



THE **BASICS**

A Bible study for small groups

Group Outlines



THE BASICS

Table of Contents

Why are we having a small group?

1. **Answers.** To answer fundamental questions about a person's relationship with God.
2. **Discussion.** To have simple biblical discussion so that we can build a strong foundation for our faith.
3. **Friendship.** To develop a tight-knit community of friends.

Week 1: Introduction to Small Group

Why do we do small group? How?

Week 2: God Made You

Am I significant to God? Am I loved? If so, how much?

Week 3: Sovereignty of God

Is God really in control of everything? What does the word "sovereign" mean? How powerful is God?

Week 4: An Overview of The Gospel

What is the gospel of Jesus? What does it have to do with me now? How do I describe it simply? Is the gospel more intellectual or emotional?

Week 5: The Incarnation

What is significant about God coming to our world as a person? What does God's immense descent have to do with me?

Week 6: Who is Jesus? | Part I

Who is Jesus? Is he more God or man? How powerful is he? Why did Jesus come into our world? What did he teach?

Week 7: Who is Jesus? | Part II

What makes Jesus unique? What are some scenes from his life that show me what he's like?

Week 8: Sin

What is sin? What are its consequences? Are we born inherently good or inherently bad? What solution is there?

Week 9: The Cross | Part I

What were the events that happened in the hours leading up to the cross? What is the spiritual formula that took place on the cross?

Week 10: The Cross | Part II

Why did Jesus die on the cross? How much does God love me? Why did Jesus' death have to be so brutal?

Week 11: The Resurrection

Why is Jesus' resurrection significant? What does the resurrection mean for me now?

Week 12: Jesus is The Only Way

Why is Jesus the only way to access God? Is there a way to be good without Jesus?

Week 13: The Church

Why does the church exist? What does it look like in Scripture? How does it affect me today? Why should I be a part?

Week 14: Telling Others About Christ

How do I tell others about Jesus? What is my part and what is God's part?

Week 15: Difficult Circumstances

Why do bad things happen? What do I do with my pain? How does God expect me to respond in difficult circumstances?

Week 16: Prayer

What does prayer look like? How am I supposed to pray? What about all my prayers that go unanswered?

Week 17: The Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit? Why does he exist? What does he want with me? What is the Trinity?

Week 18: Studying The Bible

Why should I study the Bible? Where do I start? How do I stick with it? What does the Bible say about studying the Bible?

Week 19: Layout of The Bible | Part I

How is the Bible structured and why is it put together the way that it is? How can I become familiar with the Bible? What's God's big storyline?

Week 20: Layout of The Bible | Part II

Does the Bible have a continuous theme? What does the Old Testament have to do with Jesus?

Week 21: Review and Celebration

THE BASICS

Week 1

Introduction to Small Group

Why do we do small group? How?

Maint Point

Jesus gathered diverse groups of people and shared his life with them. The Bible teaches us not to give up meeting together and to encourage and help each other in our faith.

Introduction

We need to know why we do small group and how small groups are modeled the Bible. We can experience God deeply through friendships with other Christians.

For where two or three gather together as my followers, I (Jesus) am there among them. - Matthew 18:20 (NLT)

Iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend - Proverbs 27:17 (ESV)

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! - Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

Contents

- I. Why Do We Do Small Group?
- II. How Do We Do Small Group?

Discussion Questions

1. What has been your experience with Christian community? What made it good or bad?

I. Why Do We Do Small Group?

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. - Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT)

1. According to the verse, what do we as believers do when we get together?

2. What does the verse say about stopping small group?

*Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?" When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." - **Mark 2:15-17 (NLT)***

3. What kind of people did Jesus spend time with?

4. How would you define "sin"?

5. What do you think this small group setting looked and sounded like?

II. How Do We Do Small Group?

*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. - **Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)***

6. These people probably had different personalities. What brought these people together?

Let's get comfortable with one another. Partner up and fill out the following on the other person. In a few minutes you will take turns briefly introducing one another to the rest of the group:

What's your name and hometown?

What's your favorite movie?

What's your favorite music artist?

What's your favorite restaurant

What's the best trip you've ever been on?

Why are you in this small group?

THE BASICS

Week 2

God Made You

Am I significant to God? Am I loved? If so, how much?

Maint Point

We live in a society that awards significance based on what we have or do. But God chose to create us, knows everything about us, and loves us because of who he is, not because of anything we've done. Knowing how valuable we are to God helps know him more deeply.

Introduction

The truest thing about God is what he says about himself, not just what we think he is like. The truest thing about us is what God says about us, whether or not we believe it or feel it to be true.

Contents

- I. Self-Reflection
- II. Important Points

Discussion Questions

1. What was a time in your life when you felt especially significant?
2. Which is more true: What God says about himself or what we think he is like?
3. Which is more true: What God says about us or what we feel about ourselves?

I. Self-Reflection

For each section of Psalm 139 and the other two scriptures, note what stands out to you.

*O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far
away.
You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.
You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.
You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!*

*I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.
If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.
I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night—
but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.*

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.*

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.

*They cannot be numbered!
I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up,
you are still with me!*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*

- Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24 (NLT)

I (God) knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations. - Jeremiah 1:5 (NLT)

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. - Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)

Personal Questions: (We won't be discussing these answers. Be as honest with yourself as you can.)

1. We live in a society that awards significance based on our appearance, possessions, intelligence, education, or profession. In what ways, or from whom, do you feel significant?
2. Is there anything you wish was different about yourself?
3. Think of a specific situation(s) where you've felt insignificant, unloved, worthless, or had a poor self-image. Briefly describe it.
4. Write down what has been painful inside of you recently. (Questions, doubts, broken relationships, insecurities, etc.)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is a word, phrase, or idea that stood out to you from the scriptures?

2. Why do you think God tells us that he knows everything about us?
3. How does it make you feel that God knows everything about you?
4. How often is God thinking about us? How does that compare with how often we think of him?

II. Important Points

Only God could bring you, something so incredibly complex, into existence. He wants you to know that. Knowing that God was in control of our intricate creation should help us trust him with the things we do not understand.

*The newborn baby embodies innocence, yet conceals the most taunting of all riddles: the generation of human life. The story begins with sperm and egg as they combine to form a single cell. Sheltered in the mother's womb, the cell multiplies. Soon there are hundreds of different cells able to make some 50,000 different proteins to control the work of all our cells - collagen to build skin, insulin to control energy use, hemoglobin to supply oxygen. Before long, the groups of cells are gathering into layers, then into sheets and tubes, sliding into the proper places at the proper times, forming an eye exactly where an eye should be, the pancreas where the pancreas belongs. The order of appearance is precise, with structures like veins and nerves appearing just in time to support the organs that will soon require them. In four weeks the progeny of the first cell have shaped a tiny beating heart; in only three months they are summoning reflex responses from a developing brain. Nothing more than specks of chemicals animate these nascent cells as they divide. Yet in just nine months, some twenty-five trillion living cells will emerge together from the womb; together they will jump and run and dance; sing, weep, imagine and dream. - **The Incredible Machine by National Geographic Society (1986)***

Your Value

You are extremely significant to God, not because of what you do for him, but because he brought you back into a relationship with himself at an incredible cost. When someone dies for you, you no longer question if that person cares for you.

