

# Whoever Believes

*January 22, 2023*

## Lesson Summary

### ***Main Passages***

John 1:12-13; 3:16; Romans 1:16-17; 4:1-5

### ***Session Outline***

1. Whoever Believes (John 3:16; 1:12-13)
2. Belief and Righteousness (Romans 4:1-5)
3. Belief Blesses (Romans 1:16-17)

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### ***Theological Theme***

Scripture tells us anyone who believes in Jesus will be saved. There is no distinction—the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus is available to all people.



## Leader Guide

# Whoever Believes

### Introduction

People who gamble place their faith in an outcome they have no control over. They put their money down and hope, fear, and stress over what will happen to that money because they are betting on something that may or may not happen. Nothing is ever a sure thing in the world of gambling but there are also ways that people “bet on things” without putting money down in any way.

When you sign a contract to work at a job, you are betting your career that it will be a good move. When you marry someone, you are betting that that’s the person you should spend your life with. When you choose what to eat for dinner, you are betting that the food you chose will fuel your body and do good things instead of bad things. When you bet on something you are putting your belief in it, and we do this all the time in many ways.

The idea of belief can be seen as betting your life on something or someone. When you really believe, you are betting your life on what or who you believe in. When you choose to believe in Jesus, you are betting your life on a sure thing. He is a winner, and He is victorious over all things. You never go wrong by placing your belief in Jesus and betting your life on Him as the only sure thing.

- ❓ Would you say Jesus is a sure thing to bet your life on? Why or why not?
- ❓ What are some ways you have lead someone to Christ? (Verses, process, etc.)
- ❓ Here are the Romans Road scriptures to help someone receive Christ: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, Romans 10:9-10, Romans 12:1-2

## Session Summary

The message of the gospel is that salvation is a gift offered to anyone who believes in Jesus as Savior. It is for all who believe; we don't have to do any work to receive salvation. In fact, we can't do anything to earn salvation.

Although we can't earn salvation, once we are saved, there is a change that happens, and your life will display evidence that you now have a relationship with Christ. Believers should not be ashamed of the gospel but rather celebrate it and want to share the hope they have with others who need it.

### 1. Whoever Believes (John 3:16; 1:12-13)

Today's focus phrase of John 3:16 is "everyone who believes," and it packs a lot of punch into three common words. Previously John wrote that God loved the world. He used this to set up the motivation behind salvation. "Everyone who believes" refers to the recipients of that great love of God. Though God loves the whole world and Jesus died for the world, no one receives that love or benefits from it until they believe in Jesus.

The word *believe* carries more than just head knowledge of God or even a recognition of Jesus. It is about trusting in, relying on, and even "betting" your life on Jesus. That moves belief from an intellectual concept and applies it to daily life. In John 1, John shared that when we receive and believe in Jesus, we are blessed by God.




Why is having a head knowledge about Jesus not enough? How does stopping at head knowledge fall short of full belief?

It was counter-cultural for the Jews to hear that anyone, whether Jew or not, could believe in Jesus and receive salvation. We also need the reminder that the gospel is for anyone. Sharing the gospel is not just about going to people who are like us but literally any person who needs Jesus. Everyone is qualified to receive the gospel because everyone needs Jesus.


According to John, those who receive Jesus become children of God. This is a reference to the new birth or being born again. Once you are part of the family of God, nothing and no one can remove you from it. When you believe and receive, you become a child of God and that includes all the rights and privileges of being in His family.

### Believed and Received

In John's theological vocabulary, believed and received are synonymous when it comes to the gospel.


 What does it mean to be a child of God and part of His family? How does that change our lives?

John also made it clear that this new birth is not dependent on the flesh or works or will of man; it's all about God. The people of John's day believed they had to work for salvation—that they had to follow the law and do everything right to be justified. However, Jesus fulfilled the law when He became the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice. Though we may not be bound by the law today, there are still often misconceptions or just false beliefs that keep us from truly believing and receiving Jesus. The Bible makes it clear: anyone who believes and receives Jesus will be saved.


 Application: What has kept you from fully believing and receiving the true gospel message? How might you move beyond those obstacles today?

## 2. Belief and Righteousness (Romans 4:1-5)

This concept of faith through belief is a big deal. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he addressed this issue. He used the example of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, who was highly esteemed by God's people.

 What are some ways we try to work our way to salvation today?

If anyone could be justified or made right with God by their own works, Abraham might come close. But Paul made it clear that even Abraham, the father of God's people, could not be justified by his own works. When people try to work their way to salvation, it becomes something to boast about. This kind of boasting is about self, not God, and these kinds of efforts will always fall short of the glory of God. If it was possible for humans to work their way to salvation, then the cross would not have been necessary, and Jesus would have died for nothing.

 Why is it insulting to Jesus's work on the cross for us to try to earn our way to salvation?

