

# The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 5: He Must Increase: John's Final Witness

### John 3:22-36

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 3:22-36 gives us the last recorded witness of John the Baptist, and it does two things at once. Doctrinally, it presents the supremacy of Christ in soaring terms: He comes from above and is above all, He speaks the very words of God, He has received the Spirit without measure, and the Father has given all things into His hand. The chapter ends with a stark statement of the stakes of belief and unbelief, and importantly, it sets "believe" in parallel with "obey" (v. 36), which is crucial for understanding the nature of saving faith. The teacher should be ready to show, especially at Question 9, that genuine faith is an obedient faith.

At the same time, this passage is one of the most searching tests of the human heart in all of Scripture. John models a freedom most of us long for and rarely possess: the ability to watch his own influence fade and rejoice, because his life was never about him. "He must increase, but I must decrease" is the cleanest summary of a healthy spiritual life ever spoken. The teacher should let this confront the students' competitiveness, envy, and hunger for recognition, and offer the deep joy of a life centered on Christ's honor.

So aim at both: a clearer vision of the supremacy of Christ and a heart set free from the exhausting need to be increased. The disciple we are forming finds joy in Jesus being honored, even when it costs them the spotlight.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*When his disciples worried that Jesus was drawing larger crowds, John said, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (v. 27). What does this teach us about how we should view our gifts, roles, and successes?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

John answers his anxious disciples with a principle that dismantles pride at the root: "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (v. 27). Everything he has, his ministry, his influence, his crowds, was a gift, never a possession.

Help students apply this to their own gifts and successes. Whatever we have, our abilities, opportunities, accomplishments, came from God. As Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). This truth cuts the nerve of both pride and envy. We cannot boast in what was given, and we need not envy others, since their gifts are given too.

Show how this freed John from competition. If his ministry was a gift, then he held it with open hands. When the gift began to be eclipsed by Jesus, John could let it go without grasping, because it was never his to clutch in the first place.

Apply it to the everyday. Students who see their roles and successes as gifts can serve without self-importance, release positions and platforms without panic, and rejoice when God gives to others. The whole posture of the Christian life shifts when we remember that we are receivers, not owners.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Every gift, role, and success as given from heaven, not earned or owned (1 Corinthians 4:7).
- The way this truth undercuts both pride and envy.
- Holding our ministries and platforms with open hands.
- Stewardship rather than ownership as the Christian posture.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does seeing your gifts as given change the way you hold them?
- Why does this truth cut against both pride and envy?
- What gift or role do you most need to hold with open hands?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*John's disciples were anxious about losing influence to Jesus (v. 26). When have you felt threatened by someone else's success or recognition, and how did you respond? How might this passage reshape that response?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-examining question takes up the anxiety of John's disciples, who were troubled that "all are going to him" (v. 26). Their concern was not for the truth but for their team, their teacher, their standing. It is a deeply human reaction.

Invite students to name their own experiences of feeling threatened by someone else's success, a colleague promoted, a peer praised, a friend whose life seems to be flourishing while ours stalls. The sting of comparison is nearly universal, and it often hides under spiritual language.

Help them see what drives it. Envy grows where our worth is tied to being better than others or being noticed. When someone else increases, it feels like we decrease, but only if our identity rests on the wrong foundation.

Then offer the reshaping. John could rejoice in Jesus' increase because his joy was anchored in Christ, not in his own ranking. When our worth is settled in being loved by God and belonging to

Christ, another's success stops being a threat and can even become a joy. Ask each student to name one relationship where envy has crept in and to consider what genuine rejoicing would look like there.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Envy and comparison as common threats to a healthy spiritual life.
- Worth rooted in Christ rather than in ranking above others.
- The freedom to rejoice in others' success (Romans 12:15).
- Identity in Christ as the cure for competitiveness.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When have you felt threatened by someone else's success?
- What does envy reveal about where your worth is anchored?
- Where could you practice rejoicing in another's increase this week?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*John calls himself "the friend of the bridegroom" whose joy is now complete (v. 29). What does this image teach about the proper role and joy of every servant of Christ?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John reaches for a wedding image: he is "the friend of the bridegroom," the best man, whose role is to prepare for the wedding and then step aside so the bridegroom can have his bride. "The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete" (v. 29).

