

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Discussion Starter

- Were you ever dared by your siblings or friends to do something dangerous? What happened?

Introduction

The events of **John 7** take place in Jerusalem during the Jewish *Feast* (Festival) of *Tabernacles* (Booths or Shelters). This was a very joyful festival and it was so important to the Jews that it was often called *the Feast*. It was held after harvest, so it celebrated the people's thanks for a good harvest as well as God's care for the people during their desert wanderings under the leadership of Moses. To remind themselves of their temporary shelters in the desert, the celebrants lived in tents (huts, booths) made of branches during the seven days of the festival.

The symbol of water was also important during this festival. Harvest was a period of drought in Israel. Drenching rains had not been seen since Spring. Cisterns were low and the hills were barren and parched. Because the ground could not be renewed without water, the festival

included rituals and prayer, asking God for water to replenish the land.

The prayer for rain was dramatized each day with a procession that descended the temple hill to a fountain or pool. There the priest filled a golden pitcher with water and the pilgrims sang, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (**Isaiah 12:3**). The procession then went back up the hill to the temple altar with pilgrims singing, dancing and waving branches and citrus fruits as symbols of the leafy huts and the harvest. The priest would then go up the ramp to the altar and pour the water through a silver funnel from which it flowed into the ground. The water symbolized the rain needed for next year's harvest as well the "living water" that would someday flow from Jerusalem to the entire world as prophesized in **Zechariah 14:8-9**.

Dear Facilitator: The key verses in this chapter are **7:37-38** and they are covered at the end of the lesson in **Questions 8 -13**. Be sure to leave enough time to discuss these verses and questions. It would be better to skip some of the other questions, rather than these.

Mary Jean

Questions

Read John **7:1-13**. **ACT ONE: THE BEGINNING OF THE FESTIVAL**

1. Why did the religious leaders want to kill Jesus (**John 5:18**)?
Jesus was breaking Sabbath law by healing people (which the religious leaders saw as "working") on the Sabbath and he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.
 2. In what sense, do you think, did Jesus' own brothers not believe in him (**7:3-5**)?
They didn't seem to understand Jesus' purpose or mission. They don't seem to recognize or sympathize with who he is and what he is doing. They don't deny Jesus is doing miracles, but they want him to promote himself and draw a large following. They may even be thinking that Jesus would lead a political revolt against Rome. They certainly did not see that Jesus was operating under God's command and God's time.
- ♥ Do you have family or friends who think your beliefs are foolish or who ridicule you for your faith? How do you deal with it? Does knowing what Jesus faced help you at all? Why or why not?
 - ♥ What advice would you give a friend who faces opposition from their family because of their faith?
 - ♥ Are you more likely to be bold or cautious in sharing your faith with your family? Why?

3. How did Jesus know when the "right time" came for him to speak or act (**John 5:19; 6:38**)? Jesus did not live out of self-initiated behavior. Rather, his words and actions were God motivated. He was looking to and listening to the Father who would tell him what to do and when to do it. Just like us, Jesus could have chosen to do his own will. Instead he chose to let God's will direct him.

♥ How do you know when the "time is right" for you to speak or act? What can you learn from Jesus' example? We can live the same way that Jesus did. By the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we also can speak and act according to God's will. Using our spiritual senses, we can "see" and "hear" what God wants us to do. In **Galatians 2:20**, the Apostle Paul says: I (our wills) have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, **but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.

4. Read **7:7** in the *Amplified Version*. Why would the world hate Jesus and not hate his brothers? Jesus is saying that the relation between he and the world (see box below) was different from that of his brothers. His brothers are part of the world and the world loves its own (**John 15:19**). Jesus was not of the world. Instead he was the Light of the world and as light he exposes what is wrong and evil in the world (**John 3:19-21**). His brothers were content with the worldly environment and the way the world operates (i.e., show you miracles to get a following). Jesus was content with only doing the Father's will.

