

# THE GROOM'S FRIEND

## MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus showed us how to decrease when He lowered Himself in obedience to the Father's will and came to earth as a human. He took on our sin and paid our debt so that we could have right relationship with the Father and forgiveness for our sin. Jesus pointed all glory to the Father and took on the role of a servant.



# ELEVATING ONE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 3

## WE MUST DECREASE

### JOHN 3:22-30

22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went to the Judean countryside, where he spent time with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, 24 since John had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. 26 So they came to John and told him, "Rabbi, the one you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is going to him." 27 John responded, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

## CHRIST MUST INCREASE

### JOHN 3:31-36

31 "The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, and yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 The one who has accepted his testimony has affirmed that God is true. 34 For the one whom God sent speaks God's words, since he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. 36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him."

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.

Leaders: Consider how you can point to Jesus instead of yourself. Even as leaders, we struggle with pointing to Jesus only. May we intentionally decrease and position Jesus above ourselves.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### WE MUST DECREASE

#### JOHN 3:27-30

“The Baptizer is treated not merely as a historical person, but he is also employed as a character symbol who is to be contrasted directly with Jesus. He is witness; Jesus is the Light (1:7-8). He is voice; Jesus is the Word (1:14,23). He baptizes with water; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit (1:33). To miss this contrast is to miss the Johannine theology of ‘position’ enunciated through vivid contrasts.”<sup>13</sup>

#### JOHN 3:29

“John’s joy is in fulfilling God’s will for his life—a model of Christian discipleship. He raises the question for all who would be disciples of Jesus, Where do we find our joy? It is easy to get distracted by the pleasurable blessings of this life. We should be thankful and receive gratefully God’s blessings, but our joy’s deepest foundation is God in himself. That he is as Jesus revealed him to be is our joy, as is the fulfilling of his purposes for our own lives (15:10-11), and we see this joy here in the Baptist.”<sup>14</sup>

### CHRIST MUST INCREASE

#### JOHN 3:36

“Notice that the word believes (v. 36) is not in contrast with does not believe but with rejects. An essential element of believing Jesus is accepting his word and obeying him. You can’t divorce obedience from belief. To believe you must obey what Jesus has commanded. What we believe and how we live are intertwined. Like strands woven together to make a rope, belief and obedience are woven together in salvation. The New Testament teaches that if you don’t turn from your sin to obey Jesus, then you haven’t put your faith in him.”<sup>15</sup>

# CONTEXT

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The Old Testament portrays Yahweh as Israel's faithful husband, though she was unfaithful. The prophet Hosea lived out this concept, when he obeyed God's command to marry Gomer, an unfaithful woman (Hos. 1:2). The marriage represented God's unwavering covenant relationship with Israel: Hosea, the faithful husband, represented God, and Gomer represented Israel, the adulterous wife. In today's passage, John the Baptist compared himself to the groom's friend and explained that he had no desire to distract the bride from the Groom (John 3:29). In ancient Hebrew culture, the groom's friend often safely delivered the bride to the groom and stood watch outside their door on the night of the wedding. John's job was to point the bride to the groom, Jesus. With a deep understanding of Scripture, John the Baptist built on the Old Testament theme; calling Jesus the Groom, the husband, acknowledged Him as God. Another interesting truth is that John the Baptist was both a friend of the Groom and also the bride, as are all believers!

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

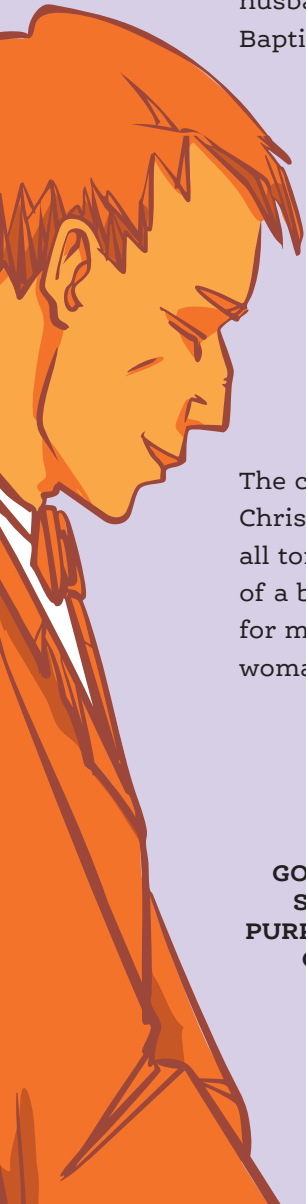
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### Bride of Christ

