

# Further up, Further in

## Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
Presbyterian Church

### “HE MUST INCREASE”

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: February 22, 2026

SPEAKER: Wil/Brian

SERIES: The Gospel of John

PASSAGE: John 3:22-36

## Family Dinner Table

In the TV show *The Office*, manager Michael Scott is asked to name his weaknesses during a job interview. Trying to sound humble, he replies, “*I work too hard. I care too much. And sometimes I can be too invested in my job.*” Funny as this parody tends to be, the joke works because we recognize the subtle self-promotion hidden inside supposed humility. But in John 3:22-36, John the Baptist shows us he’s the real deal. As Jesus’ ministry grows, and the Baptist’s own influence fades, John is not self-focused. Instead, he insists, “**He must increase, but I must decrease.**” Today’s passage reminds us that Christianity is not about protecting our significance; it is about proclaiming His.

### The Redirection

From 1997 to 2008, the Detroit Red Wings won the Stanley Cup four times, and one of their most effective weapons was “the redirection.” Stationed at the top of the crease, centerman Tomas Holmstrom absorbed cross-checks while screening the opposing goalie, waiting for the blistering slap shot from teammate Niklas Lidstrom. With the slightest touch of his stick, “Homer” would change the puck’s path, and that small redirection often made the difference between a save and a goal.<sup>4</sup> Surrounded by growing crowds and questions about his own ministry, John the Baptist quickly redirects the attention to Jesus. He refuses the spotlight emphasizing, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” Instead of drawing followers to himself, John is a master at redirection, showing us that true greatness in the upside-down Kingdom of God points others to Christ.

### When Jesus displaces us: our fearful insecurity (vv. 22-26)

Jesus and his disciples begin baptizing in the Judean countryside. John is also baptizing at Aenon near Salim. The ministries overlap and the crowds shift. A debate about purification arises, and John’s disciples feel threatened: “*Rabbi...all are going to him*” (v. 26). The spotlight moves and exposes fearful insecurity. But while the disciples see loss, John sees Providence.

- In verse 27, John states that “*a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.*” How does this theological conviction about God’s sovereignty help you ground your ability to “redirect” attention to Jesus?
- Read 1 Corinthians 4:7 and James 1:17. What would change in your ministries or relationships if you truly believed your role, influence, and platform are assigned and not achieved? What concrete ways can we “redirect” praise or influence so that attention moves toward Christ rather than ourselves?

- Calvin once wrote that true wisdom consists of “*the knowledge of God and of ourselves.*”<sup>1</sup> True discipleship turns us away from ourselves and toward Christ. Discuss what happens when our identity is rooted in influence or recognition rather than in God’s sovereign purposes. (cf. Proverbs 29:25; Galatians 1:10)

### How we must respond when Jesus displaces us: humility and joy (vv. 27-30)

John responds to their concerns with theological clarity: “*A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven*” (v. 27). John’s ministry is preparatory. He baptizes with water in anticipation; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit in fulfillment. (cf. John 1:26-27) John the Baptist bears witness about the light. Jesus is the Light. Therefore John’s joy is complete, not diminished, when Jesus increases. As Dutch theologian Geerhardus Vos points out, “*Jesus is the Bridegroom, [John is] simply the Bridegroom’s friend, whose task it is to bring Him and the bride, Jesus and Israel, together. Hence by the report that all come to Jesus (v. 26), his joy has been fulfilled.*”<sup>2</sup>

- John has an attitude of humility and chooses to put Christ above all things. Read Colossians 3:12, Ephesians 4:2, James 4:10, and 1 Peter 5:5-7. What do these passages teach us about living a life of humility?
- In what ways does this anticipate the bridegroom imagery later fulfilled in Christ (cf. Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7)?

### Why Jesus must displace us: supremacy of the beloved, Spirit-filled Son (vv. 31-36)

The Baptist now lifts his audience’s eyes higher. Jesus is not merely another great prophet gaining popularity. He is “*from above*” and “*above all*” (v. 31). Jesus must increase because he is the beloved Son of God entrusted with all authority and empowered with the fullness of the Spirit. According to Vos, verses 34 and 35 are significant as reminiscences of what had occurred at the baptism of Jesus: “*The very gift of the Spirit amounted to a declaration on the part of God that the recipient of the gift was the Messiah. To be sure, not every impartation of the Spirit has such significance, but the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at the baptism was wholly unique; it was intended for permanent possession.*”<sup>3</sup>

- How does the declaration of God’s love (John 3:16) and the demonstration of that love (Romans 5:8) deepen your understanding of God’s greatness, particularly in how his sacrificial love both exalts the Son and calls you to humble, faithful witness?

### PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

RUF Staff: Bennett Brock serves as an intern with RUF at Furman

### PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Christine, supported missionary partner serving in refugee settlements in a sensitive region

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin. *Institutes of Christian Religion*. 2008. Peabody, MA. Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Geerhardus Vos, edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*. 1980. Phillipsburg, NJ. P&R Publishing. 302

<sup>3</sup> Geerhardus Vos. *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*. 1953. Phillipsburg, NJ. P&R Publishing. 110

<sup>4</sup> Art Regner, *Tomas Holmstrom: A Goalie’s Worst Nightmare*. September 7, 2023. NHL.com. <https://www.nhl.com/redwings/news/tomas-holmstrom-a-goalie-s-worst-nightmare>