Paul made clear that Abraham was not declared righteous because of his works but because of his belief. Paul did not say Abraham was made righteous in everything that he did. He was man. He sinned and fell short of God's standard. Paul said Abraham was counted as righteous because he believed. Likewise, our justification is not based on our work of making ourselves righteous but that we are counted as righteous. Once we receive Jesus, God justifies us and begins making us righteous through the process of sanctification. As this happens, we see the difference in our

daily lives. But we will still mess up. We will still sin, but we are in the process of being transformed to be more like Christ until we are finally united with Him for eternity.

Righteousness is a big concept that some people have a hard time wrapping their minds around. One simple description is “right living.” When your faith is real and you have been changed by Jesus, you will be more focused on right living than worldly living. Right living is all about reflecting Jesus and the way He lived. It means not allowing your fleshly nature to rule your life but making choices and decisions in a way that lines up with your faith. The primary way to do that is to be increasingly immersed in God’s Word. As we grow in understanding of God’s Word and will, we are empowered by His Spirit to live in a way that gives God glory over ourselves. You are not saved by your works, but your salvation through belief in Christ will be evident in the way you live out your life.



Application: What needs to change in your life for you to display your faith and live in righteousness?

### 3. Belief Blesses (Romans 1:16-17)

Righteous living looks very different than the world. If you are very good at fitting into the world—looking, acting, and talking just like this culture—you may not be living a life of righteousness. Right living is about making choices that please God and reflect Him to lost people so that they may be drawn to faith.


Rome was a center of power and influence in that day. It was big, sophisticated, glorious, and impressive. Paul wrote to the believers there that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus. In that day people were segregated into classes with only the upper classes being able to access certain things, but the gospel of Jesus was and is for anyone who believes. Anyone. It was not exclusive to the upper class or even to the Jews. Paul’s heart was that no one in that day or in our day would be ashamed to share the good news that Jesus saves and all that is required is to receive and believe.




What are reasons someone today might struggle to live unashamed of the gospel?

Paul next explained why we should never be ashamed to share this good news. He wrote that it is the “power of God for salvation” (v. 16). This reminds us that salvation is not about man’s work or effort but is based on a crucified, perfect, sinless Savior. There is nothing we do to give the gospel power. The gospel is filled with power and our role is to not hinder that power as we share it effectively with the lost world. Power is a word

that resonated in Rome. The entire Roman focus was on building an empire of power over the rest of the world. Today we also relate to the word power. The quest for power drives people to many things. We may fear or respect those who have power, but human power is fleeting. The gospel has inherent power that cannot be diminished by man, and God will not withhold that salvation-giving power from any who believe.

 What are some additional ways you can think of that the power found in the gospel differs from a worldly view of power?

Paul noted the pattern of the gospel being spread to the Jews and then the Gentiles. No one is restricted from receiving the good news of Jesus. His declaration that the righteous shall live by faith goes back to the concept we discussed regarding Abraham. When you believe and accept Jesus, you are declared righteous, and God looks at you as if you had never sinned. That is justification. A person who has truly accepted Jesus will live differently. We are not just saved by faith; we also live by faith. Do you trust Him Jesus every part of your life? Do people you work with or live near see you living out your faith? Does your faith affect your daily decisions? A person who lives by faith naturally expresses that faith in every part of their daily lives.

 Application: What do you need to do differently to further live by faith every day?

## Conclusion

John 3:16 makes it clear that God loved the whole world and offers salvation as a gift to anyone who believes. We do not have to earn this gift or work our way to it; belief is the key. Everyone has a choice to believe and receive Jesus or not. The role of those who have believed in Him is to share the good news of the gospel with everyone we encounter. We do not pick and choose who comes to Jesus. He offered Himself as the sacrifice for everyone, and we need to share this life changing truth with everyone.

Once we receive and believe, our lives should reflect that. We do not and cannot work our way to salvation. Even the most esteemed leaders of the faith aren't justified by their works. The Bible emphatically states that we are only justified by our faith in Christ. Regardless of what culture or religious traditions teach, faith comes through receiving and believing Jesus.

Finally, we should never be ashamed of the gospel. Our lives should be lived by faith that will stand out in the world. We show our love for Jesus and are unashamed when we choose right living daily that honors Him.

- ❓ Who have you resisted sharing the gospel with because you think they will reject it or you?
- ❓ Take time to read through the Romans Road scriptures.
- ❓ How will you live unashamed of Jesus this week? Who will you seek to have a gospel conversation with?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank God for His plan of salvation. Ask for wisdom to see who you need to share the good news with this week. Prayer time should include praying for opportunities to share your faith (Romans Road is one way to do this) with lost friends this week.*

## Additional Resources

- *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans* by Tony Merida
- *Romans 1-7 for You* by Timothy Keller

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples



### Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

\*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

### DxD This Week

#### ***Call to Action***

Believe means to bet your life. Answer this question: *Have you bet your life on Jesus?*  
Use gospel conversation resources provided to learn how to share the gospel with the "whosoever."