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

### LEADERS' PRAYER

**GOD, WE CONFESS THAT SOMETIMES WE DESIRE FAME AND GLORY. WHEN WE STRIVE FOR THE PRAISE OF OTHERS, CONVICT US AND REMIND US OF OUR PURPOSE. HELP OUR LIVES POINT STUDENTS TO JESUS INSTEAD OF POINTING TO OURSELVES. REMIND US THAT ANYTHING GOOD IN US COMES FROM YOU.**





## KICK STARTER

### ♡ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about being an instrument of light as believers. Did you have opportunities to choose light (truth) over darkness (sin) last week? When did you struggle to make the right choice?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## FAMOUS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **IF YOU COULD BE FAMOUS FOR ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHY?**
- **WHY DO YOU THINK OUR CULTURE IS SO INTERESTED IN FAME?**
- **HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA PLAY A FACTOR IN MAKING FAME FEEL ACHIEVABLE?**

Social media has contributed to many of us thinking fame is desirable and attainable. We're sort of infatuated with the idea of influence. But fame and influence come with a price, often tempting us to seek glory for ourselves. Following Jesus means directing all glory to Him.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Why do jealousy and competition exist between believers and in the church? Real answer: People are sinful; people make up the church. Jealousy creeps in, even between friends who follow Jesus. Maybe a friend is making an impact on others, and you feel jealous because you know his faults. Jealousy urges you to point them out instead of celebrating how God is changing your friend for the better and using him to help others. Maybe you desire attention and applause. You see people receiving attention for their good decisions, and you struggle with bitterness. Feeling jealous or competitive reveals our motive: We want the spotlight. Jealousy and competition harm the church, causing division and bitterness and shifting our focus off of Jesus and onto ourselves. We all struggle with these feelings, but we must recognize them immediately instead of allowing the feelings to simmer. We can confess how we feel to God and to the other person and ask God to help us shift our focus onto Him. We can clap for others and celebrate their wins. The truth is that following Jesus isn't about attention or applause. Following Jesus means pointing to Him and away from ourselves because He is the One worthy of glory.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.

### WE MUST DECREASE

READ JOHN 3:22-30

#### HOW DOES FAME CHANGE PEOPLE? WHAT PRESSURES COME WITH IT?

We've watched people become famous overnight for a viral video or for a talent. Fame comes with the pressure of others watching everything you do and listening to everything you say. They see your wins, but they see your mistakes too. Sometimes, fame goes to our head, causing us to be arrogant. Fame can lead to the desire for more fame and more attention, even at the expense of our faith and our values.

**Worldly fame fades, too, just as quickly as we achieved it. Even if fame lasts for our lifetime, it means nothing in eternity.** Striving for worldly fame distracts us from pointing to Jesus, the only One worthy of all fame.



#### HOW DO JOHN'S DISCIPLES SEEM TO FEEL IN VERSES 25-26?

John explained that his purpose was to cry out in preparation for the Messiah (John 1:23). He didn't desire glory and encouraged his followers to follow Jesus instead. But some of his disciples appeared bothered by the attention Jesus received, seeming to make it a contest. Maybe they felt betrayed by people who previously followed John. Maybe they felt jealousy over another rabbi rising in public opinion. Either way, they missed the point of John's teaching. **John was joyful that everyone was running to Jesus because that meant he was fulfilling his purpose.** John showed us how to find joy by pointing to Jesus and away from ourselves.



