

I Am the Light

Jesus offers grace and forgiveness to all who repent and believe in Him.

JOHN 8:3-18

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 8:12

STUDY John 8:3-18, noting what Jesus's words and actions revealed about Him. Use Explore the Text on pages 105-109 to gain insight into the Jewish festivals and laws referenced in these verses. Reflect on how Jesus functions as light in your life.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 110-112. Focus on helping the group recognize their unrighteousness apart from Jesus and the righteousness found through Him. Look for ways of using the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 94) to help the group more fully understand humanity's need for Jesus.

GATHER the following items:

- Extra *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs)
- Index cards
- Markers and pens
- Any materials needed for the options on page 102

Make copies of:

- Pack Item 14** (*Handout: First-Century Jewish Factions*)

CONSULT the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.

REINFORCE the session by following up with anyone who spoke with you after group time about following Jesus.

FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Man

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See Psalm 32:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22.)

Mammoth Cave in south-central Kentucky is the largest known cave system in the world. The mapped system covers 420 miles. During guided tours, guests are given the opportunity to experience complete darkness. The Bible compares our sin-filled world to living in darkness. Just like turning on the lights provides comfort and direction when in a cave, Jesus provides light in our world. He brings hope and assurance to anyone who will receive Him.

(In PSG, p. 91) **What is the darkest place you've ever been in? What emotions did you experience?**

BIBLE SKILL

Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.

Review John 1:4-5. Contrast Jesus's statements about the light of the world in John 8:12 and 9:5. Since Jesus is the Light of the world, what did He mean when He said that His disciples are "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14)? How did the apostle Paul add to this concept in Philippians 2:15? How can we shine the light of Christ's gospel on an unbelieving world (2 Cor. 4:4)?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 8:1-59

A telling difference exists between the last verse of John 7 and the first verse of John 8. After the confrontation at the temple, the Pharisees went to their houses, and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem. While He may have spent the night with friends in a nearby town, Jesus often spent entire nights praying in the garden of Gethsemane on the slopes of that famous mountain.

Jesus's spiritual preparation was needed the following morning as He returned to the temple and continued teaching near the treasury. Hoping to trap Him in an ethical dilemma, the religious leaders brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. Demanding He say what should be done with her, these hypocrites were not interested in justice. They simply wanted to diminish Jesus in the eyes of the people. Confronting the Pharisees' insincerity, Jesus showed compassion toward the woman. At the same time, He warned her to sin no more. He exemplified the Father's mercy and righteousness.

After the woman's accusers silently slipped away in shame, Jesus turned back to the crowd that had been listening to His teaching. When He declared Himself to be the Light of the world, the remaining Pharisees attacked Him more directly. By their traditions, anyone who testified about himself could not be trusted. Jesus repeated the validation of the Father and demonstrated that these self-righteous judges lacked a basic knowledge of God.

The scene led Jesus to reflect aloud on the day when He would leave them, and they would not be able to find Him. The Jewish leaders couldn't comprehend this mysterious prophecy of His crucifixion, resurrection, and

ascension. Worldly attitudes robbed them of spiritual understanding. Even some of the people who had begun to believe in Him were perplexed at His claim to offer truth that could set them free.

The Jews appealed to their heritage as Abraham’s descendants, while casting a thinly veiled aspersion on Jesus’s parentage. Jesus responded that Abraham had been given a vision of the Messiah and rejoiced. He went further and claimed to be the Anointed One that Abraham had anticipated. In doing so, Jesus employed the phrase “I am” that was uniquely associated with the name of God. Furious, the people took up stones to kill Him, but Jesus left without injury because His time had not arrived.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TRAPPED (JOHN 8:3-6)

Verse 3

Hypocrisy often disguises itself as moral self-righteousness. When Jesus returned to teach in the temple complex, the **scribes and Pharisees** sought to set a trap for Jesus (“test” ESV; “tempting” KJV). Their bait involved a **woman caught in adultery**. This term *caught* translates a word meaning “to seize.” It portrays an arrest involving some measure of force. Someone, perhaps the woman’s husband, had caught her in the very act of immorality. The leaders who brought her to Jesus perpetrated a worse immorality because they were not really interested in the Mosaic law. They merely wanted to ensnare Jesus in a no-win scenario.

The law demanded capital penalties for the man and woman who committed adultery (Lev. 20:10). It is not clear why they only brought the woman to Jesus. The phrase **making her stand in the center** suggests the scribes and Pharisees placed the woman between Jesus and the people who were listening to Him. Not only had they omitted the man’s culpability, but they also showed disdain for God’s house by bringing the accused woman into the temple complex.

