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THE EDITOR

The people of God in the time between the Old and New Testaments were waiting for something to change, for God to fulfill His promises in dwelling with them, in giving them an eternal king, and in lifting the weight of persecution and suffering. God promised a Savior, but He didn't say when. So the people of God continued waiting for that Messiah.

When Jesus came on the scene, it was like a breath of fresh air, a turning of the wind that some embraced and some rejected. The Jews had heard God's Word and prayed for the promises to be fulfilled, and yet, some were still skeptical.

Is He really the One promised? Could what He says be true? Is it all consistent with what God has written? Can He really save us? Does He really love us?

The questions some asked at that time are the same questions some are asking today.

But Jesus is real. And He is who He says He is and promises change in our lives—a new birth, a new perspective, a new way of interacting with this earthly world and the heavenly one. Jesus is the game changer that tears down the veil and opens the gate through the sacrifice and payment of Himself. No other seeming deity loves like this. And this is a love we can put our faith in.

So as we study God's Word, may we respond in faith to Jesus's invitation to come and know Him more and, with that knowledge, share that gospel with others. Because with Jesus, good news has truly arrived.

Y Bonesteele

Content Editor

The Gospel Project for Adults

The Gospel Project®

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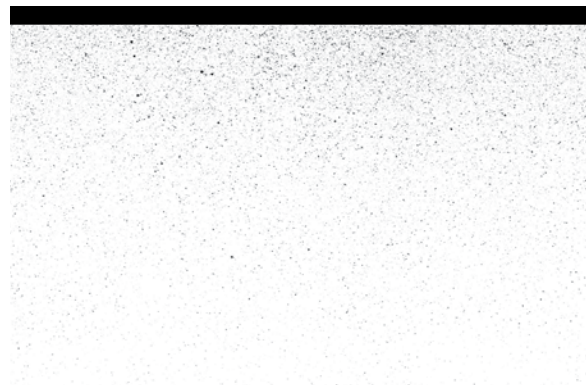
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ALL AGES STUDY PLAN

VOL 1: From Creation to Chaos

(Genesis) Fall 2021

Unit 1: The Heavens Declare the Glory of God (Gen. 1–2; Pss. 8; 96)

Unit 2: Let Us Make a Name for Ourselves (Gen. 3–11)

Unit 3: I Will Make Your Name Great (Gen. 11–50)

VOL 2: From Captivity to the Wilderness

(Exodus–Deuteronomy) Winter 2021–22

Unit 4: Out of Egypt I Called My Son (Ex. 1–15)

Unit 5: To Dwell in the House of the Lord (Ex. 16–40; Lev.)

Unit 6: Be Holy, Because I Am Holy (Num. 13–14; 20–21)

VOL 3: From Conquest to a Kingdom

(Joshua–1 Samuel) Spring 2022

Unit 7: Lord, Teach Me Your Statutes (Josh. 1; 3–4)

Unit 8: Fear the Lord and Worship Him (Josh. 2; 6–11; 23–24)

Unit 9: There Is No Fear of God Before Their Eyes (Judg.; Ruth; 1 Sam. 1–6)

VOL 4: From Unity to Division

(1 Samuel–1 Kings) Summer 2022

Unit 10: Because of Your Hardened Heart (1 Sam. 8–15)

Unit 11: Create a Clean Heart for Me (1 Sam. 16–17; 2 Sam. 6–7; 11–12)

Unit 12: If You Walk Before Me with a Heart of Integrity (1 Kings 1–12)

VOL 5: From Rebellion to Exile

(1 Kings–The Prophets) Fall 2022

Unit 13: Your Passions Wage War Within You (1 Kings 12–18; 2 Kings 1–5; Isa. 44)

Unit 14: Seek the Lord, All You Humble of the Earth (2 Chron. 24; Isa. 22; 25; 30; Zeph.)

Unit 15: He Has Made Every Nationality (Jonah; Nah.; 2 Chron. 36)

VOL 6: From Captivity to Restoration

(The Prophets, Ezra–Esther) Winter 2022–23

Unit 16: The Lord Keeps His Eye on Those Who Fear Him (Jer. 29–30; Dan.)

Unit 17: Take Refuge in the Lord (Ezra 1–6; Zech. 13–14)

Unit 18: For Look, the Day Is Coming (Esth.; Neh.; Mal.)

VOL 7: From Heaven to Earth

(The Gospels) Spring 2023

Unit 19: Here Is the Lamb of God
(John 1–2; Luke 2; Mark 1; Matt. 4)

Unit 20: God’s Love Was Revealed
Among Us in This Way (John 3–4)

Unit 21: Without Faith It Is Impossible
to Please God (Luke 4–5)

VOL 8: From Wonder to Rejection

(The Gospels) Summer 2023

Unit 22: The Works That I Do in My
Father’s Name Testify About Me
(Mark 4; 8; Luke 5; Matt. 9; John 10)

Unit 23: The Kingdom of God Is in Your
Midst (Matt. 5–7; 13; 24; Luke 15; 17)

Unit 24: God’s Glory in the Face of Jesus
Christ (Luke 13; John 11)

VOL 9: From Death to Resurrection

(The Gospels) Fall 2023

Unit 25: Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
Who Kills the Prophets
(Matt. 21–25; Mark 1; John 6; 14)

Unit 26: The Hour Has Come
(John 12; Matt. 26)

Unit 27: The King of the Jews
(Luke 22–23; Matt. 27–28)

VOL 10: From Many People to One People

(The Gospels, Acts) Winter 2023-24

Unit 28: I Am with You Always
(Luke 24; John 20–21; Matt. 28)

Unit 29: You Will Be My Witnesses
(Acts 1–2)

Unit 30: Every Day the Lord Added to
Their Number (Acts 2–5)

VOL 11: From One Nation to All Nations

(Acts and Epistles) Spring 2024

Unit 31: Every Knee Will Bow
(Acts 5–8; Phil. 2)

Unit 32: The Power and the Wisdom
of God (Acts 9–12; 1 Cor. 1; 12)

Unit 33: A Prisoner of Christ Jesus
(Acts 9; 13–14; Philem.)

VOL 12: From This World to the World to Come

(Acts, Epistles, Revelation) Summer 2024

Unit 34: Ambassadors for Christ
(Acts 15–19; 2 Cor. 5; Eph. 4)

Unit 35: That I May Gain Christ
(Acts 20–28; Phil. 3)

Unit 36: A New Heaven and a New Earth
(Rev. 4–5; 19–22)

HOW TO USE THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Central to your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults is the Daily Discipleship Guide. Here's how to make the most of your time with it:

BEGIN WITH PERSONAL TIME IN THE WORD

We recommend beginning your week with the daily devotions. These devotions lay a foundation for what will be explored and discussed in your group time as you build healthy rhythms of personal discipleship.



DAY 1

READ:
John 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:
John 1:1

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #10:
GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS

While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Philippians 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matthew 11:27; John 10:30, 16:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine, departing from it is to abandon orthodox Christianity.

When you think about Jesus, where do you start? For most of us, we start with the Gospel stories. After all, Jesus is introduced to the world in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We get His birth story and His family genealogy. We see details of His upbringing and His early life. He is like us, so surely that's where the Jesus story begins, right?

Such an understanding makes sense for how people enter our world. All of our stories start with a birth. We came into existence with our human conception and birth. We have a starting point. A family. A life that plays out chronologically and in which we grow in maturity and stature. You might push that point a bit and suggest that our lives start before our birth, in that we are the product of the various influences that brought us into existence. And surely that is true; the various lives of our parents and grandparents are critical factors that shape the persons we are today. But even in that, we did not really exist then. The circumstances that shaped us did, but our lives start with conception and a birth story.

Not Jesus. John said that the Son of God is eternal. He existed as God and with God from the foundation of the world. Jesus's story does not start with His birth. It doesn't even start with God's work of creation and the story of the garden of Eden. The Son of God existed even before Eden. The Son of God is eternal, existing as God and with God before the foundation of the world. He has always been, and He will always be.

How does the eternal existence of the Son of God compel you to worship Him?



STUDY THE BIBLE WITH YOUR BIBLE

Reading and studying the Bible is absolutely life-changing, and we believe the best way to study the Bible is to use the Bible you own. Whether you read from the CSB, ESV, NIV, KJV, or many other translations, the Daily Discipleship Guide helps you engage with the session not only with our book but your Book.



GET BACK TO BASICS

As you read and study, we recommend using the tool found in your Daily Discipleship Guide called the “7 Arrows of Bible Reading.” The 7 Arrows guide both novice and experienced students of the Word through the basic mechanics of Bible study by asking a few key questions of any passage (see pages 10-11 for more information).

7 ARROWS OF BIBLE READING

by Matt Rogers

There is often a vast disconnect between the awareness of the need for disciple-making and practical tools that actually aid in this work. Three factors are essential: Scripture, relationships, and time. Discipleship happens when the life-changing truth of Scripture is infused into genuine relationships over an extended period of time.

Our desire was to create a simple, reproducible strategy that would facilitate this process. This led us to develop a simply strategy for small clusters (2-3 people) to meet together regularly and talk about the Scriptures and apply them to their lives.

The seven arrows of Bible reading were an attempt at developing a tool for proper hermeneutics to power these relationships. We did not want our people to simply talk about the Bible. We wanted them to understand the Bible and know how to apply it to their lives. Each cluster would read a predetermined passage of Scripture and discuss it using these seven arrows.

- What does this passage say?
- What did this passage mean to its original audience?
- What does this passage tell us about God?
- What does this passage tell us about man?
- What does this passage demand of me?
- How does this passage change the way I relate to people?
- How does this passage prompt me to pray?

10

DISCUSS AND APPLY IN COMMUNITY

Each session concludes with a two-page discussion guide. This guide includes the key points of the session along with interactive questions and activities designed to address the needs of a variety of learning styles. Mark up the discussion guide, make notes, fill in the blanks, do the activities, write out questions and thoughts—make it yours!



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by Matt Rogers

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What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?

ARROW 1: The goal was for the clusters to start by summarizing the main point of the passage as succinctly as possible, ideally in one sentence.

ARROW 2: Next, the clusters sought to discern authorial intent for the passage by asking what it meant to its original audience. Since a text of Scripture can never mean what it never meant, it is necessary to begin by discerning what the text meant. Often this may require the clusters to consult other study tools or cross-reference other biblical texts to arrive at the meaning of the text.

ARROW 3: Thirdly, we asked what the text tells us about the nature and character of God and specifically His work through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

ARROW 4: Fourthly, the text was analyzed to see what it tells us about humanity. Bryan Chappell refers to this as the “fallen condition focus” of the text. What does the text reveal about sin and humankind’s need for the gospel?

ARROW 5: Then we moved the clusters to application. Since we had rooted the clusters in the meaning of the text, they were now positioned to rightly apply it’s meaning to their lives.

ARROW 6: From there we wanted our clusters to apply the Scripture to their relationships with others. Ideally, they would discuss how the text shaped both how they related to other believers and how they lived on mission in the world.

ARROW 7: Finally, the clusters rooted their prayers in the Scriptures. Hopefully, the previous six arrows kindled the flames of passionate prayer in the lives of the clusters—both for their own sanctification and for their mission to the lost.

With this model, we touched on three important areas for discipleship:

Scripture—Disciple-making was rooted in a rightful understanding of Scripture and not in simply doing life together, unpacking another sermon, or dependance on classroom instruction.

Simplicity—Disciple-making was simple enough for everyone to get involved. All believers could take these principles, a Bible, and a relationship with a young Christian and get to work.

Stickiness—Disciple-making through understanding and applying Scripture was etched in the minds of our young church. They could use these same arrows not only to guide their cluster discussions but also their personal Bible study, small group leadership, and comprehension of sermons.

These arrows have proven to be a unique tool in our disciple-making toolbox that the Lord is using to call and build faithful and fruitful followers of Jesus.

Matt Rogers is the teaching pastor at The Church at Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina. His church developed the Seven Arrows tool to help people read and understand Scripture within their small groups. The concept has gone on to form the basis of a 52-week devotional for teens from Lifeway Students, the Seven Arrows Bible from B&H, and is now featured in The Gospel Project for Adults and Students.

UNIT 19

+

HERE IS

THE LAMB

OF GOD

“We Have Found the Messiah!”

by Allyson M. Howell

One of the hardest things in life is waiting. Waiting for the doctor to call with the diagnosis; waiting to see if you'll ever get married; waiting for a baby, a job, a home, a friend. Sometimes it may even be a minor inconvenience, such as waiting in line at the grocery store, waiting for dinner to be ready, or waiting for the gas tank to fill up. At times it may get the best of us and we throw up our hands in exasperation, deciding the reward is not worth the inconvenience of the wait.

WAITING, WAITING, WAITING . . .

From Genesis to the beginning of the Gospels, God's people have been waiting. Day after day, they came to the temple with their firstborn animals, the first picks of their harvest, and their choicest oils. Every year they took a perfect lamb, slaughtered it, and painted its blood above their doorpost.

All of this was done in obedience to God while they waited for the Messiah to come. This was, of course, not done with perfect patience or steadfast obedience. Israel's history is full of failure and stories of those who took matters into their own hands. Many of the greatest men and women of the Bible decided that the perfect deliverer promised to them was not worth the wait. They had to do something to speed up the process. So they struck the rock, gave over the handmaid, formed the golden calf, and trusted themselves over God.

Yet God was still patient with them. He still offered them a way to be in relationship with Him despite their disobedience. He provided them with a temple, with Passover, and with the offering of sacrifices to come and ask for forgiveness. But the cycle continued—make sacrifices, receive forgiveness, doubt God, disobey, repeat.

But finally, Jesus makes His arrival.

JESUS'S FIRST COMING

Imagine you were one of the disciples. Your entire life, you've heard stories of a Messiah who is to come. You listened to the prophecies; you listened to stories of your ancestors. Repeatedly in your family history, you hear rumblings of who the Messiah might be. Was it Moses? Elijah? David? No. The Messiah was still to come. When will God ever bring about the one who is to save them?

You follow a man named Jesus, and you wonder if He might be the one spoken about your whole life. Throughout your time with Him, Jesus demonstrates that He is the Messiah. He performs miracles, heals the sick, forgives sins, and speaks of His Father and His kingdom. Jesus calls people into a relationship with God, pours out compassion and love on those who do not deserve it, and reveals that God's desire is to be restored to His people.

Upon Jesus's death, burial, descent, resurrection, and ascension, you see that all of the promises of God were fulfilled. God's people were waiting for a deliverer, a savior, one who would make a way for them to be with God forever. Jesus was that Savior who sacrificed Himself to make a way!

Upon Jesus's death,
burial, descent,
resurrection, and
ascension, you
see that all of the
promises of God
were fulfilled.

Now you know for sure that all who believe that their sins are paid for by Jesus's sacrifice do not have to wait to be forgiven. They do not have to wait to know God or be in a relationship with Him. All of these gifts are available now!

You know that no longer do we have to make sacrifices in the temple, no longer do we have to observe Passover. We simply see what Christ has done, trust Him fully, and recognize the payment for all of our sins has been paid.

Finally, this Messiah, this final sacrifice, was nothing you imagined but more than anything you could have hoped for. The disciples were certain that Jesus was worth the wait.

The disciples were certain that
Jesus was worth the wait.

Our lives were bought with a price— the perfect price of Jesus’s life.

JESUS’S SECOND COMING

Here you are today. You know the final sacrifice has been made on your behalf. You believe that Jesus was the culmination of God’s plan for His people. Yet you still walk through this life longing for so many things. The waiting is not over. Not only are you waiting to see how various life circumstances pan out, but you’re also waiting, whether you think of it often or not, for death.

As morbid as that may seem, death is the inevitable end of your story here on earth. If you are a follower of Jesus, however, you know that death does not have the final say. You look forward to being united with Jesus in heaven. You know that eternity promises all the joy, peace, happiness, and love that comes with being in God’s presence.

You understand that you are in what many call the “already but not yet.” This means that Jesus already ushered in God’s kingdom, but it is not fully completed or realized yet. You are on the other side of Jesus’s fulfilling all that was promised in the Old Testament. You have already received new life in Christ. But you are

not perfect yet, you are not fully healed yet, and you are not fully in the presence of God yet. Not yet, but one day.

Every day, you can make the decision to walk with your head down, despairing that you still sin and that the world is still broken. Or you can decide to remember that your fate is sealed, that your life is already paid for, and that you have been given all the promises of God in Jesus.

Sometimes this will mean sacrificing what you want or what is comfortable. Sometimes hope is exhausting and you wonder if it is all worth the pain you endure in this life. Our lives were bought with a price—the perfect price of Jesus’s life. And Jesus will be our prize. One day, when we leave this earth and enter heaven, we will forget all the struggles of this world. We will see that every sacrifice we made was worth it because we are now with Jesus!

Remarkably, Jesus will look to us, embrace us in His loving arms, and tell us that His sacrifice on the cross was worth the wait, and as He delights in our presence, we will delight in His forevermore.



THE SAVIOR IS BORN

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus is the Word, the Son of God who came into the world to bring salvation.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 1

+ **SETTING:**

At the start of the New Testament, the situation was bleak for God's people. Even after God's people returned to their land, they were still under the power of the Medo-Persians—after them, the Greeks, and after them, the Romans. The prophets were silent. The kingdom was broken. The future was dark. Greek and Roman culture had enveloped the whole area, and the elitist Pharisees and Sadducees had come into power to try to lead the Jews, but their only real hope was the coming of the Messiah. But when would that be? Into this, Jesus was born. Everything changed when Jesus showed up.

DAY 1

READ:

John 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:1

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #10: GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS

While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Philippians 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is distinct from the others (Matthew 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine; departing from it is to abandon orthodox Christianity.

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How does the eternal existence of the Son of God compel you to worship Him?

DAY 2

READ:

John 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:5

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The person who supposes that he is protected by the darkness is vain, since he cannot escape the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness grasped it not. Accordingly, he is discovered like a fugitive and a wicked hireling and is recognized before he can conceal himself. For all things are known to the Lord before he seeks them out, not only past events but also those that are to come."¹

—Ambrose (339-397)

Who wins an arm wrestling match? Unless you are arm wrestling your grade school child, it's the strongest person who wins. You might let a kid win from time to time, but if both parties are genuinely trying and all the variables are equal, then the strongest person is going to prevail.

John introduced two foes at the start of his Gospel: darkness and light. The world is dark. Everything about it gives testimony to the brokenness that sin introduced into the good world that God made. And the darkness is great. It's not a little bit of darkness from time to time, but it's overwhelming darkness in a myriad of ways. It's so dark that we can easily believe that darkness is all there is.

