

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: Rivers of Living Water at the Feast

John 7:1-52

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 7 unfolds at the Feast of Tabernacles amid intense division over who Jesus is. Doctrinally, the chapter reveals the divine origin and unique authority of Jesus' teaching ("My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me"), it ties the recognition of truth to a will ready to obey (v. 17), and it climaxes with Jesus' great invitation to the thirsty and His promise of rivers of living water, which John identifies as the Holy Spirit (vv. 37-39). The teacher should help students see Jesus' authority, the nature of His invitation, and the gift of the Spirit that marks the New Covenant.

At the same time, the chapter searches the heart. It shows that unbelief is often a matter of the will, not the evidence, and that fear of others' opinions silences many. It portrays the courage of arresting officers who could not lay hands on Jesus and the cautious courage of Nicodemus. The teacher should let the chapter expose the role of the will and of fear in our response to Christ, and press the invitation to come and drink.

So aim at both: a clearer grasp of Christ's authority and His gift of living water, and a heart willing to obey, willing to come and drink, and willing to let His life flow out to others. The disciple we are forming comes to Christ thirsty and overflows to those around them.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus said, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me" (v. 16). What does it mean that Jesus' teaching came from the Father, and how does this shape the authority we give His words?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus' claim, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me" (v. 16), explains the authority that astonished His hearers. He was not offering His own opinions or human wisdom; He was speaking the Father's words. His teaching is the teaching of God.

Draw out the implication for authority. Because Jesus' words come from the Father, they carry the authority of God Himself. They are not one teacher's perspective to be weighed against others; they are the truth of God. This is why Jesus' teaching demands not evaluation but submission.

Connect this to Jesus' wider claims in John. The Son speaks what He has heard from the Father (8:28), does nothing on His own authority (5:19), and gives the words the Father gave Him (12:49). The unity of the Son with the Father means that to hear Jesus is to hear God.

Apply it to how students treat the words of Christ in Scripture. If His teaching comes from the Father, then we cannot pick and choose, softening what is hard or setting aside what is inconvenient. The proper response to the Father's words on the Son's lips is trust and obedience. Help students examine where they treat Jesus' teaching as optional opinion rather than divine authority.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' teaching as the Father's word, carrying divine authority (John 7:16).
- The unity of the Son with the Father in speech (John 5:19; 12:49).
- The fitting response of submission rather than evaluation.
- The danger of treating Christ's words as optional opinion.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus' teaching came from the Father?
- How should this shape the authority we give His words?
- Where do you treat His teaching as opinion rather than divine truth?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus tied the ability to recognize truth to a willingness to do God's will (v. 17). Is there a truth you suspect God is asking you to obey, but have hesitated over because obeying it would be costly? What is it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up one of the most penetrating verses in the chapter: "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God" (v. 17). Jesus ties the recognition of truth to a will that is ready to obey it.

Help students grasp the principle. Truth is not merely an intellectual puzzle solved by enough evidence; it is moral and personal. Those who are willing to do God's will are given to recognize His truth, while those unwilling to obey often find reasons to disbelieve. The obstacle is frequently the will, not the mind.

Apply it honestly. Often we say we are unsure about a teaching when the real issue is that we do not want to obey it. We hesitate over a clear command, generosity, forgiveness, purity, repentance, because obeying it would be costly, and our hesitation dresses itself up as doubt.

Press for specifics. Ask each student to name a truth they suspect God is asking them to obey but have hesitated over because the cost is high. Naming it exposes the real issue. The path to deeper conviction often runs through obedience: as we are willing to do God's will, our certainty grows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The recognition of truth tied to a will ready to obey (John 7:17).
- Unbelief often rooted in the will rather than the evidence.
- Doubt that masks an unwillingness to obey.
- Obedience as a path to deeper conviction.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus tie knowing the truth to willingness to obey it?
- What truth do you suspect God is asking you to obey but have hesitated over?
- How might willingness to obey change what you are able to believe?