Draw out the proper role of every servant of Christ. The best man does not compete with the groom; he serves the wedding. His joy is not in being the center but in seeing the bridegroom united with the bride. Likewise, every Christian servant exists to bring others to Christ, not to gather a following for themselves.

Note where John's joy comes from: hearing the bridegroom's voice. His deepest delight is not in his own role but in nearness to Christ and in seeing Christ honored. This is joy that does not depend on applause or numbers.

Apply it to ministry and service. Teachers, leaders, parents, and friends all serve best when they remember they are friends of the Bridegroom. The measure of success is not how much attention we receive but whether Christ is being joined to His people. This reframes service as joy rather than burden.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The servant of Christ as the friend of the Bridegroom, not the center.
- Joy rooted in nearness to Christ and His being honored.
- The aim of all service: bringing others to Christ, not building a personal following.
- Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as His bride (Ephesians 5:25–32).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does the image of the best man teach about serving Christ?
- Where does John's joy come from, and where does yours?
- How does seeing yourself as the friend of the Bridegroom change your service?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*John says plainly, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30). What is one specific area of your life where you sense Jesus calling you to decrease so He can increase?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-examining question lands on the lesson's central sentence: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30). The aim is to move students from admiring the principle to applying it in a specific place.

Help them understand what decreasing means. It is not self-hatred or false modesty. John remained a great and fruitful man. To decrease is simply to let Christ have His rightful place at the center, to want Him seen more than we want to be seen, to gladly step back so He can step forward.

Press for specifics. Where is the student still increasing? Perhaps in needing credit for their work, in steering conversations toward themselves, in resisting another's leadership, in measuring their worth by recognition, or in holding tightly to a role they should release. The principle is easy to applaud and hard to apply.

Ask each student to name one concrete area this week where they will let Jesus increase, by deferring, by serving unseen, by pointing to Him, or by surrendering a hunger for recognition. The goal is a life that, like John's, gets smaller in self-importance and finds its joy in Christ getting larger.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- "He must increase, but I must decrease" as the pattern of healthy discipleship.
- Decreasing as letting Christ have His rightful central place.
- The distinction between humility and self-contempt.
- Concrete, specific application as the test of surrender.

### Discussion Prompts

- In what specific area do you sense yourself still increasing?
- What would it look like, practically, to let Jesus increase there?
- What hunger for recognition might you surrender this week?

### Question 5

#### Student Question:

*John testifies that “he who comes from above is above all” and “bears witness to what he has seen and heard” (vv. 31–32). What does this teach about the unique authority of Jesus compared to every other teacher or messenger?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

John turns from himself to a soaring testimony about Jesus: “He who comes from above is above all... He bears witness to what he has seen and heard” (vv. 31–32). The contrast is between earthly messengers and the One who comes from heaven.

Draw out the uniqueness of Jesus’ authority. Every other teacher and prophet, including John himself, speaks from below, relaying what they have been told. Jesus speaks from above, testifying to what He has directly seen and heard in the presence of God. He is not passing along secondhand truth; He is the firsthand revelation of God.

Connect this to the prologue. The Word who was with God and was God (1:1) now speaks the words of God among us. This is why Jesus’ words carry an authority no other teacher’s can. To hear Him is to hear heaven itself.

Apply it to how students treat the words of Jesus. If He comes from above and is above all, then His teaching is not one opinion among many to be weighed against the experts of the age. It is the voice of the One who has seen the Father. This calls for a different kind of listening, submission rather than evaluation.

#### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unique heavenly origin and authority of Christ (John 3:31; 8:23).
- Jesus as the firsthand revelation of God, not a secondhand messenger.
- The supremacy of Christ over every other teacher or prophet.
- The fitting response of submission to His words.