If someone were to buy a Coke at a convenience store, they may pay about one dollar. If a hopeful man were to buy a diamond ring for his soon-to-be fiancé, he may pay thousands of dollars. Do you know how much you cost? In order to purchase you back from being owned by sin God paid for you with the death of his own son - Jesus. Jesus' death shows you how valuable you are to him.

The gruesomeness of Jesus' death shows you how much you're worth. A punishment is a reflection of how severe a crime is. Our crime of sin against God is very severe, as can be seen by Jesus' pain on the cross. God's love for us immeasurable, as can be seen by his death and resurrection.

Application Question:

5. Why do I need to know how significant I am to God?



THE BASICS

Week 3

Sovereignty of God

Is God really in control of everything? What does the word "sovereign" mean? How powerful is God?

Maint Point

God is sovereign, meaning he is bigger than anything, knows everything, and is everywhere all the time. He is alone in his power, wisdom, and freedom. Knowing God is sovereign and good should give us confidence that we can trust him with everything.

Introduction

God is bigger than anything, knows everything, and is everywhere all the time. That means that wherever you are you can count on God to hear you and be near.

Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. - 1 Chronicles 29:11b (NLT)

*Only I can tell you the future
before it even happens.
Everything I plan will come to pass,
for I do whatever I wish. - Isaiah 46:10 (NLT)*

*God's love is meteoric,
his loyalty astronomic,
His purpose titanic,
his verdicts oceanic.
Yet in his largeness
nothing gets lost;
Not a man, not a mouse,
slips through the cracks. - Psalm 36:5-6 (MSG)*

Contents

- I. God's Power
- II. God's Knowledge and Wisdom
- III. God's Freedom
- IV. Important Points and Questions

Discussion Questions

1. What has affected your image of God throughout your life? (Other people, church, experiences, etc.)
2. The truest thing about God is what he says about himself, not just what we think he is like. When have you believed something about God that you found wasn't true?

I. God's Power

How much power does God have? If so, what does that have to do with me?

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.
Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world. - Psalm 19:1-4 (NLT)*

1. In your own words, what does this say?

*The Lord merely spoke,
and the heavens were created.
He breathed the word,
and all the stars were born. - Psalm 33:6 (NLT)*

*God has rolled up his sleeves.
All the nations can see his holy, muscled arm.
Everyone, from one end of the earth to the other,
sees him at work, doing his salvation work. - Psalm 52:10 (MSG)*

2. In your own words, what does this say?

3. What are some of the differences in the two verses? How does it describe how God sees us?

Creating the universe was effortless for God, like breathing. It cost him nothing. But when it came to him showing how much he loves you there was an enormous cost. God became a person, Jesus Christ, and died a brutal death. Do you realize what this means? You, individually, are more significant to God than the entire universe.

II. God's Knowledge and Wisdom

How does God know how to use all of his power? What does that mean for me?

If God can create and maintain a universe so big we can't measure it and have a name of more stars than we could ever count - all without any effort - then he can easily know everything on our hearts and minds.

*He counts the stars
and calls them all by name.
How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!
His understanding is beyond comprehension! - Psalm 147:4-5 (NLT)*

○ Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away...
How precious are your thoughts about me, ○ God.
They cannot be numbered!
I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand! - **Psalm 139:1-2, 17-18 (NLT)**

4. What is a word, phrase, or idea that stands out to you from these scriptures?

III. God's Freedom

God is all-powerful and infinitely wise, but can anything or anyone tell him what to do?

All the people of the earth
are nothing compared to him.
He does as he pleases
among the angels of heaven
and among the people of the earth.
No one can stop him or say to him,
'What do you mean by doing these things?' - **Daniel 4:35 (NLT)**

5. In your own words, what does this verse say?

IV. Important Points and Questions

*But all the stars and the mountains and oceans and galaxies and everything were nothing compared to how much God loved his children. He would move heaven and earth to be near them. Always. Whatever happened, whatever it cost him, he would always love them. - **The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones***

*What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. - **Matthew 10:29 (NLT)***

*Who is able to advise the Spirit of the Lord?
Who knows enough to give him advice or teach him?
Has the Lord ever needed anyone's advice?
Does he need instruction about what is good?
Did someone teach him what is right
or show him the path of justice? - **Isaiah 40:13-14 (NLT)***

Knowing God doesn't need us is a wonderful blessing. Only a God who has no needs is capable of loving unconditionally.

6. How does it make you feel that God knows and understands all of your thoughts and emotions?

7. How does knowing God's sovereignty change your attitude? What truth backs that up?

THE BASICS

Week 4

An Overview of The Gospel

What is the gospel of Jesus? What does it have to do with me now? How do I describe it simply? Is the gospel more intellectual or emotional?

Maint Point

Here is a way to order the gospel: Creation, Sin, Jesus, Life. Jesus became who we were so that we could be in his family forever.

Introduction

*For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. - **John 3:16 (NLT)***

*Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? - **Romans 8:32 (NLT)***

*You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. - **2 Corinthians 8:9 (NLT)***

Contents

- I. An Overview of The Gospel
- II. Scriptural Evidence
- III. A Visual of "The Great Exchange"

Discussion Questions

1. What comes to mind when you hear the words "the gospel"?
2. When you think about Jesus dying, do you have any questions? Any uncertainties on what it has to do with us?
3. Have you ever wanted to explain the story of God's love? How did it go? Did you have any questions yourself?

I. An Overview of The Gospel

The gospel (a.k.a. the good news about God's love) can be described like this:

1. Creation
2. Sin
3. Jesus
4. Life

1. **Creation**... God created man so that we could have an intimate relationship with him. God and man's relationship was perfect.
2. **Sin**..... Man got deceived and actively leapt away from God. Sin infected the human heart and from that point on every person is a sinner separated from God deserving death. Sin (man) and holiness (God) are incompatible; they cannot exist together.
3. **Jesus**..... God sent himself as Jesus to be a substitute in our place. His death on the cross was a payment for our sin.
4. **Life** Jesus then rose from the dead, guaranteeing that God's love for us and payment for our sin will last forever. The rest of our life in this world is a process of God making us more like himself.

II. Scriptural Evidence

1. Creation

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them...

*Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! - **Genesis 1:27, 31 (NLT)***

*By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen. - **Hebrews 11:3 (NLT)***

2. Sin

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. - **Romans 3:23 (NLT)***

*For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. - **James 2:10 (NLT)***

The Bible talks a lot about God's "Law." What is it?

*Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. - **Galatians 3:19a (NLT)***

The Law (God's big set of rules given to Moses more than 1,000 years before Jesus) is God's instruction about the behavior of his people.

The Law represents perfection. Since God is perfect, the Law is perfect. The Law includes the 10 commandments, rules for social life, and rules about worshipping God. It was and still is unable to make us good enough to be with God. It is impossible for a person to keep all the rules of the Law. The Law requires that we have perfect behavior, and when we fail, the law says that we deserve to die. In fact, we deserve to die even if we break just one law.

The Law didn't tell us how to be saved. The Law was a measuring stick that showed us how far from perfection we really are. God always knew the Law couldn't save us. The Law shows us that we need to be saved by Jesus.

3. Jesus

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. - **John 3:16 (NLT)**

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. - **1 Peter 3:18 (NLT)**

God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that.

