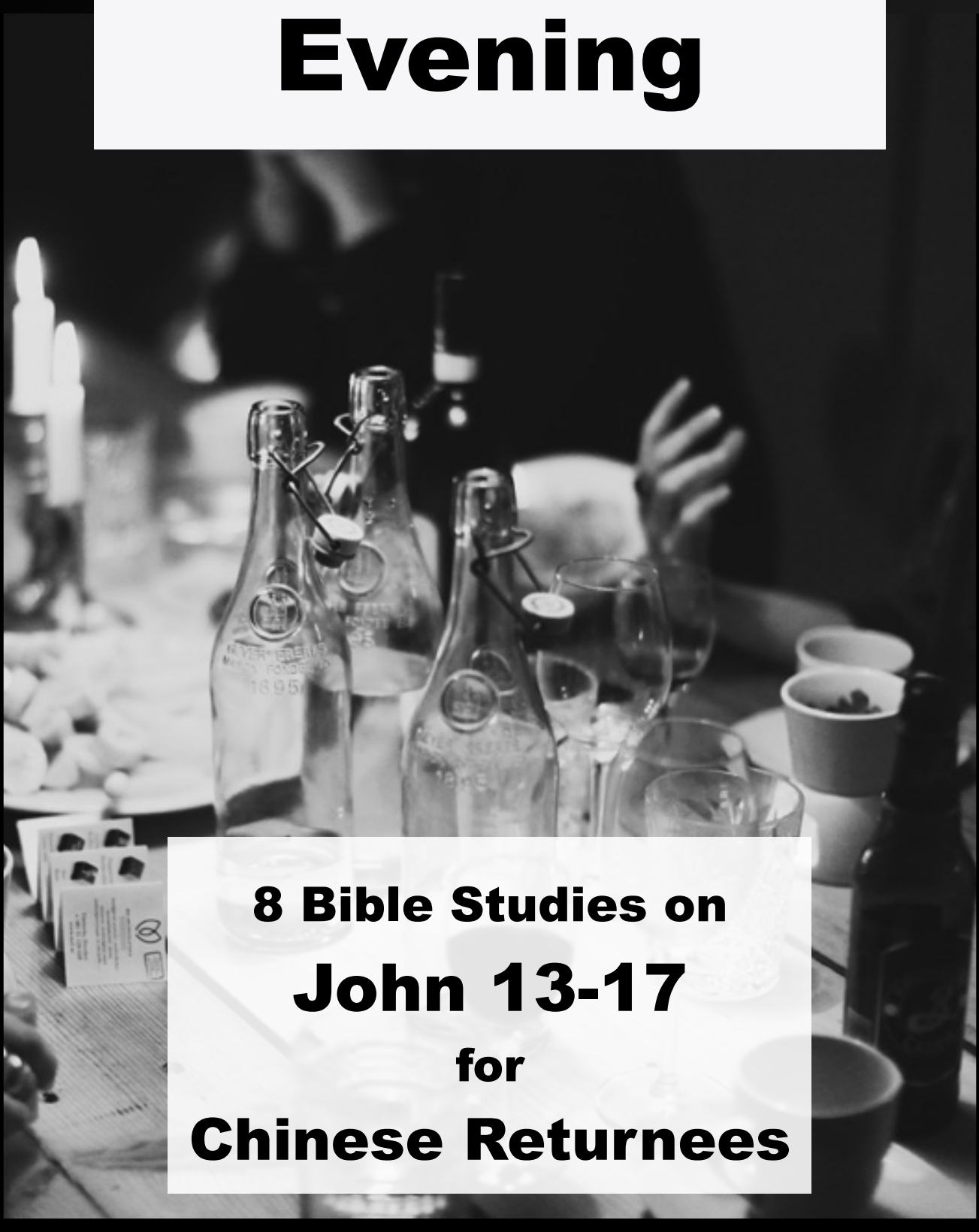


One Last Evening



**8 Bible Studies on
John 13-17
for
Chinese Returnees**

Prepared for the Return

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Study 1 John 13:1-30

Introduction: One Last Evening

Imagine that while studying overseas you go to your church small group one evening and hear some surprising news: one of the small group members, a Chinese student, has suddenly had her visa cancelled, and she has to leave the country to return home the next day! She has one last evening to spend together with her church friends.

What sort of things would you want to talk to her about?

How could you help prepare her to continue as a Christian back home?

