

CREATING LIVING TRUSTING

HEBREWS 10:16 

This is the covenant that I will make with them.

*After these days, says the Lord,
I will place my laws in their hearts
And write them on their minds.*

TRUSTING

JEREMIAH 31:33b CEB

*I will put my instructions within them
and engrave them on their hearts.*

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

LIFE, AS WE KNOW ALL TOO WELL, IS IMPERFECT. Trials are inevitable. That’s why the final eight-week module, **Trusting the Covenant**, looks at the crises that sometimes call covenant life into question, and how we are restored to trust in God when troubling things happen.

This module discusses the loss of hope, and how it is restored by faithfulness in the midst of suffering. From the story of Job, to the Hebrew exile, to the apocalyptic visions in Daniel and Revelation, we learn how faithful love is at work in everything—to restore hope, freedom, and wholeness to our lives.

TRUSTING

EPISODE 17

John; 1, 2, and 3 John

Leader Guide

Participant Guide

Meditation Guide

PARTICIPANT GUIDE 3

EPISODE 17—John; 1, 2, and 3 John

LIFE TOGETHER

Abundant, eternal life with others

John's Gospel and John's Letters offer a framework for mature Christian beliefs and behaviors. The good news demonstrates how a Christian community is to live well together, even under stress and during dangerous times (especially by 100 CE, some seventy years after Jesus' resurrection). Jesus encounters many kinds of people (for example, Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman), and he performs signs that bridge our differences into common identity and purpose. The daily readings from this week highlight how the dearly loved community should be formed:

Day 1: as people of the light;

Day 2: as healed disciples;

Day 3: through an intimate connection to Jesus;

Day 4: by resurrection; and most importantly,

Day 5: through love of God and each other.

This episode will help your group:

- become familiar with John's use of imagery in his account of Jesus;
- encounter unique people in John's Gospel who embody a healthy response to Jesus; and
- discover the identity and the purpose of Jesus' dearly loved community.

Materials needed: Covenant leader guide, Trusting the Covenant participant guides, *CEB Study Bible*, Trusting the Covenant DVD (or video download), extra pens or pencils



1. GATHERING TOGETHER (10 min)

Invite participants to consider how shared imagery defines many communities today. After an opening prayer, divide participants into groups of two or three, and invite them to reflect on this question: What examples can you give, either personally or culturally, of people groups who are shaped by common symbols?

Examples might be visual (a family coat of arms, a denominational logo, a national flag) or verbal (a family saying, the motto of an alma mater, a cultural idiom [e.g., the “Volunteer State”], or a corporate slogan). How do these symbols carry great meaning in defining the ideals and purpose of a community?

Tip: In theater and film, a character secret often motivates an actor’s performance. This secret is something about the character that no one except the actor knows that explains why that character feels and acts the way he or she does. Is there a story in the Gospel of John that resonates with your own experience of Jesus as God with us? Without sharing it with the group, let this be your own character secret as a leader, shaping your interaction with the group during your conversation about the Gospel of John.

2. REFLECTING TOGETHER (10 min)

Read together “Our Longing for Relationship” at the beginning of Episode 17 in the third participant guide. Invite participants to break up into pairs and share any passages from the week’s readings that were particularly meaningful. Have them share any insights they gained about John’s Gospels and Letters from the questions in the daily readings section of their participant guides. They might also share any verses they chose to memorize for the week.

Divide the participants into small groups of two or three, and have each subgroup explore further one of five characters that John shares either exclusively or uniquely in his Gospel: Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), the blind man (John 9:1-38), Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (John 11:1-46), and Pilate (John 18:28–19:16a). For each of these characters, have them answer the following questions:

- What choices does this character face in response to the words and actions of Jesus?
- Why are these choices difficult for this character?
- What are the positive and negative consequences of the choices this character makes?

After all the subgroups have reported to the whole group, discuss how these choices might constitute John’s ideal definition of the faithful community.