### Discussion Prompts

- How is Jesus’ authority different from that of every other teacher?
- What does it mean that He testifies to what He has “seen and heard”?
- How should His heavenly authority shape the way you receive His words?

## Question 6

### Student Question:

*John says that the one who receives Jesus' testimony "sets his seal to this, that God is true" (v. 33). In what areas of your life are you tempted to doubt that God is true, and what would it look like to trust His word fully there?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

John says that whoever receives Jesus' testimony "sets his seal to this, that God is true" (v. 33). To believe Jesus is, in effect, to certify that God keeps His word. To reject Him is to call God a liar (compare 1 John 5:10).

Turn this toward honest self-examination. We rarely say outright that God is untrue, but our doubts often function that way. When we worry as though God will not provide, when we disobey as though His commands are not for our good, when we despair as though His promises will fail, we are quietly questioning whether God is true.

Invite students to locate where they struggle most to believe God is true, in His provision, His forgiveness, His promises about the future, His care in suffering. Naming the specific area of doubt is the first step toward trusting Him there.

Then call them to set their seal. Trusting God's word fully means acting as though it is true: obeying His commands, resting in His promises, refusing to live as functional skeptics. Ask each student to name one promise of God they will deliberately take Him at His word on this week.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Receiving Christ as certifying that God is true (John 3:33; 1 John 5:10).
- Practical doubt as a quiet questioning of God's truthfulness.
- Faith as taking God at His word in real life.
- Obedience and rest as the fruit of trusting God's promises.

### Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to doubt that God is true?
- How do our worries and disobedience quietly call God's word into question?
- What promise of God will you take Him at His word on this week?

## Question 7

### Student Question:

*John says, “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure” (v. 34). What does it mean that Jesus alone received the Spirit without measure, and how does that set Him apart from the prophets who came before Him?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John makes a striking claim: “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure” (v. 34). The prophets received the Spirit in measure, for particular tasks and seasons. Jesus received the Spirit without measure, in fullness.

Help students grasp what this sets apart. The prophets were genuine messengers, but partial and temporary. The Spirit came upon them for specific purposes. Jesus, by contrast, possesses the Spirit fully and permanently; the fullness of God dwells in Him (Colossians 2:9). His revelation is therefore complete, not fragmentary.

Connect this to the reliability of His words. Because Jesus has the Spirit without measure, His teaching is not a partial glimpse of God but the full and trustworthy word of God. He does not give us a piece of the truth; He is the truth (14:6).

Apply it to how students value the words of Christ recorded in Scripture. The same fullness that marked Jesus’ ministry is preserved for us in the inspired apostolic witness. We are not left with fragments but with the complete and sufficient revelation of God in Christ, which is why we do not need to look for new revelations beyond what He has given.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Jesus’ reception of the Spirit without measure, surpassing all prophets (John 3:34).
- The fullness of God dwelling in Christ (Colossians 2:9).
- The completeness and trustworthiness of Christ’s revelation.
- The sufficiency of the revelation given in Christ and preserved in Scripture.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean that Jesus received the Spirit without measure?
- How does this set Him apart from the prophets before Him?
- Why does this assure us that His revelation is complete and trustworthy?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*John says the Father “has given all things into his hand” (v. 35) because He loves the Son. How does knowing that all things are in the hands of the Son you love change the way you face the things you cannot control?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

John says, “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand” (v. 35). Two glorious truths sit side by side: the eternal love between Father and Son, and the authority over all things entrusted to the Son.

Help students feel the comfort of “all things.” There is nothing outside the Son’s authority, no circumstance, no power, no fear, no future. The One who holds all things is the same One who loves us and gave Himself for us. The hands that hold the universe are the hands that were pierced for us.

Apply this to the things students cannot control. We spend enormous energy trying to manage outcomes that are beyond us, health, loved ones, the future, finances, reputation. This verse invites us to release them into the hands of the Son who already holds all things and loves us perfectly.