The disciples are in a similar situation here. While eating dinner together, Jesus suddenly tells them that this is the last evening he will spend with them. Just as your friend in the scenario above will have to keep going as a Christian without the support of her church friends from overseas, so the disciples will have to continue following Jesus after he has left them. This one last evening together is so important - and Jesus spends it teaching his disciples things that will prepare them to continue following him after he has gone.

Read John 13:1-30

1. This passage describes Jesus washing the disciples' feet. What is this a picture of?

We could make lots of guesses about the meaning of Jesus' actions here, but John doesn't want us to guess. He has included plenty of clues so that we can work out the message Jesus intended to teach his disciples through washing their feet. Consider each of the questions below, and then try to sum up the answer to the main question above.

- a) **Read verses 1 and 3. What does Jesus know is about to happen?**
- b) **What other hints are there in this passage that this thing will happen?**
- c) **Think about what the action of washing someone's feet meant in first century AD (see CONTEXT).**
- d) **Read verses 7 and 12. What do these verses tell us about Jesus' actions?**

CONTEXT:

Foot-washing. Jesus lived in the Middle East in the first century, where the roads were dusty and filthy, and everyone walked around in sandals. This meant horribly dirty feet! In most households the lowest servant had the task of washing peoples' feet when they came into the house - this job was disgusting, degrading and despised by others.

Passover. In 11:55 and 12:1 John has emphasised that it is Passover time. Passover was the biggest feast in the Jewish calendar, when the Jews remembered the time when God saved them from being slaves in Egypt (these events are recorded in Exodus 11-12). God killed all the eldest sons in Egypt, but told the Jewish families to kill a lamb instead, putting its blood on the doorposts of their houses, so that God would 'pass over' their houses and not kill their eldest sons. The lamb was killed instead of the son.

2. What does the foot-washing teach us about Jesus' death?

3. What does Judas' betrayal teach us about Jesus?

(see verses 18-19 in particular. Verse 18 quotes Psalm 41. What does Psalm 41:8-9 teach about God's chosen King?)

In John 13-17 Jesus teaches his disciples what to expect from life when he is no longer physically present.

4. Why do you think Jesus washes his disciples' feet at the start of this teaching section? What does this tell us about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus?

5. How has this passage encouraged you to take Jesus' death more seriously?

6. How should Jesus' death impact: a) your thinking? b) your living?

7. Use the examples below to consider how to respond to this passage in two imaginary situations:

- a) Your friend Yang became a Christian while studying overseas, and has now been back in China for several months. He shares with you that he is starting to doubt his relationship with God because he feels like such a bad Christian: he has had fierce arguments with his parents, he is struggling with impure thoughts, and he has been dishonest in his dealings at work. He tells you that he doesn't feel he can ever make it up to God and be a proper Christian again.

How could you use this passage in your reply to Yang?

- b) Ling joined the only church she could find in her hometown, but she is really struggling with it. The style of singing is very different to what she was used to at church overseas, the sermons are much longer, and the other Christians there annoy her - they don't seem to understand the Bible as well as she does, yet they have very strong opinions which they are quick to share with others. She doesn't want to get too involved in the life of the church because of this.

How should this passage shape Ling's response to this situation?

8. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction (page 3).

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

Thanksgiving

One of the things that Jesus emphasises in this section is that all Christians can speak directly to God as Father. Each study will suggest a different topic to guide our prayers. In this study it seems appropriate to begin by thanking God for Jesus and his servant-hearted death for us.

- * Give thanks for each of the facets of Jesus' death that we see in this passage. For example, give thanks that Jesus willingly served us, although he is the King of kings; give thanks that Jesus' death is all we need to be forgiven by God, etc.
- * No matter how we are feeling about returning to China, give thanks that all these aspects about Jesus' death are still true back home.
- * Give thanks that Jesus has called us to be his disciples and to be like him in loving and serving others.
- * Give thanks for Jesus' teaching to his disciples in these chapters of John, and that it has been preserved for us too.

Study 2 John 13:31-14:4

Before you start...
Read John 7:32-34 and 8:21 where Jesus speaks to the Jews who opposed him. How would this make the disciples feel when they hear Jesus' words in John 13:33?

Starter Question: During your time overseas, what things are/were you homesick for?