Verse 4

Forms of address reveal much about the people’s attitude toward Jesus. In this case, instead of “rabbi” or “master,” the Jewish leaders referred to Jesus simply as **teacher**. The term means someone who offers instruction. Certainly, Jesus was teaching in the temple, but He was much more than a pedagogue. Their use of this title also emphasized His responsibility for the Scriptures He was expounding.

Speaking to Jesus, but playing to the crowd, the scribes and Pharisees introduced the situation. They did not speak the accused’s name, but they referred to her as **this woman**. They also did not say who **caught** the woman **in the act of committing adultery**, even though witnesses should have been present to make a lawful accusation.

VERSE 3

³ Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center.

VERSE 4

⁴ “Teacher,” they said to him, “this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery.

VERSES 5-6

⁵ In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ They asked this to trap him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse him. Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger.

Verses 5-6

The leaders further revealed their insincerity by demanding Jesus pronounce judgment on the woman. He was not in the position of judge, yet they posed a question of legal judgment. They correctly identified the **law** in which **Moses commanded** the people to **stone** anyone caught in adultery. The penalty of stoning specifically applied to a betrothed woman as opposed to a married person (Deut. 22:23-24). These hypocrites focused only on **such women**, refusing to hold the man responsible.

By asking, **so what do you say**, the scribes and Pharisees tried to force Jesus either to validate their interpretation of the Mosaic law or to ignore the woman's moral guilt. The scribes were supposed to be experts in interpreting, teaching, and applying the law. Their presence likely was intended to lend weight to the question.

John interjected his observation about the religious leaders' intentions. They had **asked** for Jesus's opinion so they **might have evidence to accuse him**. If Jesus agreed the woman should be stoned, many would have condemned Him for callousness. He also may have caught the attention of the Romans, who reserved the right to carry out capital punishment. If He disagreed, others would accuse Him of denying the law.

Jesus did not play their game. Instead, He simply **stooped down** and **started writing on the ground with His finger**. The dust-covered courtyard provided a simple writing tablet as Jesus traced words in the dirt. John did not reveal what He wrote, but the effect of His action was profound.

Believers must be aware of the traps of judging others. We not only recognize our personal culpability, but we also must admit our lack of spiritual authority to condemn others. As advised in Galatians 6:1, we should remain humble and seek to restore people who have been overcome in a fault.

(In PSG, p. 94) **How does self-righteousness get in the way of grace?**

VERSES 7-8

⁷ When they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground.

FREED (JOHN 8:7-11)

Verses 7-8

Ignoring whatever Jesus was writing, the leaders **persisted in questioning him**. Badgering a witness is a typical tactic when a prosecutor does not get a desired response. The scribes and Pharisees took Jesus's silence as a sign of vulnerability. They continued pestering Him with the intention of dishonoring Him before the people.

Finally, Jesus **stood up**. While teaching, He sat in the position most usually assumed by rabbis. Responding to the accusers, Jesus stooped to write. At this point, He stood facing them eye to eye, undaunted and unafraid. Breaking His silence, Jesus directed His response not to the crowd but to the religious leaders and witnesses who brought the woman to Him.

With wisdom greater than Solomon, Jesus insisted, “**The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.**” Scripture required the witnesses to a capital crime should be the first to lay their hands on the accused (Deut. 17:7). Disarming the blood-thirsty mob with a single sentence, Jesus accomplished two objectives. First, He did not deny the defendant’s guilt or ignore Moses’s commands. Second, He placed responsibility for self-examination on the plaintiffs. They had permission to carry out the sentence but only if they were not under condemnation for their own sins.

Having delivered His judgment, Jesus **stooped down again**, leaving them to consider what He had said. Silence fell over the crowd as Jesus **continued writing on the ground**. Tradition claims He listed the names and sins of the hypocritical leaders. Other scholars suggest He may have drawn characters in the dust. We cannot know for sure, but Jesus’s words and actions pierced the woman’s accusers to the heart.

Verses 9-11

The phrase **when they heard this** emphasizes that what Jesus said, more than what He wrote, convicted the watchers. Without a word in defense, they **left one by one**. The KJV indicates they were condemned by their own consciences. Shamed by the knowledge of personal liability, they had nothing to say in response. The fact that they exited individually shows how the Holy Spirit convicts each person. Scholars reason that **the older men** recognized their greater guilt and, consequently, left first. As their elders departed, the younger men followed until only Jesus **was left**.