## For Next Week

### Session Title

- Eternal Life

### Main Passages

- John 3:16; Colossians 3:1-4; John 10:24-30

### Session Outline

1. Eternal Promise (John 3:16-21)
2. Eternal Focus (Colossians 3:1-4)
3. Eternal Security (John 10:24-30)

### Memorize

*“For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”* - John 3:16

# Historical Context of John

## Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

## Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

## Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

## Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

## Extended Commentary

### John 3:16

3:16–18 God, out of love, gave his one and only Son (cp. 1:14, 18), so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. John’s favorite designation for Jesus is the Son sent by the Father (3:34–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1), imagery taken from the Jewish concept of the shaliach (messenger), according to which the sent one is like the sender himself and faithfully pursues the sender’s interests (13:16, 20). Jesus is that “sent one” par excellence (9:7), and he in turn sends his disciples. Being sent implies that the commission, charge, and message are issued by the sender rather than originating with the ones sent. The messengers’ role is to fulfill their commission according to their sender’s will.<sup>1</sup>

### John 1:12-13

1:12–13 Reference to children of God builds on the OT characterization of Israel as God’s children (Dt 14:1; cp. Ex 4:22). Born, not of natural descent ... but of God makes clear that true children of God come into being through faith in Messiah, not physical birth or ethnic descent (8:41–47; cp. 3:16). This opens the way for Gentiles to become God’s children (11:51–52; cp. 10:16).<sup>2</sup>

### Romans 4:1-5

4:1–25 Abraham was the father of the Hebrew nation (Gn 12:1–3). Jews commonly believed that Abraham kept the whole law before it was given on Mount Sinai (Gn 26:5), so he had something to brag about. Paul refutes this, showing that Abraham was justified by faith and had no grounds to boast.

4:3 Tradition must give way to the clear statements of the Scripture. Genesis 15:6 is the text that Paul cited.

4:4–5 Pay and gift are as different as works and faith. Paul describes God as having a set of books of the kind an accountant has. God imputed or credited righteousness to Abraham’s account because of his faith. To the one who does not work, but believes on him who declares the ungodly to be righteous is a shocking expression. The Reformation focused on this passage. God saves the ungodly, sinners, and his enemies (5:5, 8, 10). Though Jews took Abraham to be a paragon of virtue, Paul declared that he was just a sinner saved by grace. He was justified by faith, just as any Christian is.<sup>3</sup>

### Romans 1:16-17

1:16 Why might someone be ashamed of the gospel? On the surface, the gospel seems like a very strange message. It is about a Jewish carpenter and teacher who was put to death on a cross by Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea in AD 26–36. The message says that this man Jesus was raised from the dead and is now Lord—the (Gk) kurios. This title was used of God in the Greek Bible and was applied to the emperor by some Romans. Paul himself wrote that this message seemed foolish to Gentiles (1Co 1:23) and was a stumbling block to Jews. A crucified Messiah seemed to be a contradiction in terms to the Jews. A crucified Jew seemed

like foolishness to the Romans, who despised Jews in general. Anyone who was crucified was considered among the lowest members of society. Paul had no confidence in his rhetorical skills to overcome the human objections to the message, but he knew the power of the Spirit to change the lives of people as they heard the good news about Jesus's death and resurrection. People are saved by faith, but faith is not the cause of salvation. The cause of salvation is the grace of God, the will of God, and the power of God working through the message.

1:17 The righteousness of God was the core of Paul's message. Martin Luther came to better understand God's grace as he studied this verse in the original Greek rather than in the Latin translation. It forever changed his view of God. God's righteousness can be understood in several ways. First, God always does what is right and can be said to have righteousness as one of his attributes (Dt 32:4; Ps 119:142). Second, since God always does what is right, his actions or activities are sometimes identified as his righteousness (Is 45:8; 46:13; 51:5–6, 8; 56:1). Third, God's righteousness is as a gift from him to us, justifying us in his sight. "Justification" is a courtroom term signifying that a judge declares a person to be "right" or "just." Augustine wrote, "The righteousness of God is that righteousness which he imparts in order to make men righteous" (Spirit and the Letter, chap. 16). In the gospel, God reveals his righteousness (his nature, his activity, and his gift of right status) by faith. In the course of this letter, Paul will explain how God is able to declare sinners to be righteous because of Jesus's work on the cross. From faith to faith emphasizes that the entire process of being declared righteous comes to us from start to finish by faith.<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*

## Author Bio

### **D.A. Carson (The Gospel According to John)**

D. A. Carson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and is the author or editor of more than fifty books, including *The God Who Is There* and *How Long, O Lord?* He is one of the founders of The Gospel Coalition and an active guest lecturer in academic and church settings around the world.

### **Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in Romans)**

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

### **Timothy Keller (Romans 1-7 for You)**

Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989 with his wife, Kathy, and three young sons. Dr. Keller's books, including the New York Times bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 25 languages.