Enter light. It's the opposite of darkness in every way. John said Jesus is the light, and He entered into the darkness. Who wins?

We know this answer intuitively, without even considering Jesus. What happens when light enters darkness? The light prevails. Even a little bit of light can drive out a whole lot of darkness. Just think about what happens when you turn on a flashlight at night and switch on your headlights for an evening drive. Light dispels darkness.

It's easy for us to lament the shape of the world and fear that darkness will win out. But Christian, take heart that Jesus is light, and darkness cannot prevail against the bright light of Jesus. Non-Christian, if you sense and fear the darkness around and within, come to Jesus and enter His light by faith and be saved.

What situation are you facing in which you fear that darkness will prevail? How can the light of Jesus bring hope and help there?

DAY 3

READ:

John 1:6-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:8

NOTES

Creation is awe-inspiring. You've likely had the experience of seeing something in nature that made your jaw drop. The classic examples would be places like the Grand Canyon or an ocean sunset. But it doesn't even have to be something that compelling. Every time we step into nature, we see something that inspires us or draws our attention to the creative nature of God. The color green. The sound of birds. The smell of flowers.

John used the image of "light" to describe Jesus. It's a feature of creation. In fact, light is the way we perceive the other elements of creation that astound us. Without light we could not see the mountain range or the cresting waves of the ocean.

What do you do when you see something awe-inspiring? You talk about it. Well, more likely, you first take a picture of it, then you tell someone about it, then you post the picture online so that others can see it and you can tell more stories about it. No one sees something astounding and keeps it to themselves. The things that capture our attention compel our conversations. This was true for John the Baptist. He saw the light of Jesus, and he spent his time testifying to that light. He wanted others to see the light. He wanted them to experience the glory He saw in Jesus. He didn't attempt to take attention away from the light. He understood His role was merely to stand back and point to the light so that others could see.

How are you living to testify to the light of Jesus Christ?

DAY 4

READ:

John 1:9-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:15

NOTES

Rank is a concept often relegated to the military. A person who has demonstrated unique competence and character is promoted through the ranks. The higher the rank, the greater the position of honor. Rank is not something that comes to a person passively. People have to earn the rank. The higher the rank, the more that is required to earn that status.

Rank necessitates submission. Others do not have the freedom to break rank and, for example, talk down to a superior. The person who has earned the rank gets to embody the privilege of that rank, and the subordinates are expected to honor the person of higher rank.

If there is anyone who has rank, it is Jesus. He is not merely the most excellent One, the glorious God of all creation. He has also earned His superior rank by entering our world and securing salvation for His people through His death and resurrection. John the Baptist understood that Jesus ranked higher than him because of His pre-existence, but he also knew the reason for which Jesus came—to be “the Lamb of God” who would take away the sins of the world. In the opening of John’s Gospel, it’s clear that John the Baptist willingly and humbly submitted himself under the superior rank of Jesus Christ.

What are some ways your life indicates that you believe Jesus ranks higher than you?

DAY 5

READ:

Hebrews 1:1-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 1:3

NOTES

Children often are a reflection of their parents. Yes, our children might look like us and reflect our physical attributes, but likely they act like us as well. They reflect our personality and our method of interacting with the world. This can be good when they show the best of who we are. But it can also be a painful mirror for our sin. In them we see the poor ways that we deal with the world and the broken aspects of our identity.

God has no such problem. There are not good aspects and bad aspects of His being. He is a God who is good and who does good. All of the time. Everywhere. Exactly. So when God's Son comes to the world, He comes as the exact imprint of that nature. He is a man who is fully and perfectly good. He only and always does what is good. Jesus is the exact imprint of the perfect nature of God.

As such, Jesus helps us see God. Imagine all you had was the Old Testament and you were seeking to understand the character of God. How far could you get? You could see and understand so much about who God is, but the full impact of the glory of God is seen most clearly in Jesus. He is God in the flesh, and since this "enfleshment" allows us to see God in a personal way, we are better positioned to see and understand the glory of God by looking at Jesus.

What attributes of God does the revelation of Jesus help you understand better?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Can we wonder that the Lord Jesus, in his preaching, should continually draw lessons from the book of nature? When he spoke of the sheep, the fish, the ravens, the corn, the lilies, the fig tree, the vine—he spoke of things which He Himself had made.”²

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

POINT 1: The Word of God in Creation (John 1:1-5)

KEY DOCTRINE #10: GOD IS ONE IN THREE PERSONS

While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the _____ is fully divine—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Philippians 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is _____ from the others (Matthew 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect _____ within the three Persons of the Trinity is a first-order doctrine; departing from it is to abandon orthodox Christianity.

? What makes it hard for you to think about the Son of God existing as God when God created the world?

In Jesus is _____ and _____, and that being so, He came into the world to bring _____ to overcome the darkness.

POINT 2: The Word of God in Redemption (John 1:6-13)

Like John the Baptist, God calls all believers to be _____ to share the truth of Jesus Christ with others so they might _____ in Him.

? Why might it be difficult to share the truth of Jesus Christ?

All who _____ in Jesus, who _____ and believe in Him, are brought out from the darkness and are able to see the glory of God as His children.

? How does this passage say people are saved from sin and darkness?

POINT 3: The Word of God in Glory (John 1:14-18)

The Son of God put on _____ to become the _____ for the sins of the world that we may see His _____ .

? What attributes of God are revealed through Jesus's incarnation for our salvation, for which we should praise and imitate Him?

Jesus brought _____ and _____ to the world, revealing the Father and revealing Himself as God.

? Why might we find it difficult to speak and act in grace and truth?

MY RESPONSE

Because our spiritual blindness has been removed through Christ, we never cease sharing the gospel with grace and truth, praying that the eyes of others might be opened as well.

- **HEAD:** How does Jesus's incarnation reveal God's love for human beings?
- **HEART:** How will you respond to the glory of God seen in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ?
- **HANDS:** How will you be like John the Baptist in pointing someone to Christ this week by your words and deeds?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God's own Son became the Son of Man that he might make the children of human beings into children of God. For when that which is exalted associates with that which is lowly, its own glory is diminished in no way. Instead, it elevates the other from its great lowliness, and this is what happened with Christ."³

—John Chrysostom
(347-407)

THE SAVIOR IS PRESENTED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Even from childhood, Jesus fulfilled all of the law, showing that He is the Messiah, the righteous One who came to bring salvation to the world.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 2

+ **SETTING:**

The Gospel writers spent almost no time covering the details of Jesus's life following His birth up until the time He began His public ministry around the age of 30. Their main focus was the three years of Jesus's ministry in and around Jerusalem proclaiming the kingdom of God and, uniquely, His death, burial and resurrection. Mark started his Gospel with Jesus's ministry and spent roughly half of the total time of his writing describing the final weeks of Jesus's life. In Luke's Gospel, however, we are given one of the few glimpses into Jesus's early years to reveal His perfect character.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 2:8-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 2:21

NOTES

What's in a name?

For many of us, our names denote something important about us. Some have family names that tell us about our parents or grandparents. Some are named after a person that our parents thought was worthy or important. Some names have meaning based on the etymology that our parents used to communicate something about their hopes and dreams for us. Some of our names are a living testimony to a great person whose life and death had an impact on our family.

Names carry meaning. They do now and they did even more so in the time when the Bible was written. Names were given by God to communicate something about His work in a person's life. Parents based names on the future dreams or plans they had for their child. In a communal culture, names communicated something vital about the identity of the child and his or her family of origin.

The Bible makes a big deal about the name "Jesus." The name itself indicated Jesus's mission. He came to save, and His life and work would be a fulfillment of His great name. His name would be His identity, and throughout all of the rest of the history of the world, there would be people like us who would base our salvation on that great name. Not only was Jesus's name critical for those who lived around Him, but the name of Jesus is the God-ordained name that is given among men whereby all people must be saved (Acts 4:12). No one is saved except through Jesus Christ.

Why does the name of Jesus matter for you?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 2:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 2:25

NOTES

Simeon is described as a righteous and devout man. As a result, he was looking for God's Messiah and noticed Jesus when He came. Certainly, we are told that God had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before his death. So Simeon's attentiveness to Jesus is attributed to God's faithfulness to keep His promise. Yet Simeon also was faithful. He was intent on upholding his commitment to God.

In many ways, this parallels the sending of Jesus. In part, Jesus came as the fulfillment of God's promises. Yet Jesus also was faithful to keep the law and obey God perfectly. Luke 2 describes Jesus and His family obeying the letter of the law down to the very little details.

Simeon certainly did not obey perfectly like Jesus did, but his life is a model for us nonetheless. He was righteous and devout, and this gave him unique insight into God's purposes and plans for the world.

Like Simeon, we are apt to notice God's activity around us when we are repenting of sin and walking faithfully with God. When we are not, we are blinded to much of what God wants to do in and around us. It's worth considering how much of Jesus's activity we miss because we allow sin to fester in our lives.

How are you fighting sin and pursuing righteousness?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 2:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 2:32

NOTES

If people are trapped in darkness and do not have a light, then the only hope for them isn't that they are able to find a light in the darkness but that someone with a light makes the way to them. You might think of someone who is trapped underground after a natural or human disaster. They are trapped—hopeless and helpless. Darkness obscures any hope they have of finding a way out. Even if the answer to their predicament were right under their noses, it's unlikely that they could find it because they can't see.

This is the picture of Jesus's mission. People who are dead in trespasses and sins can't find salvation on their own (Ephesians 2:1-3). They can't find a light they don't have and often don't know what they need because of their spiritual darkness. They live in the dark, and tragically, they have grown accustomed to the dark.

Their only hope is that someone on the outside—someone with a light—makes a way to them and brings them hope and help. Jesus, the One described as a light sent from God (John 1:1-5), is just that. He enters the darkness to bring the light of life.

He doesn't merely bring light to the deserving. In fact, there are none who are deserving. Even the nation of Israel was trapped in darkness. He comes to all people and sets about the mission of bringing light to the nations. He's intent on saving anyone, everywhere, who will reach out to Him in faith and cling to the light He offers. Sadly, many will reject the light and live and die in darkness.

How did Jesus bring light to you, and how are you bringing that light to others?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving."¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 2:39-40

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 2:40

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #49: JESUS'S HUMANITY

In addition to being fully divine, the Bible also affirms that Jesus is fully human. Not only does the Old Testament affirm that the Promised One (Messiah) would be a man (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus's earthly life bore all the marks of being a human. He experienced the circumstances common to living as a human being, such as hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matthew 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).

Is it strange for you to think of the perfect Son of God growing and developing? Probably so. We have a hard time grasping how the Messiah would grow and develop in human form. It's an astounding testimony to the humility of God that He would put on flesh and enter the world and subject Himself to the painful process of human development and maturation. But this is what Jesus did. He spent His developing years growing, not merely in physical size and stature but Luke records He also grew in strength and wisdom. This development of strength and wisdom would allow Jesus to enter the temple and speak with the religious leaders of the day with a maturity and insight that would set Him apart from His peers (Luke 2:47).

Luke then says that a defining feature of Jesus's life was that God's grace was on Him.

Paul often shared this reflection when speaking of the church. He prayed that God's grace would be with them, among them, and in them (2 Corinthians 13:13). In the previous session, we saw that Jesus came bringing this grace (John 1:14). So, God gave Jesus grace, and that grace was the basis for Jesus's interaction with the world. He brought God's grace to God's people, who then extend that grace to the world. Like Jesus, those who bring God's grace to the world give evidence that God's grace is in them.

How does your life testify to the grace of God?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 2:41-52

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 2:50

NOTES

Those who were close to Jesus did not fully grasp who Jesus was and what He had come to do. Who could blame them? It's hard to get your mind around the fact that the Holy Spirit gave Mary a child who was born as a normal baby and grew up to be the Savior of the world. There is no paradigm for such a miracle. Even the angel's declaration could not prepare Mary and Joseph for the totality of who Jesus is.

Those alive today have a different privilege. Yes, we do not have Jesus living among us, and we do not have angels announcing truth to us, but we do have God's full Word to the world in the Scriptures. We have the complete testimony of all that Jesus has done to save sinners and all that He will do to rid the world of sin and Satan. We have the full picture.

With this knowledge, are we more understanding? Do we humble ourselves to acknowledge the truth of who Jesus is said to be in the Scriptures? There is danger for us in that Mary and Joseph and those who were closest to Jesus—even His disciples—did not seem to grasp all that He said and did. Proximity to Jesus does not automatically produce belief in Jesus. Many times, our unique vantage point can blind us to the truth of Jesus's person and work.

We need to ask the Spirit of God to help us see Jesus for who He is and continue to give us eyes to see and ears to hear so that when Jesus is presented among us, we understand and obey.

Because of your understanding of Jesus's person and work, what will you do today in response?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The Messiah will fulfill the law entirely (Luke 2:21-24).

KEY DOCTRINE #49: JESUS'S HUMANITY

In addition to being fully _____, the Bible also affirms that Jesus is fully _____. Not only does the Old Testament affirm that the Promised One (Messiah) would be a man (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus's earthly life bore all the marks of being a human. He experienced the circumstances _____ to living as a human being, such as hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matthew 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).

? **What benefits might we discover in dwelling upon Jesus's humanity?**

Mary and Joseph were faithful to fulfill the law of Moses in raising Jesus, and thus, _____ about Jesus was a fulfillment of the _____.

POINT 2: The Messiah will bring salvation globally (Luke 2:27-32).

Simeon praised God because He recognized that _____ was God's promised plan to bring _____ to all people.

? **What are some ways we should respond to the good news of salvation?**

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"It is an encouraging thought that God never leaves himself entirely without a witness. Small as his believing church may sometimes be, the gates of hell will never completely prevail against it. True Christians in every age should remember this and take comfort."²

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

In Jesus, Simeon saw that God was being faithful to His promise to send a Messiah who would bring salvation—first to the nation of _____ and then to the entire _____ .



What do we learn about God when we see Him keep His promises?

POINT 3: The Messiah will obey the Father completely (Luke 2:41-50).

Jesus was _____ in thirsting for knowledge of God as He grew in _____ .



What character traits are demonstrated by Jesus's listening and asking questions in the temple?

Jesus knew His _____ and was obedient to Him, _____ and foremost.



How should we reconcile our obedience to God and our expected obedience to human authorities?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been credited with Christ's righteousness, we live knowing that we are fully accepted by God while also seeking to obey God in all areas out of gratitude and love for Him.

- **HEAD:** Why does it matter that Jesus was perfect, even as a child?
- **HEART:** Why should Jesus's perfection on your behalf help you fight temptation?
- **HANDS:** How will you be involved in testifying of Jesus to the nations?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Jesus came to set men free. By interpreting the true spiritual meaning of the Law, He released them from the legalistic bondage under which they had so long been oppressed, without lowering the standard."³

—J. O. Sanders (1902-1992)

THE SAVIOR IS BAPTIZED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

John the Baptist was the herald who prepared the way for the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Mark 1

+ **SETTING:**

In his Gospel, Mark first introduced Jesus to the world through the eyes of John the Baptist. The pacing of Mark's Gospel is fast—it's the shortest of all the Gospel accounts and the oft-used term "immediately" demonstrates that Mark was intent on progressing the stories quickly so that his readers could focus their attention on Jesus's work on the cross. Therefore, it is worth noting that Mark slowed down to consider how John paved the way for Jesus—both through his declaration of Jesus's identity and by baptizing Him in the Jordan River.

DAY 1

READ:

Mark 1:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 1:2

NOTES

Anytime we bring a new message to someone or a group of people, it sure does help to have someone go ahead of you and set the stage for that message. This is particularly true if you are bringing a message that is difficult for people to understand or is painful for them to accept. A business owner, for example, might have a supervisor prepare the employees for some substantive changes in office protocol in a weekly staff meeting ahead of the annual performance review season.

John the Baptist played this role for Jesus. Being a forerunner and messenger was not his only role, but it seems to have been his key role. He brought a message to the world that made it easier for people to understand and respond to the news that Jesus would bring. This message revolved around the need for confession, repentance, and the forgiveness of sin. And this message would continue to define the ministry of Jesus, who announced His public ministry with exhortations to repent because the kingdom of heaven had come near (Matthew 4:17). Those who heard John's message and were baptized by John were better positioned to see and respond to Jesus as a result.

How does your life and your message make it easier for people to understand who Jesus is and what He wants to do in the lives of others?

DAY 2

READ:

Mark 1:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 1:6

NOTES

John was an odd man. Why did Mark include the biographical note about the dietary habits of John the Baptist and his clothing? Surely this was not an attempt to give some sense for what Christians should eat or wear!

John's location (in the wilderness), his activity (crying aloud), his dress (camel-hair garment), and his food (locusts and wild honey) connect John to the Old Testament prophets. As you might remember, these same types of odd habits defined the life and ministry of many of those God raised up to declare His word long before Jesus came on the scene. In fact, many times God actually asked His prophets, like Isaiah, to dress and act in strange ways in order to call attention to His message or paint a picture of the spiritual need of the people.

It had been a long time since God had spoken through a prophet. The years surrounding the exile and return in the Old Testament were filled with voices proclaiming the word of God to the people. Even though they did not listen and heed the warnings, the people had messengers pointing them to God. But then it stopped. For over four hundred years, God was silent. But then John stepped on the scene and looked and acted and talked like the prophets of old. This was meant to prepare the people for God's ongoing activity and to encourage them that God had not forgotten the people forever.

What are some ways you have been encouraged by God's faithfulness after a long time of silence?

DAY 3

READ:

Mark 1:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 1:8

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #91: BAPTISM

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to the believer's faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is not an arbitrary option for followers of Jesus. As with the fact that there are no church-less Christians, there are to be no unbaptized Christians. We are saved by faith in Jesus and baptized into the local church. Jesus inaugurated His public ministry with an act of baptism, and Christians reveal to the church and the world that they are new creations in Christ intent on living on mission for Him by this act as well.

The act of baptism is one of submission. Jesus submitted Himself to John's baptism, though He had no sin (Hebrews 4:15). Christians submit to God's directive that they should be baptized as well (Matthew 28:18-20).

This activity is modeled in the opening of the book of Acts, where, following Peter's sermon at Pentecost, many responded to the good news of Jesus. When asked, Peter told the people to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Following their salvation, thousands were baptized and united to the church there in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Repentance and baptism went hand in hand.