Question 3

Student Question:

On the last day of the feast Jesus cried, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (v. 37). How does this invitation, given during a water ceremony, reveal who Jesus claims to be and what He offers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The dramatic center of the chapter is Jesus' loud cry on the last day of the feast: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (v. 37). The setting heightens the claim. During Tabernacles, priests poured out water drawn from Siloam, remembering God's provision in the wilderness and praying for rain. Into that ceremony, Jesus stands and shouts that He is the source of living water.

Draw out who Jesus claims to be. By inviting the thirsty to come to Him and drink, Jesus claims to be what the whole ceremony pointed to, the giver of the water of life, the One who can satisfy the deepest thirst of the soul. He places Himself at the center of Israel's hope.

Note the universality and simplicity of the invitation. "If anyone thirsts." There is no qualification of worth, status, or background. The only requirement is thirst and a willingness to come. The invitation is wide open, and it is personal: come to me and drink.

Apply it to the students. The same invitation still stands. Help students hear it as more than a familiar phrase: a living offer from Christ to satisfy the thirst of their souls. Ask them where they are thirsty and whether they have truly come to Christ to drink, or whether they are still trying to satisfy that thirst elsewhere.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the giver of living water, the fulfillment of the feast (John 7:37).
- The universal, simple invitation to all who thirst.
- Christ at the center of Israel's hope and the soul's satisfaction.
- Coming to Christ as the response the invitation calls for.

Discussion Prompts

- How does this invitation reveal who Jesus claims to be?
- Why is it significant that He gave it during the water ceremony?
- Where is your soul thirsty, and have you truly come to Him to drink?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus promised that out of the believer's heart "will flow rivers of living water" (v. 38). Beyond being filled yourself, where might Christ want His life to flow out of you to others, and what would that look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the second half of Jesus' promise: "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (v. 38). The water Christ gives does not merely fill the believer; it overflows to others. The image is not a private cup but flowing rivers.

Help students see the outward movement. The life of Christ in us is meant to flow out, in love, encouragement, service, witness, and grace toward others. A believer is not a reservoir that hoards but a channel through which Christ's life reaches others. Being filled and overflowing belong together.

Apply it to where their lives touch others. Ask students where Christ might want His life to flow out of them, into a family, a workplace, a neighborhood, a struggling friend. The rivers flow wherever the believer goes. Often we focus only on being filled and forget that we are meant to overflow.

Press for concreteness. What would it look like, this week, for the living water to flow out of them to a specific person? An act of love, a word of encouragement, a sharing of the gospel, a practical kindness. Encourage students to see themselves not as cisterns to be filled but as rivers through which Christ refreshes others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The life of Christ overflowing from the believer to others (John 7:38).
- The believer as a channel, not merely a reservoir.

- Being filled and overflowing held together.
- Love, service, and witness as the outflow of living water.

Discussion Prompts

- Where might Christ want His life to flow out of you to others?
- What is the difference between being a reservoir and a river?
- What would overflowing to a specific person look like this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

John explains that Jesus “said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive” (v. 39). What does it mean that the living water is the Holy Spirit, and how does this gift mark life under the New Covenant?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John interprets the living water for us: “Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (v. 39). The living water is the Holy Spirit, given to believers after Jesus’ glorification (His death, resurrection, and ascension).

Help students grasp the timing and the gift. The full giving of the Spirit awaited Jesus’ glorification and came at Pentecost (Acts 2). The promise of the indwelling Spirit is a defining mark of the New Covenant: God’s people are not merely instructed from outside but indwelt and empowered from within (compare Ezekiel 36:27).

Connect this to the believer’s experience. The gift of the Spirit is promised to those who come to Christ in the obedience of faith. Peter declared at Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The living water Jesus promised is poured out on those who believe and obey the gospel.

Apply it without distortion. The Spirit’s presence is the inner source of the overflowing life Jesus described, working through the truth of God’s word to transform and empower. Help students value the gift of the Spirit as the abiding presence of God within His people under the New Covenant, the very life that satisfies and overflows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The living water identified as the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).
- The full giving of the Spirit awaiting Jesus’ glorification, fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2).
- The indwelling Spirit as a defining mark of the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:27).
- The gift of the Spirit promised to those who obey the gospel (Acts 2:38).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the living water is the Holy Spirit?
- How does this gift mark life under the New Covenant?
- How is the Spirit the source of the overflowing life Jesus described?

