is breathtaking: *"that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me"* (v. 21). The model for Christian unity is nothing less than the **unity of the Trinity**. And the purpose of that unity is **mission** — *"so that the world may believe."*

Key terms to notice: **"glory"** (*doxa*) — the radiant weight of God's character revealed in Christ; **"sanctify"** (*hagiazō*) — to set apart for sacred use; **"sent"** (*apostellō*) — the root of our word "apostle," meaning one who is officially commissioned and dispatched with authority.

1. What does Jesus mean when He asks to be "glorified" (v. 1; see Jn. 12:23–33)? How is the cross an act of glorification rather than defeat? Do we glorify God primarily because of His love (Good Friday) or because of His power (Easter Sunday)? How do the two work together?

2. In vv. 15-18, what doesn't Jesus ask His Father and what does He ask? Why? (see Col. 1:24,28-29)
3. What does "*sanctify them in the truth*" (v. 17) mean? How is sanctification related to mission rather than withdrawal?
4. For whom does Jesus pray in verses 20–21? What does it mean that He prayed for *you* before you were born?
5. What is the relationship between unity (v. 21) and the world's belief? Why does Jesus connect these two things?

C — CONVICT

The prayer for unity convicts us of every **division, faction, grudge, and preference** we allow to fracture the body of Christ. Jesus' standard is breathtaking: "*that they may be one, even as we are one*" (v. 22) — the unity of the Trinity is the model for Christian community. The Father and the Son are not merely cooperative; they are one in essence, purpose, and love. When we harbor resentment, nursing old wounds, drawing party lines, or withholding forgiveness, we are working against the very thing Jesus prayed for on the night before He died for us.

We are also convicted by our tendency to treat sanctification as a private project rather than a communal commission. "*As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them*" (v. 18). To be set apart is not to be set aside. It is to be sent.

1. Where do divisions — in your family, your congregation, or the broader Church — grieve the heart of Christ? Be honest.
2. What grudge, preference, or wall of separation might Jesus be asking you to lay down for the sake of the unity He prayed for?

A — ASSURE

Jesus prays for us. Let that sink in. The Son of God, on the night before His death, lifted your name to the Father. "*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word*" (v. 20). That is you. That is everyone in this room. Two thousand years ago, Jesus anticipated your existence and interceded for your faith, your protection, your joy, and your unity with other believers.

And His prayer is **effective**. It does not return void. The Father always hears the Son. Right now, at this very moment, the risen and ascended Jesus continues to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25). Our sanctification is not our project alone — it is **Christ's prayer being answered by the Father through the Spirit**. We are held not by our commitment to God but by God's commitment to us, sealed in the prayer of His Son.

1. How does it change your sense of security to know that Jesus prayed specifically for you — and that the Father always hears Him?
2. What does it mean that sanctification is ultimately God's work, not yours (v. 17)? How does that free you from the pressure to "fix yourself"?

S — STRETCH

"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (v. 18). This is a commissioning prayer. We are not called merely to enjoy unity within our walls — we are called to **display it in a fractured world** as a witness to the Gospel. The stretch is outward: unity is for mission. Our togetherness is not for our comfort but for the world's salvation. When the world sees Christians who genuinely love each other across differences of age, race, politics, and preference, it sees something it cannot explain — and it asks where that love comes from.

1. How might the visible unity of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church be a witness to the Rockford community? What would that look like in practice?
2. What is one step you could take this week to build a bridge across a division — in your church, your family, or your neighborhood?

E — EMPOWER

Jesus empowers our mission by His **ongoing intercession** (Hebrews 7:25), by the **truth of His Word** (v. 17), by the **gift of His glory shared with us** (v. 22), and by the **love of the Father poured into our hearts** (v. 26). We are not sent empty-handed. The same glory that unites the Father and the Son is given to us — not for our private consumption but for the sake of the world. The means of grace — Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper — sustain us as sent people, feeding our faith and renewing our calling week after week.

1. What does it mean to be "sent" with the glory of Christ (v. 22)? How does that shape your sense of purpose and identity?
2. How do the means of grace — Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper — sustain you as a "sent" person? What would it mean to receive them more intentionally?

APPLY

1. **This week, pray Jesus' prayer from John 17 slowly and personally** — inserting the names of people in your life, your congregation, and your community. Pray for their protection, their joy, their sanctification, and their unity. Pray as Jesus prayed.
2. **Take one concrete action to build unity:** reconcile with someone, reach across a divide, forgive an old wound, or invite someone new into your circle. Let the prayer of Jesus become the practice of your life.

Closing Prayer

Father, we have heard Your Son's prayer — the prayer He prayed for us before we drew our first breath. We are humbled. We are moved. We are sent. Thank You for choosing us, for washing us, for filling us with Your Spirit, for connecting us to the true Vine, for sending us into the world, and for holding us together by the prayer of Your Son. Forgive us for the divisions we have tolerated, the grudges we have nursed, the walls we have built. Make us one, Father — as You and the Son are one — so that the world may see and believe. We have walked through the Upper Room together these six weeks. Now send us out. Send us out washed by Your love, assured of Your promises, filled with Your Spirit, connected to Your Son, empowered for Your mission, and united by Your prayer. Jesus for us. Jesus in us. Jesus through us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For Personal Reflection & Discussion

KNOW

1. What stands out to you in this passage?

2. What do you notice about Jesus' actions and words?

3. What questions do you have?

4. What does Jesus pray for?

5. Who does He pray for?

CONVICT

1. What part of this passage challenges you?

2. Where do you see yourself in this story?

3. What needs to change in your life?

4. Where/how are you contributing to division?

5. What relationships need repair?

ASSURE

1. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' grace?