In the same way, those who repent of their sins should be baptized in the context of the local church today. The act of baptism sets the pace for humble submission to God's leadership for the rest of the Christian's life. It is wise for the church and local pastors to assess the validity of a person's faith, but it's important to press the priority of baptism as soon as possible. A tight link between repentance and baptism is biblically faithful, and prioritizing this connection makes it clear to others who come to faith that this is normative for followers of Jesus.

How does baptism encourage you?

DAY 4

READ:

Ephesians 4:1-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 4:4-6

NOTES

The church is united by faith in Jesus Christ and a common baptism in His name. The apostle Paul pointed to this unity with the rapid repetition of the word “one” here in verses 4-6 in the middle of his letter to the church in Ephesus. There is salvation in no one other than Jesus, and the common process by which we are united to Him in faith is through repentance of sins, symbolized in the act of baptism.

There are all sorts of reasons why people unite in the church. They might share a common ethnic heritage or denominational affinity. They might live in a common sector of society or socioeconomic strata. People might even align around hobbies or political alliances. Many times churches were created with this intent in mind—pastors or missionaries would attempt to evangelize one subset of the culture and unite people who are already alike in the church.

The beauty of the gospel of Jesus, however, is that Jesus unites different people—people who have no business being in relationship with one another apart from their shared union with Christ. We see this in Jesus’s choice of His disciples. These were men who had little in common but built their lives around their shared relationship with Jesus.

As we engage with our churches today, we should give praise to God for the differences that we see represented there rather than use those differences as a means of fostering disunity. Even more so, we should seek to share the gospel with people who are different than us so that the church is built up based on unity found in Jesus.

What examples of diverse unity do you see in your church?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Believers are never told to become one; we already are one and are expected to act like it.”¹

—Joni Eareckson Tada

DAY 5

READ:

Mark 1:9-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 1:10

NOTES

Many Christians tend to under-appreciate or under-value the role of the Holy Spirit. After all, the work of the Spirit doesn't seem as tangible as the ministry of Jesus since the Son of God took on flesh and walked among this world.

Yet the Spirit of God wasn't out-of-sight-out-of-mind for Jesus nor for the Bible's authors. We see the fingerprints of the Spirit all over the story of God's work through redemptive history. Mark introduced his Gospel and Jesus's ministry through the sending of the Spirit. Jesus told the disciples to wait to begin their mission until they received the power the Spirit supplies (see Acts 1). Luke connected the Spirit's work to the birth of the church at the outset of the book of Acts (see Acts 2).

Christians would be wise to spend more time thinking and talking about the Spirit's activity. Churches should highlight the role of the Spirit of God in empowering and compelling the mission. The Spirit's presence was a constant comfort and guide to the work of Jesus through His life. Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit would continue to do this same work in the life of His people—He guides them to truth and empowers and comforts them in the work (John 15–17). If the very Son of God in the flesh relied on the agency of the Holy Spirit to empower His work, how much more do the people of God need that help in our work today?

How will you strive to rely more and more on the Spirit's work in and through you?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The baptizing work of the Spirit is the means of associating us with the crucifixion of Christ (Colossians 2:12 and especially Romans 6:1-10) in our dying to the old life. Being associated by baptism unto His death, burial, and resurrection is the basis for the crucifixion of the believer's sin nature and his victory over sin."²

—Charles C. Ryrie (1925-2016)

POINT 1: The herald prepares for the Son (Mark 1:1-6).

_____ had prepared for all the details of Jesus's coming, including using John to prepare the world for Jesus's _____ .

? How should the steady use of Old Testament prophecy in the story of Jesus's birth encourage us?

John's practice of baptism, connected with confession and _____ , was a precursor to the work that Jesus would do to make a way for the _____ of sins.

? How would John's practice of baptism help people understand Jesus's message?

POINT 2: The herald points to the Son (Mark 1:7-8).

John knew that Jesus's baptism would be greater because it would symbolize the work of God's _____ to transform the _____ .

? What does baptism do?

KEY DOCTRINE #91: BAPTISM

Christian baptism is the immersion of a _____ in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of _____ symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a _____ to the believer's

faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

POINT 3: The herald baptizes the Son (Mark 1:9-11).

_____ was baptized, in part, as an _____
for us to follow in His steps.

? **Why did Jesus get baptized even though He had nothing to repent of or confess?**

God the _____ validated the identity of
God the _____, Jesus Christ, and sent His
_____ to dwell on Him.

? **How can growing in our understanding of the triune God help us worship Him more?**

MY RESPONSE

Because we have died with Christ and have been raised to new life through Him, we call on others to repent of their sin, trust in Christ, and be baptized.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways Christian baptism should impact believers in Christ and even unbelievers who witness a believer's baptism?
- **HEART:** In your life, what sources of identity compete with a secure identity in Christ as God's beloved child? How do you need to repent in this regard?
- **HANDS:** How will you leverage your life this week to point others to Jesus?



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"He told them he had drenched them with water which was only external, but One would come who would drench them in the Holy Spirit, which was intrinsically internal. What a beautiful metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit! When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, he permeates every part of us."³

—R. Kent Hughes

THE SAVIOR IS FAITHFUL

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

In overcoming Satan's temptations, Jesus affirmed He is the greater Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 4

+ **SETTING:**

The wilderness provides the backdrop for a well-known interaction between Jesus and Satan. In essence, the wilderness is a backdrop to the story of the Old Testament. The Israelites spent decades wandering in the wilderness as a result of their sin. This was a place of judgment, a place of failure, a place of hopelessness and death. The wilderness was anchored in the Israelite mind as the foremost location where they experienced the implications of sin. The Messiah entered into His ministry through the wilderness, presenting Himself to the world as the One who succeeded where Israel failed.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 4:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 4:1

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #51: THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS

While the Bible affirms the full humanity of Jesus, it also affirms that Jesus was completely sinless throughout His earthly life (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22). Nevertheless, because Jesus was fully human, He experienced real temptation of sin, as seen during His trials in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Yet even though His trials and temptations were real and similar to the rest of humanity's, Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus did not sin.

Prove it!

Anyone who makes a claim to be able to do something great is immediately met with this challenge. If you say you can dunk a basketball, then someone is going to want you to prove it. If you claim to be able to drink a whole gallon of milk, then the same request will be made. If you made an offer to buy a home for a million dollars, sooner or later a bank is going to ask you to prove it. The greater the claim, the greater the need to prove it.

Jesus began His earthly ministry with some strong claims. He said that He is God. The Father Himself spoke from heaven declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son. Soon He would invite people to repent of sins and come to Him for forgiveness because He is One who can forgive. These claims require validation. You can't say that you are God and not prove it.

Jesus proved His claim to be God in a host of ways throughout His life. Ultimately He would prove it by going to the cross to die and then rising again and defeating death. This is surely something that only God can do. But long before that, in the remote wilderness, Jesus proved He is God by facing off against Satan. Matthew tells us that the Spirit led Him there, knowing that His victory over sin and death would prove that He is God. This showdown with Satan was a primary way Jesus proved He is God. God graciously recorded this experience in the Bible so that readers today could be reminded that Jesus is God through His sinless perfection.

How do you know that Jesus is God?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 4:2-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 4:2-3

NOTES

A fisherman knows that you can't catch fish with just any bait. You might be able to throw a little bread into the water and see some fish come to the surface to take the bait, but you can't catch a prized fish this way. They are too smart. You have to know the bait the fish like and present that to them in just the right way at just the right time. You trick them into eating by presenting the bait and hiding the hook.

Sin works in the same way. Satan knows how humans are tempted to sin. He knows there are some common patterns for all people—we are prone to anger, lust, passivity, pride, and other sins like these. But even more, Satan is precise. He doesn't merely know the general sin patterns of people, but he knows the unique temptations to which each person is susceptible. In other words, he knows what bait we are likely to consume.

In this passage, Satan knew that Jesus was hungry. It's no wonder since He hadn't had food for forty days. Satan started in the place of clear need and held out a temptation that seemed too easy for Jesus to pass up. You might imagine that His stomach was growling with the ache of hunger, and all He had to do was say the word and a rock could become bread. Jesus stood up to this temptation through the power of God's Word.

This reminds all Christians that we should be alert to the enemy because he is aware of what is most likely to cause us to fall.

How does sin present the bait and hide the hook for you?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 4:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 4:4

NOTES

It doesn't come easy for most of us to depend on the Word of God. After all, there is so much else in the world that we can depend on. When we face temptation, these false sources of dependence come to the forefront.

We might try to depend on our own strength. We know that sin is not good for us, so we try to work our way out of places of temptation by our will power alone. Or we might try to depend on others for help: "Maybe if there are enough people around holding me accountable or checking up on me, then I won't be as likely to give in." Sometimes we try to depend on morality—maybe since we've fought temptation in the past, then the good we've done will sustain us even if we blow it this time.

Jesus modeled dependence on the Word of God. He knew that the truth of God in the Scriptures reveals the unchanging nature of God's character and His work in the world. The best means of fighting current temptation is to observe how God has acted in the past, how the people in the past have fought similar temptations, or what truthful lessons can be learned from their failure. To depend on the Word of God, we have to know the Word of God. We will not be able to recall the truth of God in places of suffering and challenge if we do not store that Word in our hearts each day. The more we dwell on the Word, the more the truth of that Word will come out when we are tempted to sin.

How will you grow in your dependence on God's Word in your fight against sin?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 4:5-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 4:7

NOTES

It sounds somewhat strange to think about “testing God.” How do people put God to the test?

It’s helpful to think about this using a human illustration. A parent might tell a child that they will be there should anything happen in the middle of the night. The parent puts the child down for the night, pulls up the covers, turns off the light, and leaves the room. The parent is completely dependable. The child, wanting to make sure, calls out to the parent thirty minutes later: “Mom, are you there?” The mom comes into the room and reassures the child. An hour later, the child calls again, this time with a more alarmed voice. The mom reenters the room with an exasperated look. “Why are you continuing to call out to me?” the mom asks. The child responds, “I just wanted to make sure you will keep your word.”

The child is testing the mom to see if she is dependable. In some ways this is sweet and endearing, but in other ways it’s frustrating. After all, the mom wants the child to know her character enough to trust her without having to test her time and time again. Her past history and proven character should be enough.

In an even greater way, God is entirely trustworthy. He does not want us to “test” Him by asking Him to prove His trustworthiness over and over again. He wants us to trust that He will come through for us in places of temptation. He is there, even if we can’t sense that in the moment. His past faithfulness to His people, demonstrated throughout the Bible and throughout our lives, should be enough to train our hearts to take Him at His word.

What is one promise of God that you need to remember to trust Him for this week?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 4:8-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 4:11

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The Bible teaches us in times of temptation in the flesh, there is one command: Flee! Flee fornication. Flee idolatry. Flee youthful lusts. Flee the lusts of the world. There is no resistance to Satan in lust other than flight. Every struggle against lust in one’s own strength is doomed to failure.”¹

–Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)

The angels came to Jesus’s aid. This is a vivid picture of God’s care for His people when they face temptation and fight with the strength that God provides. He is not inattentive to the challenge of sin and the brokenness of the world. He loves His people and wants what’s best for them. He knows that they will face all sorts of suffering in this life—some that will come at them from the outside and some that will emerge from their sinful hearts.

You may have seen a video of someone who completes a marathon. They’ve been running for hours and have depleted every bit of energy they have. The finish line appears, and they painstakingly grind to it and across it. As soon as they cross, medical professionals and loved ones surround them to provide care and encouragement.

In a sense, this is a picture of God’s attentiveness to His people. When they fight sin throughout life, they will be greeted in heaven by God, who will usher them into eternal rest. But this alone is not enough. Not only will God minister to His people when they die, He meets us in this life as well. And He doesn’t merely meet us after we’ve battled sin, but He meets us in the midst of the battle and provides a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). This escape will not come easily, nor will it come in our strength alone, but we have the Spirit of God living inside of us as believers to remind us of God’s Word and give us the strength to fight sin by the power of God.

When have you experienced encouragement from God’s presence in the midst of your battle against sin?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Unbelief, just like Satan, will always take the easy way out. It will tell us to eat the fruit in exchange for knowledge, instead of fearing God to gain real wisdom. Unbelief will unravel our perceptions of both suffering and the blessedness of life and beckon us to skip self-denial at all costs with the faux promises of comfort that can't extend beyond the grave.”²

—Jackie Hill Perry

POINT 1: The Son of God trusts in the Father's provision (Matt. 4:1-4).

KEY DOCTRINE #51: THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS

While the Bible affirms the full humanity of Jesus, it also affirms that Jesus was completely _____ throughout His earthly life (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22). Nevertheless, because Jesus was fully human, He experienced real _____ of sin, as seen during His trials in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Yet even though His trials and temptations were real and similar to the rest of humanity's, Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus did not sin.

? What might we learn from the high point of Jesus's baptism being followed by a difficult time of challenge, such as facing Satan in the wilderness?

Satan tempted Jesus at a place of _____, and Jesus countered that temptation by pointing to God's _____.

? How should we react knowing Satan is real and ready to tempt us at any time?

POINT 2: The Son of God trusts in the Father's providence (Matt. 4:5-7).

Satan tempted Jesus to demonstrate His _____, departing from His mission; but He _____, trusting God's providence.

? How does succumbing to temptation lead us astray from God's mission for our lives?

Jesus _____ to reject Satan's temptation of an inappropriate use of power.

? Why did Jesus use Scripture to counter Satan's attacks?

POINT 3: The Son of God trusts in the Father's plan (Matt. 4:8-11).

Jesus was tempted to use His power and position _____, to claim the kingdoms of the world apart from God's _____.

? What are some occasions when we might be tempted to use our power and position proudly?

Jesus responded to Satan's temptation by directing _____ to God _____ and telling Satan to leave.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been credited with Christ's righteousness, we resist temptation by relying on the power of the One who overcame temptation in our place.

- **HEAD:** What encouragement do you find in the sinlessness of Jesus?
- **HEART:** What steps will you take to fight against temptation in your own life?
- **HANDS:** What will you do to grow in your knowledge of and love for the Word of God so that you may share it with others?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"His whole life and death were nothing else but perfect obedience to the will of his heavenly Father, and he was always fully occupied in that task. He teaches us that if we look to be children and co-heirs by adoption along with Christ of his Father's kingdom, we must also along with our Master and Lord yield ourselves up wholly to the will of our heavenly Father and always be occupied in his business."³

—Bernard Gilpin (c. 1517-1583)

THE SAVIOR IS FOLLOWED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus invited His first followers into relationship with Him and promised that they would experience great things.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 1

+ **SETTING:**

John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He understood Jesus's role from the start. Jesus was the sacrificial substitute, laying down His life for His people. John again, the following day, called Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:36), specifically telling two of his own disciples, allowing them to follow Jesus and become His disciples. The call to follow the Lamb is the foundation of John's Gospel and the basis for the entire story of the Bible. From cover to cover, the Bible invites the reader to look at Jesus, follow Him, and be saved.

DAY 1

READ:

John 1:35-39

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:36

NOTES

It must have seemed odd to hear someone point to another person and describe that person as the Lamb of God. After all, lambs are not people. Ancient Israelites would have appreciated the value of a lamb, both in terms of their role in human society and in terms of their worship to God. A lamb was, after all, the means by which sinners could approach a holy God.

But lambs die. This was their primary spiritual role in society and in worship. They were valuable for food and clothing but especially in the sense that their death appeased the wrath of God for sin. They were not domestic pets; instead, they were brought to the temple to be slaughtered. Their blood and mangled bodies reminded worshipers of the cost of sin and the necessity of holiness.

When the disciples referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God, then, it created some dissonance in the minds of the hearers. Here was the One that John and others were now calling the Messiah—God’s Savior who comes bringing God’s kingdom to earth. And He is a lamb? This term does help picture the perfection of Jesus, since it was only a perfect lamb that could die for sin. But it also meant that the Messiah would die. He would give His life to pay the price for sin. Certainly those who first heard this description did not fully understand, but from the very beginning it was clear that Jesus came to die.

How was Jesus’s sacrifice different than that of lambs in the Old Testament?

DAY 2

READ:

John 1:40-42

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:41

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #66: CALLING

The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

Families can be the most challenging part of our lives for many of us. Our families know us well. They've seen us on our best days and our worst. They know us inside and out. Siblings are even more intimate. They have walked beside us through all of life. We've likely celebrated life's victories with them, but we've also experienced pain and fought with them more than anyone else.

In our passage today, we see Andrew invite His brother to meet Jesus. These two brothers certainly had a back story. They were close, in the way that brothers are. They talked to each other about things that matter, including their relationship with God. So when Andrew found Jesus, he wanted Simon to meet Jesus as well.

Do you have the same impulse toward those in your family? Often times we can grow cold to those in our family, especially if they are not following Jesus and seem hardened to the truth of the gospel. We can feel awkward or cold when it comes to telling them about Jesus and the hope He can bring. Many times we pray for them in private but fail to talk to them about Jesus when we have the chance. We need the challenge from this passage to remind us to persevere in relationship with our family. God places us in these human relationships to give us a chance to share about Jesus, and we should leverage our role to do just that. Of course, God can bring others to share with our siblings and family, but we must not depend on other people to do what we could be doing ourselves.

**Who in your family needs to hear of the hope of Jesus?
What opportunities might you have to share the gospel with them?**

DAY 3

READ:

John 1:42

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:42

NOTES

Jesus changes people. Peter's name changed when he met Jesus. Jesus likely did this to communicate something about Peter's new identity as a follower of Him. No longer would he be marked by his former way of life. Now he would be known as "the Rock." Soon Jesus would suggest that He will build His church on the faithful witness of this rock (Matthew 16:18). Throughout the Bible, a name change is an indication of a life changed by the power of God.

God continues to change those He saves. Those who see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ are transformed from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Spirit of God lives within them and produces change in their character and actions (Galatians 5:22-23). This change is not instantaneous. While God's salvation happens in a moment, the sanctification of a Christian takes a lifetime. Only when we die will we experience the full transformation into the image of Jesus. But throughout this life, we must give ourselves to the progressive growth God's Spirit is producing in us.

The Spirit of God wants to change your life as well. Many times Christians can grow cold or stale to this type of transformation. They may have seen change immediately after coming to faith, but sometimes we stagnate and stop growing. Ask God to bring change in you today, even if that change is small and unnoticeable to start with. God is increasingly transforming us in our sanctification process to become more of who we are meant to be as children of God.