The **woman** remained **in the center**, suggesting the original crowd of listeners remained while the woman’s accusers departed. This time, **Jesus stood up** not in the posture of judge, but as an advocate. Likewise, when we do wrong, Jesus serves as our advocate (1 John 2:1). Addressing the accused as **woman**, Jesus was not being derogatory or negative. The word was often used as a polite reference to an adult female.

Asking **where are they**, Jesus clearly meant those persons who had seized and accused her. He knew the answer, but He wanted the woman to recognize no one was left to denounce her. The question **has no one condemned you** made her realize that she remained without a guilty verdict against her. The men who had been determined to put her to death had vacated the area and abandoned their right to condemn. The term condemn involves both invoking a sentence and executing its penalty.

While the accusers contemptuously addressed Jesus as “teacher,” the woman called Him **Lord**. The word conveys recognition of a superior, if not a personal master. She answered **“no one.”**

According to the law, a person could not be put to death without the testimony of multiple witnesses (Deut. 19:15). Of course, as the sinless Son of God, Jesus could have convicted her and taken up the first stone. But He was interested in redemption, not condemnation (John 3:17).

At the same time, Jesus did not merely excuse the woman’s sin. By telling her to **not sin anymore**, Jesus accomplished two purposes. First, He acknowledged that she had sinned. Forgiveness does not mean the absence

VERSES 9-11

⁹ When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only he was left, with the woman in the center. ¹⁰ When Jesus stood up, he said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ “No one, Lord,” she answered. “Neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus. “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

of sin but setting aside its penalty through Christ's atonement. Second, the tense of the verb forms a present imperative. In other words, Jesus commanded her not to continue in sin and released her to live in freedom.

Believers should seek to be agents of God's forgiveness. We lack the authority to absolve people of sin, but we can introduce them to Jesus. Through Him, they can begin anew, free from the bonds of sin.

(In PSG, p. 96) **Why is it easier to point out other people's sins than deal with our own?**

VERSE 12

¹² Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

VERSES 13-14

¹³ So the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying about yourself. Your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴ "Even if I testify about myself," Jesus replied, "My testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you don't know where I come from or where I'm going."

SHINING (JOHN 8:12-18)

Verse 12

As the woman departed, the original audience remained and **Jesus spoke to them again**. Having witnessed the extraordinary proceedings between Jesus, the woman, and the religious leaders, they must have been eager to hear what He would say next. Jesus declared, "**I am the light of the world.**" In doing so, He incorporated several important concepts. First, by using *I am*, Jesus issued a claim. He linked Himself to God's identity as the great I AM (Ex. 3:14). In doing so, Jesus claimed equality with God the Father.

Second, Jesus was *the light of the world*. In one sense, His presence exposes sins, such as the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and the immorality of the adulterous woman. On a more positive note, Jesus illuminates the path of **anyone who follows** Him. Not only is His Word a lamp and a light for us (Ps. 119:105), but Jesus Himself also lights our way. And, since He is the light, we **will never walk in the darkness**. This statement does not imply sinless perfection, but it does promise that believers can always discern what's right even if they don't choose it.

In Jesus, we **have the light of life**. Some scholars translate this phrase as "the light that is life" or "the light that produces spiritual life." However, the syntax more accurately refers to how Jesus illuminates godly living.

Verses 13-14

Some of the religious leaders must have been present in Jesus's original audience and felt compelled to challenge His statement, particularly having witnessed the embarrassing departure of their peers. They accused Jesus of **testifying about yourself**. This point was previously discussed in the scene recorded in John 5.

The primary arguments against self-testimony relate to the law's requirement of two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6). Rabbinical teaching specifically prohibited someone from giving **testimony** about himself. Therefore, the Pharisees claimed that Jesus's witness was **not valid**. When people are unable to refute truth, they attack the truth teller. These Pharisees would not be the last unbelievers to question Jesus's credibility.

In response, Jesus insisted that His **testimony is true** even if He did **testify** about Himself. The validity of His statement rested in His confidence regarding where He **came from** and where He was **going**. Jesus was referring to His divine origin and His heavenly destination. He contrasted this knowledge with the spiritual ignorance of the Pharisees. They did not understand His true nature or purpose.

Verses 15-18

Because the Pharisees based their judgments on **human standards**, they could not comprehend spiritual matters. Their judgment was faulty because it was flawed by sin. These leaders claimed superior religious knowledge that gave them the right to judge others. In contrast, Jesus refused to **judge** anyone.