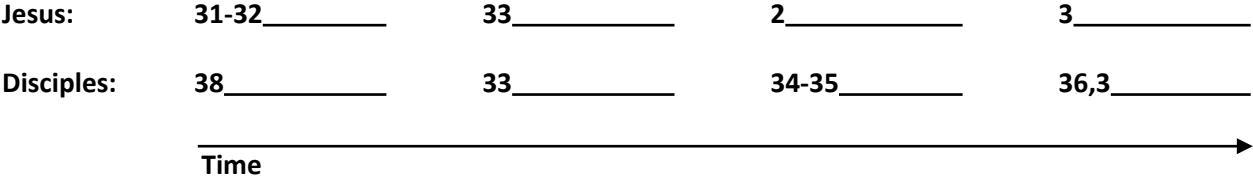
Read John 13:31-14:4

1. Go through the passage and draw appropriate facial expressions for the disciples at each point.

2. a) Why are the disciples so distressed in this passage?

b) How would the context of John 7:32-34, 8:21 (see 'Before you start...') add to the disciples' distress?

3. Complete this timeline for the passage. Include what will happen to Jesus, and what will happen to the disciples.



(Read 12:23-24. What is Jesus referring to when he says he will be "glorified" in 13:31?)

4. a) Why are the disciples unable to go with Jesus now? (v36-38)

b) What will make them able to go with him in the future?

5. a) How does Jesus want his disciples to respond to his words (14:1)?

b) In question 2 we discussed the disciples' distress. How would this passage comfort them in this distress?

WHO AM I?

An important question to ask in these chapters is: Which character does John want us to identify ourselves with? The book *Dig Deeper*¹ calls this principle the 'Who Am I?' Tool. Each part of the Bible is written for us, but we are not meant to identify directly with every character. The 'Who Am I?' Tool is useful in John 13-17 as we consider to what extent Jesus' words are intended just for his original disciples, and to what extent they are applicable for us also. We are in a similar position to the disciples, yet not exactly the same.

6. Should we respond in the same way as the disciples? Why/why not?

(To help answer this question, consider what similarities and differences there are between the disciples' situation and ours)

7. How should this passage shape the way we understand our lives now? (Look back to the timeline from question 3)

8. In 14:2 Jesus tells us that our real home is in his Father's house. How has this passage helped you see what things we should be 'homesick' for?

9. How could you use this passage to help Ling and Yang, whose imaginary situations we discussed in the previous study?

¹ *Dig Deeper*, Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach (IVP 2005), see chapter 16.

'Ask, and you will receive...'

Authorities

This passage teaches that our home is in heaven with Jesus, not here on earth. However, at present we live under the authority of human rulers whom God has set over us, and it is right that we pray for them (Paul teaches this in 1 Timothy 2:1-4). Our prayers should be shaped by the knowledge that Jesus has prepared a perfect, eternal home for those who trust him.

- * Give thanks for China's leaders and for how they are working for the stability of the nation. Pray that God would give them wisdom to rule well and that God would work through their decisions to open many doors for gospel advance.
- * Pray for Christians in positions of authority, that they would value their home in heaven more than the privileges they enjoy on earth and that they would be unashamed to be known as Jesus' disciples.
- * Pray for Chinese Christians to be wise in the way they relate to authorities: to be respectful and submissive towards human authorities, while honouring God as the ultimate authority.

Study 3 John 14:5-21

Before you start...

To understand this passage, it is useful to know some background from the rest of John's Gospel.

1. To help us understand 14:6 more clearly:

- Read John 1:14-18, 5:30-47, 7:18, 8:14-18. Why can Jesus say he is "the truth"?
- Read John 3:14-18, 4:13-14, 6:47-51, 10:10-11, 11:25-44. What does it mean for Jesus to be "the life"?

2. To help us understand 14:10-12 more clearly, read John 5:1-24.

- What are the "works" that Jesus does?
- What are the "greater works" referred to in 5:20?
- How do Jesus' works relate to the Father's works?

Read John 14:5-21

It is helpful to note that John 13:36-14:31 is structured around questions asked by the disciples and Jesus' answers to these questions. 14:5-21 includes two questions, in verses 5 and 8. We will look at them both in turn.

1. John 14:5-7

a) Why does Thomas ask this question? (how is it linked to what Jesus has just told them?)

b) How does Jesus answer Thomas' question?