How do you see God's Spirit changing you this week?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"So many missionaries, intent on doing something, forget that God's main work is to make something of them."¹

—Jim Elliot (1927-1956)

DAY 4

READ:

John 1:43-51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:48

NOTES

How does it feel to consider the fact that God takes notice of you? Your life might seem small and insignificant, but the God of the universe is attentive to you. Nathanael was awed by the fact that Jesus saw him under the fig tree and cared enough about him to show him that He is the Messiah.

God continues to notice His people. This is a primary focus of the passage in Matthew 6 where Jesus challenges His people to stop worrying (Matthew 6:25-34). They need not worry but should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Why? Because they are more important than the flowers of the field and the birds of the heavens. God sees and cares for His creation. Since He takes notice of the birds and the flowers, people should be confident that He cares for us as well.

Sometimes it is tempting to think that God does not notice us. Especially when we are going through hard times, we might think that God has forgotten us or is busy with other things and simply can't handle our needs. Isn't it encouraging to remember that God sees us? He sees what you are going through today. He sees your heart and knows your joys and your pains. He's aware of the things that keep you up at night. And right now, in hundreds of ways that you can't see, He is caring for you.

What would change about you if you truly believed God cared for you?

DAY 5

READ:

John 1:43-51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:50-51

NOTES

What is the greatest thing God has ever done for you?

The place to start is certainly our salvation. He made us aware of our sin, convinced us of the righteousness of Jesus, and allowed us to repent of sin. He gave us a new heart—one that beats with the life of His Spirit.

Beyond that, He's likely done many things for you. He's given you His Word, His Spirit, His church. He's likely blessed you in innumerable ways in this life. He's come through for you in hard times, turned around a situation that seemingly was beyond hope, and made a way for you where it seemed you were at an impasse.

God can do great things still. Paul reminded the church in Ephesus that God is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20), in the same way Jesus was telling Nathanael that he would see great things. God is able and powerful to do greater things than even what we've seen thus far.

Some of the manifestations of this promise may come true in this world. We should certainly have hope that God can do greater things here and now. For example, He can send workers to hard-to-reach places and see those who have never heard of Jesus come to saving faith. However, much of the fruition of this promise will come when Jesus returns. When that happens, the entire cosmos will witness the kingdom of God descend on this world and all things made new. We should live with hope and anticipation for that glorious day.

What makes heaven exciting for you to think about?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus was way more than just some prophet or teacher. And to point to Him as anything less than the King of kings, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, is to reject Him and insult Him"²

-Trip Lee

POINT 1: The Messiah invites others to follow Him (John 1:35-42).

Discipleship includes _____ Jesus and staying near Him in response to His invitation to come and _____ Him more.

? What does it mean to follow Jesus for the modern reader?

Discipleship also includes _____ about Jesus with others, bringing them to Him so they too can have a new _____ in Christ Jesus.

? Why is it sometimes difficult to share about Jesus with others?

POINT 2: The Messiah reveals His identity by His power (John 1:43-49).

KEY DOCTRINE #66: CALLING

The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the _____ and internally through the _____ working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are _____, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

Our _____ in Jesus is dependent on our understanding of who He is, namely, the Messiah, the Son of God, and the _____ of all.

? What names of Jesus resonate with you at this point in your life, and why?

POINT 3: The Messiah promises greater things to come (John 1:50-51).

Jesus promised to show His people greater things to _____ their faith in _____ .

? **What causes you to believe that Jesus really is who He says He is?**

Jesus described Himself as the _____ of _____ , widening the people’s understanding of who He is and is not.

? **Who do you say that Jesus is?**

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus gave up His life for us and we have committed to following Him, our lives are to be marked by sacrifice as we are willing to do whatever God calls on us to do as we invest in others so that they might become disciples of Jesus.

- **HEAD:** What are some potential risks and joys from sharing with others the good news of Jesus as the Messiah?
- **HEART:** Do you view sharing the gospel as a joyful privilege or dreaded duty? Why?
- **HANDS:** How will you use your influence to invite others to follow Jesus this week?



Scan this QR code to access this session’s Scripture passages.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Jesus has no desire to trick you into following him with a kind of bait and switch. He is utterly up front about the cost. In fact, he urges you to count the cost. ‘For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? . . .’ (Luke 14:28). Let the call to follow Jesus be clear and honest. ‘In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). It is costly, and it is worth it.”³

–John Piper

THE SAVIOR IS OUR SACRIFICE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus came to be the ultimate sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world and bring people into relationship with God.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

John 2; 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 10

+ **SETTING:**

Easter week is a vivid reminder of Jesus's purpose and work, the reason why He was born into this world as a human being. We focus on the cross and resurrection at Easter since this week commemorates these key events in Jesus's life. However, all the way back at His birth, the descriptions used of Jesus pointed forward to the way His life would lead to His sacrificial death. These descriptions also point back to the Old Testament as many of the images that foreshadowed His death were woven into the story of God from long ago—such as the temple and the sacrificial system.

DAY 1

READ:

John 2:13-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 2:15-16

NOTES

Many in the temple were using God's house for their own selfish pursuits. While we may not be guilty of robbing people by charging outrageous prices for worship offerings or raising the exchange rate for currency, we can be tempted to use God for our own selfish pursuits in other ways.

Many times Christians can be guilty of approaching church attendance or morality as a means of looking good in the eyes of the watching world. We're not so much in it to worship God for His character and worth, but we want to be seen as a good, upstanding person or be perceived as having a happy marriage or family. Some even approach God thinking that if they do a bit of good, like go to church or care for the needy, then God owes them something in return. In this way, people use God and attempt to manipulate Him with their actions so that He does for them what they want.

This type of selfishness is unfit for the people of God. It drew the ire of Jesus in the temple and continues to draw scorn from Him today. He's not interested in fake worshipers who are merely playing a game for what they can get in return. He wants genuine worshipers, those who worship and serve Him simply because He is worthy. Jesus's anger in the temple should alarm us to consider our ways any time we take advantage of God or use Him for our own selfish pursuits.

How are you tempted to use God for your selfish desires?

DAY 2

READ:

John 2:13-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 2:22

NOTES

What does it take for you to believe?

Jesus's disciples were given unique insight into who Jesus is and what He came to do. Yet it would take time for the truth of these claims to make sense. After all, the reality of Jesus's mission was hard to fathom, even for those who were looking for the Messiah. Years later, they would be able to look back and see how God's faithfulness was on display through Jesus's promises and His faithful fulfillment of the work God had given Him. It's as if they had spiritual light bulbs come on that clued them in to the reality to which Jesus had been pointing all along.

Have you ever had an experience like that? Someone—maybe a pastor or trusted friend—pointed you to a truth about God from the Bible that you did not want to hear or did not fully understand at the time. Later, when you returned to that conversation in memory, however, you saw and understood the truth about God. In the intervening time, you may have experienced something painful that jarred you to consider what God was saying. Or it may have been that your heart was uniquely poised to hear the truth and respond in a way that it had not been before.

Over time, we want to become the kind of people who hear God and believe His promises quickly. Every time we sit down and read our Bibles, God is speaking to us and He has truth that He wants us to understand and apply. We now have the benefit of seeing the fullness of Jesus's work through His death and resurrection, so our perspective is clearer than that of the first disciples. We should seek to understand now rather than wait until later.

What truth is God trying to communicate to you right now?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 5:8

NOTES

The immediate context of Paul's words regarding Jesus as the Passover sacrifice was a matter of church discipline. Sexual sin has invaded the Corinthian church, and Paul exhorted the church members and leaders to expel the offending members for the purity and health of the body. He used the picture of leaven, or yeast, to show how a seemingly small amount of sin can have a massive negative influence on the church.

The application does not stop there, however. The same truth applies to our individual lives as well. We are often tempted to indulge certain sins and think that they will not destroy our lives. After all, if we keep them hidden and seemingly in check, then how much harm can they really do? We rationalize our sinful habits with the fact that we are doing so many other good things in the world. We go to church, read our Bible, love our family, and avoid much of the heinous sin that we see play out in those around us. All that good stacks the scales in our favor, so we think.

We forget that a little leaven leavens the whole lump in our lives as well. A little sin, left unchecked, contaminates the whole person. Unfortunately, we see testimony of this reality on a near-daily basis as public figures and pastors fall into heinous sin seemingly overnight. The reality is that it didn't happen overnight. Sin infested the person's life, perhaps in a way that seemed small and insignificant, and it festered for a long time before becoming public.

Our churches are also filled with people who coddle sin for too long and get exposed. As with the church as a whole, each of us should fight to repent of known sin and kill our sinful flesh so that we live a life worthy of the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb.

From what sins do you need to repent?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"A man is first startled by sin; then it becomes pleasing, then easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed. The man is impenitent, then obstinate, and then he is damned."¹

—Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

DAY 4

READ:

Hebrews 10:1-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 10:2-3

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #58: CHRIST AS SACRIFICE

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

It is good for us to be reminded of our sin. The ongoing process of offering animal sacrifices served a valuable purpose for the nation of Israel. All those who approached God in this way were reminded that they were not holy. They needed something, or someone, to die in order to appease God's wrath and make it possible for them to approach Him. The gory scene of blood and death in the temple would have been a stark reminder of the cost of sin.

If we are honest, for many of us, sin can be out of sight, out of mind. We grow accustomed to the aspects of our lives that have become normative, even our sin. Many times we don't even notice our sin anymore. And many of us don't live in contexts where we have rituals like animal sacrifices that call our sin to mind.

This is one good reason for church membership and active involvement. As we participate in the regular rhythms of the church's life, we should be confronted with our sin and God's holy standard. A steady diet of biblical sermons should hold up a mirror to our lives and force us to consider how far we fall short. We should live in community with others in such a way that their lives challenge us to pursue holiness and in which these friends can push us to repent.

However, this isn't all the church does. Through the active ministry of the church, we are also encouraged by the truth of Jesus's work. We do not have to sit in our sin and live with perpetual shame and regret. We can turn to Jesus and find help and hope that forgiveness can be found through faith in Christ. We should find joy in the fact that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

How is your church community helping you see your sin and turn to Jesus for help and hope?

DAY 5

READ:

Hebrews 10:5-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 10:10

NOTES

Christians can make progress in fighting sin and pursuing holiness. This may seem like a common-sense claim, but we may be tempted to live like it's actually impossible for us to grow in Christ. We subtly assume that we've hit our ceiling and just can't go any further.

The author of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus died to sanctify His people. The term sanctify refers to something that is set apart for holy use. Like items for worship in the temple, God takes common sinners and makes them holy. He does this, first, by imputing Jesus's righteousness to God's people as a gift. We are sanctified by faith. Then, as the Spirit indwells believers, we are conformed to God's image. We are made in practice what God has made us as a gift. Certainly this work will not be realized fully until the second coming of Christ and we enter heaven, when God's people are resurrected, fully glorified, and sin is done away with for good. But we can make progress in this life. We can kill sin and overcome those habits that have plagued us in the past.

It's important for us to have hope around sanctification. Often the work is slow and the progress is unnoticed in the moment. Only long after the fact can you truly see the progress you've made. Like a weight-loss journey, it's little changes to your diet and a commitment to exercise that brings lasting change when a person commits to it for a long period of time. Christians have to commit to the process in order to make progress. Praise God that He is committed to transforming us to look like His Son.

What habits do you need to develop to continue to grow in your walk with God?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Such was the holy, heavenly zeal of our Great Exemplar! His were no transient outbursts of ardor, which time cooled and difficulties impeded. His life was one indignant protest against sin;—one ceaseless current of undying love for souls, which all the malignity of foes, and unkindness of friends, could not for one moment divert from its course. Even when He rises from the dead, and we imagine His work at an end, His zeal only meditates fresh deeds of love.”²

—John R. Macduff (1818-1895)

POINT 1: Jesus came to be the greater temple (John 2:13-22).

Jesus was passionate that God’s temple be used for _____ alone, not self-serving _____ .

? What do you think of when you hear the word temple?

Jesus came to be greater than the temple and to _____ its true _____ .

? How is the temple of Jesus’s body better than the temple building?

POINT 2: Jesus came to be the greater Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

As the _____ , because of Christ’s saving work and sacrifice, we are to pursue _____ , not letting sin continue to take hold.

? How should the church treat sin and sinful people?

KEY DOCTRINE #58: CHRIST AS SACRIFICE

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the _____ of the _____. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), Christ’s sacrifice on the _____ was able to permanently, “once and for all,” take away sins.

POINT 3: Jesus came to be the greater sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-10).

The Old Testament sacrificial system was _____ because sacrifices had to be offered _____, not being able to take away sins forever.

? How would you feel if you had to offer sacrifices for sin year after year?

Jesus's death for the once-and-for-all forgiveness of sins both _____ (makes us right with God) and _____ (makes us holy like God).

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus's sacrifice provides us with complete forgiveness and acceptance by God, we live with assurance and gratitude, obeying God's commands so we reflect our new identity in Christ.

- **HEAD:** How do the Old Testament shadows of the temple and the sacrificial system help you understand what Jesus did?
- **HEART:** What distractions and offenses against God's holiness do you need to repent of to honor Christ?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the good news of Jesus's perfect sacrifice and not having to achieve perfection ourselves for salvation?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"True love will motivate us to make sacrifices that might even cost us our lives. Such sacrificial love makes God's heart glad. This kind of love is worth it."³

—Africa Study Bible

UNIT 20

+

GOD'S LOVE

WAS REVEALED

AMONG US

IN THIS WAY

“You Must Be Born Again”

by Chris Poblete

A group of short-term missionaries traveled to an impoverished nation where they were greeted by a pastor at a church building in the middle of the region. The church’s property appeared worn down with cracks in the tiled walls and what looked like a thick layer of red dirt covering the entire floor. Making plans to serve the village, one missionary suggested they “spruce up” the church building by scrubbing the floors with soap and warm water.

The pastor laughed and informed the well-meaning volunteer that the floor was made of red clay, patted down and dried in the heat, and that there were no tiles beneath the clay to match the walls. If soap and water were used, it would just turn into mud, and the more you added, the muddier it would get. Embarrassed by his mistake, the missionary then recommended they replace the floor altogether, which the team eventually did for the grateful pastor.

WE NEED TO BE BORN AGAIN

What the church building needed was an entirely new floor made of something other than dried up mud. The same is true of the human heart—it comes dried up, hard, and dirty, and no amount of scrubbing can help it or prepare it for worship. While it’s technically true that church buildings don’t need clean floors for Sunday worship, it is true that human beings need a new heart. The only way we receive a new heart is by being made new, or born again.

This “new birth” the Bible speaks of is necessary because we are all sinners by nature and choice. Some of the first words that come out of a child’s mouth after “mama” and “dada” are “no” and “mine.” From our earliest years of development, the human heart is bent toward defiance and self-centeredness.

Elaborating on this grim reality, the apostle Paul described us as “dead” in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). The metaphor

Without God, we are cosmic rebels without a cause.

of “deadness” is appropriate when you consider the parallels between being “spiritually dead” in our sins and being “physically dead” in our bodies. For example, a physically dead person cannot feel his surroundings. He has no eyes to see and no ears to hear. He has no senses to perceive the world around him. In the same way, part of what it means to be spiritually dead is to be blind and deaf to spiritual things. It is to be unresponsive to the truth, goodness, and beauty of God and to find other things as more interesting—be it a person, a place, a cause, a concern, or some other idol of the heart.

Jesus spelled out our helplessness when He said that we love the darkness and hate the light (John 3:19). Without God, we are cosmic rebels without a cause. Before God’s holy face, even our best deeds are incomplete, come with wrong motives, and fall short of His glory.

WE CANNOT FIX OURSELVES

There’s a scene in C. S. Lewis’s *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* in which a young boy named Eustace suddenly finds himself in the awesome-yet-unwanted form of a dragon. Eustace finds himself very frustrated. He cannot talk. He cannot play with his cousins. He’s lonely and miserable. Wishing to be a boy again, he tries to shed off his dragon skin, but with each skin that sheds, another dragon hide is revealed underneath. It is only when he allows Aslan, the Christlike lion of Narnia, to claw into his dragon scales and peel them off that the formidable dragon skin is finally shed.

Similarly, we find ourselves trying to fix the brokenness sin brings to our hearts by turning to anything other than Jesus. We move from one functional savior to the next, and it never seems to work or satisfy. The good news for us is that in Jesus, God has come to make us new. He has come to make us born again. He has come to awaken us to the way of joy, the truth of His Word, and the life we have always longed for.

The good news for us is that in Jesus,
God has come to make us new.

Once the Spirit “re-births” us to a new life in Christ, everything changes.

GOD’S LOVE MAKES US BORN AGAIN

This metaphor of being “born again” might seem perplexing at first, as it certainly was for Nicodemus, but once again we find the biblical metaphor helpful when we consider its implications. How do you know that you were physically born? The answer should be obvious: You’re here! You’re alive! You wouldn’t be here reading this paragraph if you were never born. You wouldn’t appeal to your birth certificate to prove you were born. You would appeal to the fact that you are here, living and breathing and existing. Similarly, the way you know you are spiritually born again is you become alive to the things of God. You once were a slave to your sins, but now you are free to walk in newness of life! It’s not that you no longer sin but that when you do sin, you hate it and it seems unnatural. You once were blind, but now you see.

And once the Spirit “re-births” us to a new life in Christ, everything changes. We begin to seek true satisfaction in Christ alone. We begin to realize that He supplies the living water we’ve thirsted for all our life. None of us deserve this. But Jesus lived and died for undeserving

sinners like you and me because He is the very embodiment of God’s amazing love. The good news of God’s love for us is not like Jesus throwing you a life raft in the sea of eternity and you having to reach out and grab it. Instead, you are dead on the bottom of the sea and needing to be quickened to new life. God sent His Son into the world to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that our hardened and dirty hearts might be made new and that we might now have new life through Him.



THE SON BRINGS ETERNAL LIFE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus came to earth so that those who believe in Him would escape condemnation and have eternal life.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 3

+ **SETTING:**

John began his Gospel helping his readers understand that Jesus is God and pre-existed at creation and was active in creation. He continued with John the Baptist and his pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God. He then moved to the beginning of Jesus's ministry as He gathered disciples. In chapter 2, Jesus turned water into wine and began to show people how He is able to transform things in His power for His glory. His zeal for the Lord is unmatched. Chapter 3, then, begins with one of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, approaching Jesus at night. Nicodemus wanted to talk with Jesus about the signs Jesus was doing.