The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for but we couldn't deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us. - **Romans 8:3-4 (MSG)**

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. - **Romans 5:8 (NLT)**

4. Life

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. - **John 1:12 (NLT)**

Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? - **Romans 8:32 (NLT)**

For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die. - **Galatians 2:21b (NLT)**

And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. - **1 Corinthians 15:17 (NLT)**

III. A Visual of "The Great Exchange"

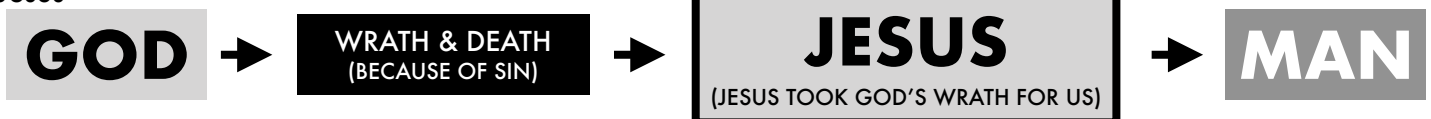
Creation



Sin



Jesus



Life



The Gospel in Four Minutes by Propaganda, a hip hop and spoken word artist

It's the full story of life crushed into 4 minutes
The entirety of humanity in the palm of your hand
Crushed into one sentence
Listen, it's intense right
God. Our. Sins. Paying. Everyone. Life
The greatest story ever told, that's hardly ever told
God. Yes. God
The maker and giver of life
And by life I mean any and all matter and substance
Seen and unseen
What can and can't be touched
Thoughts, image, emotions, love, atoms, and
oceans, God
All of it his handy work
One of which is masterpiece
Made so uniquely that angels looked curiously
The one thing in creation that was made with his
imagery
The concept so cold
It's the reason I stay bold
How God breathed in the man and he became a
living soul
Formed with the intent of being infinitely, intimately
fond
Creator and creation held in eternal bond
And it was placed in perfect paradise 'til something
went wrong
A species got deceived and started lusting for his job
An odd list of complaints, as if the system ain't
working
And used that same breath he graciously gave us to
curse him
And that sin seed spread though our soul's genome
And by nature of your nature, your species, you
participated in the mutiny
Our. Yes. Our sins
Its nature inherited, blackened the human heart
It was over before it started
Deceived from day one and lead away by our own
lusts
There's not a religion in the world that doesn't agree that something's
wrong with us
The question is what is it?
And how do we fix it?
Are we eternally separated from a God that may or
not have existed?
But that's another subject. Let's keep grinding
Besides trying to prove God is like defending a lion
homie
It don't need your help, just unlock the cage
Let's move on how our debt can be paid
Short and sweet
The problem is Sin
Yes. Sin
It's a cancer. An asthma. Choking out our life force
Forcing separation from a perfect and holy God
And the only way to get back is to get back to
perfection
But silly us, trying to pass the course of life without
referring to a syllabus
This is us
Heap up your good deeds. Chant, pray, meditate
But all of that of course is spraying cologne on a
corpse

Or you could choose to ignore it as if something
don't stink
It's like stepping in dog poop and refusing to wipe
your shoe
But all of that ends with how good is good enough?
Take your silly list of good deeds and line them up
against perfection, good luck
That's life past your pay grade
The cost of your soul you ain't gotta big enough
piggy bank
But you could give it a shot
But I suggest you throw away the list
'Cause even your good acts are an extension of your
selfishness
But here's where it gets interesting
I hope you're closely listening
Please don't get it twisted
It's what makes our faith unique
Here's what God says is Part A of the gospel
You can't fix yourself, quit trying it's impossible
Sin brings death
Give God his breath back, you owe him
Eternally separated and the only way to fix it is
someone die in your place
And that someone gotta be perfect
Or the payment ain't permanent
So if and when you find the perfect person
Get him or her to willingly trade their perfection for
your sin and death in
Clearly since the only one that can meet God's
criteria is God
God sent himself as Jesus to pay the cost for us
His righteousness, His death, functions as Payment
Yes. Payment
Wrote a check with his life but at the resurrection we
all cheered 'cause that means the check cleared
Pierced feet, pierced hands, bloodstained Son of
Man
Fullness, forgiveness, free passage into the promised
land
That same breath God breathed into us God gave
up to redeem us
And anyone and everyone
And by everyone, I mean everyone
Who puts their faith in trust in Him and Him alone
can stand in full confidence of God's forgiveness
And here's what the promise is
That you are guaranteed full access to return to
perfect unity
By simply believing in Christ and Christ alone
You are receiving Life
Yes. Life
This is the Gospel
God. Our. Sins. Paying. Everyone. Life

THE BASICS

Week 5

The Incarnation

What is significant about God coming to our world as a person? What does God's immense descent have to do with me?

Maint Point

Jesus came into our world and became a person. The better we understand how important this is, the better we understand how much God loves us.

Introduction

It was a generous act of love when God chose to make man in his image. And when God made himself into the image of a man we saw his love in a much closer way. God becoming a person changed God's relationship with humanity forever. The incarnation (a.k.a. God becoming a person) meant that human beings can see, hear, and know God in ways never before possible.

The visual picture here is of an immense "V" coming down and becoming a minute, measurable point, piercing our tiny time. In God's Incarnation, in the human of Jesus of Nazareth, the Absolute became relative, the Almighty - a baby, the Ancient of Days - nowadays, the Divine - human, the Eternal - temporal, the Immortal - mortal, the Infinite - finite. The believing human race is deeply grateful for this Immense Descent. -

Dale Bruner in The Gospel of John: A Commentary

Contents

- I. The Setting
- II. Jesus' Visitors
- III. Important Points

Discussion Questions

1. Think of the elements of the traditional Christmas story (Jesus in a manger, wise men, etc.). What comes to mind?
2. Think of what we've learned about God over the past few weeks. Was he forced to come to our world or did he come willingly? Most importantly, why did he come?

I. The Setting

*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. - **John 1:14 (NLT)***

*She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. - **Luke 2:7 (NLT)***

God - who is bigger than anything, knows everything, and is everywhere all the time - wasn't born in a palace. He was born in a feeding trough for animals. His parents weren't well-known, but instead were a humble engaged couple of a carpenter and a young woman.

1. Why did Jesus come in the form that he did?
2. What does that mean for us? What does that mean for you personally?

II. The Setting

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."*

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. -
Luke 2:8-16 (NLT)

Shepherds: The greatest event in history had just happened, and when it finally occurred, the announcement came to humble shepherds. Shepherds were lowly in society's standards. But God must have considered them important because he came to them first.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him..."

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. -
Matthew 2:1-2, 10-11 (NLT)

Wise Men: The magi (wise men who studied astronomy, astrology, and natural science) were thousands of miles away when they saw the star that directed them to the newly-born Jesus. They visited King Herod's palace looking for Jesus, and when Jesus wasn't there, they went to Bethlehem and found him. They brought treasures - frankincense, gold, and myrrh - just right for a king.

III. Important Points

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,

*he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.*

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

*he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.*

When he appeared in human form,

he humbled himself in obedience to God

*and died a criminal's death on a cross. - **Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)***

3. This passage tell us to have the same attitude as Jesus. How can we practice the same attitude that Jesus had in the incarnation?

This coming Christmas season, with all of this in mind, consider listening to traditional, biblical Christmas songs as if for the first time.

