

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

WELCOME TO A NEW PART OF THE JOURNEY



In this unit you look at mission through the eyes of John and John's community of faith. When it comes to John's Gospel, we have a document that reads and feels differently from the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. For many people, John's Gospel is the "spiritual" gospel, and yet as you read John through the lens of missional engagement, what you will find is razor-sharp insights into the nature of God's mission -a mission that comes from the very heart of God. In this unit you will investigate how the nature and mission of God is revealed in Jesus ("the Word that became flesh") and how the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is sent to embark on this same mission- a mission that calls for reaching out to all of creation in love. The missional challenge for the church "back then" was as it is today; how are we engaging the world in God's love without condemnation?

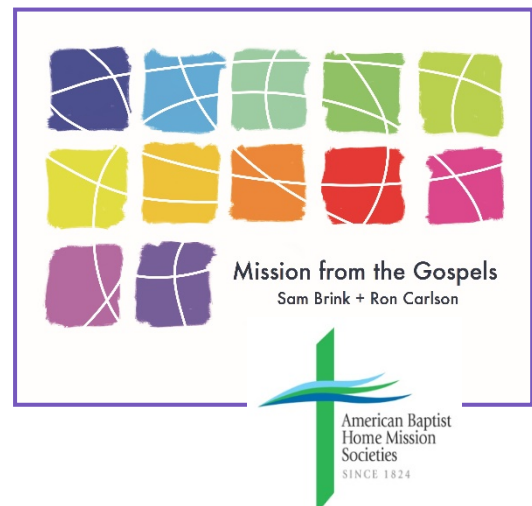
Welcome to John's Gospel

Week One: A Mission for all Creation but with a Variety of Responses In Unit One, *Mission Before the Gospels*, we looked at how the gospel (good news) has many facets to it. In this week's lesson you will see that there are also many different responses to the good news.

Week Two: The Mission of the Holy Spirit This week's lesson examines the role of the Holy Spirit from the perspective of John's gospel. You will explore the tension that seems to be present in John's faith-community as, on one hand, John portrays the world as God's creation and the object of God's love, while on the other hand, the world is exposed as a broken place in which faith is threatened. It is into this diverged world that the Spirit sends us in the same manner that God sent his Son and the Son sent his disciples.

Week Three: The Nature of Church and God's Mission A common theme throughout the gospels is that we are "sent" on God's Mission. In this lesson you will look at a multi-natured God who sends disciples into a multifaceted mission.

Week Four: John Speaks to our Present Day Situation In this week's lesson you will have a chance to examine some of the faith issues you might encounter as you seek to talk about and live out your faith journey in your everyday life.



UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Week One: A Mission for all Creation but with a Variety of Responses



In Unit One of **Mission from the Gospels —Mission before the Gospels—** you explored how the gospel message is multifaceted. There is one gospel, but it shines differently depending on the person's situation experiencing the good news. In this exercise you will see how Christ demonstrates the multifaceted nature of God's mission as Jesus encounters a variety of people and their responses to the good news. Keep in mind as you read John's Gospel that stories and teachings of Jesus and the responses of the variety of people to their encounters with him are intended to be lessons on mission engagement for the readers of John, including us today.



Welcome back

Last week, as we concluded our study of Luke, you were asked to write down missional insights and/or questions you had after the study of Luke. Share one insight or question you had.



Begin class with prayer

Give each person an opportunity to share one realization or experience of the good news of the gospel which they encountered this past week. What was the life situation that helped bring about this awareness? (Example: "I became aware of God's love when..." or "I realized the importance of having a community of faith when...")



Let's investigate

Following are six groupings of scripture taken from John's gospel. Go over each scripture passage and answer the following investigation questions. If you have a large class you may want to divide up into smaller groups and assign a passage to each group. Be sure to cover all of the scriptures. If you do divide your class into smaller study groups reconvene and share your findings.

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Investigation Questions

Apply the following set of questions to each of the passages from John given below.

1. What is happening in your story?
2. Who is involved in your story?
3. What facet/s of the gospel (good news) is presented in this story?
4. What behaviors and reactions to the good news are apparent in your story?

A. John 1:19-42, 3:22-36

B. John 1:43-51, 2:1-12

C. John 2:13-25

D. John 3:1-21, 19:38-42

E. John 4:1-42

F. John 4:43-54



If time permits

Go around the class and share which one of the following narratives you think best describes the situation of your faith community. Which describes where you find yourself in your personal faith journey? Are you:

- A. At the river with John the Baptist?
- B. Introducing people to Jesus like Phillip did?
- C. Standing outside of the temple, battling religious abuse?
- D. Encountering people who are afraid to come out from shadows with their faith and commitment?
- E. Drinking water with people of religious convictions unlike your own?
- F. Experiencing signs and wonders of the Kingdom of God?