DAY 1

READ:

John 3:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 3:1-3

NOTES

In John 3, Nicodemus approached Jesus. Nicodemus was “a man from the Pharisees” and “a ruler of the Jews.” These descriptions meant that he would have been someone who was looked up to in the community. He would have been known for his strict following of the law and would have been well respected in the community. He would have been someone the people looked at and admired. He would have been known as a person everyone would have thought to be in the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus, when approaching Jesus, acknowledged that Jesus is from God and that God was with Him. He hadn’t even asked a question yet, but Jesus knew what He needed to hear. Jesus bluntly told him that unless he was “born again,” he could not see the kingdom of God. Despite Nicodemus’s moral character and adherence to the law and respected authority in the community, Jesus essentially told him that he still wasn’t a citizen of heaven.

Imagine hearing the words “born again” for the first time ever. What does that even mean? Would I have to die and come back? Would I have to go back in the womb and be re-birthed? And if so, why? Have I not followed every rule, dotted every “i,” crossed every “t”?

The gospel confronts us in our own sinful trust of our self-righteousness. We need to guard ourselves from the false way of thinking that our own morality will save us. There are many who think they will be saved because they are seen as “good people.” However, one’s identity as a “good person” is not what saves.

As Jesus taught here, one must be born again. Spiritually dead people cannot bring themselves to life. They need to have the life that comes from believing in Jesus Christ, that He is God, and His life, death, and resurrection is the only thing that saves us.

How might you be trusting in your own morality for salvation?

DAY 2

READ:

John 3:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 3:3-4

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #69: REGENERATION

Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

When Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Nicodemus was confused and asked, “How can a man be born when he is old?” He responded just like many of us would respond if we were talking to Jesus here. Yet Jesus was not speaking of a physical birth but a spiritual birth. Jesus used a human baby's birth as an illustration for the spiritual reality of new birth that needs to take place for someone to enter the kingdom of God.

Theologians have called this concept of being born again “regeneration,” which “takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5)” (see sidebar).

The only way for any of us to have eternal life and enter the kingdom of God is through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit bringing life where there was only death. Think about how incredible the miracle of regeneration is! God did not have to save any of us. However, in His mercy, grace, and love, God sent Jesus to save us from our sins! Understanding the nature of conversion should strip us of all our pride. There is nothing we can contribute to our own salvation, aside from repentance and faith, the resignation of any strength or worth we think we have on our own. We do not bring about this birth on our own, but God in His grace brings life to us.

The gospel is meant to humble us because we cannot save ourselves from our sins. Additionally, the gospel is meant to bring us confidence because the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in saving us is fully and finally accomplished.

How can you live a life of humble confidence while trusting in God's grace?

DAY 3

READ:

Ezekiel 36:24-30;
John 3:5-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 3:5

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The answer to Nicodemus' question, 'How can a man be born when he is old?' is: Only when he is willing to die to everything in his life, including his rights, his virtues, and his religion, and becomes willing to receive into himself a new life that he has never before experienced."¹

—Oswald Chambers
(1874-1917)

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless someone is “born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

There are all sorts of interpretations of what Jesus meant here. However, Jesus likely was alluding to Ezekiel 36. Jesus was using two metaphors (water and Spirit) from the Old Testament to teach about what being born again means. The metaphor of water in the Old Testament usually refers to a cleansing or renewal process. And the reference to the Spirit’s work reminds us of God’s sovereignty and control. He is the One working. He is the One washing and changing our hearts and giving us new life.

In Ezekiel 36:25-27, we see that both water and Spirit are used. These images in Ezekiel are used to signify a cleansing from impurity and the transformation of the heart. This cleansing and transformation will take place in order to help us follow God faithfully. Every single one of us needs to be cleansed from our sin. God is holy; therefore, our sin has separated us from His presence. We must be cleansed and filled with His Spirit. This comes about by the work of the Lord through the Holy Spirit in bringing us to saving faith.

Jesus was teaching Nicodemus that the process of washing and renewal has arrived. The only way for Nicodemus to be washed and brought to new life was to trust in Christ. The only way any of us can get into the kingdom of God is through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you have been washed and cleansed of your sins through faith in Jesus Christ, how will this change cause you to live a grateful life for what God has done for you?

DAY 4

READ:

Numbers 21:4-9;

John 3:14-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 3:14-15

NOTES

Are you prone to grumble? Every day we are given numerous opportunities to grumble and complain. At the heart of our desire to grumble and complain is forgetfulness. When we grumble and complain, we fail to remember what God has done for us.

In Numbers 21, the people of Israel began to grumble and complain against God and Moses. They had forgotten all that God had done for them. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and provided for their daily needs in the wilderness for forty years! Due to their grumbling and complaining, God sent a plague of poisonous snakes upon them. Moses, then, went to the Lord to intercede on behalf of the people. God told him to make a snake image and put it on a pole, and when anyone who was bitten looked at it, they would be healed (Numbers 21:8). Thankfully, the people repented and the Lord provided a way of deliverance for them.

Jesus used the example of Moses lifting up a serpent for the people's deliverance to explain to Nicodemus how all who look to Christ will have eternal life. God graciously gave the people in the wilderness a way to be delivered. In a small way, that deliverance pictured how Christ would be lifted up, and all who look to Him in faith for salvation and eternal life will also be delivered.

When we grumble, we are actually sinning against God. We are saying that what God has given us is not good enough. When things don't go our way, we can either turn to grumbling or we can turn to remembrance—remembering what God has done for us in Christ. People will not be drawn to Christ in you if you are known for grumbling. Christians should seek to be those who have joy in any circumstance because they have not forgotten what God has done for them.

How are you tempted to forget what God has done for you and complain?

DAY 5

READ:

John 3:16-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 3:16

NOTES

Are you amazed by God's love?

There are times when we no longer are amazed by the fact that God loves us. Yet it is truly incredible that He does. Think about how incredible this passage of Scripture is: "For God so loved . . ." Why would God love us? What have we done to deserve God's love? The answer is that we have done nothing to deserve the love of God! It is truly incredible to think that God does not simply "put up with us" but that He actually loves us.

How do we know that God loves us? The ultimate demonstration that God loves us and is for us comes from knowing that He sent His one and only Son so that everyone who believes in Him would have eternal life. The Lord would have been just and right to leave us in our sin, destined for eternity in hell. But praise be to God that He did not. God did not just save us from punishment for our sins—no, He also gives us eternal life! The wonderful gift of salvation means that God loves us and brings us into His own family.

God's love is never meant to be an excuse to sin though. There are some who wrongly misuse John 3:16 to justify their sinful lifestyle. The grace and love of God should never be used as a license to sin. The apostle Paul wrote that even though we have grace, that doesn't mean we should continue in sin (Romans 6:1-2). The love of God should change us and motivate us to live faithful and God-glorifying lives.

How has God's love transformed you? How is God's love transforming you still?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“And indeed from the Spirit comes our New Birth, and from the New Birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from Whom it is derived.”²

—Gregory of Nazianzen
(c. 329-390)

POINT 1: The Son came so that people might experience new birth (John 3:1-8).

KEY DOCTRINE #69: REGENERATION

Regeneration takes place at the _____ of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the _____ (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person’s life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is _____ to produce.



How should a biblical understanding of regeneration inform our evangelism?

Both the Old and the New Testament speak of the need to be made _____ in the power of God’s Spirit through a spiritual _____ of sin.

POINT 2: The Son came so that people might have eternal life (John 3:9-16).

Jesus used an Old Testament story to teach that _____ those who look to _____ in _____ will be saved from their sins and given eternal life.

God’s _____ is seen in that He did not leave the world in its sin but sent His only _____ so that all who believe in Him would not _____ but live eternally.



What is the present reality and future expectation for one who doesn’t believe in Jesus?

POINT 3: The Son came so that people might escape condemnation (John 3:17-21).

Our sin _____ us, but God sent His Son, Jesus, to _____ us and those in the world who would believe.

? Why should we not brush aside sins, even “small” ones?

Though human beings tend to run to the darkness, when we live by God’s truth, trusting in _____, we show that we are in the light because of God’s _____ in us.

? Why is sin so tempting and desirable at times?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been born again and have new life in Christ, we live with eternity in view as we prioritize calling others to be born again.

- **HEAD:** How have you heard about God’s love in Christ? Experienced God’s love? Come to believe in Jesus as the saving gift of God’s love?
- **HEART:** What sins are tempting you this week that you will ask God to strengthen you to overcome?
- **HANDS:** How does knowing that everyone who does not believe in Jesus is already condemned (John 3:18) motivate you to be courageous in your witness to the gospel?



Scan this QR code to access this session’s Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Our Redeemer and Maker, who was Son of God before the ages, became Son of man at the end of ages. Thus the one who, through the power of his divinity, had created us to enjoy the happiness of everlasting life, might himself restore us, through the weakness of our humanity, to recover the life we had lost.”³

—Bede (c. 673-735)

THE SON OFFERS LIVING WATER

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus promised the Samaritan woman that all who believe in Him receive living water—the Holy Spirit—who completely satisfies the longings of the heart and enables true worship of God.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 4

+ **SETTING:**

Jesus was returning home to Galilee after some time spent in Judea. Instead of going around the region of Samaria, He went through it. While in Samaria, He stopped at a well and interacted with a Samaritan woman who was known for her immoral lifestyle, seeking satisfaction from the pleasures of the world. Jesus met her and promised that He could give her living water—the Holy Spirit—who would completely satisfy her deepest longings.

DAY 1

READ:

John 4:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 4:6-7

NOTES

In John 4, Jesus encountered a woman from Samaria at Jacob's well. She went to the well at noon to draw water alone in the heat of the day. We know from later verses that she was a social outcast because of the immoral lifestyle she had chosen to live. She was thinking that day that she would sneak off to get some water by herself in her shame. Jesus, however, had other plans for her.

Though Jesus was weary from His travels, He was always obedient to God, not only in the structured rules but also in complying to God's will and mission. He saw an opportunity to share good news with a Samaritan, a non-Jew, a Jewish enemy, so He took that opportunity. He was first in starting the conversation and He did so casually in asking her to give Him a drink.

In our own lives, sometimes we think evangelism is such a big word and sharing the gospel is so difficult. But if we follow Jesus's example, we find that everyday conversations easily could lead us to spiritual conversations. The first step seems to be the hardest: just taking the initiative in saying something, anything.

"How was your week?" to a barista.

"Has it been a busy day?" to the grocery clerk.

"This weather is amazing!" to your neighbor.

Little did the Samaritan woman know that Jesus's first words to her, "Give me a drink," would lead to a transformation that comes from knowing Jesus. Some may be hiding in sinfulness or shame, but once someone reaches out with a word and it develops into a spiritual conversation, God's glory and the spread of the gospel can flourish. Once this woman encountered the Lord Jesus Christ, she was changed and became a witness for Christ herself.

What conversation starters can you think of with specific people in your community that you can initiate this week?

DAY 2

READ:

John 4:9-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 4:11-12

NOTES

“Are you greater than our father Jacob?” This is the question the Samaritan woman asked Jesus in John 4:11. Jesus met her at Jacob’s well. This well had been running for nearly two thousand years before Christ came to earth and had been meeting the daily needs of the people around it. Actually, if you were to go to Jacob’s well today, you could still drink water from this well. For nearly four thousand years this well has been running and providing water.

While this well that Jacob dug gave the people enough water to be drawn for a day, Jesus is greater than Jacob because His gift is greater. The water that Jesus has come to provide is greater because one sip from what Jesus offers is enough to never thirst again. While Jacob’s well provided for the people’s physical needs for a day, Jesus’s water is greater because it brings eternal life. Jesus was using the physical illustration of water to describe the eternal life that He brought to those who would believe in Him.

Another reason why Jesus is greater than Jacob is because He is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God promised Abraham that “all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring” (Gen. 22:18). Jesus is greater than Jacob because He is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that through his offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Jesus’s talking with this Samaritan woman was a fulfillment of the blessing of salvation going out to the nations.

How can you follow Jesus’s example to talk to anyone anywhere to share the gospel this week?

DAY 3

READ:

John 4:13-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 4:15-18

NOTES

Inside of each one of us there is a longing for more. Inside of everyone there is a longing for fulfillment and a longing to worship. There is a reason why millions of people travel every year to visit beautiful national parks like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon. Humans long to enjoy something that is greater than themselves. However, the problem comes when that longing for fulfillment and worship turns inward or turns to a continual chasing after the desires of our sinful flesh. The desires of the flesh will never truly satisfy, nor will they ever quench our thirst for fulfillment.

The woman at the well was longing to be filled. However, she was turning to the desires of her sinful flesh to find fulfillment. Instead of those desires filling her inner longing, she moved from relationship to relationship. She had likely moved from husband to husband thinking the next person would fill that longing inside of her, only to be disappointed every time. Now, the only One who could quench her deepest desire was standing right in front of her.

In John 4, Jesus points us to the sources of our longing for more. Jesus alone can quench our thirst for true fulfillment and joy. Only by receiving the gift that Jesus brings can our thirst be quenched. Jesus said that whoever drinks from the water that He gives him will never thirst again (John 4:14). What is this water that Jesus offers? Ultimately, it is the gift of salvation and eternal life. Jesus explained that the water He gives will become a well springing up in him for eternal life (John 4:14). This water is the Holy Spirit and His power welling up in us. Have you come to drink of this water? Have you received this gift from Jesus?

Where are you looking for true satisfaction and joy right now other than in Jesus?

DAY 4

READ:

John 4:16-24

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 4:19-23

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #90: WORSHIP

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

When someone is spiritually dead, they need something to shock them to life, which is what Jesus was doing here in His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. When Jesus told her to go call her husband (John 4:16), this would have been shocking. However, what was even more shocking was when Jesus exposed her past, knowing that she had five husbands and the current one wasn't even her husband (John 4:18). How could Jesus have known about her sinful past? Who was this man who knew her life story?

When Jesus told her to get her husband, He was exposing her sinful idols that she had been holding on to. The Lord does not allow us to keep our idols from Him. When we are called to follow Jesus, we are called to lay down our idols at His feet and follow after Him alone.

What are the idols that you are trying to keep from the Lord? It is only when we lay those things down that we are able to follow Jesus faithfully.

This woman would have been shocked by all that Jesus knew. However, Jesus knew that this shock was exactly what she needed to be brought to life. After Jesus exposed her shameful past, she changed the subject to a theological debate over the proper place of worship. Jesus told her that those who worship God will worship in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). The only way for her to truly worship God was to trust in the One who was standing right in front of her.

What idols are you holding on to in your life that need to be confessed to the Lord?

DAY 5

READ:

John 4:27-38

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 4:34-35

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Throughout the Scripture . . . God celebrates the diversity of His creation. He does not distinguish between races in His saving love. He created man in His own image, sent His Son to save the world, and saves anyone who believes. God calls Christians to be imitators of Christ and to walk in love. If He doesn’t show partiality, neither should we.”¹

–Trillia Newbell

When the disciples returned, they found Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman. They were surprised at why He was doing this as it wasn’t normal for men back then to talk to strangers who were women, and a Samaritan at that.

Once the woman left, the disciples told Jesus that He needed to eat. However, Jesus let them know that He had food that they didn’t know about (John 4:32). They were confused, so Jesus went on to explain that His food was to do the will of the Father and to finish His work (John 4:34). Just as Jesus used the physical illustration of the well water to explain a spiritual reality earlier in chapter 4, here He used the physical illustration of food to explain the spiritual reality of doing God’s will.

Jesus was alluding to Deuteronomy 8:3-6, specifically verse 3, which says that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Living on God’s Word means keeping His commands (Deuteronomy 8:6). Jesus, then, is the perfect fulfillment of these verses as He told His disciples that there is greater nourishment in doing the Father’s will than in eating any food they had to offer Him.

The Father’s will for Jesus was to reveal His identity as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman that she might have life and be part of God’s kingdom. The mission of God is to save humankind for His glory. For Jesus, there was greater satisfaction in seeing this woman come to believe in Him than any meal this world could ever offer.

Jesus then told His disciples that they did not need to wait any longer for the harvest of souls because the harvest was already upon them. We should not be distracted from this priority like the disciples were, but we should have an urgency to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

What can you do this week to do the will of God in sharing the gospel with someone?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Because Jesus treated this stigmatized woman as someone worth talking to, she became a witness to Jesus, and all of Sychar was brought to him.”²

—Samuel Ngewa

POINT 1: The Son gives living water (John 4:7-14).

Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman about the physical need for _____ to explain how, through Him, our spiritual need for _____ is fulfilled.



With what types of people might we find it difficult to share the good news of Jesus?

Jesus is greater than Jacob because His _____ is greater—one sip from the water that Jesus _____ is enough to never thirst again.

POINT 2: The Son enables true worship (John 4:19-24).

KEY DOCTRINE #90: WORSHIP

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the _____ and extends to all areas of _____. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian’s life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and _____ other Christians, but it also serves as a _____ to non-believers of the greatness of God.

True worship comes from knowing the truth of the _____ and _____ of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and from being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.



Why are truth and the Holy Spirit necessary for our worship of God?

POINT 3: The Son provides an abundant harvest (John 4:34-38).

Jesus used the need for _____ and nourishment to teach His disciples about the importance of doing God’s _____ , especially in terms of evangelism and mission.



Why is evangelism so important to God?

Whether sowing or reaping in the harvest of _____ , all _____ are important in the mission of God.



How can we have a stronger sense of urgency in sharing with others the good news of Jesus?

MY RESPONSE

Because Christ satisfies our deepest longing, we worship Him as a way of life, praying that God might use us to draw others to Himself so that their thirst might be quenched as well.

- **HEAD:** How will knowing that Jesus Christ talked with all types of people help you live on mission for Him this week?
- **HEART:** What hurtful attitudes toward a particular person or people group will you confess to God that He may restore you with the truth of His grace?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you sow the seeds of the gospel this week in hopes of seeing a harvest for Christ?



Scan this QR code to access this session’s Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Jesus calls the quickening gift of the Spirit ‘living water’ because mere human nature is parched to its very roots, now rendered dry and barren of all virtue by the crimes of the devil. But now human nature runs back to its pristine beauty, and drinking in that which is life-giving, it is made beautiful with a variety of good things and, budding into a virtuous life, it sends out healthy shoots of love toward God.”³

–Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376-444)

THE SON EMBODIES DIVINE LOVE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God, who in His essence is love, has called on people to love one another according to His love for them.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 4

+ **SETTING:**

In his letter known as 1 John, the apostle John, one of Jesus's disciples, exhorted his readers to be on guard against false prophets. His readers must not be caught up in worldly errors but know "the Spirit of truth" (1 John 4:6). John then went on to point his readers to the importance of love in their relationships with one another. This love is rooted in the love of God for His people. Knowing "the Spirit of truth" should lead to love that looks like God's love for us. Our love for our fellow Christians is rooted in the gospel. Belief in the gospel should lead to love for other believers and for the whole world.