Oh Holy Night by Placide Cappeau in 1847

*○ Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the Spirit felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
○ night divine, the night when Christ was born
○ night, ○ Holy Night, ○ night divine!
○ night, ○ Holy Night, ○ night divine!*

*Truly He taught us to love one another
His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother
And in his name all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we
With all our hearts we praise His holy name
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!*

*Here, then is a claim that Aristotle - indeed, all the other philosophers and religious teachers of the world - would find outrageous. How could God be our intimate friend? How could we approach him with complete confidence? It is because God became like us, equally mortal and subject to suffering and death. He did it so we could be forgiven and justified by faith apart from our efforts and merits. That is why we can draw near. - **Tim Keller in Prayer, a devotional***

THE BASICS

Week 6

Who is Jesus? | Part I

Who is Jesus? Is he more God or man? How powerful is he? Why did Jesus come into our world? What did he teach?

Maint Point

Jesus is God in human flesh. God chose to come down to our world to show us what he is like and to rescue us from sin into life with him through his death and resurrection.

Introduction

This topic, "Who is Jesus?", will take two weeks. The first week will be an overview of Jesus' identity and mission - who he is and why he came. The second week will be a closer look at specific scenes from Jesus' life that explain what his heart is like.

The crucified Jesus should not be one theme among the preacher's many ["Next week we will study Elijah."] The Bible is not about the Bible or figures in the Bible. It is about Jesus Christ - in promise in the Old Testament, in presence in the New - and every Scripture we teach should be pointed to him exclusively. -

Dale Bruner in *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Contents

- I. Jesus' Identity
- II. Jesus' Mission
- III. More on Jesus

Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned about Jesus from last week's topic, The Incarnation?
2. Growing up, how did you learn about Jesus?
3. What is a specific memory you have learning about Jesus?

I. Jesus' Identity

Who is Jesus? Is he more God or man? How powerful is he?

Jesus Is God in Human Form

*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. - **John 1:14 (NLT)***

1. What about this verse shows us that Jesus is more than just a good, human teacher?

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. - **Colossians 1:15a (NLT)**

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?" - **John 14:8-9 (NLT)**

Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything. - **Colossians 2:9-10 (MSG)**

Jesus Is God's Perfect Sacrifice

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' - **John 1:29-30 (NLT)**

II. Jesus' Mission

Why did Jesus live on Earth? What did he teach?

Jesus Came on a Rescue Mission

For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost. - **Luke 19:10 (NLT)**

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son - **Colossians 1:13 (NLT)**

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. - **1 Peter 3:18a (NLT)**

How Did Jesus Rescue Us? (i.e. What made him the perfect sacrifice?)

The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. - **Romans 8:3-4 (NLT)**

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. - **Hebrews 4:15 (NLT)**

III. More on Jesus

The Old Testament, written many years before Jesus' birth, contains more than 300 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled through his life, death, and resurrection.

Here are just a few:

Jesus will be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2
Jesus will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12-13
Jesus will die by crucifixion.....	Psalm 22:14-16

This is who Jesus said that he is. Let's discuss a few:

The Son of Man.....	John 6:27
The Bread of Life.....	John 6:35
Light of the World.....	John 8:12
Door for the Sheep.....	John 10:7
Good Shepherd.....	John 10:11
The Resurrection and the Life.....	John 14:6
The True Vine.....	John 15:1

By seeing Jesus' heart we can come to know God's heart. Next week we'll look at specific moments from Jesus' life to get glimpses into his heart.

Interactions with Jesus:

A prophet	Matthew 3	The Roman governor	Mark 15:1-15
Fishermen.....	Matthew 4:18-20	A Roman centurion.....	Luke 7:1-10
A despised tax collector.....	Matthew 9:9	A poor widow	Luke 7:11-17
A lawyer.....	Matthew 22:35	A group of women	Luke 8:2-3
The high priest	Matthew 26:62-68	A homemaker	Luke 10:38-42
A helpless and paralyzed man	Mark 2:1-12	An outcast with leprosy.....	Luke 17:11-19
An insane hermit.....	Mark 5:1-15	The Jewish Council	Luke 22:66-71
A synagogue official	Mark 5:22	A king	Luke 23:7-11
A sick woman.....	Mark 5:25-34	A criminal	Luke 23:40-43
A young girl	Mark 5:41-42	A prominent religious leader ...	John 3:1-21
A woman from a foreign land .	Mark 7:25-30	A Samaritan woman	John 4:1-26
A young boy	Mark 9:17-27	A royal official	John 4:46-53
A group of children.....	Mark 10:13-16	An adulterous woman.....	John 8:1-11
A rich man	Mark 10:17-23	A traitor	John 13:1-3, 27
A blind beggar	Mark 10:46	An angry mob	John 18:3-9
Jewish political leaders	Mark 12:13	A doubting follower	John 20:24-29
		An enemy who hated him	Acts 9:1-9

THE BASICS

Week 7

Who is Jesus? | Part II

What makes Jesus unique? What are some scenes from his life that show me what he's like?

Maint Point

If we want to see the heart of God we look at Jesus. Jesus is a friend of sinners and what he does matches exactly who he is on the inside.

Introduction

Last week was an overview of Jesus' identity and mission: who he is and why he came. This week is a closer look at the specific scenes from Jesus' life that explain what his heart is like.

Contents

- I. Characteristics of Jesus
- II. Specific Scenes from Jesus' Life

Discussion Questions

1. What is a story about Jesus that is significant to you?

I. Characteristics of Jesus

He is **compassionate**:

The word "compassion" in the Bible is often translated from the original Greek word "splanchnizomai" [*Pronounced 'splanchnizomai'*] which means to be moved to one's bowels. The bowels were thought to be the seat of love and emotion, the deepest place of feeling imaginable. Examples of when Jesus felt splanchnizomai were when:

- He described people as sheep without a shepherd..... Matthew 9:36
- He fed groups of 5,000 and 4,000 hungry people Matthew 14:14, 15:32
- He healed two blind men Matthew 20:34
- He cleansed a leper Mark 1:41
- He met a widow whose son had died Luke 7:13
- He told the story of the prodigal son Luke 15:20

He is **understanding**:

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. - Hebrews 4:15 (NLT)

He is a **servant**:

and [Jesus] poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. - John 13:5 (NLT)

He is **transparent** (What is seen on the outside is exactly who Jesus is on the inside.):

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

*He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,
for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.*

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

*Everything was created through him and for him. - **Colossians 1:15-16 (NLT)***

II. Specific Scenes from Jesus' Life

Disciples Argue, and Jesus Welcomes the Children Mark 9:33-37

Zacchaeus, a Despised Tax Collector..... Luke 19:1-10

An Adulterous Woman John 8:1-11

Turning Over the Tables in the Temple..... John 2:13-17

Notes and Thoughts:

Questions I Have:



THE BASICS

Week 8

Sin

What is sin? What are its consequences? Are we born inherently good or inherently bad? What solution is there?

Maint Point

We are born with a spiritual disease in our hearts called sin that separates us from God. If we do not clearly understand what sin is and why we are the way we are, we'll have a relationship with God that can often lead to frustration and disappointment.

Introduction

The Bible teaches that the human heart is selfish and inclined toward evil. Though God loves us, because he is perfect he cannot live with evil. Habakkuk 1:13 describes God this way: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."

Have you ever noticed that no one had to teach you how to misbehave? No one taught you how to hit someone, tell a lie, scream in anger, or disobey instruction. Sin comes naturally.