The term *judge* can refer to an evaluation of facts and condemnation because of guilt. The case of the adulterous woman demonstrated the difference between Jesus's approach to judgment and that of the Pharisees. But even if Jesus did **judge**, His **judgment is true**. The term Jesus employed for *true* means unconcealed or factually accurate. Unlike the claims of the hypocritical Pharisees, Jesus spoke with clarity and authenticity.

Jesus was not **alone** in His judgment. Because He was one with the **Father**, the judgment of the Godhead was valid. A second support for His legitimacy rested in His faithfulness to the will of the One **who sent** Him. As such, Jesus spoke as one with the Father and for the Father.

Jesus reminded His opponents that the **law** affirmed **the testimony of two witnesses**. As noted, no one could be condemned without two or more witnesses (Deut. 19:15). Later, the New Testament repeated the requirement of two or three persons to establish a matter of church discipline (Matt. 18:16) or spiritual fact (2 Cor. 13:1).

Jesus did not think it inappropriate that He was **one who testifies about myself** because the **Father** also **testifies about me**. His repeated reference to the Father sending Him was vital. Although completely divine, Jesus was also completely human. His testimony was valid because, as God, He could not lie. His words also were dependable because they were in total agreement with the word of the Father.

Believers can testify with confidence that Jesus offers forgiveness. He is the Light of the world, illuminating the truth regarding our sin and His ability to save. He enables believers to live in His light through His Holy Spirit. Forgiven by His grace, we can walk in His light.

(In PSG, p. 98) **How do we know that Jesus can be trusted for telling the truth?**

VERSES 15-18

¹⁵ You judge by human standards. I judge no one. ¹⁶ And if I do judge, my judgment is true, because it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. ¹⁸ I am the one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me.”

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: Before the group arrives, dim the lights in your meeting space. As the group arrives, share the story about Mammoth Cave from the opening paragraph on page 91 of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG). Invite volunteers to share answers to these questions: ***What is the darkest place you have ever been in? What emotions did you experience?*** (PSG, page 91)

DISCUSS: Explain that the Bible often uses darkness as a metaphor for sin. Ask: ***How is being in darkness similar to living in sin?*** Encourage the group to refer back to their previous answer regarding the emotions they experienced in darkness. Ask: ***How did you feel when you left the darkness and came back into light?***

TRANSITION: *In dark places, light provides direction and comfort. It can also expose dangers or obstacles in our path. In this session, Jesus claimed to be the Light of the world, bringing hope and assurance to a dark place.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: First-Century Jewish Factions*). Call on the group to locate Pharisees on the handout. Lead the group to highlight information that provides insight into why many Pharisees opposed Jesus. Emphasize their strict adherence to the law. Note that some Pharisees, like Nicodemus, eventually became Christ-followers.

CHALLENGE: *As we study today's verses, pay attention to the differences between righteousness, self-righteousness, and unrighteousness. Consider if there are areas in your life where religion gets in the way of truly following Jesus.*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud **John 8:3-6**, as the group pays attention to the Pharisees' attitude toward the woman.

CONSIDER: Distribute index cards and markers. Direct the group to write "Righteous" on one side and "Unrighteous" on the other. Lead them to consider whether the Pharisees' actions were righteous or unrighteous. Invite them to signify their answer by holding up the appropriate side of their card. Call on volunteers to share their thoughts. Use the information from pages 93-94 of the PSG to provide insight into the law regarding adultery. Discuss how following God's law is righteous but that the motivation of the Pharisees was unrighteous. Suggest "self-righteous" as a description of the Pharisees.

ASK: ***How does self-righteousness get in the way of grace?*** (PSG, p. 94)

TRANSITION: *Jesus recognized the leaders' impure motives. By writing in the dirt, He took control of the situation and set up His response on His own terms—not the terms His opponents were pushing.*

READ: Call on someone to read **John 8:7-11**. Invite the group to pay attention to Jesus's attitude toward the woman who had been dragged before Him. Ask: ***If you had been in Jesus's shoes, what verdict would you have determined for the woman?***

DISCOVER: ***What does this encounter show us about Jesus's character?*** Emphasize attributes of God which were on display through Jesus. (Examples: justice, mercy, grace, righteousness) Hold up your own index card on the "Righteous" side, noting that Jesus was and is always righteous.

DISCUSS: *How did the religious leaders respond to Jesus's verdict? What does it say about their own attitudes and motives?* Point out that Jesus's words actually condemned them instead of the woman.