World - The organized system of earthly values that are opposed to the values of God. The Bible describes the world system as "dark" (**Ephesians 6:12**) and operating on basic principles that are not of God (**Colossians 2:20; 1 John 2:16**). The entire system is under the power of Satan (**1 John 5:19**) and it is from this kingdom that people are rescued when they believe in Christ (**Colossians 1:13-14**). The Bible teaches that every human culture is warped and twisted by the impact of sin. The basic human desires that motivate people (i.e., *wanting our own way, wanting everything for ourselves and wanting to appear important*) are proof of sin's warping power. Followers of Jesus are called to display on earth a completely different set of values. Rather than being squeezed into the world's mold, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (**Romans 12:2**). Worldliness is unthinkingly adopting the perspectives, values, and attitudes of our culture, without examining them in the light of God's Word. It is carrying on our lives as if we did not know Jesus. A Christ-follower does not live for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (**1 Peter 4:2**).

♥ In what ways is the world today evil?

♥ Can you expect any different reaction from the world than Jesus received (**John 15:18-21**)? What is your level of comfortableness in the world? When do you feel unaccepted in the world?

♥ How does fear sometimes keep you from openly sharing your beliefs about Jesus (**7:13**)?

Read **John 7:14-24**. **ACT TWO: THE MIDDLE OF THE FESTIVAL – SCENE 1: YOUR CREDENTIALS, PLEASE!**

As Jesus began to teach, the Jews (the religious leaders) were amazed at his skill and authority. Educational standards for rabbis (teachers) were well established in the first century. Advanced study under a rabbinic scholar in order to become a rabbi was the norm. Knowledge and authority was passed down from rabbi to rabbi.

5. Where did Jesus say he got his "diploma" (**7:16**)?

Jesus' teaching comes directly from God the Father who sent him into the world. Jesus was sent to "take away the sins of the world" (**1:29**). He was sent to save the world, not condemn the world (**3:16-17**).

♥ How can a person know if Jesus' teaching is true and comes from God? (**7:17**)? Does this make sense to you? Why or why not?

It might help to read **7:17** in the *Amplified version*. This verse says that spiritual understanding is not produced by learning facts or procedures. Rather, it depends on obedience to the known truth. Obedience to God's will (living life as God designed it to be lived) develops discernment concerning falsehood and truth.

This is the only way to test whether something is God's truth. Because God claims to be the ultimate and highest authority, there is no way to "prove" his truth. (Any "proofs" we might use are part of his creation and below his ultimate authority.) Only by submitting to God with complete willingness to do his will are we in a position to evaluate Jesus' claims and teaching. And when we do come with this attitude, Jesus says that we will discover that Jesus' teaching is indeed the very truth of God, and we will know that Jesus is who he claims to be – the divine Son who is one with the Father. The yielding of self-will to the will of the Father is the key that unlocks spiritual understanding.

Usually the process is reversed in human thinking. Humans seek to know first and act afterwards. God says, "**Do** (obey) and then you will **know**." Humans want to **see** and then **believe**. God says **believe** and then you will **see (understand)**.

♥ According to the "test of proof" in 7:17, why would the religious leaders' desire to kill Jesus keep them from recognizing the truth of Jesus' message?

Working to kill someone is against the Law of Moses and certainly against God's will. Because they were not obeying known truth (You shall not kill), they would not be able to know and recognize if what Jesus was teaching was actually true. If they had submitted their will to God's will and began to obey the truth they already had (Law of Moses, 10 commandments, etc.), then they would be in a position to know if Jesus' teaching came from God or not. The religious leaders, however, did not want to give up their own will (the own program and way of thinking) so they automatically are disqualified from being able to understand what Jesus is teaching.

♥ What will you have to do to apply the test given in 7:17? Completely surrender our wills to God and be willing to obey what we know is right. Then, and only then, will we have spiritual understanding.

6. The religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus because he healed a man on the Sabbath. How does Jesus show his brilliance by using their own law and reasoning to prove his case (7:21-23)?