*Lord, if you kept a record of our sins,
who, O Lord, could ever survive? - Psalm 130:3 (NLT)*

*The Lord looks down from heaven
on the entire human race;
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,
if anyone seeks God.
But no, all have turned away;
all have become corrupt.
No one does good,
not a single one! - Psalm 14:2-3 (NLT)*

Contents

- I. What is Sin?
- II. The Effects of Sin
- III. God's Solution

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever tried to assemble something without reading the directions? If so, what?

Read and discuss Luke 7:36-50

1. Describe the people around the dinner table before the woman comes in.
2. Describe the woman
3. Why did Jesus tell the parable of the moneylender and the debtors?

I. What is Sin?

Take some time alone to quietly read and answer the questions and commentary below.

When we understand the words God used to describe sin we can easily see that sin is everywhere. These words remind us that sin is not always obvious. Sin is not just a behavior. Sin is a spiritual disease buried in the human heart. Some of the most common words used to describe sin in the Bible are:

Hamartia [*ham-ar-tee-ah*] (Greek) - Often translated to the word "sin," this means to miss the target.

For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a (ESV)

1. What is God's target? What is an example of you missing the target?

Paraptoma [*par-ap-to-mah*] (Greek) - Often translated to the words "transgressions" or "trespasses," this means to go off a path or wander from the right way.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins... - Ephesians 2:1 (ESV)

2. Wandering away from God is natural to us. What is an example of you wandering away from God?

Akikia [*ad-ee-kee-ah*] (Greek) - Often translated to the word "unrighteousness," this means a crime or rebellion against God.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth - Romans 1:18 (ESV)

3. What makes sin a crime? What is an example of you rebelling against God?

The History of Sin (A summary of Ezekiel 28 and Genesis 1-3)

Part 1 - Lucifer was a beautiful angel. The Bible says he was "perfect" in his beauty. He became prideful and would not give God credit for his beauty. Instead, he wanted to be just like God. He rallied some angels with him and rebelled against God. They failed and were all cast to Hell. Lucifer (now called Satan or "devil") and his demons hate God and will do all they can for people to believe lies and not know how much God loves them.

Part 2 - God created Adam and Eve with needs: the need for significance, security, and purpose. God created them with needs so that he could meet them and they would trust him and know how significant they are to him. God told them that, for their own good, they could not eat from the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil. Adam and Eve chose to go against God and to eat from the tree. At that point sin infected the human heart. In a way, they said, "We want to be independent and take credit for our own lives! We don't want our significance to only come from God. We don't need him to provide for us to feel secure. We want to determine our own purpose and make our own decisions!"

Notes and Thoughts:

Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins. - Ephesians 7:20 (NLT)

4. In your own words, what does this say?

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. - Romans 5:12 (NLT)

5. In your own words, what does this say?

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin." - John 8:34 (NLT)

6. What is slavery like? In your own words, what does this say?

*For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. - Psalm 51:5 (NLT)*

7. In your own words, what does this say?

For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. - Romans 8:7-8 (NLT)

8. In your own words, what does this say?

*We are all infected and impure with sin.
When we display our righteous deeds,
they are nothing but filthy rags.
Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall,
and our sins sweep us away like the wind.* - **Isaiah 64:6 (NLT)**

9. In your own words, what does this say?

II. The Effects of Sin

In Genesis 3 everything changed. Let's take time to focus on how drastically creation changed when sin entered the world. All pain and sadness originates from this moment:

Spiritual Death Like a person inherits their parent's features, all of humanity now inherits Adam and Eve's dead heart (Ephesians 2:1).

Physical Death..... Creation was reversed. Thorns started growing on rose bushes, weeds tangled themselves among flowers, the first death happened when God killed an animal and made clothes for Adam and Eve. Scripture says that creation is in "bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21).

Pain..... Childbirth became extremely painful. And of the first children to be born - Cain and Abel - one murdered the other.

Distortion..... Sin infected and corrupted God's design for the human heart's emotions. The heart that was once satisfied became envious. Joy became destructive anger. Dependence on God became selfish pride. All goodness became all badness.

Groaning..... Scripture (Romans 8:22) says that from this point forward all creation would be groaning, deeply yearning, trying to find something or someone to save us from this curse.

10. What evidence of sin do you see in the world? What evidence of sin do you see in yourself?

No One is Without Sin

The smallest black stain ruins a white dress. One drop of dye colors an entire pitcher of water. God is perfect, and the universal laws that God wrote say that perfection and imperfection cannot be in the same place at the same time. One speck of sin makes our whole heart sinful.

For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. - **James 2:10 (NLT)**

You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. - Matthew 5:21-22 (NLT)

You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. - Matthew 5:27-28 (NLT)

God wants us to know how far we've fallen from him. When we understand how far we are away from God we better understand the lengths Jesus went to bring us back to himself.

III. God's Solution

A person may ask, *"What does Jesus dying a nasty death on a cross 2,000 years ago have to do with me and my sin?"*

Because of sin we were weak and helpless. We could do nothing to help ourselves because the Bible says that we are incapable of doing anything godly on our own. Because we were drowning in sin there was only one option: God took the initiative and came on a rescue mission for us. He became a person - Jesus. He loved us even though we were running away from him.

So Jesus said, in effect, *"Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to die a nasty death and everyone is going to see it happen. My death will be the final sacrifice to pay for sin forever. I will become sin, and instead of you dying, I'll die with your sin on me on the cross as a substitute for you. Why? Because I want you to live with me forever and know how significant you are to me. I'd rather die than be without you."*

THE BASICS

Week 9

The Cross | Part I

*What were the events that happened in the hours leading up to the cross?
What is the spiritual formula that took place on the cross?*

Maint Point

Learning the historical events that led up to the cross help us better understand the spiritual significance of the cross.

Introduction

This topic - The Cross - will take two weeks. The first week focuses on a historical understanding of the events of the cross. The second week focuses on the spiritual implications of the cross.

Imagine a wise, educated, powerful king sitting on a throne. He loves the people in his kingdom dearly. Anyone who comes before him bows low. Now imagine a deadly plague infecting the people of his country. No doctor can find a cure and everyone is dying. In an act of love, the king leaves his throne, takes off his crown, replaces his royal robe with simple clothing, grabs his doctor's bag and goes on a rescue mission to heal his people. This is what Jesus did.

Contents

- I. The Events of The Cross
- II. It Was Jesus' Choice

Discussion Questions

1. Can we ever obey God's laws well enough to be considered perfect?

I. The Events of The Cross

Time Approx. 11:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.

Location Garden of Gethsemane

(Matthew 26:36-56, Mark 14:32-52, Luke 22:39-53, John 18:1-11)

The disciples followed Jesus out to the Mount of Olives, a place Jesus frequented with his disciples. Peter, James, and John went further into the garden with Jesus than the others. They were asked to pray but fell asleep. Jesus prayed in agony *"not as I will, but as you will,"* as he began to sweat drops of blood. Judas, the chief priests, and the guards arrived and asked Jesus if he was the one they were looking for. Jesus said, "I am He," and the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground. Peter attacked one of the guards with a sword and cut his ear off. Jesus healed the guard and assured Peter that if he, Jesus, needed help, he could call on tens of thousands of angels. Jesus assured those around him that everything was happening just like the prophets said they would. John Mark fled and so did the disciples.

Time Approx. 3:00 a.m.