Question 6

Student Question:

The crowd was divided, some afraid to speak openly about Jesus for fear of others (vv. 12–13). Where does fear of others' opinions still keep you from speaking openly about Christ, and what would courage look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the climate of fear in the chapter: “no one spoke openly of him for fear of the Jews” (v. 13). The crowd whispered about Jesus but would not speak openly, afraid of the authorities and of one another.

Help students recognize the same fear in themselves. The fear of others' opinions is one of the most common silencers of Christian witness. We hesitate to identify with Christ, to speak of Him, or to take a stand, because we fear ridicule, rejection, or cost. Proverbs calls this “the fear of man” that lays a snare (Proverbs 29:25).

Locate where it operates. For some it is at work, for others among friends or family, for others online or in public settings. The fear is rarely about dramatic persecution; usually it is the quiet dread of awkwardness or disapproval. Naming the specific setting helps.

Then call them toward courage. Courage does not mean recklessness or rudeness; it means a willingness to be openly identified with Christ where it would be easier to stay hidden. Ask each student where fear of others most silences them and what one act of courageous openness would look like this week. Remind them that the One they confess is worth confessing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of others' opinions as a silencer of witness (Proverbs 29:25).
- Open identification with Christ versus hidden discipleship.
- Courage as willingness to be known as Christ's, not recklessness.
- Confessing Christ before others (Matthew 10:32).

Discussion Prompts

- Where does fear of others' opinions keep you from speaking of Christ?
- What is the difference between courage and recklessness here?
- What one act of courageous openness could you take this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The temple officers returned without arresting Jesus, saying, “No one ever spoke like this man!” (v. 46). What was it about Jesus’ words that so arrested them, and what does this reveal about the unique authority of His teaching?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the officers sent to arrest Jesus return empty-handed, their explanation is unforgettable: “No one ever spoke like this man!” (v. 46). The very words of Jesus disarmed those sent to seize Him. They could not lay hands on Him because His teaching held them.

Draw out what was unique about Jesus’ words. Throughout the chapter, people marvel at His authority and wisdom. He spoke with a directness, truth, and power unlike the scholars of His day. His words carried the weight of God, exposing hearts and offering life. The officers felt it even without understanding it.

Connect this to the divine origin of His teaching established earlier (v. 16). Because His words come from the Father, they carry a unique authority that no merely human teacher possesses. The officers’ testimony is an unwitting witness to His identity.

Apply it to the students’ encounter with Jesus’ words. The same words that arrested the officers are preserved for us in Scripture. Help students approach the recorded words of Christ expecting to meet that same authority, and to let His words arrest, expose, and feed them. Ask where the words of Jesus have arrested them recently, and where they need to listen afresh.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unique authority and power of Jesus’ words (John 7:46).
- His teaching arresting even those sent against Him.
- The officers as unwitting witnesses to His identity.
- Approaching Scripture expecting to meet the authority of Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What was it about Jesus’ words that so arrested the officers?
- What does this reveal about the authority of His teaching?
- Where have the words of Jesus recently arrested you?

Question 8

Student Question:

Nicodemus quietly urged the council to give Jesus a fair hearing and was mocked for it (vv. 50–52). When has standing up even cautiously for Christ or for truth cost you something, and how did you respond?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Nicodemus reappears, the man who came to Jesus by night in chapter three. Now he speaks up, cautiously, urging the council not to condemn Jesus without a hearing: “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing?” (v. 51). For this he is mocked: “Are you from Galilee too?” (v. 52).

Note the growth in Nicodemus. He is still cautious, but he is no longer silent. He takes a small but real risk to speak for fairness toward Jesus, and he pays for it with ridicule. His courage is imperfect but genuine, and it foreshadows his open devotion at Jesus’ burial (19:39).

Use this to honor the costly, imperfect courage of standing for Christ or for truth. Most of us will not face dramatic martyrdom, but we will face the smaller cost of ridicule, exclusion, or disapproval when we speak up. Nicodemus shows that even halting courage matters and can grow.