DAY 1

READ:

1 John 4:7-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 4:7

NOTES

Are you a loving person? This may seem like a silly question, but one of the marks of a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus is love for others. In 1 John 4:7, John called his readers to “love one another.” The reason why we are to love one another is due to the fact that “love is from God.” The basis for our need to love one another comes from the character of God. If we belong to God and seek to live for Him, then we should seek to be like Him. This includes loving one another.

One of the worst ways to compromise a church’s witness in a community is a lack of love. A church that is made up of people who do not love each other is an awful witness. Jesus said that others will know His disciples when they see them loving each other (John 13:35). Not only does love come from God, but our love for one another is a sign to the world that we are followers of Jesus. Therefore, we should seek to be loving toward the people whom God has placed in our lives. The way the church loves one another actually serves as a witness to the watching world. How can you work to make sure love is a defining mark of your church?

Is your life marked by a love for others, or is it marked by a love for yourself? Love for our fellow Christians is fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives.

What can you do this week to show love and care for someone in your church community?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Let no one say that when he sins he sins against other people but not against God, for how can you not be sinning against God when you are sinning against love?”¹

—Bede (c. 673-735)

DAY 2

READ:

1 John 4:7-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 4:8-9

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #13:

GOD IS LOVE

To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

How does the world define love? Much of the way the world speaks of love has to do with what others can do for you. We see this over and over in movies where the characters love each other because the affection of the other person makes them feel special. In other words, for the world, love is self-centered. However, that is not the case when it comes to biblical love. Biblical love is others-centered. We love one another not to get something out of a relationship but because we genuinely desire the good of others. We see this in 1 John 4:8-9. God's love for us is sacrificial and others-centered.

First John 4:8 shows us that love is one of the pieces of evidence in our life that we truly know God. John wrote that those who do not love “do not know God.” Those are terrifying words and should cause us to search our hearts. John shows us that those who have experienced God's love are truly changed and transformed. Instead of living solely for ourselves, we should live to make much of Jesus and love our fellow believers.

What does John mean by “God is love”? This verse has been misunderstood and at times misused. Some have misused this description of God as a license to live however they please. They dismiss their sinful actions by thinking that because God is love, He will let them live however they want. But “God is love” means that one of His key characteristics is love and it is in perfect union with His holiness. If we are to be Jesus's followers, then we will strive to love like God and live as God would have us to.

John also shows that God does not simply love us in a conceptual or theoretical way but in a concrete way—through sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to earth so that we might live. The love of God is meant to transform us. Our status before God is transformed and our relationships with one another are transformed.

What is some evidence that your life is characterized by God's transforming love?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

NOTES

We live in a day when there is much debate over the spiritual gifts, such as whether spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues continue today or they have ceased. While these are important topics to discuss, we must not overemphasize these debates about the gifts of the Spirit and miss out on the importance of the fruit of the Spirit. If we think our current debates about spiritual gifts can be controversial, the church in Corinth would make these debates look childish. The church in Corinth was being splintered into different groups due to these debates over the spiritual gifts. This is why Paul wrote to them about a “better way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). First Corinthians 13 comes right in the middle of a long section about spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14). Paul was showing the church at Corinth that if these gifts are truly being used in a God-glorifying way, then their lives should be marked by love and unity, not by division.

What about you? Are you known more for being divisive than you are for being loving? Our world is full of division, some good and some bad. However, in the church, our common love for Christ should unite us in a common love for one another.

Paul was warning the believers in Corinth, and us today, of the dangers of seeking power at the expense of love and unity. The better way is not the possession of powerful gifts that can easily lead to pride but humility marked by a love for our fellow believers. Is your life a constant pursuit of pride or is it a pursuit of humble love? Do you live for your own reputation or do you live for the good of others? The only way we can live with this humble love is to look to Christ and be transformed by His redeeming love in the gospel.

What topics in the church are you or have you been divisive about in the present or past, and how are you dealing or have you dealt with them?

DAY 4

READ:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 13:4

NOTES

One of the distinctive marks that developed over time in the early church was their kindness toward those in desperate need. First Corinthians 13 would have been a formative section in Scripture for developing patience and kindness. Whether it be toward widows, orphans, or unwanted infants, the early church's kindness was a defining mark that gave them opportunities to share the love of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul begins to paint a picture of what Christian love looks like. The first characteristic of love is patience. Paul wrote, "Love is patient." This could also be translated "long suffering." Christian love does not leave when things get hard but sticks through until the end. God Himself is patient with us, longing for us to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). If God is patient with us, then we should seek to be patient with others. When the circumstances of life get difficult, we are not to lose patience and move on. We should see the challenges in our life as an opportunity to practice the discipline of patient love. May you seek to use the trials and hardships of this broken world as an opportunity to practice loving patience.

Additionally, Paul said that love is kind. Paul used this word here to show how love is not simply an emotion but involves action. Due to the loving-kindness that God has shown us in Christ, we are to be kind toward others in our actions, in our words, and in our thoughts. In our present culture, this can sometimes be difficult to do. Yet through our kindness toward others, we can share about the reason why we are kind—because Christ has been kind to us. We must not overlook the apologetic for the Christian faith that is our kindness inspired by the love of God for us.

How is your love for others proving to be patient and kind?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

NOTES

When we think of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (and 8a), we often think of marriage, but none of us has lived up to this ideal description of love. We can't, so this passage helps to point us to the One who perfectly followed what Paul was teaching here—Jesus Christ. The greatest act of love the world has ever seen was the Lord Jesus Christ going to the cross to die for our sins. Love is not simply an emotion or a feeling; as we see at the cross, love requires action.

Eight characteristics described in this passage tell us what love is not: love does not envy, love is not boastful, love is not arrogant, love is not rude, love is not self-seeking, love is not irritable, love does not keep a record of wrongs, and love does not find joy in unrighteousness (13:4-6). Think for a moment about the picture of love that Paul was painting here. When you think of those eight characteristics of what love is not, how far short of that standard do we fall? We all fall incredibly short.

Finally, Paul stated positively that love rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Think again about the way Paul described love here. How are you doing at living out the biblical understanding of love? Again, we see how far short we fall.

Yet there is One who never failed to love in this better way—the Lord Jesus Christ. Where we have so often fallen short of this biblical standard of love, Jesus lived this out perfectly. His life was marked by love, and even His death on the cross was marked by love. He went to the cross to die and purchase for Himself a sinful people who needed to be transformed by the love of God. Love is not about receiving; rather, it is about giving. We see this ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead so that we might know God and be loved by Him.

How do you see Christ's love reflected in this passage, and how can you live that out in your own life?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH


“Right love of God is what enables right love of self and others. When we devote heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving [God], we perceive ourselves rightly—no room for pride or self-exaltation—which prepares us to love our neighbor freely. Rightly perceiving ourselves to be the unworthy recipients of the *agape* [love] of God, we become willing to love our neighbor in spite of himself because God first loved us in spite of ourselves. We do not wait to feel love; rather, we will ourselves to act in love whether we feel it or not. *Agape* transcends our feelings.”²

—Jen Wilkin


POINT 1: The Nature of Love (1 John 4:7-10)

KEY DOCTRINE #13: GOD IS LOVE

To say that God is love is to say that God is the _____ of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a _____ that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in _____ so that we might become reconciled to Him.


 **How does the Bible's description of love contrast with the world's view of love?**

Love is best exemplified by God's _____ His Son as a _____ for us that we may know God's love and learn to love others sacrificially.

 **What are some ways people can misunderstand God's love?**

POINT 2: The Primacy of Love (1 John 4:11; 1 Cor. 13:1-3)

Following Christ's _____, we must love _____ sacrificially.

 **Why do you think we find it difficult to love others?**
_____ and _____, even if learned and done for the Lord, are pointless if we don't have _____.

POINT 3: The Character of Love

(1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Love is _____ and considers the other person
_____ ourselves at every opportunity.



Paul's list is not exhaustive in terms of what love is or is not. What would you add to the list?

It is _____ to love perfectly this side of heaven, but as we look to Jesus's love and example for us, we can be empowered to love _____ .



What can you do to help you love better?

MY RESPONSE

Because God, out of His great love, has sacrificed of Himself for us, we are to love others and sacrifice greatly on their behalf.

- **HEAD:** How might the truth that "love endures all things" help you in your relationship with other Christians?
- **HEART:** What person or group of people do you need to love better, and how?
- **HANDS:** What is one concrete action you will take this week to love in the way Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Love, and do what thou wilt: whether thou hold thy peace, through love hold thy peace; whether thou cry out, through love cry out; whether thou correct, through love correct; whether thou spare, through love do thou spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good."³

—Augustine (354-430)

UNIT 21

+

WITHOUT FAITH

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

TO PLEASE GOD

“You Are the Son of God!”

by Daniel Ritchie

Mistaking a person for someone else is easier to do than many might assume. It actually happens to me quite a bit. It happens most of the time when I am visiting a church, but I have also had it happen to me when I am at the airport or at a restaurant. People will walk right up to me and ask, “Are you Nick Vujicic?”

Let me backtrack for just a second because there are a few things that Nick and I have in common. We both preach and speak for a living. We both have beards. Lastly, we both are missing limbs. I was born without arms and Nick was born without arms and legs.

Given the fact that there are not many bearded preachers who are missing limbs, it would be easy to assume that I am Nick. I always feel bad for people when I let them down by telling them that I am not Nick and I am not mad at them at all. They made an assumption on my identity because they had never met me and they had no idea who I really am.

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

We can fall into the same trap of mistaken identity when we allow our faith assumptions to crowd our perspective of who Jesus is. We see people’s mistaken assumptions of Jesus throughout the Gospels. The people of Nazareth could not get past the wisdom and power evident in Jesus’s life because to them, He was a simple boy who was the son of a carpenter (Mark 6:2-4). The Jewish leaders feared that Jesus would topple their position of authority with the power that He both lived with and taught with (John 11:48). The Romans saw Jesus as a threat to their governing power and mockingly labeled Jesus as “King of the Jews” on a sign at the top of His cross at Golgotha (John 19:19).

These assumptions and priorities led people to overlook the greatest news the world has ever known—the saving work of Jesus through His death and resurrection

When we see the Father rightly, we will worship Him rightly.

because of His grace and mercy. It is so important for all of us to see who Jesus is and what He has done for His church. In looking deep into the truth of Scripture, any false assumption about the identity of Jesus is shoved to the side.

JESUS, OUR GOD AND MESSIAH

By peering into the Bible, we see Jesus for who He truly is—the powerful Son of God, the promised Messiah sent for our salvation. When we begin to take stock of who the triune God is and all that He has done, we must respond. Paul painted a clear and simple picture of the grandeur of God in Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things.” This verse reveals the picture that God makes all things, sustains all things, and that His glory is the ultimate aim of all things.

In light of this picture of who God is, we also see that Paul gave the church in Rome the only viable response to such power and grace—because of God’s mercies, we should present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to the Father—this is true worship (Rom. 12:1). When we begin to perceive the power,

grace, and mercy of God, the only right response is to offer all we have as a response. When we see the Father rightly, we will worship Him rightly.

In coming to know who Jesus is, we begin to hear clearly His guiding voice in our lives through the Spirit and His Scriptures. Jesus described Himself as the good shepherd and the church as His sheep in John 10. In John 10:4, Jesus said that His sheep will follow Him because they know His voice. When the sheep spend time with their Shepherd, a trusting relationship is developed. In this relationship, the sheep will respond in faith to go where the Shepherd goes and to yield to the call of the Shepherd.

In looking deep into
the truth of Scripture,
any false assumption
about the identity
of Jesus is shoved
to the side.

NEW LIFE IN JESUS

As we see Jesus for all that He is and place our faith in Him as our Savior, Lord, and King, everything about our lives will be changed from top to bottom. Paul laid out how faith in Jesus changed his entire life as he wrote to the church at Philippi in Philippians 3. He declared that his righteousness did not come from any good work or moral choice he made—His righteousness came through faith in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:9). Paul's identity and worth were not rooted in any accomplishment or possession. He was able to withstand all sorts of loss and trials because of what placing his faith in Christ won him (Phil. 3:8). He found his identity and worth in the person and work of Christ alone (Phil. 3:9). Paul's life was entirely changed for the better the moment that he placed his faith in Jesus on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9), even as earthly troubles followed him from that moment forward. It was all worth it because of the gain that came from trusting in Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

Jesus was not merely a bold teacher to glean truth from. He was not simply a moral man worthy of emulating. Jesus is the Son of God, the living prophecy, and the fulfillment of the serpent crusher promised in Genesis 3:15. He is the very Word of God who came to this earth so that all who receive Him might become children of God (John 1:12).

When we see Jesus as He truly is—our Savior, our Lord, our everything—we see the only One we can fully rest our lives on.



Jesus is the Son of God,
the living prophecy, and the fulfillment
of the promised serpent crusher.

REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who came to bring good news to all people.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 4

+ **SETTING:**

With a view toward presenting proof of messiahship, Luke presented an orderly account of the life of Jesus through his Gospel. Filled with connections to the Old Testament, the Gospel of Luke recounts the power of Jesus, the Christ, and affirms the prophecies fulfilled in the events that unfolded throughout His life. Jesus began His public ministry in the insignificant village of Nazareth, His hometown. Here an incredible moment occurred. Jesus attended a local synagogue service, as He had many times before. But in this particular service, Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, would claim to be the long-awaited Savior and turn this small town on its head.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 3:21–4:21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:14-16

NOTES

The authors of Scripture did not throw together a random order of words, sentences, and paragraphs; their works were carefully crafted. The structure and organization of each book points to its purpose. Many books cover a span of years, oftentimes decades, and are not comprehensive. The human author, led by the Holy Spirit, had to choose what to leave out and what to keep and then how to present it. Sometimes they used a basic statement of facts. Other times they communicated through storytelling, dialogue, or poetry.

Luke's Gospel is no exception. After recording the miraculous birth of Jesus, His early life, baptism, genealogy (traced back to David, Abraham, and Adam), and Satan's failed attempt to tempt Jesus, Luke turned to the personal life and ministry of Jesus, starting in His thirties. Each of the literary units up to this point provides proof of Jesus as the promised One and of His authority as the Christ, the Messiah.

As Luke continued his deliberate progression, he took special care to emphasize the enabling presence of the Holy Spirit throughout. Once he began with the details of Jesus's public ministry, Luke wrote that Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14). Luke then zoomed in to give a snapshot of the preaching ministry of Jesus and recorded Jesus's proclamation to the people that because of His presence, "Scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:21).

The order of events here and these first recorded words are no accident. Luke 4:14-30 is a preview, the thesis of what is to come throughout the rest of the book. Jesus will proclaim the good news. Many will forsake this message and seek to stop Jesus. Yet God's purpose, which includes the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, will be accomplished. No scheme of man can stop His plan.

Knowing Scripture is deliberate and focused on Christ's purposes for the salvation for humankind, who can you share that good news with this week?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 4:16-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:18-19

NOTES

The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible. Yet the reality the word represents—one God in three Persons—is all throughout Scripture. Both the Father and the Spirit can be seen clearly throughout the Old Testament, as can the Son through the promise of the Messiah. The New Testament presents Jesus as the fulfillment of those messianic prophecies and continues to show the work of the Holy Spirit alongside the purpose and plan of the Father.

Luke pointed to the work of the Trinity earlier in Luke 3:21-22 as he described Jesus’s baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit and the voice and words of the Father.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, there is a theme of trinitarian collaboration. Most clearly, Luke presented the life and ministry of Christ Jesus. But when we pay attention, we can also see the empowering presence of God the Holy Spirit, supporting and guiding God the Son every step of the way. Each moment of messianic ministry, every special stirring of the Spirit, led up to the finale of God’s plan.

With this prophesy in Luke 4 brought to light, seen through the lens of the Trinity, we can better understand the significance of this moment. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have brought healing, freedom, and abundance to any who will place their faith in Jesus as their only hope.

How does the doctrine of the Trinity help you understand God better?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Kings 17:8-16;

2 Kings 5:1-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:25-27

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #36:

SIN AS MISSING THE MARK

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's standards set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious choosing of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is intentional. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.

The narratives recorded in the Old Testament are important for life and faith. And when they are recalled or repeated in the New Testament, they can have a double sense of importance. But without a good handle on the Old Testament, we miss much of the in-depth meaning within the New Testament. Gratefully, we have tools like cross-references that can help us out. Reviewing Old Testament stories alluded to in the New Testament can help us better understand the nuance and significance of the words recorded in the New Testament. As demonstrated by the crowd's response to Jesus's references, the original audience needed no explanation. They caught what Jesus was throwing.

So, what exactly was Jesus throwing? It is significant that He recalled two stories from the Scriptures. Whenever there seems to be comparison, contrast, or any sort of repetitive wording, using simple lists or charts can help us begin to better understand a passage. Consider crafting a table to make sense of Jesus's teaching in Luke 4.

There is a parallelism between the two stories Jesus referenced. Both told of great need in Israel. Both showed how God did not act on behalf of the Israelites. Both showcased a display of God's favor toward a Gentile. Jesus highlighted the faith-filled actions of the Gentiles and God's grace given to them.

As you read of how God reached out to various types of groups, to whom can you reach out with the gospel in word or deed that is "outside" your normal group of influence?

DAY 4

READ:

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:28-29

NOTES

Anger can be a right and good thing. When someone wrongs us or one of our loved ones, it is a normal reaction to become angry. The Bible speaks of God's holy and righteous anger toward sin and sinners. Jesus Himself displayed anger toward the hardhearted (Mark 3:5) and even the disciples when they hindered children from approaching Him (Mark 10:14). So if Jesus could be angry and still be perfectly righteous, then being angry is not inherently sinful. It is our motivation behind our anger and what we do with our anger that can lead us to sin.

Several places in the New Testament address anger, and most of those references are commands to lay aside or cast off our anger (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:8). James said that the anger of man doesn't produce righteousness (James 1:20). The command in Ephesians 4:25 is not "Don't be angry," it is, "Do not sin," specifically, to not let the sun go down on our anger. Holding on to anger—even anger at the right things—will lead us into sin.

Yet not all anger is righteous. There are certainly times when our anger is sinful. In fact, anger can often be an indicator of idols in our lives. We see this clearly in the synagogue members' response to Jesus. Their god was their tradition, their religion, their special status. These idols usurped the authority of God's rule, and when something threatened their idols, anger spilled out of them—lots of it. Sinful anger rarely stays put. It takes over and drives us to even deeper sin.