2. What promise speaks to you personally?

3. Where do you need to receive this truth?

4. Jesus prayed for you. What does that mean?

STRETCH

1. What is God calling you toward?

2. What new way of thinking or living is emerging?

3. What step of faith feels uncomfortable?

4. Where can you pursue unity?

EMPOWER

1. What feels beyond your ability right now?

2. What does God provide?

3. How can you rely on the Holy Spirit this week?

4. How does Jesus sustain you as a “sent” person?

APPLY

1. What specific action will you take this week?

2. This week I will:

☐ Pray for others using John 17

☐ Take one step toward unity

Action: _____

BACK MATTER

From the Upper Room to the World

We entered the Upper Room six weeks ago as guests at a table. We watched Jesus kneel with a towel and a basin. We heard Him call Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We received His promise of the Comforter. We learned to abide in the true Vine. We were prepared for a world that would resist us — and promised a Spirit who would sustain us. And finally, we listened as Jesus prayed the most sacred prayer ever spoken, lifting us by name to the Father.

The arc of these five chapters is the arc of the Christian life: **received, inhabited, sent.**

Jesus for me: He washed our feet before we asked. He opened the way to the Father before we knew we were lost. His love came first, and it came to the uttermost.

Jesus in me: He did not leave us orphaned. The Comforter has come. The Vine's life flows through connected branches. We are never, ever alone.

Jesus through me: He has overcome the world — and now He sends us into it. Sanctified by truth. United by prayer. Empowered by the Spirit. Bearing the glory of the Father and the Son into every relationship, every conversation, every corner of our community.

We leave the Upper Room not as we entered. We leave *washed, assured, filled, connected, empowered, and sent.*

Jesus for me. Jesus in me. Jesus through me.

Now go.

Scripture Index

The following passages are referenced across the six sessions of this study. Primary study texts are shown in **bold**.

Old Testament

Book	Reference	Week(s)
Psalm	Psalm 80 (Israel as God's vine)	Week 4
Isaiah	Isaiah 5 (Song of the vineyard)	Week 4
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 2:21 (degenerate vine)	Week 4

New Testament — Gospel of John

Reference	Topic	Week(s)
John 3:16-17	God's love for the world	Week 5
John 13:1-17	The foot-washing	Week 1
John 13:30	Judas departs; "it was night"	Week 2
John 13:31-35	Glorification; new commandment	Week 2
John 13:35	Love as the mark of discipleship	Weeks 2, 5
John 14:1-14	Way, Truth, Life; the Father's house; prayer	Week 2
John 14:15-31	The promise of the Holy Spirit; peace	Week 3
John 15:1-17	The vine and the branches; abiding; love	Week 4
John 15:18-27	The world's hatred; the Spirit's witness	Week 5
John 16:1-33	The Spirit's conviction; sorrow to joy; "I have overcome"	Week 5
John 17:1-26	The High Priestly Prayer	Week 6

New Testament — Other Books

Reference	Topic	Week(s)
Hebrews 7:25	Jesus' ongoing intercession	Week 6

At-a-Glance Guide

A summary of the six-week study for quick reference and planning.

Week	Title	Scripture	Theme	Arc	Key Verse
1	Love to the End	John 13:1–17	Servant Love	Jesus FOR me	John 13:14–15
2	The Way Home	John 13:31–14:14	Way, Truth, Life	Jesus FOR me	John 14:6
3	The Comforter Comes	John 14:15–31	The Holy Spirit	Jesus IN me	John 14:18
4	Abide in Me	John 15:1–17	Vine and Branches	Jesus IN me	John 15:5
5	Sent into the World	John 15:18–16:33	Mission and Witness	Jesus THROUGH me	John 16:33
6	That They May Be One	John 17:1–26	Unity and Sending	Jesus THROUGH me	John 17:20–21

The CASE Rhythm — Each Session

KNOW → CONVICT → ASSURE → STRETCH → EMPOWER → APPLY

The movement of Law and Gospel: grounded in Scripture, convicted by truth, assured by grace, stretched toward growth, empowered by the Spirit, and sent into the world.

The Upper Room: Walking with Jesus through John 13–17

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Bible Study Group Covenant

A shared commitment for Christ-centered community

1. Our Purpose

We gather as a small group to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ — learning His Word, practicing His way of life, and encouraging one another to live as His people in the world.

2. Our Commitments to One Another

Presence

I will make participation in this group a priority.
If I must miss, I will communicate with the group leader.

Confidentiality

Personal stories shared in the group stay in the group.
Stories are ours to protect, not to repeat.

Scripture & Prayer

We will center our time on God's Word and prayer.
We will encourage one another to practice Scripture and prayer throughout the week.

Participation

I will contribute honestly and graciously.
I will listen well and avoid dominating our conversations.

Spiritual Growth

I will pursue growth in Christ through Scripture, prayer, and obedience.
I welcome gentle accountability and encouragement from the group.

Hospitality & Care

We will create a safe, welcoming environment for all.
We will support one another in times of need.

Mission

We will look for ways to bless our neighbors, serve our community, and live out the Gospel together.

3. Our Group Practices

Begin and end on time.
Share leadership responsibilities as gifts allow.
Communicate respectfully and promptly.
Resolve conflict biblically and directly (Matthew 18:15–20).

4. Our Covenant

By God's grace, we commit to these practices for the sake of Christ, His church, and His mission.

Signed:

Group Members: _____

Date: _____