- Where is Jesus going? (v7)
- Consider your answers to 'Before you start...' question 1. Why can Jesus say he is the way? Why can Jesus say he is the *only* way ("No one comes to the Father except through me")?

c) How would Jesus' answer help his disciples to continue following him after he leaves them?

2. John 14:8-21

a) Why does Philip ask this question (how is it linked to what Jesus has just told them?)

b) How does Jesus answer Philip's question?

Jesus' answer is much longer this time. Let's consider it step by step:

v9-11

- How does Jesus answer Philip's question?
- How does the context from 'Before you start...' question 2 help us understand this?

v12-14

- Jesus did some very great "works", such as healing a lame man (John chapter 5) and even raising a dead man (John chapter 11)! How can Jesus say that those who believe in him will do "greater works" than him? (use the context from 'Before you start...' question 2 to help)
- So what sort of things do you think Jesus expects his followers to ask in his name (v13-14)?
- How does this address Philip's question?

v15-21

- What will the disciples' relationship with the Father and Jesus be like after Jesus leaves them?
- What is the Helper's role in this? (consider what it means for him to be "another" Helper (16), and the "Spirit of truth" (17))
- How does this address Philip's question?

Try to sum up Jesus' answer to Philip's question.

c) How would Jesus' answer help them to continue to follow him after he leaves them?

3. How does this passage help you answer the following questions/objections that friends and family might have:

- How can Christians say that Jesus is the only way to have eternal life when there are so many other religions?
- I can't believe in God because I can't see him.
- Your kind of Christianity seems to only care about what happens in the future. My church helps us receive blessings here and now.

4. How has this passage helped you to understand your relationship with God?

5. After you return home to China, there are likely to be times when you feel lonely, far from God, and tempted to doubt his existence.

What truths from this passage will be a comfort to you at those times?

Write down your answer so that you can remind yourself of it when you feel lonely etc:

6. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction.

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

People from other religious groups

China is a country with great ethnic and religious diversity, despite being an officially atheist state. This passage teaches that Jesus is the only way to truly know God and have eternal life, and so no matter whether someone is Buddhist, Muslim, atheist, or something else, they need to know Jesus. This passage is a good opportunity to pray for different religious groups in China.

- * Pray for the two large Muslim ethnic groups in China: the Hui (around 13 million) and the Uighur (around 11 million). Only a handful of Christians exist in these people groups, and those who convert to Christianity face social rejection and persecution by their communities. Pray for Han Chinese to have confidence and conviction to reach Hui and Uighur people with the gospel.
- * Pray for other people groups which have their own religion, such as Tibetan Buddhism. Pray for God to soften their hearts towards Jesus and for them to recognise that he is the way, the truth and the life.
- * Buddhism is the most common religion in China. Some are devout Buddhists, but many just feel an affinity to Buddhism as the most Chinese religion, and occasionally visit a temple or say a prayer. Pray for them to see that Jesus offers more than a sense of peace or a philosophy to live by; he offers personal relationship with the one true God.

Study 4 John 14:22-31

Before you start...

1. How does Jesus' answer in v23-31 relate to Judas' question in v22? (clue: who does Jesus says can know him?)
2. This passage (particularly v27-31) has a lot of similar themes to 13:36-14:4. What similarities can you find? How do these help you understand what Jesus is talking about in 14:27-31?

Read John 14:22-31

1. a) Put Judas' question (v22) in your own words.

b) Why does Judas ask this question? (Look back to what Jesus has just said in 14:17,19)

c) When do we feel frustrated that Jesus has not revealed himself to more people?

2. How will Jesus reveal himself to the world? (The following questions will help to answer this question)
 - a) v23-24: Who can know Jesus? How?
 - b) v25-26: Who can know Jesus? How?
 - c) v27-31 What does Jesus teach the disciples? How will this reveal Jesus to the world?
 - d) How does this passage help us understand how the disciples will do "greater works" than Jesus (14:12)?

3. Using the 'Who Am I?' Tool from Study 2, which parts of Jesus' words are addressed to us? For the parts not addressed to us, where do we fit in?