Location Trial before the High Priest and the Council

(*Matthew 26:57-75, Mark 14:53-73, Luke 22:54-71, John 18:12-27*)

Jesus was brought to Annas and Caiaphas, the High Priest, and was charged with blasphemy. Jesus was struck, spit on, blindfolded, mocked and condemned. Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, swore that he didn't know Jesus.

Time Approx. 6:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Location Trials before Pilate and Herod

(*Matthew 27:2-31, Mark 15:1-20, Luke 23:1-25, John 18:28-19:15*)

Judas, after facing the reality of what he had done, returned the silver pieces he was paid and hung himself. Pilate, the Roman Governor over Palestine representing Caesar, had to approve causes for the death penalty. Pilate declared Jesus innocent and sent him back to Herod to rule the case. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great (Herod the Great, about 30 years prior, ordered all males under the age of two to be killed because he heard about the birth of Christ. Jesus' family fled and escaped the massacre). Jesus was silent to Herod's questions, so Herod put a velvet robe on Jesus, mocked him, and sent him back to Pilate. Pilate insisted that Jesus was innocent, so he had Jesus beaten, then wanted him released. Crowds kept crying "Crucify him!" Pilate succumbed to the crowd's demands, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and handed Jesus over to be crucified. Barabbas, a prisoner, was released in exchange for Jesus. A crown of thorns was jammed onto Jesus' head and he was severely beaten and spat on.

Time Approx. 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Location Golgotha (a.k.a. The Place of The Skull)

(*Matthew 27:32-66, Mark 15:21-47, Luke 23:26-56, John 19:16-42*)

Jesus was taken to Golgotha. Simon from Cyrene was pulled from the crowd and forced to carry the cross because Jesus was too weak from his beatings. Jesus was stripped and nailed to the cross. The soldiers gambled for his clothing. His charge against him was nailed to the top of the cross saying, "This is Jesus from Nazareth, King of the Jews." People mocked him, saying that if he was really the son of God then he should save himself. At noon the sun was hidden and everything was dark until 3:00 p.m. Dying of suffocation, Jesus spoke the following from the cross:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"Woman, behold your son!" (Identifying John as the one who would take care of Mary, Jesus' mother)

"Behold your mother!" (To John about Mary)

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Spoken to the thief who believed in him and would join him in heaven that very day)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (A scream of such agony in being separated from his father, God. Jesus was carrying the whole wrath of God for sin)

"I am thirsty."

"Father, into your hands I commit My Spirit." (He knew he would go to be with his father)

"It is finished." (He paid the debt we could not pay)

When Jesus died the curtain in the temple was torn in two, top to bottom, representing humanity's full access to the presence of God. The Roman Centurion in charge said, "Surely this was the Son of God." A guard pierced Jesus' side with a spear and blood and water poured out - a clear sign he was dead. A wealthy man from Arimathea named Joseph asked Pilate for Jesus' body. He and Nicodemus wrapped the body in cloth and laid it in a tomb. Pilate ordered the tomb to be heavily guarded.

II. It Was Jesus' Choice

"Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?" - Matthew 26:53-54 (NLT)

It could be easy to view Jesus as a victim. It's important to remember that Jesus was with God when God breathed the universe into existence. On the cross Jesus was in complete control the entire time. He expressed his love by willingly becoming the sacrifice for our sin. How absurd is it for us to ever think Jesus was a helpless victim?

Soldiers bound hands that had healed lepers and resort sight to blind eyes.

They came with swords to capture the Prince of Peace.

They came with torches to find the Light of The World.

They judged the Judge of all men.

They nailed feet to the cross that had walked on water.

They blindfolded eyes that could see into a person's heart.

They mocked and spat on the one whom demons would submit to and run from.

The mouth that had silenced storms, commanded Lazarus to rise from the dead, and kept crowds captivated, remained quiet like a gentle lamb led to slaughter.

You will teach the other members of the small group what happened in one segment of the cross story from Section I. Use the handout as a guide and take each perspective from the different gospel writers to piece together the details of what happened in your segment of time.

(There is beauty in studying Jesus one Gospel book at a time because of the unique story each writer is communicating. However, the goal is this exercise is to simply understand everything that happened surrounding Jesus' death, so we're connecting all of the Gospel books.)

Time:

Location:

Notes:

THE BASICS

Week 10

The Cross | Part II

Why did Jesus die on the cross? How much does God love me? Why did Jesus' death have to be so brutal?

Maint Point

If we want to see how much God loves us, we look at the cross. God loves us with such immeasurable love that he became sin and died so that we can be adopted into his family.

Introduction

It's your sins that have cut you off from God. - Isaiah 59:2a (NLT)

Every priest goes to work at the altar each day, offers the same old sacrifices year in, year out, and never makes a dent in the sin problem. As a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it! Then he sat down right beside God and waited for his enemies to cave in. It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process. - Hebrews 10:11-14 (MSG)

Contents

- I. What Happened?
- II. Why Did It Happen?
- III. Why Did It Have To Be So Brutal?
- IV. What Does It Mean For Me Now?

Discussion Questions

1. What is an example of when you've seen someone's words backed up by their actions?
2. If our goodness got us into heaven, how would we ever know that we're good enough?

I. What Happened?

The Problem: Sin

Sin, the origin of all pain and wrongness, infected the human heart. If we clearly do not understand what sin is and why we are the way we are, we'll have a relationship with God that can often lead to frustration and disappointment. If we know how far we well from God we can better understand what Jesus did for us. Sin's penalty, death and eternal separation from God, was paid in full when Jesus died as our substitute.

The Solution: The Cross

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. - 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

Christ became sin and we became good. Jesus became who we were so that we could be with him forever.

Below is a description of the cross by the prophet Isaiah who lived hundreds of years before Jesus. The verse has been separated so Jesus' role is on the left and our role is on the right. Notice what of ours Jesus took upon himself to make us healed and whole.

*But he was piercedfor our rebellion,
crushedfor our sins.
He was beatenso we could be whole.
He was whippedso we could be healed.
All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.*

*Yet the Lord laid on him
the sins of us all.*

- Isaiah 53:5-6 (NLT)

II. Why Did It Happen?

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. - Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)

We were separated from God, helpless to be good on our own. Jesus took the initiative and made us good by dying for us because he loves us.

III. Why Did It Have To Be So Brutal?

A punishment fits the crime. A severe crime calls for a severe punishment.

1. What are some examples of crimes, major and minor, and levels of their punishments?

A large dam holds back enough water that if it were to burst could wash a town away in seconds. From the time of Adam and Eve's first sin until Jesus was on the cross, God's punishment for everybody's sin was held back like a dam holding back water. Jesus willingly received our punishment as he became sin for us. As Jesus hung on the cross God allowed the dam of his wrath to burst and pour out onto his beloved son. The brutality of the cross displays how severe of a crime sin is and how extreme God's love is for us, that he was willing to take the enormous wrath that we deserved onto himself.

IV. What Does It Mean For Me Now?

Jesus died as a substitute for us because he loves us so passionately. Christians now have a chance to know God here on earth and forever in heaven. Jesus did not die so that we could just become nicer people with better morals. He died so that we could have a radical heart transformation. Our relationship with God never starts with what we do for God. It always starts with what God does for us.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new

person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. - **Romans 12:1-2 (NLT)**

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. - **1 Peter 1:18-19 (NLT)**

How Deep The Father's Love For Us

Written by Stuart Townend

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.*

*Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.*

*I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.*



THE BASICS

Week 11

The Resurrection

Why is Jesus' resurrection significant? What does the resurrection mean for me now?