Apply it personally. Ask students when standing up, even cautiously, for Christ or for what is right has cost them something, and how they responded. Encourage them that imperfect courage is still courage, and that, like Nicodemus, those who take small risks for Christ often grow into bolder devotion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Costly, imperfect courage in standing for Christ and truth.
- The growth of Nicodemus from secret inquiry to open devotion.
- The reality of ridicule and exclusion as a cost of discipleship.
- Small acts of courage as the seedbed of greater faithfulness.

Discussion Prompts

- When has standing up for Christ or truth cost you something?
- How did you respond, and what would you do differently?
- How does Nicodemus encourage you in imperfect courage?

Question 9

Student Question:

The whole chapter is full of division over Jesus’ identity, with the crowds debating whether He is the Prophet, the Christ, or a deceiver (vv. 40–43), while the leaders reject Him out of prejudice about His origins. What does this division teach us about why people reject Jesus, and how does it show that the real barrier is often the heart rather than the evidence?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. The chapter is saturated with division over Jesus: "There was a division among the people over him" (v. 43). Some say He is the Prophet, some the Christ, some a deceiver; the leaders reject Him with prejudice ("Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee," v. 52). The question is why people rejected, and reject, Jesus.

Show that the division was not mainly about lack of evidence. Jesus' words and works were before them. The officers were arrested by His teaching; many in the crowd were inclined to believe. Yet the leaders rejected Him, and they did so largely out of prejudice (His Galilean origins), pride (their position threatened), and an unwillingness to submit. The barrier was the heart, not the evidence.

Connect this to verse 17, the chapter's interpretive key. Those willing to do God's will would recognize the truth; those unwilling found reasons to reject it. The leaders had decided in advance, and so they sifted the evidence to fit their conclusion. This is how unbelief often works: not honest evidence-weighing, but a heart already set against submission, dressing itself in objections.

Apply it with both honesty and hope. Help students see that people today reject Christ for similar heart reasons, pride, the cost of obedience, prejudice, love of sin, more often than for genuine intellectual obstacles. This guards them from thinking that more arguments alone will always persuade, and it turns their attention to the heart, theirs and others'. The good news is that a willing heart, however imperfect, is given to recognize the truth. The aim is not to win debates but to call hearts to a willingness to obey, and to examine our own hearts for the prejudices and unwillingness that keep us from fully following Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The division over Jesus rooted in the heart, not the evidence (John 7:43).
- Unbelief driven by pride, prejudice, and unwillingness to submit.
- Verse 17 as the key: a willing heart recognizes the truth.
- The limits of argument where the real barrier is the will.
- Self-examination for the prejudices that hinder full obedience to Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What does this division teach about why people reject Jesus?
- How does the chapter show the real barrier is often the heart?
- What prejudices or unwillingness might be hindering your own obedience?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this chapter and the loud invitation at its center. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to come to Him and drink, and to let His living water flow out to others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question returns to the loud invitation at the center of the chapter and asks for a personal response: to come and drink, and to let the living water flow out. Both are the formation the lesson aims at.

Help students see the order. First we come and drink. Before the rivers can flow out, the believer must come to Christ and be filled. The overflow depends on the intake. A dry soul has nothing to give; a soul drinking deeply of Christ overflows naturally.

Then the water flows out. The living water is never meant to be hoarded. As students come to Christ and are filled with His Spirit, His life flows through them to others. The two movements, coming and overflowing, define a healthy disciple.

Press for specifics and close with the invitation. Ask each student to name one concrete way they will come to Christ and drink this week, and one way they will let His life flow out to someone else. Then let the chapter's loud cry ring in their ears: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." The invitation is still open, and still personal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Coming to Christ to drink before His life flows out.
- The overflow depending on the intake.
- The living water meant to flow to others, not be hoarded.
- Concrete formation in both coming and overflowing.

Discussion Prompts

- What would it look like to come to Christ and drink this week?
- How might His living water flow out of you to someone else?
- How does the invitation to the thirsty land on you personally?