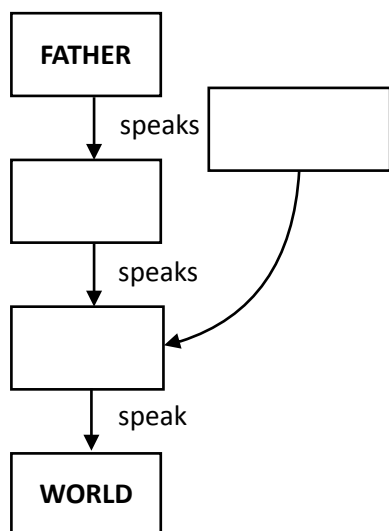
CLUE Look out for words like "anyone" or "whoever" which suggest Jesus' words apply to more than just his original hearers.

a) v23-24:

b) v25-26:

c) v27-31:

Sum up answer to Question 2 using the diagram below, and talk through how each link in the chain works:



4. Read John 20:30-31. Here John tells us that he wrote this book so that his readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. How does this passage help us to trust what John writes about Jesus?

5. How does this passage help us to respond when we face the frustrations discussed above (1.c))?

6. What could you do this week with the words of Jesus that have been entrusted to you?

7. How does this passage increase your confidence to tell others about Jesus?

8. Share one or two names of people back home that you hope to share the news of Jesus with, and pray for opportunities to do this.

9. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction.

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

The workplace

After returning to China, many who have studied abroad will find that they spend the majority of their waking hours at work. Working hours are long and expectations are high. However, the workplace is not just something to be endured, it is also a great opportunity for the gospel.

- * Praise God that there are an increasing number of workplace Christian groups in Chinese cities, where Christian colleagues meet together regularly. Pray that these groups would be deeply convinced that Jesus is revealing himself to the world as Christians pass on the apostles' words about Jesus, and that they would work together to help their colleagues hear these words of life.
- * Pray that individual Christians would see their workplace as a mission field, that they would build good relationships with their colleagues and be committed to helping their colleagues hear about Jesus.
- * Pray for Christians to live lives of integrity that commend the gospel, particularly when they are put under pressure at work to compromise Christian values.
- * Pray for Christians to have wisdom as they seek to honour their boss and work hard, while prioritising their commitment to Jesus and to his church.

Study 5 John 15:1-17

Before you start...

1. Look for repeated words or ideas in this passage. How do these help you identify the main ideas in the passage?
2. The image of a vine appears several times in the Old Testament. Read Isaiah 5:1-7 and 27:2-6:
 - a) What does the vine represent?
 - b) How do these two images of the vine in Isaiah differ from each other?
 - c) How does this background help us understand John 15?

Starter Question: After you return home, what do you think will be the main challenges for you to stand firm as a Christian?

Read John 15:1-17

1. Feedback from 'Before you start...' question 1. What repeated words and ideas are in this passage?
2. How does the vine image help us understand our relationship with Jesus?
 - a) From verses 1-8?

b) From the Old Testament context? (see 'Before you start...' question 2.)



3. What does the life of someone abiding in Jesus look like?

What we do: _____ *(7,10,14)*

_____ *(12,13,17)*

What we experience: _____ (7,16)
_____ (9)
_____ (11)
_____ (14,15)

Remember the context of this passage: in John 13-17 Jesus teaches his disciples what life will be like without him physically present.

4. a) What have we already learnt about what life will be like for Jesus' disciples from John 13-14?

b) What does this chapter add to our understanding of life now?

5. From this passage, what motivates you to abide in Jesus?

6. Think about the challenges you discussed in the Starter Question. How could this passage help you to 'abide' when facing these challenges?

7. To stand firm in our relationship with God it is important to keep listening to him (through reading the Bible) and talking to him (through prayer).

- a) How does this passage encourage you to do these things?**
- b) Are you in the habit of doing these things regularly?**
- c) What steps could you take to make progress in these areas?**
- d) Have you thought about how to keep doing this after you return home?**

8. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction.

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

Returnees

My pastor used to often say "no change is spiritually neutral". For those who have studied or worked overseas for a period of time, returning to China can bring many great opportunities for spiritual growth and gospel ministry, and can also present many challenges. We need to pray for ourselves and for other returnee friends, that in this new environment we would continue to abide in Jesus and bear much fruit.

- * Pray for returnees to quickly establish patterns of regular of prayer and Bible reading, making this a priority amongst all the other demands on their time. Pray that they would delight in listening to God and talking to him.
- * Pray for returnees to quickly settle into a faithful church back home. Pray that they would love the other Christians there in the same way that Jesus has loved them, that they would have a humble attitude, and would have opportunities to serve their church.
- * Pray for returnees to joyfully abide in Jesus when they face pressure to live for other things, such as family, career, marriage, money, etc.