#### HOW DO CHURCHES AND BELIEVERS GET CAUGHT IN THE TRAP OF INFLUENCER CULTURE, IN SEEKING WORLDLY FAME OR INFLUENCE?

Our culture is saturated with influencers. A quick scroll on social media exposes us to people being elevated because of their opinions about certain brands, songs, or political issues. We strive for influencer status. Churches and believers aren't immune either. Influencer culture has helped create a celebrity Christianity. **We measure impact by social media reactions and number of followers. If people don't like and share our posts, then we aren't influential.** Sure, we can use social media as a platform to share the gospel, but how do we keep our motives pure? How do we not get caught in a desire for worldly fame—for attention, for more followers, for applause? **The line gets blurry between pointing to the gospel and pointing to ourselves.** The truth is that Jesus didn't seek His own fame. He pointed to the Father. He lowered Himself, descended from a throne in heaven, and came here as a suffering Servant (Isa. 53). **Consistent faithfulness in the small things isn't small; serving when no one sees matters.** Are we willing to decrease—to follow Jesus's and John's example? Or do we demand for the world to see our good works? If that's our motive, then their applause is our only reward—applause we can't carry with us when we go to heaven.

## CHRIST MUST INCREASE

READ JOHN 3:31-36

### WHAT DOES VERSE 31 SHOW US ABOUT WHO WE ARE IN RELATION TO WHO JESUS IS? HOW SHOULD THIS IMPACT THE WAY WE LIVE?

Verse 31 is clear that Jesus is above all—not just some things, some people, some of creation. Jesus has authority over all. He is God’s eternal Son, who reigns forever. Us? **We’re earthly—created, temporary, finite, imperfect—yet, we often live like we are the ones in authority. We live as if we’re the center and everything revolves around us.** The reality is that Jesus is the center, holding all things together (Col. 1:16-17). He speaks the words of the Father and shows us His character. **Knowing this truth should cause us to reorient our lives to revolve around Jesus, to live according to the Word and not our opinions, to live with gladness under God’s good authority.**



### READ VERSE 36. HOW DOES THE WORLD TEACH VERY DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT GETTING TO HEAVEN OR HAVING ETERNAL LIFE?

Verse 36 presents a choice: Believe in the Son or reject Him. Believing in Jesus as Lord leads to life, but rejecting Him as Lord leads to eternal wrath. Think of marriage: Marriage is the commitment of a man and a woman to one another. You’re either married to someone or not; there is no in-between, even if the world teaches otherwise. Scripture often compares believers to a bride and Jesus to the groom. **We’re either in covenant relationship with Jesus or not.** The world often teaches that many paths lead to “god,” who can exist in different forms. People believe they can go to heaven if they’re good people, but the truth is that none of us are good; we’ve all chosen sin (Rom. 3:23). **Just as we’re either married or not married, we’re either the bride, committed to Jesus, or we’re not; vague middle ground isn’t an option.**



### HOW DOES OUR FAITHFULNESS TO JESUS HELP HIM “INCREASE”? WHAT DOES OUR UNFAITHFULNESS DO?

Jesus is above all; nothing we do changes His position. But our faithfulness to Jesus increases His name, or His reputation, in the world around us. We point to His glory and act as His ambassadors. **When we’re unfaithful—when we live like the world—we harm God’s name and reputation because we spread a false idea of what it looks like to follow Him.** We get to live in a way that increases Jesus’s name! Though God doesn’t need us, He chooses us as His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20)!

## WRAP-UP



### HOW CAN YOU USE YOUR INFLUENCE TO LIFT UP JESUS INSTEAD OF ELEVATING YOURSELF?

This type of decrease is a choice. John chose to step out of the way and to direct all attention to Jesus. Why? **Because Jesus is the One who matters—always.** God may bless you with some amazing talents or skills. He may gift you with an ability to speak or to sing in front of large crowds. He may grant you opportunities that bring some type of fame. **But what you do with attention and applause shows what’s at the center of your life: Jesus or yourself.** If God gives you any sort of influence (and to some degree, He gives this to all of us), use it for His glory. Live faithfully, showing the world what a follower of Jesus looks like. Point others to Jesus, not just in your actions, but in your words; verbally share the gospel. God doesn’t desire for us to decrease in a harmful, demeaning, or self-deprecating way. God loves us and treasures us as His most unique creation, calling the day He created us “very good” (Gen. 1:31)! But may we never forget that our existence depends on Him. Our entire purpose is to give God glory—our influence for His name and not our own.