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL



Prayerful reflection

As you close your class today, give thanks to God for the richness of the good news. Invite group members to share one way they witnessed some good news during the class today.



In preparation for next week

If you were not able to finish reading John's Gospel last week, take time this week to finish your reading. Give thought to and be prepared to share about a time you were made vividly aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. If you have not had such an experience, then be prepared to share something you have thought or been taught about the role of the Spirit in one's faith journey.

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Week Two: The Mission of the Holy Spirit

***Just as the Father sent the Son to execute God's mission,
so the Son sends the Holy Spirit."***

(G. Harris. Mission in the Gospels)



Welcome back

This week we examine the role of the Holy Spirit from the perspective of John's Gospel. John's Gospel seems to paint two pictures of the world in which we are called to experience our journey of faith. On one hand, the world is God's creation and the object of God's love. On the other hand, the world is a broken place in which faith is threatened or distorted and where life is prematurely taken. It is into this world that the Spirit sends us in the same manner that God sent his Son and the Son sent his disciples.



Begin class with prayer

During the week you were asked to recall a time when you were vividly aware of the Holy Spirit in your life or to recall something you have been taught about or always thought about the role of the Holy Spirit in a life of faith. Briefly share your story or thoughts as an act of prayer. After everyone has had the opportunity to share, close the prayer time by saying in unison:

*"We bring our lives and thoughts together in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen."*



Let's investigate

Assign the following passage to members of your class to be read aloud:

- John 14:12, 16, 26
- John 15:18, 26
- John 16:4-11
- John 16:12-15

After hearing all of these passages read, reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with the class.

- What is the connection between Jesus and the Spirit?
- What is the role of the Spirit?
- What are some implications of John's teaching about the Holy Spirit for your faith community and your own personal faith journey?
- What are some implications of John's teaching about the Holy Spirit for your mission engagement in your neighboring community?

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL



Prayerful reflection

Ask a volunteer or volunteers to read out loud the prayer of Jesus in John

17. After reading the prayer, go around the group and share:

- How you feel after hearing this prayer read?
- What facet/s of the good news speaks to you in this prayer?
- Having heard this prayer, what message does it have for our group/faith-community/congregation?

Look again at John 17:23. Reflect on the questions, “In what way/s does our faith community reflect unity in Christ? Are there ways we are falling short?”



During the week

If time permits this week, join with one other class member and try to visit with as many people as you can from your faith community to listen to their stories/thoughts/experiences with the Holy Spirit in their faith journeys. Be prepared to share a summary report of what you heard at the next class.

During the week...a step further

u·ni·ty: 'yōnədē/ *noun* 1. the state of being united or joined as a whole.

The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is that we might know unity and in being united we might show the world God's love. During the week plan a mission project, and if time permits, carry it out as a group – together. You might call it a “**Group Love Project.**” It maybe something such as:

- Having the class fix a meal for a family or individual who “needs a break today.”
- Doing a greeting card shower for someone who is having a birthday or special celebration or need in their life.
- You may adopt a “person on the street” (like someone who stands on the street corner asking for help) and see how you might help them and befriend them.
- Can you think of more ideas?

Be creative in how you can share God's love by working together.

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Week Three: The Nature of Church and God's Mission



Welcome back

A common theme throughout the gospels is that we are “sent” on God’s mission. In this lesson you will look at a multi-natured God sending disciples into a multifaceted mission.



Begin class with prayer

Throughout your study in **Mission from the Gospels**, you have been challenged to realize that God calls all of us into God’s mission. Reflect on your experiences thus far. Share with your group a time you have “felt sent” by God to respond to a missional call or need. Respond to each person’s sharing with the phrase: “Thank you God for sending.... (insert their name).”



Let's investigate

On the next page, you will find a list of four accounts of Jesus’ commission to the disciples; one from Matthew, two from Luke’s writings and one from John’s account. Assign people to read out loud each of the four accounts of the sending of the disciples. After hearing the account read, discuss the following:

1. Which of the four commissions are you most and least comfortable with? Explain your answers.
2. What is the main message of each account? (Note the similarities and differences of each commission.)
 - What is the main message of Matthew’s account?
 - What is the main message of Luke’s account in Luke’s Gospel?
 - What is the main message of the commission in Luke’s Acts?
 - What is the main message of John’s account?
3. What can we learn about our mission as a faith community from reading these four commissions?
4. As a group write a commission statement for your faith community that reflects its present situation.

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said; "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Luke 24:44-49

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Acts 1:6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?"