Be careful to keep it warm and not fatalistic. Trusting that all things are in Christ’s hands does not make us passive; it makes us peaceful. We still act faithfully, but we do so resting in the knowledge that the final outcome belongs to a loving Lord. Ask each student to name one thing they need to entrust to His hands this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The eternal love of the Father for the Son (John 3:35; 17:24).
- All authority given into the hands of Christ (Matthew 28:18).
- The comfort of resting our uncontrollable circumstances in His hands.
- Trust that produces peace rather than passivity.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does it comfort you that all things are in the hands of the Son?
- What are you trying to control that you need to release to Him?
- How is resting in Christ different from being passive?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*The chapter ends, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (v. 36). Notice that John sets “believe” and “obey” in parallel. How does this verse show that genuine, saving faith is an obedient faith, and how would you explain this against the idea that one can be saved by faith with no obedience?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it turns on a single carefully worded verse: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life,



but the wrath of God remains on him” (v. 36). The teacher should not miss what the Holy Spirit does here.

Point to the parallel structure. The first half says “whoever believes”; the second half says “whoever does not obey.” Believing and obeying are set as two sides of the same coin. The opposite of believing the Son is not merely doubting Him but disobeying Him. This single verse, by its very grammar, shows that the faith that saves is an obedient faith.

Build the case from the wider New Testament. Hebrews calls Jesus “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Paul speaks of “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26). James says faith without works is dead (James 2:17). The consistent witness of Scripture is that genuine faith expresses itself in obedience, beginning with the obedient response of repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ, and continuing in a life of faithfulness.

Address the contrary idea directly and kindly. Some teach that a person is saved by faith with no necessary obedience, that one may simply believe and be assured of heaven regardless of how they live. This verse will not allow it. To refuse to obey the Son is to remain under God’s wrath, even while claiming to believe. We do not earn salvation by obedience; rather, true saving faith always shows itself in obedience to the One we trust.

Then keep it from becoming cold. The point is not to make students anxious but to make their faith real. Believing in the Son means trusting Him enough to follow Him. The same verse that warns of wrath promises eternal life to all who truly believe and obey. Help students examine whether their faith is the living, obedient kind, and rejoice that such faith has eternal life right now (“has eternal life”).

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Believing and obeying set in parallel as two sides of saving faith (John 3:36).
- Christ as the source of salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).
- “The obedience of faith” as the New Testament pattern (Romans 1:5; 16:26).
- A clear rejection of a faith that requires no obedience.
- Obedience as the fruit and evidence of true faith, not a means of earning salvation.
- The present possession of eternal life by those with living, obedient faith.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is it significant that John sets “believe” and “obey” in parallel?
- How would you answer someone who says obedience has nothing to do with salvation?
- What does it mean that genuine faith trusts Christ enough to follow Him?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back over John's final witness. He decreased so Christ could increase, and his joy was complete. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you, through this lesson, into someone whose joy is found in His increase rather than your own?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone question gathers up John's example. He decreased so that Christ could increase, and the result was not loss but complete joy. The aim is to help students want that same freedom and joy.

Help students see the connection between decreasing and joy. We assume that being made smaller would diminish our happiness, but John found the opposite. His joy was made complete precisely as he stepped aside for Christ. Joy is found not in being increased but in loving and exalting Someone greater than ourselves.

Make it concrete and personal. Ask each student where their joy has been tied to their own increase, recognition, success, control, being right, and what it would look like to relocate that joy in Christ's increase instead. This is the formation the lesson is aiming at.

Close with John's contentment. He would soon be imprisoned and executed, his public ministry over, and yet his witness ends in joy and worship of the Son. A life centered on Christ's honor can face even loss with joy. Let students leave longing to say, with John and from the heart, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Joy found in Christ's increase rather than our own.
- The freedom and contentment of a self-forgetful life.
- Decreasing as the path to complete joy, not diminished joy.
- Spiritual formation expressed in relocating our joy in Christ.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where has your joy been tied to your own increase?
- What would it look like to find your joy in Christ being honored?
- How can John's example free you this week?