Study 6 John 15:18-16:4

Before you start...

Read John 5:1-18 and 8:31-59.

1. How do the Jews respond to Jesus?
2. Why do they respond in this way?

Read John 15:18-16:4

1. Why does the world hate Jesus' disciples? (15:18-21)

CONTEXT: Who is "the world"?

In John's Gospel, "the world" refers to humanity in opposition to God (see for example 1:10, 3:19, 7:7). In this passage "the world" is used to mean anyone who does not believe in Jesus.

2. Why does the world hate Jesus? (15:22-24)

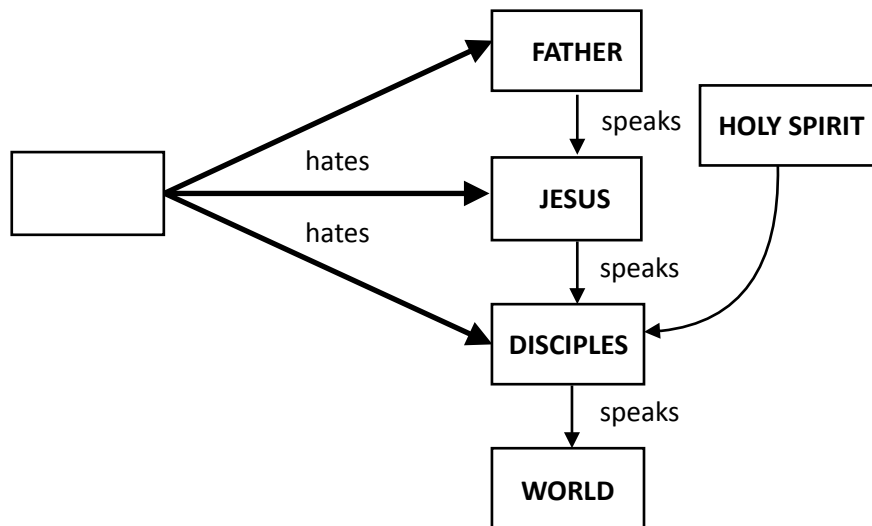
CONTEXT: Jesus' words and works

The significance of the things Jesus says and does is explained in passages such as John 5:19 and 12:49-50. Read these verses and consider: Why does the fact that people have seen and heard Jesus increase their sin?

3. What will the disciples do? Why will this increase the world's hatred of them? (15:26-27)

4. What effect does Jesus want his words to have on the disciples? How do his words achieve this effect? (16:1-4)

Add to the diagram from Study 4:



5. When facing persecution, how would the relationship with Jesus and with other Christians described in John 15:1-17 comfort Jesus' disciples?

6. How should this passage impact what you think about non-Christians around you?

7. a) Why do you think many churches fail to teach the content of this passage?

b) What would be the impact on a church if it failed to teach it?

8. a) Back in China, what kind of opposition might you face from the world as you speak of Jesus?

b) How would this passage help you in these situations?

c) How could you use it to help Christians in the scenarios below?

- A Christian in a state-owned company in China where employees are not meant to have any religion. If they admit they are a Christian to their colleagues, they risk losing their job.
- A Christian whose family are upset because of certain choices she has made due to being a Christian: e.g. breaking up with her non-Christian boyfriend, spending every Sunday morning at church.

9. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction.

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

Persecuted Christians

This passage teaches us that persecution is normal for Christians, and is one of the things that Satan may use to tempt us to fall away. Therefore we should pray for our brothers and sisters who are persecuted all over the world.

- * Pray for Christians in countries where Christians risk losing their lives for following Jesus. You could pray for places such as North Korea, Nigeria and many parts of the Middle East. More detailed information can be found from organisations like Open Doors.
- * Pray for yourself or people you know who have met with opposition to their faith in Jesus, from family, friends, colleagues etc.
- * Pray that persecuted Christians would rejoice that they belong to Jesus and not to the world, and that the joy of knowing Jesus would keep them standing firm. Pray that they would not compromise or fall away from Jesus.
- * Pray that persecuted Christians would continue to testify to Jesus, and that God might have mercy on those who oppose them, bringing them to repentance and faith in Jesus.

Study 7 John 16:5-33

Before you start...

Split this passage into several smaller paragraphs and give each one a title.

How does each paragraph encourage the disciples to “take heart” (16:33)?