Jesus told them that because he "worked" on the Sabbath to heal a man, they were offended. But he points out to them that they "work" on the Sabbath too! The Law of Moses says that circumcision for a baby boy was to be done on the 8th day after birth. If the day of circumcision fell on a Sabbath, they went ahead and did the circumcision so that they didn't break the Law of Moses. So, Jesus reasons with them by saying: If it's okay for you to treat (make whole) one part of the body on the Sabbath, why can't I treat (heal, make whole) the WHOLE BODY on the Sabbath. In 7:24 Jesus says, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." In other words, "Think this through and you'll see that I am right" (7:24 NLT)

♥ How do people today respond to the teaching of Jesus?

♥ What gives you the confidence to believe that what Jesus taught is true?

♥ How do we sometimes judge Jesus by "appearances" instead of thinking it through and making a right judgment (7:24)?

Read John 7:25-36. **ACT TWO: THE MIDDLE OF THE FESTIVAL – SCENE 2: DIVISION IN THE RANKS**

7. What two, differing opinions emerged about Jesus among the crowd at the festival (7:25-31)?

Some wondered if he might be the Christ, but rejected that conclusion because they didn't think Jesus fit their pre-conceived ideas of who the Messiah was (see box below).

Many others put their faith in him and believed he was the Messiah because of his miraculous signs.

(The religious leaders were trying to arrest him.)

- ♥ What divisions do we see today over Jesus' identity?
- ♥ Why do you think Jesus consistently used double meanings and plays on words (7:28-29; 35-36) when talking about himself and his mission?

Jesus words confuse the ones who do not believe. He will not give them any more information to be used against him. He will not give the precious truth to those who harden their hearts and choose not to believe the truth. For the one who does believe, Jesus words are understandable.

- ♥ Do you think Jesus is more or less controversial today than he was 2000 years ago? Why?

When the Christ (Messiah) comes, no one will know where he is from (7:27). Messiah means **anointed** and the Jews believed, from Old Testament Scripture, that a special **Anointed One** would come from God and set the world right. Where the Gospels read "**Christ**", they give Jesus the title of God's Anointed One. In Jesus' day, the Christ (Messiah) was thought to be Israel's deliverer. God's Anointed would redeem Israel, rule as king over the restored kingdom, and answer all mankind's questions about God's plans and purposes. Even though it was expected that the Messiah would come from King David's line, it was also believed that the Messiah would appear suddenly and mysteriously and no one would know where he came from. For some, Jesus' background disqualified him as being the Messiah.

Read John 7:37-52. **ACT THREE: THE LAST AND GREATEST DAY OF THE FESTIVAL**

On the last and seventh day of the festival, the water procession (see *Introduction*) took place seven times. It was on this final day, as water is being poured out from the golden pitcher into the silver funnel, that Jesus steps into public view and makes his most stunning declaration of the festival, crying out the words of **John 7:37-38**.

8. Jesus extends an invitation in **7:37-38**. What two words define who is included in the invitation?

Anyone and whoever – the invitation is open to all

9. **Thirst** can be defined as *the desire or need to drink water or a feeling of dryness in the mouth or throat caused by the need for water*. We become thirsty because water is needed to sustain physical life. Some synonyms for thirst are *dryness, desire, longing, craving, yearning* and *eagerness*. Relate these facts about **physical thirst** to **spiritual** (pertaining to soul and spirit) **thirst**.

Humans were created to live in relationship with God. Spiritual thirst is what our souls and hearts feel if we are separated from God. We keep looking for what is missing. We look for love, significance and purpose in our relationships, work and pleasure. But, no matter how we try to quench this spiritual thirst, our souls and hearts continue to desire, long for and crave what only God can give. Our spiritual thirst is often what drives us to God. He is the only one who can satisfy our need for love, significance (knowing that you count and make a difference) and purpose (having a reason to live).

- ♥ What spiritual needs and desires are you aware of in your life right now?
- ♥ How does it make you feel when your spiritual needs and desires are unmet?

10. What two things must we do if we want our spiritual thirst quenched (**7:37**)?

Come to Jesus and drink.