So when we encounter anger, we must be quick to release it. If it isn't already sin to begin with, it will most certainly lead us to transgression again and again.

When you get angry, what are some ways you can deal with it in yourself and before God?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Hot heads and cold hearts never solved anything. May God give us cool heads and warm hearts."¹

—Billy Graham (1918-2018)

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 14:8-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:29-30

NOTES

The transition between Luke 4:29 and 4:30 is jarring. It feels a bit like riding forward, full throttle, only to slam on the brakes. The cyclone of the enraged crowd was about to take matters into their own hands. Yet Jesus simply passed through the crowd like the imminent threat on His life didn't exist. This must have been a miracle.

In Acts 14, we see another mob in another city, resulting in yet another miracle. Paul, after being beaten—to the point that his Jewish assailants thought him to be dead—simply got up, entered the city, and got on with his life's work of preaching about Jesus. This too must have been a miracle.

In a world full of spiritual enemies (and a social network that rarely misses a beat), it is easy to give in to fear. What if I speak up too much and anger the crowds? What if the vitriol spewed on social media gets sent my way? What if the God-haters decide to take out their anger on me or my loved ones? What if God sends me into a dangerous situation and asks me to speak truth?

In this early stage of His ministry, the crowd did not overtake Jesus, but this would not be the last time He encountered an angry gang ready to kill. Ultimately, it would be the same sort of people who put Jesus on the cross. Paul too had and would encounter more murderous mobs. But the thing we often forget is that God is always in control.

God's power is not subject to the savage.

God's sovereignty cannot be sabotaged by the tactics of the throng.

God's grace for His people cannot be dislodged from our days, even when all around us seems to give way.

What are some Scriptures you can cling to when you are tempted to forget God's power and plan?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The tragedy of the world is sin. The one obtruding fact in the world today is the fact of sin. The one galling yoke on human necks and hearts in the world today is the yoke of sin. Jesus came to remove that yoke. Jesus came to break those shackles. Jesus came to set men free, and to put their feet on the solid Rock, Himself, the Divine Saviour. Whoever comes to Him receives deliverance, forgiveness, redemption, salvation."²

—George W. Truett (1867-1944)

POINT 1: Jesus is the Messiah bringing good news to Israel (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus was _____ by God with the Holy Spirit to bring restoration, freedom, and the Lord's favor to those who receive Him by _____ .

? **What characteristics of our triune God are reflected in this passage?**

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's _____ to His people—He is the _____ , the Anointed One.

? **If Jesus fulfills God's ultimate promise and purpose, how should we view our salvation through Christ?**

POINT 2: Jesus is the Prophet bringing grace to the world (Luke 4:22-27).

The Jews marveled at Jesus at first but wanted to see a _____ because of their _____ , like those before them when God gave them His prophets.

? **What are some reasons why people might refuse to listen to God's mouthpieces?**

Jesus warned the Jews with the stories of the widow and Naaman who, though _____ , received the offer of God's _____ because their saving faith led to faith-filled actions.

? **How would you describe the relationship between saving faith and works?**

POINT 3: Jesus is the Son experiencing rejection by His own (Luke 4:28-30).

KEY DOCTRINE #36: SIN AS MISSING THE MARK

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's _____ set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious _____ of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is _____ . We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.



Why is admitting our sin so hard to do?

Though the crowd had the end of Jesus in mind, _____ had other plans. It was not yet time for Jesus to die, so no matter the plans of human beings, the will of God _____ .

MY RESPONSE

Because we are no longer estranged from God but are now accepted by Him through Christ, we seek to live in peace with all, forgiving greatly as we have been forgiven.

- **HEAD:** How do the truths of God's sovereignty and grace change how you see and relate to God?
- **HEART:** How does the reality that, if not for God's grace, you would be a part of this murderous mob stir your heart toward worship?
- **HANDS:** What steps will you take today to make the Great Commission a more integral part of your life, knowing God has saved you from sin?



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VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We may note in passing that [Jesus] was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval."³

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

AMAZED BY THE MESSIAH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus's power over evil and sickness showed people that He is the Messiah, the One who had come to usher in God's kingdom.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 4

+ **SETTING:**

In contrasting the rejection of Jesus in His hometown with the events that followed later in Capernaum, Luke purposely drew a comparison between these two narratives. Though the Nazarenes demanded Jesus give them a miraculous sign, He responded with a rebuke. But in Capernaum, Jesus provided several displays of His power. Though we may not always know why Jesus worked one way in one place and worked another way elsewhere, we can trust that He is omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign, and perfectly working out His will to do the will of His Father.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 4:31-44

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:31-44

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #35:

DEMONS

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and now continually work evil in the world today (Job 1:6; Zechariah 3:1; Luke 10:18).

Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work, as seen in the Bible's description of Satan, the head of demons, who seeks to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10). Though demons have power, they are limited by God's control and can only act within the constraints of what God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.

From the dawn of time, God has been using His words to bring life and abundance (Genesis 1). God said, and there was. He spoke to Moses to give His people His law (Exodus 20). The Lord said, and there were good and righteous commandments to follow. Out of great compassion, God also spoke words of warning through the prophets. Thus said the Lord, and what was foretold came to pass. Yet Jesus is the Word sent from God to bring grace and truth to humankind (John 1). The Word became flesh, and human beings beheld His glory.

Again and again, we can see that the words of God hold great power. He does not need physical brawn or intellectual power to effect change or create substance. He is the source of all, able to bring forth by Himself anything He pleases. While on the earth, Jesus demonstrated this power by using His words to teach, drive out demons, heal, and proclaim His mission. He commanded and the evil spirit obeyed. He spoke and the sickness vanished. He rebuked and the demons lost their voice.

Today, we hold the Word of God in our hands, and these words hold the same power they always have. They are words that bring life and salvation. They are words that set people free. They are words we ought to treasure, savor, and adore. Yet so often we forget the force behind these words, we fail to treasure these truths, and we ignore the Person in the precepts. The Word of God is not merely a book full of words on a page. It is divine power gifted to us that we may know, love, and worship the omnipotent One who delivered it to us.

How can you better treasure God's Word today?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 4:31-37

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:33

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Being a believer doesn't give you immunity from the assaults of the enemy, but it does give you access to the power of the Father—His power to defend you as well as reverse what's been done to you. If you want to win the fight—if you want to join me in flipping the script, pinning down the enemy, and crippling his impact in your life—the key is realizing you're connected to more spiritual brawn than is coming against you."¹

—Priscilla Shirer

Most of us have stories of how other Christians have wounded us or others we love. This is a harsh reality that so many hurts come from within the walls of the church. This may be a simple case of immaturity on the part of the offender. Or perhaps an offense taken was not even originally intended. But there certainly are cases of sheer evil from within the congregation where an individual stirs up trouble, violates trust, and brings about great turmoil to the bride of Christ. Even in Jesus's day, it was from within the synagogue that a man with a demonic spirit brought about a disturbance.

The harsh reality is that there are dangerous people within the church. Some are wolves in sheep's clothing who do not know or love God and who dwell among the sheep to take advantage of them. Others are true believers, but they don't realize Satan is using their disobedience to attack the church from within. On one hand, these realities ought to surprise us. Demons have no place amidst God's people, nor do they belong in God's house. However, we shouldn't be surprised that Satan uses whomever he can to further his plan. The evil one is a cunning foe, and if he can keep us fighting among ourselves and wounding one another, he can distract us from our purpose.

Though we cannot control the actions of others, we can be on guard and prepare to shield against the fiery darts the evil one will throw our way (Ephesians 6:16). Too often we attack one another while our true adversary watches with delight. Let us be men and women of wisdom and mercy as we navigate stormy relational waters. Let us remember that save the grace of God, we would be the "problem child." Let us be aware of the spiritual battle we are in, ever prayerful and ready to fight the evil one's attacks on the body of Christ.

What can you do to combat Satan's schemes within the church?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 4:14-44

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:38-44

NOTES

In 2020, after months of sheltering in place, civil unrest, and nationwide protests, many businesses were on the brink of bankruptcy. Not only were they hurting financially, some found themselves smack dab in the middle of rioting, chaos, and physical destruction of property. Doors were closed, windows boarded, and selling shut down. Amidst the aftermath, one video went viral. The footage showed a woman who approached a worker, borrowed his power tool for a photo op, then promptly left the scene in her luxury vehicle. Presumably, the woman took the photo to make it seem as if she had been hard at work in the protection/restoration efforts.²

Of course, a seventeen-second video can never tell the whole story,³ but regardless of whether this particular woman's motive was to present a falsehood, the phenomenon known as performative activism is widespread. There is a temptation within every human to put off the appearance of being better than we really are and doing more than we actually do. It could be through virtue signaling, actively managing our image, or simply not correcting someone when they attribute positive motives to something we did when that wasn't quite the case.

Jesus filled His life with helping people in both public and private settings. There were marvels He performed amidst the crowds as well as wonders accomplished that only few knew about. He enacted miracles, both seen and unseen, and often He told people to be silent about His powerful deeds. Jesus did not act on behalf of His image. His compassion for people and His obedience to the Father fueled the life and ministry of the Son of God. Let us follow in the footsteps of Christ through wholehearted obedience, compassionate service, and with no regard for our image beyond that which brings glory to God.

What are some ways you can serve and care for others for the glory of God, even if no one else sees your deeds?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 4:31-44

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:44

NOTES

Accounts of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) have flown into headlines throughout the decades. Personal tales of encountering these UFOs make for great movies inspired by speculative stories. Recently, since not all instances are actual objects, “UFOs” have undergone a name change to UAPs: Unexplained Aerial Phenomena. Regardless of their name, the eyewitness narratives often include loads of presumption and very little physical proof. Even with a name change, these UFOs/UAPs retained the first letter within their name: U for unidentifiable or unexplained. Time will tell if additional information will emerge that can explain the unexplainable, but when it comes to believing in these Unexplained Aerial Phenomena, we don’t have much concrete evidence to hold onto.

Unfortunately, many treat the Bible more like a UFO than the authoritative Word of God. Not only is the Bible authoritative, it is also reliable. Often the very details we gloss over in a passage are some of the most important details when it comes to authenticity. Here in Luke 4, the geographic details can be confirmed. Synagogues have been uncovered. Landscapes fit the description. People have been verified. With every year that passes, more and more archaeological evidence points to the veracity of scriptural accounts. What is known in the annals of history has affirmed details found in the Bible.

We can trust God’s Word—not only because God Himself is faithful and trustworthy, not just because we have personally experienced transformation from its message, but because there is ample proof that the people, places, and periods mentioned in the Bible existed. These words we get to enjoy are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17), endure forever (Psalm 119:160), and prove true (Psalm 18:30). God’s Word is not a book full of unidentified phenomena. It is real, living, active, and trustworthy.

What are some ways you can share the trustworthy words of Scripture with someone who needs the hope of the gospel?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 16:21-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 16:21-23

NOTES

If we take an in-depth look at the ministry of Jesus, we can identify many instances of strategic moves made. However, we will also find plenty of times when His actions seem antithetical to His purpose. This would have been especially true for those watching the life of Jesus unfold, those who didn't have the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. Undoubtedly, the disciples and followers of Jesus found themselves scratching their heads, wondering what in the world Jesus was doing. One instance of this was when Peter had the boldness to rebuke Jesus's announcement that He must suffer at the hands of the religious leaders. Jesus, in turn, vehemently chided Peter, calling him a hindrance who had his mind set on the things of human beings instead of the things of God.

The ministry of Jesus cannot be turned into a calculated formula for us to follow. His key to success was not in the strategic moves He made; it was found in His intimacy with His Father. This closeness afforded Jesus a perspective no earthly guru could give. Christ's nearness to God provided the knowledge of His character, His plan, and His desires.

Today, through the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and the words of God before us on the pages of Scripture, we also can know God intimately. We can comprehend His character, His plan, and His desires. As we do, we can receive the same wisdom and perspective of Jesus, which defies human wisdom and is superior to all earthly strategy. This allows us to make better decisions and not be swayed by the whims of the world. We can be tethered to God's truth, grounded in God's goals, and steered by God's scope.

What decisions are you facing today for which you will ask for and apply God's wisdom?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Satan can do nothing in this world, and nothing in your life, apart from the sovereign permission of God. Satan is a lion (1 Pet 5:8), but he is a lion on a leash. And God holds the leash. Demons decidedly do not have all authority; Jesus does.”⁴

—David Platt

POINT 1: Jesus’s powerful teaching prompts astonishment (Luke 4:31-32).

Jesus’s move to Capernaum was not to avoid the Nazarenes but primarily a _____ move to proclaim the _____ in a more diverse, catalytic space.

? How should we balance strategy with faith in and dependence on the Holy Spirit in our ministry efforts?

Jesus preached from the absolute _____ of God the Father, through the _____ of the Holy Spirit, and with perfect knowledge of God’s plan, such that the people were astonished at His teaching.

? What does it mean to teach with authority today?

POINT 2: Jesus’s power over unclean spirits fuels amazement (Luke 4:33-37).

KEY DOCTRINE #35: DEMONS

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and now continually work _____ in the world today (Job 1:6; Zechariah 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons _____ God and seek to destroy His work, as seen in the Bible’s description of Satan, the head of demons, who seeks to “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). Though demons have power, they are _____ by God’s control and can only act within the constraints of what God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.

? Why might we struggle to recognize the work of demons today?

As the sovereign _____ of all things,
God the Son—Jesus—by the word of His mouth,
commanded the demon and it had to _____ .

? What does it say about us when we don't obey
God's command?

POINT 3: Jesus's proclamation of the gospel reveals His mission (Luke 4:38-44).

Jesus repeatedly demonstrated His power, divinity,
and _____ as He healed sicknesses and liberated
demon-possessed people. Both the physical and the
spiritual are _____ to Him.

? How did the actions of Christ reveal His mission?

Jesus was steadfast in His purpose, obeying the
_____ and fulfilling His _____ in all
that He did, proclaiming the good news of the
_____ of God.

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has set us free from sin and death, we
recognize and embrace His authority over every area
of our lives as we proclaim what Jesus has done for us.

- **HEAD:** In what areas of life do you need to
remember the reality of God's ability and
power to save?
- **HEART:** In what areas of life do you need
to repent and submit to the authority of our
powerful, loving, and caring Savior?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will walk
forward in the authority of Christ and proclaim
the good news today?



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The life of a believer is a series
of miracles wrought by 'the
mighty God.' He is mighty to
keep His people holy after
He has made them so, and to
preserve them until He brings
to completion their spiritual
existence in heaven."⁵

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

OBEDIENCE TO THE MESSIAH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus called His followers to exercise faith in Him in such a way that they would draw others to place their faith in Christ as well.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 5

+ **SETTING:**

Jesus is on the move. On the heels of Jesus's Capernaum declaration that He must go to other towns, the backdrop of His ministry has turned to the seaside. People are still pursuing Him, but the winds of the crowds seem to have changed from an affinity toward sensationalism to an eager desire to learn more about God and the purpose of Jesus. From the banks of the sea, He will perform another miracle, but this one will be in the context of everyday life. Jesus not only has power over demons and disease, He can also direct creatures of the sea and the eternal trajectory of souls.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 4:38–5:3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:1-3

NOTES

As we follow the ministry of Jesus, it is evident that He had many followers. Throughout the Gospel accounts, there are many mentions of Jesus's attempts to find a moment to be alone after a day full of people's requests. The wonders and miracles of Jesus certainly warranted the gathering crowds. But Jesus discouraged the sensationalism. He didn't seek to be a celebrity to congregate around. He came to be a Savior to depend on.

Even today, it is easy for people to get caught up in the performance aspects of gathering. Whether it be a dynamic new preacher or the fancy new stage lights, it is tempting for churchgoers (both leaders and attenders) to get caught up in the entertainment value of church. Currently, courses and books abound on how to gather crowds and influence people—many of which are specifically geared toward Christian leaders. While it can be helpful to make some modifications to provide a more welcoming environment for newcomers, many times we can go overboard.

When all was said and done, those who sought Jesus for His salvation message, not His healing skills, stuck around. Nowadays, there are still those who seek the flashy and fun over the substantive and salvific. However, aesthetics of the service are momentary, and as trends shift, eventually the latest and greatest will not be enough to keep those people who crave "better." The message of God, however, is timeless and life-changing. It's God's Word alone that can draw souls in and keep them coming.

What do you value most about the services and ministry of your church?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:4-8

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #73: IMPUTATION

When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or transferred to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to us (Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Romans 4:6).

Perhaps this point in time—the one where Jesus defied all fishing wisdom and logic—was the instance when Peter first placed his faith in Jesus as Lord. Maybe this was the moment that the fisherman went from spiritual death to life. But God had even more in store for Peter, and transformation didn't happen overnight. Peter, like each of us, was on a journey of growing closer to God. He incrementally saw Jesus more clearly as he continued to follow Christ. In just a few short minutes, Peter went from seeing Jesus as Master—a man of due respect—to declaring Jesus as Lord—a man whom he would do anything for. However, he still had a ways to go in his walk with God.

It's easy to think the men and women we encounter in Scripture had it all figured out. But they didn't. They stumbled. They failed. Not one of us "arrives" upon conversion. We all have growing to do. After all, it was Peter who rebuked Jesus about His plans, only to be rebuked himself (Matthew 16:22-23). It was Peter who snoozed instead of seeking God through prayer just moments before the Son of God was betrayed (Matthew 26:36-41). Most notably, it was Peter who, out of fear and cowardice, denied Jesus three times as the arrest and trial of Jesus played out (Matthew 26:69-75). Yet God also used Peter as an integral part of establishing His church. God doesn't wait for us to be perfect before He unfolds His plan. So, let's embrace our messy journey, lean on the power of God to use us, and seek to know Him more and more clearly as we go.

What are some ways you can move forward today and trust that God can use a work in progress like you?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:4-6

NOTES

On its best days, credible facts, compelling logic, and correct reason guides our society. Education and upbringing (and the School of Hard Knocks) have equipped us to make intelligent, rational decisions. This is especially true in our vocation. Whether our job consists of manual labor, processing data, or caring for people, every job involves training, regulations, and inspections to ensure we know how to complete tasks correctly. Deviating from the well-thought-out and proven plan is a difficult feat.

