

John 20:30–31 Sermon-Based Discussion Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To explore how we understand our identity, the ways we define ourselves, and how ultimately that should be shaped by Jesus as the Messiah, the one who loves us and gives us life.

Sermon Refresher: John gives his purpose statement for why he wrote his Gospel at the end. John was someone who knew Jesus personally and was profoundly shaped by how Jesus loved him. We are all looking for a Messiah to save us from death (of the body, the soul, real meaning, hope, etc.), and John points us to Jesus as the only true Messiah who can deliver us completely.

Discussion

Read John 20:30–31 out loud.

1. What three words would you use to describe yourself? What three words do you think someone else, maybe a family member or friend or colleague, would use to describe you?
 - Have each person take some time to brainstorm and come up with three. You could have everyone share, although not everyone may want to share, or you may not have time.
 - You might want to explore how similar or different are the words people used for themselves vs. what they think someone else might say for them.
2. How we understand and define ourselves says something about what's important to us, or maybe what we want to be important to us. Certainly death is a big deal and unavoidably part of the big questions of life. How do you feel about death? What do you think we typically look to in order to save ourselves—or at least take our mind off of—from death?
 - **Digging Deeper (optional) question:** Read this quote from Larry Ellison, founder of the software company Oracle.

John 20:30–31 Sermon-Based Discussion

“Death makes me very angry. It doesn’t make any sense to me. Death has never made any sense to me. How can a person be there and then just vanish, just not be there?”

- In what ways is Ellison right that death doesn’t make sense? In what ways is he wrong?
 - Possible answers for how he’s right include that death isn’t originally part of God’s plan for human beings (and creation). Death is an invader, something that comes in after the fact. So it always feels out of place, because it’s not what God intended.
 - Possible answers for how he’s wrong include the fact that death is the penalty for our sin (Gen 2:16–17). Because Adam broke God’s commandment, death was the just, righteous penalty. So death does make sense as the result and culmination of sin.
- 3. The sermon pointed out how we are all looking for a Messiah, someone to save us, to defeat all the ways that death invades our lives. Who or what do you tend to look to as a Messiah? What’s your functional Messiah? You might want to think about your calendar, how you spend your time, or your credit card bill and checking account, how you spend your money.
- 4. How do we tend to get off track when it comes to looking for a Messiah? How can we encourage one another to keep our eyes on Jesus as the Messiah?

What or whom we look to for rescue, to save us from death, will have a big impact on how we define our identity. When we look to Jesus as the Messiah we realize that Jesus defines us according to how he loves us and who we will become. These next questions explore those implications for our identity.

- 5. Dave said this about our identity in the sermon. “I think those who—in the course of the Christian life—are most profoundly aware of their own sin, and so more profoundly feel the wonders of the love and grace of God that has reached out and saved them, are those who are less likely to talk about their own achievements and more likely to talk about themselves as the objects of God’s love in Jesus.”
 - In what ways do you tend to define yourself by what you’ve done, either your failures and sin, or your successes and achievements?

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6. John never called himself by name in his Gospel. Instead, he referred to himself as “the one whom Jesus loved.” Paul describes himself in similar terms: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).
- Can you describe yourself as someone whom Jesus loves? What would make that hard for you? What could help you believe that? What could help you feel like that description does fit, that it is appropriate?

Sharing and Prayer Time

One of Dave’s side-points in his sermon could make a great prompt for your prayer time. He pointed out how probably Jesus was first cousins with the Apostle John and second or third cousin to John the Baptist. The principle there—and throughout the Bible—is that God works in and through families.

- How have you seen or experienced God working in your family?
 - You might want to skip this question if it takes too long or just opens too big a door.
- What’s one thing that we could pray for as a small group for how God could be at work in your family? Think especially along the lines of him changing people, giving them faith, growing in faith, etc.