Starter Question:

What things make you think: “I wish Jesus was physically here with me!”?

When might you think this after returning to China?

Recap: Look back to the timeline from John 13:31-14:4 (page 6)

Consider what we have studied so far up to 16:4. What will life be like for followers of Jesus between his departure and future return?

Read John 16:5-33

16:5-15

1. Why does Jesus say that it is better for the disciples that he leaves them (v7)?

a) What will the Helper do for the disciples? (v7,12-15)

b) What will the Helper do for the world? (v8-11)

c) How are the Helper’s two roles connected?

2. Using the ‘Who Am I?’ Tool, where do we fit in these verses?

3. How does this help us when we're sharing the gospel and we think, "If only Jesus were physically here it would be so much easier to make people believe in him!"?

16:16-33

4. What is the "sorrow" that the disciples will experience?

5. When will it turn to joy? (v21-24, see also 14:16-20)

6. Why will they (and we!) go on experiencing joy?

7. Jesus has already promised his disciples that they can ask the Father anything "in Jesus' name" (14:13-14; 15:7,15-16). "In Jesus' name" means anything that is in line with Jesus' character and plans. So what sort of things should we ask for?

8. Look back to your answers to the Recap above. How does John 16:5-33 add to your understanding of what to expect from life now as Jesus' follower?

9. Think back to the situations you mentioned in the Starter Question. How can this passage help you when you face those situations?

10. How does this passage challenge your attitude to prayer? How would you like this passage to impact your prayer life over the next week?

11. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction.

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

Family members

This passage teaches that we can have great joy now in praying directly to God as our Father. So enjoy talking to your Father using the suggestions below:

- * Thank God that through Jesus we become part of his family, with God as our Father and other Christians as our brothers and sisters. Pray that we would identify even more closely with God than with our human families, while still relating with love and wisdom towards our human families.
- * Pray for non-Christian family members, that they would have opportunities to hear about Jesus and that the Holy Spirit would convict them concerning sin, righteousness and judgment. Pray for our own witness to them.
- * Pray for Christian family members, that they would have joy in their relationship with God through Jesus.

Study 8 John 17:1-26

Before you start...

1. Split this passage into several paragraphs. Who does Jesus pray for in each paragraph? (hint: look at verse 20)
2. This passage tells us a lot about God's plan. Look for repeated words and phrases in order to identify important elements of this plan. Which of these elements has Jesus already spoken about in John 13-16?

Starter Question: If you asked your friends back in China "What is the goal of your life?", what would the most common answers be?

Read John 17:1-26

1. What is the goal of God's plan? (v1-5)

- How will Jesus be glorified? (see 12:23-24)
- How do these verses define "eternal life"?

"glory" = magnificence, honour, beauty

2. Complete the table:

	v6-19	v20-26
Who does Jesus pray for in these verses?		
What does Jesus pray for them?		
How will God achieve his plan to glorify himself (see v1-5)?		

3. Looking at the whole passage, how will God glorify himself?

a) Why is the role of the apostles so important?

b) What is our role in God's plan?

4. Jesus has already told the disciples about his plan in John 13-16. Why do you think he wanted them to hear him pray for this plan?

5. Look back to your answers to the Starter Question. Why is God's goal so much better than the goals we have for our own lives?

6. How should knowing God's plan impact your goals for your life:

a) while you are overseas?

b) back in China?

7. What role should our relationships with other Christians play in our evangelism? How could you put this into practice?

8. Think back to the scenario in the Introduction.

From this passage, what would Jesus tell your friend to help her stand firm as a Christian back in China? What would he pray for her?

'Ask, and you will receive...'

The Church in China

It is encouraging to see that in this passage Jesus prayed for the church throughout history - including the Church in China today. This prayer helps us know how we should pray for the church.

- * Pray for churches in China to have the same desires as Jesus: that many people would know God, have eternal life and bring God glory. Pray that this would prevail against human plans for our own glory.
- * Pray for church leaders and preachers in China, that they would have confidence in the apostles' words recorded in the Bible. Pray that they would teach clearly and faithfully about Jesus, and through this make God known to the world. Pray that they would have good training to equip them to do this.
- * Pray for Christians in these churches to be united around the gospel. Pray against divisions in churches or selfish arguments between church members. Pray that Christians' unity and love for each other would help non-Christians to believe in Jesus.