ASSERT: *Jesus turned the tables on His opponents by reminding them of their own sin. When we truly recognize our own unrighteousness, we also recognize our need for Jesus more deeply. It's not the same as completely trusting Jesus, but it offers a solid first step in that direction.*

CONSIDER: *How did Jesus view the woman? How did meeting Him lead her toward righteousness?* Facilitate a discussion on how the woman trusted Jesus. Challenge the group to consider the meaning of Jesus's words to her.

TRANSITION: *Jesus did not ignore her sin. Instead, He urged her to turn away from sin. As she did, He was able to forgive her sin.*

READ: **Read aloud John 8:12-18,** encouraging the group to pay attention to what Jesus said about the world.

EXPLAIN: Use information from verse 12 (PSG, p. 97) to describe the backdrop to Jesus's "I am" statement. Remind the group that Jesus equated Himself with God through these "I am" statements. Ask: **How was He connecting Himself to the Father here?** Point out that the light at the Festival of Shelters reminded the people of God's presence when He led their ancestors through the wilderness in a pillar of fire.

ASK: *How might Jesus being light give hope to the people in the crowd?* Discuss responses. Note that Jesus shined a light on the evil motives of the Pharisees who wanted to stone the woman. *Instead of making the most of His light, they walked away. But Jesus's light can bring help and healing for those who are willing to stand in it.*

DISCUSS: Point out that the Pharisees did not accept Jesus's testimony and tried to use legal technicalities to question its validity. Share that Jesus defended His testimony by pointing to His Father who sent Him. Ask: **How do we know that Jesus can be trusted for telling the truth?** (PSG, p. 98)

TRANSITION: *Jesus is the Son of God. Human standards of judgment fall short, but He is completely trustworthy and full of truth.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Direct attention to their index cards. Guide the group to write a short description of their unrighteousness on one side and of their righteousness in Jesus on the other side. Assure them that they will not be asked to share their descriptions. Encourage them to consider their lives before Jesus and their lives since trusting Jesus.

APPLY: Direct attention to the application statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 99). Invite the group to consider how what they wrote influences their response to the application statements. Challenge them to highlight one area where they could better model the life of a believer. Announce that you will be available after group time to speak with anyone who wants to know more about following Jesus and experiencing life in His light.

RESPOND: Instruct the group to reflect on the first set of questions under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 99). Lead members to suggest ways the group can serve as agents of God's forgiveness each day. Encourage them to look for opportunities to share His love and forgiveness with someone else this week.

PRAY: Close in prayer, praising Jesus for His offer of grace and for the forgiveness He provides to all who come to Him.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Secure a copy of the hymn “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,” by Horatius Bonar. Before you begin, invite three volunteers to read these verses: Matthew 11:28-30; John 4:13-14; and John 8:12 (the memory verse). Encourage the group to consider whether they have responded to Jesus’s call.

CASE STUDY

Gather paper and pens.

Divide the group into teams of three or four. Invite each team to create a case study of a person whose sin is obvious to those around them or whose sin is brought to light for others to see. After a few minutes, allow teams to share with the group. Lead the group to discuss different ways of responding to this person. Encourage them to show mercy without dismissing the sin.

MEMORIZATION

Gather post-it notes, a whiteboard, and marker.

Guide the group in memorizing John 8:12. Write the memory verse on a board and invite the group to read it aloud a few times. Cover several of the words with post-it notes and invite the group to read the verse again. Continue applying more post-it notes until the group can repeat the entire verse with all words covered. Consider beginning the group time with this activity and then repeating it at the end.

DRAMA

Pre-enlist volunteers to plan a dramatic reenactment of verses 3-11. Allow the volunteers to prepare in advance or to improvise on the day of your study.

PHYSICAL REFLECTIVE

Gather stones, markers, and red paint.

Collect some stones that are small enough to carry, but large enough to write on. Guide the group in a time of silent prayer to ask God to reveal specific sins in their lives. If possible, provide space for privacy. Direct the group to write one word on their stone that represents their sin and assure them that they will not be sharing their responses with the group. After a few minutes, instruct them to read Jesus’s words in John 8:11-12. Guide them in a private time of repentance. Encourage the group to cover their stones with red paint. Remind them that Jesus’s blood has already covered every sin we commit. Note that believers maintain a healthy and growing relationship with Jesus as they confess their sins to Him.

VERBAL

Draw attention to the last paragraph under verse 12. (PSG, p. 97) Emphasize the Old Testament and New Testament connections between God and the three comparisons Jesus referenced: manna, water, and light. Lead a discussion about God’s provision of both our physical needs and our spiritual needs. Ask: **Which is more important? Why?** Affirm that we need to rely completely on Jesus for both in our lives.