Next, divide the participants into two subgroups, and have one group look at the reading for Day 3 (John 14–17) and the other group look at the reading for Day 5 (1 John 2–4, 2 John, and 3 John). For those looking at John 14–17,

invite them to come up with a list of adjectives that should describe the community of believers according to John. Invite those reading John's Letters to come up with a list of verbs that should describe the mission and purpose of the community of believers. After both groups have reported, discuss how close your own congregation is to embodying the qualities of both lists.

3. VIDEO SEGMENT (25 min)

The video for Episode 17, on the DVD or available by download, gives the group a chance to overhear a conversation with Jaime Clark-Soles, who is Associate Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas. Before showing the video, have the participants listen for the following key conversation points:

1. God in Jesus is the one who keeps coming into the world, always reaching out to us and going out of the way to be in relationship with us.
2. Jesus meets his followers in whatever ways they need with new life, drawing them back into the community.
3. We have access to the same Someone to get us through tough times that Jesus promised to all who follow him: the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the viewing, choose one or two of the following questions to ask:

1. How does the "looking-for-us-first" God fit with the picture of God's faithful love in the Old Testament? What does this mean for those of us who are more (or less) inclined to be "seekers"? Where would Jesus find you if he were seeking you out this week?
2. John is a very relational Gospel with "room to spare" in God's household and at God's table. Can you think of people that some might feel uncomfortable welcoming in God's "room to spare" household? What are some practical ways we can share God's welcome with people in everyday life (at work, school, on our street)?
3. Has the risen Jesus drawn you (or someone you know) back into the community of followers? What happened?

TAKE A BREAK (10 min)

During the break, ask someone to share his or her favorite "I am" saying of Jesus: living bread (John 6:51); light of the world (John 9:5); the gate of the sheep (John 10:7); the good shepherd (John 10:11); the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); or the true vine (John 15:1).



4. DISCOVERING TOGETHER (15 min)

Invite someone in the group to read aloud John 12:1-6, and have someone else read aloud John 13:1-17. Invite the group to reflect together on the power of human touch evident in both stories. Ask them to discuss how touch creates intimacy and deep connection between people, and what these two stories might suggest about the relationship between believers and each other and with Jesus.

Divide the group into pairs and invite them to work from their participant guides through the three questions in the Group Meeting Experience together. Allow time for the pairs to share their findings with the full group.

5. CENTERING TOGETHER (10 min)

John's Gospel is a visual book. It's loaded with visual and verbal images that define the ideals of the faith community. Therefore, it is best experienced visually, drawing together the meaning that individuals elicit from an image as a way of forming common bonds. Lead the group in an experience of meditating on scripture by following the instructions for the Covenant Meditation on John 15:9-13 in their participant guides. Be sure to allow time for them to share with others what words or phrases are meaningful to them.

6. SERVING TOGETHER (5 min)

Read together the "Signs of Faithful Love" at the end of the episode. Break the participants into pairs, and have them review for a moment any notes they recorded and any insights they gained throughout this episode. Invite them to consider how John's Gospel and John's Letters might shape the identity and mission of their congregation. Ask, "What tangible actions are you challenged to undertake as a result of this week's experience?" (for example: visiting a lonely person who has too little physical contact). By now in the Covenant study, the group may be thinking together about a service project to meet a need in their community.

7. NEXT WEEK (5 min)

Turn to Episode 18 and briefly introduce next week's title and theme. Encourage participants to select a verse from the readings that they might commit to memory and share next week. Invite them to bring an mp3 player, smart phone, or other mobile device with music they like to listen to when they are happy, resting, worshipping, or exercising (see the Gathering Together exercise in Episode 18).

8. CLOSING PRAYER (5 min)

Ask for any prayer concerns or joys, and invite participants to write these items down in the space provided under next week's Covenant Prayer. This way, they will have them in front of them as they read throughout the week. Close in a prayer together.