Simon Peter likely grew up on the water, pulling up nets full of fish. He had a system that worked. The local sea was as familiar to him as the back of his hand. Simon Peter discerned daily where and how to find and catch fish. So when Jesus told Peter to put out to sea and put down his nets, Peter knew within every fiber of his fisherman being that this was a waste of time and resources. Yet he trumped his logic with his mustard seed of faith, and he obeyed.

God may call us to do something antithetical to our training, experience, and logic. Scholars don't call God's work and plan the "upside-down kingdom" for nothing. Obedience to God often may seem illogical in the world's eyes. Following in faith may not make financial sense. Christian discipleship does not always fit within the world's definition of success. Living a life of worship to God will lead us to make decisions others will mock.

May we have the willingness of Peter to obey the Lord of lords, even when what He leads us to do makes no practical, fiscal, or logical sense to the world.

Who might you talk to this week to help you keep an eternal perspective and better obey the call of God on your life?

DAY 4

READ:

Isaiah 6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 6:4-8

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Calling is not a sacred privilege reserved for a select few, conveyed through some mystical manifestation. The call to leverage your life for the Great Commission was included in the call to follow Jesus: ‘Follow me,’ he told them, ‘and I will make you fish for people’ (Matt. 4:19). So you can stop waiting on a mystical moment, a wet fleece, or a quiver in your liver. You’re called.”¹

—J. D. Greear

Throughout the Old Testament, we have records of special, visible appearances of God to humankind. Known as theophanies, these were more than a mere God sighting. They were life-changing experiences filled with purpose, in which God typically provided a glimpse of His glory and plan. Human beings rightly responded in fear and worship. Occasionally, God commissioned the person with a new purpose or task, often attached to a promise.

Here in Isaiah 6, we can witness this pattern. God appeared to Isaiah and allowed him to see the Lord on His throne while receiving worship from heavenly beings. In response, Isaiah declared his sin-stained status. Because he saw the holiness of God, this caused Isaiah to see his sin more acutely. With this admission of sin, God provided forgiveness and cleansing to Isaiah. Then the Lord charged Isaiah with a significant task to bring the word of the Lord to His people—a message of warning and a call to repentance. This would prove to be an important moment in the life of Isaiah.

This pattern of theophany can also be seen in the New Testament. From the miracles of Jesus to the visions that came to the early church, God continued to approach His people, reveal His character, and bring clarity to His plan.

We also experience the special presence and commissioning of God. Instead of arriving in burning bushes, dreams, and pillars of light, God dwells within every believer in the Holy Spirit. Additionally, He has given us the council of His plan through the written Word of God. We don’t need to wait for God to arrive in some special way for us to know who He is or what He wants us to do. God’s glory and power are readily accessible within us. He has made His plan clear. Let us respond, as Peter and Isaiah did, in humility, submission, worship, and obedience.

What part of God’s commission and commands will you work on being more obedient to this week?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:5-8

NOTES

The perspective of a child is much different from that of an adult. When asked, “How old is your mother?” most preschoolers seriously state ridiculous ages (such as 11 or 78). Some kids think the moon is a big, heavenly night-light. Millions believe that Santa visits their homes on Christmas Eve to eat cookies and leave them presents. An adult understands that the moon has no light of its own and parents are the ones who eat the Christmas Eve cookies and place presents under the tree. Grown-ups can usually guess someone’s age within a small margin of error. Most of us can look back and point to a moment when we realized that the world we had in our mind’s eye was nowhere near reality.

Unfortunately, false perceptions and wrong facts about God don’t always end in childhood. Many still see Him as distant and disinterested, ignorant and impotent. Similar to how we can remember the moment we learned that the Easter Bunny wasn’t able to lay chocolate eggs, there are times when our perspective shifts about who God is. Maybe we thought He had been silent in a certain situation and long wondered where He was and what He was up to. Only later did we uncover that He had been perfectly orchestrating the best-case-scenario that exceeded our wildest dreams.

How we view God matters. God knows all, sees all, and is all-powerful. So when we have a chance to trust in His view of things instead of our own, let’s humbly remember that He is God, and we are not.

How has your view of God grown over the past year, and what can you do this week to further your understanding of who God truly is?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look to ourselves only, and not to the Lord also—He being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced.”²

—John Calvin (1509-1564)

POINT 1: Disciples are called to act in faith (Luke 5:1-4).

Jesus asked a _____ request of Simon, perhaps to gauge his obedience in light of a larger request to come. Those who are _____ with little will be _____ with much.

? **When we obey God, what is that saying about our understanding of Him?**

Jesus’s commands, indeed the commands of Scripture as a whole, may seem unwise or _____ to us, but they are worthy of our _____ nonetheless.

POINT 2: Disciples are stirred to confess in faith (Luke 5:5-8).

The commands of God may be beyond our understanding, but they carry the _____ and _____ of Christ, our Creator and Sustainer.

? **What are some reasons we have to trust the wisdom of God and obey His commands?**

When encountering the holiness of Jesus, the Son of God, true faith leads us to _____ and acknowledgment and _____ of sin.

? **Why would encountering holiness cause us to see our sin more clearly?**

POINT 3: Disciples are invited to follow in faith (Luke 5:9-11).

KEY DOCTRINE #73: IMPUTATION

When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or _____ to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's _____ was imputed to us (Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of _____ as belonging to them (Romans 4:6).

The call to follow Jesus comes with a _____ to join in His work of sharing the _____ of salvation by faith in Jesus.



What are some ways believers participate in the mission of catching people with the gospel?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been made holy through the work of Christ, we yield to the ongoing work of the Spirit in changing us to live according to our new identity so that others might see God's power at work in and through us.

- **HEAD:** What steps will you take so you can be confident about how God is leading you and then be faithful in obedience?
- **HEART:** What are some wonders you've seen God accomplish lately for which you will praise Him?
- **HANDS:** What will you change in your life this week in order to be a better fisher of people with the gospel of Jesus?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Here is a holiness that comes to sinners. Rather than going away, Jesus says, 'Join me.' Here is a holiness that uses a confessing sinner in its mission. Here is holiness that not only calls the sinner but commissions the sinner to become a fisher of men. Here is holiness so stunningly beautiful it causes a man to leave everything for its sake. It gives the former sinner a new purpose, direction, and call."³

—Thabiti Anyabwile

FAITH IN THE MESSIAH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Faith in Christ is the only means of salvation and relationship with God.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Romans 5; Hebrews 11; James 2

+ **SETTING:**

True discipleship in action involves obedience to Jesus Christ, confession of our sinfulness, and a desire to follow Jesus, leaving all else behind. Simon and the other disciples did just that. They demonstrated true faith in the person of Jesus. We are still on the topic of faith, but now we move to some of the letters of Jesus's disciples to learn more about what faith truly is as taught to the early church.

DAY 1

READ:

Romans 5:1-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 5:1

NOTES

There are many who thrive on physical order and cleanliness. If their house, yard, or office is in disarray, they find it hard to function. They may be out at work, running errands, or at a birthday party with friends, but all they can think about is how they need to calm the chaos. Others find themselves distressed when there is disorder when it comes to people. Perhaps they recently had an argument with a friend or family member. Maybe they find themselves in the middle of a relational storm in which they can't see a way out. This discord disturbs their souls terribly.

We all seek peace. Whether it be relationally, physically, or intellectually, there is something innate within us that knows that things are not as they should be. Though humankind tries to find peace through serene spaces, calm communication, and mystical meditation, peace ultimately and only comes from God. We can take a trip to calming coasts, but there are always storms on the horizon. For a time, we may enjoy healthy relationships and fruitful fellowship, but eventually, the selfishness of our hearts will come to crash the party. There is no amount of soul-searching that can save us from distress. Only God can provide a permeating peace.

When we admit our need for a Savior, confess our sins to God, and make Him Lord of our lives, He replaces our sin-stained, offending hearts of stone with righteous hearts of flesh. It is through this grace we can find peace. Then as we live out our time on earth and await our forever home in ultimate serenity, the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

How can you better rely on the peace of God amidst chaotic surroundings, relational discord, and internal turmoil?

DAY 2

READ:

Romans 8:1-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 8:12-17

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“A Christian who walks by faith accepts all circumstances from God. He thanks God when everything goes good, when everything goes bad, and for the ‘blues’ somewhere in-between. He thanks God whether he feels like it or not.”¹

—Erwin W. Lutzer

Etiquette varies from each region, culture, and time. In the Deep South, you’ll find rules about what women are to wear and when, how children are to address their elders, and the right amount of grip in a man’s handshake. Head west, and that which is a social blunder in Alabama, a Californian will not notice. Showing up on time (or a bit early) is a great American habit. But if you show up to church in Haiti, the start time is more of a suggestion—be prepared to wait hours before everyone gets there.

In many Asian cultures, it is expected to refuse a gift several times before accepting it with both palms turned upward. Whether it is a thank-you note with the item specifically named, waiting later to open the goodies (or not), as well as the reciprocation of giving later on, most hold to certain expectations around both the offering of and receiving gifts.

As Christians, we have received the greatest gift of all, and there is a biblical expectation of action to be taken in response to that bestowal of salvation. God’s grace accepted permanently changes a soul. Thus, we ought to show off our salvation, and according to the new life and identity God has granted us, we are obligated to. This is not to say that God is expecting us to pay Him back. (We never could!) But it does imply that there is a right response to the One to whom we owe everything: to put to death the deeds of the body, to be led by the Spirit of God and not by the spirit of slavery to sin, to name a few. In short, we say, “Thank you,” to Christ with obedient worship.

What can you do to say, “Thank you,” to God today?

DAY 3

READ:

Hebrews 11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 11:1-6

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #68:

FAITH

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Most of us have probably encountered a friend or acquaintance with the tendency to exaggerate. It could be the amount of weight he can benchpress, the elite company she keeps, the vacation home he supposedly owns in Mexico, or the story of a day she spent with a superstar. If it were only one epic tale, the benefit of the doubt would be more easily applied. But when each saga has an even more fabulous sequel, it takes a gigantic leap of faith for the listener to believe all of them. Over time, the ridiculousness of each claim casts more and more doubt on the validity of the stories. This also leads to doubting anything the person says, since his or her word cannot be trusted.

In the Word of God, with each story of God's faithfulness, we have the opposite effect. The Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11) in particular provides tale after tale of God's people drawing near and depending on the trustworthiness of God. Through each story, we get a clearer portrait of what faith in God looks like and how God blesses those who exhibit faith with His presence and provision. Hope rises through each account of an individual who chose to trust in God's way instead of their own. Some stories ended in great rejoicing. Others die gruesome deaths. All were commended for their faith, regardless of the outcome they experienced on earth as a result of their obedience. They understood that "God had provided something better" (Hebrews 11:40) for each of us who place our faith in God.

What are some other stories of faith from Scripture we can meditate on that point to the reality of God's trustworthiness?

DAY 4

READ:

Jeremiah 17:5-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Jeremiah 17:5-8

NOTES

Decades ago, after a hard, deep freeze in central Florida, many farmers of orange groves lost much of their crops and had to close up shop. There are numerous towns that have taken over those old orange groves, but today a few trees remain scattered throughout. Homeowners have planted other citrus trees alongside the existing orange trees in hopes of obtaining their own small crop from the Florida sunshine. Most of these citrus trees look identical. Their leaves, branches, and general shape are the same. It's not until they produce fruit that one can tell if the topiary is a lemon, orange, or grapefruit tree. If the trees are unhealthy, they don't put out fruit, which makes it difficult to know what type of tree it is. But the thriving citrus tree will put out fragrant blooms in the spring, followed by the fruit it was destined to produce. Only then can one identify the tree.

We too can be identified by our fruit. Scripture often uses trees as a symbol of the life of God's people. The thriving, healthy Christian will be a resilient, fruit-bearing soul—no matter the season she finds herself in. This fruit is proof of a life saved by Jesus. Worship-fueled works bring an assurance of salvation, both to the Christian and the watching world around her. The actions that can only be explained by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us are the evidence of our true identity as children of God. Just as a citrus tree without fruit simply takes up space, so faith apart from works is useless. True faith in Jesus always leads to fruit. James so rightly stated that just as how the body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without works (James 2:26).

What are some examples of faith-fueled fruit that can only be explained by the work of God in your life?

DAY 5

READ:

James 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

James 2:5-14

NOTES

Many a teacher, parent, and grandparent can identify with the reality that some kids are fantastic at hearing but not listening. Though the eardrum receives the vibrations of sound, amplifies them, and sends them on to the nervous system to process the hearing, there are times when actual listening does not occur. Children are not the only ones who present this lack of listening. Adults often tune out in noisy situations. Amidst a cacophony of a family with young children, a mother may hear many words while she cooks dinner and her thoughts are elsewhere, until she is brought back by the “Mom, Mom, Mom, MOMMY!” of her children. Even in a one-on-one conversation, we’ve each found the attention of our minds drifting to other subjects than that which we were hearing.

Hearing is passive. It is a physiological phenomenon that happens automatically, without thought. Listening, however, is intentional. The same is true for our spiritual ears. How many sermons have we heard of which we could not retell one detail about over Sunday lunch? How many verses have we read that we’ve simply skimmed over so we can check off a box on a reading plan? God is speaking. If we are not hearing His voice, it isn’t because He’s not loud enough—it is because we are not listening. Earlier in his letter, James made this connection: “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). A faith that listens is a faith that responds. A mere claim of faith proves nothing. A simple hearing of the gospel changes nothing. It is spiritual listening that leads to a faith that works.

How can you go beyond mere hearing and better listen to the Word of God this week?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We can picture faith as a connection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the power at work in our new nature. Faith is a wire that conducts a current called grace that flows from the Spirit so that the new nature receives power."²

—Tony Evans

POINT 1: Faith in Christ changes a person's standing before God (Rom. 5:1-2).

KEY DOCTRINE #68: FAITH

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in _____ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and _____ of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as _____ and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

? What are some signs we might be leaning toward a works-based salvation instead of justification by faith?

Because of Jesus and the grace we are given, we have a _____ standing before God, and we rejoice looking forward to the day when God's glory is Christ is _____ for all to see.

? How can our lives reflect the joy we have in the hope of the glory of God?

POINT 2: Faith in Christ changes a person's relationship with God (Heb. 11:1-6).

The Bible gives us many examples of _____ people with whom God was pleased to be in relationship because of their _____ .

? Why might we try to prove ourselves to God by means other than faith?

Faith involves believing that God is _____ that He says He is—sovereign, powerful, good, and faithful. Without faith in this God, it is impossible to _____ Him.

POINT 3: Faith in Christ changes a person's actions for God (Jas. 2:14-26).

Saving faith is displayed through active _____ and _____ done for the Lord.



How is saving faith different from the belief the demons have in God?

Those who have proven faithful in the past were those who trusted in the _____ and _____ of God and acted in response to that trust.

MY RESPONSE

Because God has provided salvation from sin through our faith in Christ, we seek to live out that faith, showing the watching world the difference the gospel makes.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can continue to learn more about God as an act of faith rather than simply gathering facts?
- **HEART:** What are some practices you can add to your time with God that will help you respond in faith and worship?
- **HANDS:** What specific faith-filled works are you being called to do this week by God as acts of worship and evangelism?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Faith gives us peace with God, not the law. For it reconciles us to God by taking away those sins which had made us God's enemies. And because the Lord Jesus is the minister of this grace, it is through him that we have peace with God. Faith is greater than the law because the law is our work, whereas faith belongs to God.”³

—Ambrosiaster (c. 4th century)

PURPOSE MATTERS

by Daniel Davis

Knowing the purpose of something makes a big difference in the way we view and interact with that thing. This is certainly true of objects as a whole—it would be foolish to rent a motorcycle for the purpose of moving all your possessions from one home to another, just as it would be foolish to rent a moving truck for the purpose of going on a joyride.

Purpose becomes even more important as you examine the parts of a whole. Doctors and surgeons must know the reason for the individual parts of the human body in order to treat and heal a patient without causing further damage. Auto mechanics without an understanding of the purpose of parts risk more extensive, and expensive, repairs in the course of a simple tune-up.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

The Bible as a whole has one grand storyline and purpose—to reveal the person and work of God to the people He has created for their joy and His glory. Without this understanding, we are prone to mistake its meaning and misuse its words.

Yet the Bible is not just a whole but also the sum of its parts—66 books of the Bible, each with its own purpose to support the one grand purpose intended by the Author who inspired every word to tell His story.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPELS?

Perhaps the best examples of unique purposes for books of the Bible are the Gospels. These books focus on the same Person and period of history yet with different emphases. The Gospel writers sought to communicate the truth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, but they did so in unique ways because of different audiences and their own unique style, experiences, and theological intents.

- Matthew wrote to display for Jewish Christians the redemption God brought about through Jesus as the promised Messiah of God (see Matthew 1:1-17, which provides a genealogy to connect Jesus with the pinnacles of Jewish history in King David and Father Abraham).

The words of Scripture are filled with meaning and purpose to reveal God, and especially Jesus, for our joy and His glory.

- Mark wrote to display for Gentile Christians the redemption God brought about through Jesus as the perfect Servant of the Lord (see Mark 7:3-4, in which Mark explained a Jewish custom for the understanding of a Gentile audience).
- Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile Christian likely of high social standing, to provide an orderly account of the beginnings of Christianity so the reader would have reliable information about Jesus Christ (see Luke 1:1-4).
- John wrote for both Jews and Gentiles to provide an account of Jesus's life and the signs He performed so people would believe in Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, and experience eternal life (see John 20:30-31).

The varied purposes of the biblical authors and the singular purpose of the Author of the Bible inform how we read and understand their message. These aren't random verses and chapters thrown together; these aren't random books compiled on a whim. This is a story carefully crafted by God through history,

through historical accounts, and through prophetic and poetic writings. The words of Scripture are filled with meaning and purpose that the God of all the universe might be revealed and that we might know Him as He has revealed Himself ultimately in these last days through His Son, who is Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3).

HOW CAN WE DISCERN THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE?

In addition to reading and studying the Scriptures on our own and in community with the church, here are some resources that can aid in understanding the uniqueness of each biblical book and how it contributes to the Bible's story as a whole and points to Jesus Christ:

- A study Bible that provides brief introductions about the time period, context, audience, and themes for each book of the Bible;
- Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding the Bible: A Book-by-Book Overview, by Kendell H. Easley;
- A Bible dictionary, such as Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary;
- An introduction to the Bible, Old Testament, or New Testament;
- A theology of the Bible, Old Testament, or New Testament;
- Bible book volumes from the Christ-Centered Exposition commentary series.

Reading the Bible with its purpose in mind helps us to discover ours.

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