11. **Come** means to *approach, move toward, draw closer to* and *get near*. **Drink** means to *take in*. What are some ways we can **come** to Jesus and **drink**?

We respond to Jesus' invitation by drawing close to him through prayer, quietness and Scripture. We come to him by making him a priority in our lives and living in relationship to him. We come to him by slowing down and making room for him in our lives.

We drink in Jesus when we talk to him, listen to him, and read and study his Word. We drink or take in Jesus when we worship and have spiritual relationships with other Christ-followers. We take him in when we look to him to satisfy our desires and needs.

- ♥ When was a time when you came to Jesus to quench a specific thirst or need in your life?
 - ♥ Where do we encounter Jesus when we come to him? Heart? Mind? Body? Soul? Spirit? Other?
- Jesus is a real person and we can encounter him with all of the above.

♥ In what ways do we attempt to satisfy our thirsts and longings in life outside of Christ?

12. Read **7:38-39** in the *Amplified Version*. What does Jesus promise for the one who *believes* in him? From his innermost being will flow continuous rivers of living water. Jesus was saying that the Holy Spirit (who lives in the person who has invited Jesus into their lives) is like a continuous stream of life and power flowing from our hearts. If the Holy Spirit lives in us, the well of our heart never runs dry.

13. What do the words *streams, living water* and *flow* tell you about the Holy Spirit and his role in your life?

The Holy Spirit is moving, not stagnate. He is alive and full of life. He fills us like water in a container. (The Bible calls us "vessels.") His flow never stops or runs dry. Like a stream or river, his power carries us. He is meant to flow from us to others.

Discuss with your small group:

♥ Who is the Holy Spirit and what are some things he does?

The Holy Spirit is God and his role is to call us, convict us of sin, counsel us, empower us to follow Jesus, fill us, give us supernatural gifts, grow his fruit in us (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control). He gives us Life, teaches us, guides us, inspires us, intercedes for us, regenerates us and sanctifies us. We will learn more about the Holy Spirit in John 16.

♥ Where does this flow of living water begin and what do you think is its destination?

This flow begins within us (from our spirit or heart) because that is where the Holy Spirit lives. The flow (the Spirit's power and love) is meant to fill us, but then flow out from us to others as we minister to them in the power and love of the Spirit.

♥ How can you tell when streams of living water are flowing from within you?

Have several share what it "feels like" to them when they sense the Holy Spirit flowing in them and from them.

♥ What difference does the presence of the Holy Spirit make in your life?

♥ What, specifically, do *you* need to do in order to experience *streams of living water flowing from within*?

response

John wrote his Gospel so *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31)*. Put yourself in the crowd at this festival, closely watching Jesus as you try to decide who he is. Below are some events from this chapter. Which of these would be *most persuasive* in convincing *you* that Jesus is the Son of God, come to save you? Why?

Have several share what would be most persuasive for them and why.

His miracles? 7:3, 21, 31	His life of destiny? 7:6-9	His exposing evil? 7:7
His insightful and powerful teaching? 7:14-18; 21-24, 46	His humility and lack of arrogance? 7:18	His knowing people's hearts? 7:19
His confidence in his own identity? 7:28-29; 33-34	His miraculous escapes? 7:30,32,44-45	His personal invitation and offer of living water? 7:37-38
The fact that the religious leaders <i>didn't</i> believe and accept him? 7:32; 48-52	Your ability to know the truth because of your willingness to do God's will? 7:17	

Encounter with Jesus

Write out a paraphrase of Jesus' invitation in **7:37-38** so that it is worded as a personal invitation to you. Be sure that the invitation includes your name. **Ask for volunteers to share their paraphrased invitation.**

Imagine yourself sitting or walking with Jesus in a peaceful setting. Read his invitation to you out loud. Tell him what it is you are thirsty for. Tell him how you are going to respond to his invitation to you.

Wait and listen. How do you sense Jesus' presence with you? What do you sense he is communicating to you? How sure are you that he will give what you have requested? After you listen, thank him for being with you and write down anything you want to remember from this encounter.