Maint Point

Jesus died as our substitute to be a payment for our sin. He resurrected, showing that he is God, and that nothing - not even death - can ever stop him from loving us. If we respond to that love and believe in what he did for us, then we can live forever knowing how much he loves us.

Introduction

Many young toddlers can sing the entire ABC song with no problem. However, they may only be able to recognize a few of the letters of the alphabet on a piece of paper. Many people can say "Jesus died and rose again" without sincerely understanding why he died and what his resurrection means. The more deeply we understand sin, the cross, and the resurrection, the more intimately we experience God's love.

And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless... And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. - 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17 (NLT)

Contents

- I. The Events of The Resurrection
- II. The Formula for Our Salvation
- III. Why a Resurrection?

Discussion Questions

1. What is something you've only halfway finished?

I. The Events of The Resurrection

Guards placed at the tomb:

The Pharisees had heard Jesus mention his resurrection before. They told Pilate, the Roman governor, to secure the tomb with Roman guards so that the disciples couldn't steal the body and claim a resurrection. Pilate obeyed their requests. (See Matthew 27:62-66)

1. What emotions were the Pharisees feeling around this time?

The tomb was empty:

Three days after Jesus was crucified, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb where he was buried. The stone had been rolled away from the tomb and Jesus wasn't inside. An angel dressed in white said to them, "Do not be alarmed. He has risen. Go tell his disciples." (See Matthew 28:1-10)

2. What emotions were Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" (another follower of Jesus, not Jesus' mother) feeling around this time?

Jesus appears to two disciples:

Later that day, two of the disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, but they did not recognize him. Jesus walked with them as they told him all about Jesus' death on the cross and how two women discovered his empty tomb that morning. When they reached town Jesus sat at a table and broke bread with them. Then they recognized him. (See Luke 24:13-35)

3. Why do you think Jesus concealed his identity?

Jesus appears to all of the disciples:

That night the disciples were hiding in a house out of fear of the Jews. They had to have felt bad. When Jesus wanted their support most before his trial, they fell asleep while he prayed. One of them publicly denied Jesus several times, and only one of them went to see him on the cross. The first words Jesus said to them were "Peace be with you." (See Luke 24:36-49)

4. Why is it important that Jesus says "Peace be with you" to the disciples?

II. The Formula of Our Salvation

Sin and holiness are incompatible.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. - **Romans 5:12 (NLT)**

*It's your sins that have cut you off from God.
Because of your sins, he has turned away
and will not listen anymore.* - **Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)**

The universal laws that God made said that there had to be the death of something good in order to pay for the badness of someone else.

In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. - **Hebrews 9:22 (NLT)**

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. - 1 Peter 1:18-19 (NLT)

III. Why a Resurrection?

And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. - 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (NLT)

Jesus dying on the cross paid for our sins completely. He became sin (see 1 Corinthians 5:21) and died, receiving the punishment that we deserved. And because he resurrected from the dead we can be resurrected from our sinful nature and have life in him.

What sets apart Christianity from other religions?

Our God beat death. By raising Jesus from the dead God showed us that nothing could stop him from being with us, not even death.

And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. - Romans 8:10-11 (NLT)

What does the resurrection (Jesus beating death) mean for me?

The resurrection means two things:

- Nothing, not even death, can ever stop God from loving you.
- God can raise your dead heart to life.

Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

"Death is swallowed up in victory." - 1 Corinthians 15:54 (NLT)

THE BASICS

Week 12

Jesus Is The Only Way

Why is Jesus the only way to access God? Is there a way to be good without Jesus?

Maint Point

Jesus is the only way to access God. Jesus is God, and he proved it in the resurrection. God made Jesus the only way to himself as an act of love.

Introduction

It may be said that Jesus being the only way to God is too narrow. But truth is always narrow. Two plus two will always equal four. We can believe that what we do will make us good, but that doesn't mean it's true. Jesus refutes the idea that there are many ways to God, and says, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life." We can't be good enough; Jesus is the one who makes us good.

There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. - Acts 4:12 (NLT)

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. - 1 John 5:12 (NLT)

Contents

- I. Reflection Time
- II. God is Initiator and Finisher
- III. God's Standard is Above Ours
- IV. Heaven and Hell

Discussion Questions

1. Which is more true: What God says about himself or what we think he is like?
2. Which is more true: What God says about us or what we feel about ourselves?

I. Reflection Time

Most of the world's religions are built on the premise that a person must do some things right in order to be with God. These religions have a conduct of behavior. Judaism and Islam both believe this way.

What sets Christianity out from the other religions is that God says, in effect, "It is not you who will make you right before me, but I will make you right before me." (See Isaiah 53:4-6, Romans 8:1-4)

We don't behave so that we can belong, we behave because we already belong - because God has adopted us as his children.

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. -
John 14:6 (NLT)

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. -
1 Peter 3:18a (NLT)

he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. -
Titus 3:5 (NLT)

One difference between Christianity and other world religions is Jesus Christ. The faith of a Christian isn't in the good things a person does, it's in a person: Jesus.

Notes from Reflection Time:

II. God is Initiator and Finisher

Our relationship with God never starts with what we do for God. It always starts with what God does for us.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. -
Ephesians 2:8 (NLT)

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. -
Romans 5:8 (NLT)

This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in his Son. So, whoever has the Son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life.

My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion. -
1 John 5:11-13 (MSG)

III. God's Standard is Above Ours

*For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my (God's) ways are higher than your (humanity's) ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. -*
Isaiah 55:9 (NLT)

The Bible does not say "Jesus knows the way to life." Jesus says himself, "I am the life."

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. - John 14:6 (NLT)

IV. Heaven and Hell

In order to address Heaven and Hell, our definition of them must be biblical and our assumptions must be correct. God is infinitely wiser and infinitely more loving than humanity. We are not God's judge, God is our judge. If God forced us to love him we would be robots. Love is only love when it is voluntary.

Jesus tells a story about Heaven and Hell.

Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.

"Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.

"The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'

"But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.'

"Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father's home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.'

"But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.'

"The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.'

"But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" - Luke 16:19-31 (NLT)

Jesus plainly teaches that after death those who have been made right with God live with God forever, and those who have not been made right with God live separated from God forever.

Don't good people go to heaven?

Doing good things has nothing to do with your access to God. Our salvation is not about good things we've done but about what Christ has done for us. Learning how to live comes after we recognize that we are already accepted and saved.

There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. - John 3:18 (NLT)

What about remote tribes who've never heard of Jesus?

God is fair and would never condemn anyone for information they've never heard. We can't see into others' hearts, only God can do that. The truth is that nobody falls into the category of never hearing about Jesus.

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. - Romans 1:20 (NLT)

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship. - Psalm 19:1 (NLT)*

There is enough information in creation to understand that there is a God that people should know and seek. Scripture says in Romans 1 that people decided to worship the creation rather than the Creator.

Another way God shows himself is through dreams, supernatural experiences, etc. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. Joseph, Jesus' father, was visited by an angel in a dream. Paul was blinded by Jesus in a supernatural vision. God has shown that he can use methods other than people.

Hell is a real place.

They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. - 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (NLT)

Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell? - Matthew 23:33 (NLT)

Heaven is a real place.