He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL



Prayerful reflection

As you close your class today, go around the class and share one word or sentence about how you are reacting to the call of God as explored in today's lesson. If you wrote a "commission statement" for your faith community, read it out loud as an act of closing prayer.



During the week

Find time during the week to write a "peace prayer." In John's commission story, Jesus greeted the followers twice with the phrase: "*Peace be with you.*" Write a prayer or prayer poem of peace reflecting on God's peace that is with you. This will be shared with the class as next week's opening prayer.

During the week...a step further

If you did not have time to carry out the "Group Love Project" last week, attempt to do it this week. Or, you may have enjoyed last week's experience so much that you will want to create another "love project" with the class for this week.

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

Week Four: John Speaks to our Present Day Situation



Welcome Back

In this week's lesson, you will have a chance to examine some of the faith issues that you might encounter as you seek to talk about and live out your faith journey in your everyday life. Below is a letter written to John (a "Dear John letter") based on actual conversations with people struggling with the issue of faith and religion in the world today.



Begin class with prayer

Invite people to share in a sentence or two what "peace" means to them. After everyone has had a chance to share, go around the class again and invite people to share the "peace prayer/poem" they wrote during the week.

Close the prayer time by reading in unison what has become known as the "Peace Prayer of Saint Francis." (An alternative would be to find a recording of the song "The Prayer of St. Francis" and play the song.)

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL



Let's investigate

Appoint someone to read the following letter.

Discussion questions will be raised after the reading of this letter.

Dear John,

I don't believe in God anymore. In fact, I'm not sure I ever did. Oh, as a child I guess I kind of believed in a God who ranked along with Santa Clause, the Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy. But even then, God was not my favorite – the other fantasy characters were more loving, and even gave gifts, but God was always the one who stood ready to destroy the world and condemn me to hell. You get what I mean?

I don't understand why you still believe in God, or why you keep hanging around with people who do? What do you get out of going to church all the time? Is that your way of appeasing God, so you get off the hook, or what? Most of the people I know who talk about God are always telling me how "sinful" I am, and that I deserve God's judgment – so I usually try to avoid them. But a few keep chasing after me, telling me I should be "born again" or something like that. At first I thought that was kind of cool, because I am starting to believe in reincarnation, but then I found out they didn't have that in mind! So I still have no idea what they are talking about!

And another question. Who is Jesus? Some of the church people I know keep talking about him like he is alive or something! They keep telling me I should "accept him as my personal savior!" I don't have the slightest idea what they mean by that! I asked them, and they just say that "Jesus is God's son" or something like that, and that "he took God's punishment on himself so I don't have to be punished by God for my sins." What kind of God would do that? That's child abuse, and I had enough of that growing up! I was the oldest child in our family and my folks, especially my dad, would beat us to a pulp if we did anything bad! So, I use to lie and say that it was my fault when my brothers or sisters were in for it, that way I would get the whip and not them. Who would want to believe in a God like that?

Though, I must say, I have been doing some reading about Jesus lately, and from what I read, he was pretty cool! In fact, he doesn't seem to be anything like God at all. So I am a little confused, if Jesus was so good and all that, why would Jesus believe in such a hateful God?

Another thing I don't get. Why do so few church people act like Jesus? If they did, I might like hanging out with them a bit more. Is it because they are afraid and think they should act like God instead of Jesus?

Sincerely,

I. M. Confused

UNIT FIVE: LEARNING MISSION FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL



Discussion questions:

If you have a large class you may want to divide up into smaller groups for discussion. If you do divide your class into smaller study groups, reconvene and share your findings.

You have just heard someone's life situation who is struggling with belief and unbelief today:

1. Make a list of the questions you hear the author, "I. M. Confused", raising in this letter.
2. Which questions from this list have you heard people raise during your faith journey?
3. What questions does I. M. Confused raise that have also risen in your mind? If comfortable, share your questions with the class.
4. What facets of good news (stories or passages) from John's gospel would you share with I. M. Confused?

Prayerful reflection

(Note: a candle will be needed during this reflection)



Close this class time together by placing a lighted candle in the center of your group. See the candle as the light of the world- the light that came into the midst of our darkness to shine forth the love of God in Christ. (If possible, darken the room before you light the candle.) In the light of Christ, share what is on your heart as you end this time in John's gospel and the study of **Mission from the Gospels**.

A word of thanks from the authors:

This lesson completes the five unit study **Mission from the Gospels**. Thank you for participating in this learning journey. We hope that this study of the Gospels has stimulated you to go further on the journey of mission engagement in your neighboring community and beyond. You are invited to visit our website, which offers additional learning tools and stories for faith communities wanting to go deeper into the missional journey: <http://www.missionalnetworking.org>

Sam Brink
Ron Carlson