There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? - John 14:2 (NLT)

When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. - Mark 16:19 (NLT)

Every person will live eternally in either Heaven or Hell.

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life. - Matthew 25:46 (NLT)

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, - Hebrews 9:27 (NLT)

Why will some people go to Heaven?

God states throughout the Bible that a person must receive Christ to live eternally with him.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:12 (NLT)

Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. - Revelation 3:20 (NLT)

Why will some people go to Hell?

Because they actively suppress the truth.

But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. - Romans 1:18-19 (NLT)

If we refuse Jesus as our substitute for sin, we must pay the price ourselves.

For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a (ESV)

How can a loving God send people to Hell?

Our God is a God who wants to save. There is no one whose heart is so hard that God can't open it up. God doesn't recoil from our sin but approaches us in our sin and offers us forgiveness and fullness of life.

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16 (NLT)

THE BASICS

Week 13

The Church

Why does the church exist? What does it look like in Scripture? How does it affect me today? Why should I be a part?

Maint Point

The Church is the body of Christ, of which Christ is the head. Being involved in a local church is a necessary part of becoming more like Jesus.

Introduction

Many people consider themselves Christians simply because they go to church or were raised by Christians. But going to church, serving those less fortunate than you, or being a good person does not make you a Christian. Going to church does not make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a car or going to a restaurant makes you a hamburger. Being a part of a local church is a gift from God and a large part of how he makes us more like himself.

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)

Contents

- I. What is The Church?
- II. Why Do We Need The Church?
- III. What is "The Body of Christ?"
- IV. How Can I Be a Part?

Discussion Questions

1. If you've regularly attended church before, what's your experience been like? (i.e. size, type, leadership, personal experience, what you like or don't like, etc.)
2. If a coal falls out of a fire, what happens? What happens when a baby animal wanders away from the herd?

I. What is The Church?

The Bible does compare the church to a building, but it's walls are made of living stones. The stones are the people who follow Jesus, with Jesus as the cornerstone. All other stones line up with the cornerstone to make sure they're straight and true. If church was about a building then we would be in trouble. We would need a "holy" place to experience God.

The New Testament letters were written to local groups of believers (churches) in different parts of the Roman Empire. (Galatians to believers in Galatia, Romans to believers in Rome, Corinthians to believers in Corinth, etc.)

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

*A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. - **Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)***

Is a para-church organization a replacement for church?

A para-church organization is not a replacement for the church. The goal should be to introduce people to the local church so that they can become a part of the larger body of Christ for the rest of their lives.

II. Why Do We Need The Church?

The Bible says that we need to go to church.

*Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. - **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT)***

1. What good things come out of friendships with fellow believers?

Consistent and accurate teaching from the Bible transforms us as Christians.

*For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. - **Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)***

2. What's a time that corporate worship (teaching, group discussion, music, etc.) had a significant impact on you?

A note on styles of worship:

There are no biblical rules on worship expression like music style, preaching style, or order of worship. What matters most is that we worship in spirit (in our hearts, emotionally) and in truth (in our minds, intellectually).

Differing worship styles can be compared to differing food styles around the world. Although ingredients, cooking styles, and flavors differ among cultures, the food still provides nutrients and satisfaction. Some people prefer certain types of food more than others. Although teaching style, music style, size, and personalities differ among church congregations, all serve God's purpose of the Church in the lives of Christians.

(Obviously, if a church, regardless of its style, is corrupt or preaching heresy then it is not fulfilling God's purpose.)

But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. - John 4:23-24 (NLT)

III. What is “The Body of Christ?”

God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself. - Ephesians 1:22-23 (NLT)

If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. - 1 Corinthians 12:15-20 (NLT)

IV. How Can I Be a Part?

Giving

And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ - Acts 20:35 (NLT)

*Give freely and become more wealthy;
be stingy and lose everything.*

*The generous will prosper;
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed. - Proverbs 11:24-25 (NLT)*

Serving

And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them. - John 13:14-17 (NLT)

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. - 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

Outreach to Others

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. - John 13:34-35 (NLT)

But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted. - 1 Peter 2:9-10 (MSG)

THE BASICS

Week 14

Telling Others About Christ

How do I tell others about Jesus? What is my part and what is God's part?

Maint Point

God does not need us but he chooses to use us in his process of bringing people into his family. As we are a part of his ministry he makes us more like himself.

Introduction

Being a part of God's ministry is a gift from God. Although ministry styles may differ among cultures and traditions, we must plant ourselves in what Scripture says about ministry.

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works. - James 2:14-26 (NLT)

Contents

- I. Laying Our Foundation
- II. Evangelism
- III. Discipleship

Discussion Questions

1. Have you been in a Christian ministry before? What was it like? (good, bad, easy, difficult, etc.)
2. Have you had a leadership position in a Christian ministry before? What was it like? (good, bad, easy, difficult, etc.)

I. Laying Our Foundation

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. -
Ephesians 2:8 (NLT)

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. -
Romans 5:8 (NLT)

God's Sovereignty

God is sovereign, meaning he is bigger than anything, knows everything, and is everywhere all the time. What does that mean for us in ministry?

- **Freedom.** Because God has already defeated sin and death, we can do ministry freely and confidently even when it's difficult.
- **Peace.** God doesn't need us; he chooses to use us. Knowing God doesn't need us gives us peace in knowing he's the one who changes a person's heart, not us.

Our Goal in Life: To Know God

A goal is something to aim at. A purpose is the reason why the goal exists. Our goal (or aim) in life is to know God deeply. The reason for knowing God deeply is so that he can make us more like himself (a.k.a. "sanctification").

As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." -
Luke 10:38-42 (NLT)

1. What are some of the differences between Mary and Martha?
2. What was Martha missing out on?

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ -
Philippians 3:8 (NLT)

3. According to Paul, what is more important: doing things for Christ or knowing Christ?

Our Purpose in Life: To Be Made More Like God

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. - Romans 8:28-29 (NLT)

4. How does God define our purpose in life?

Where Does Ministry Come From?

But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. - Acts 20:24 (NLT)

5. Who called Paul into ministry?

6. Who gave Paul instructions for his activities?

We are never to be independent contractors working for God. An independent contractor decides what jobs he will take, how he will do them, and when he will do them. He is not accountable to and does not take direction from a higher authority. Unfortunately, many Christians, in their zeal to “serve” God, approach ministry this way. Like Paul immediately after his conversion, they decide what they are most qualified to do, what they believe their gifts are, what they would most enjoy doing, and where they can best serve. Then they ask God to bless their efforts. Even Jesus did not do this. He did nothing on His own initiative (John 5:30). Our prayers should be for God to lead us, not for Him to bless the decisions we make on our own. We are to live as Jesus did, totally dependent the Father for what we do, where we do it, and when we do it. We are to depend on Him for everything in our lives, especially ministry. When we follow God in this manner, His blessing on us will be guaranteed.” - Will Wyatt in Discovery

II. Evangelism

What is Evangelism?

We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God’s Good News but our own lives, too. - 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NLT)

7. Why is it important to share your life along with sharing the gospel

Later, Levi held a banquet in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi’s fellow tax collectors and other guests also ate with them. But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus’ disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with such scum?” Jesus answered them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent.” - Luke 5:29-32 (NLT)

8. Who is a Christian you know that has loved non-Christians well? What is that person like?

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. - 2 Corinthians 4:7 (NLT)

four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." - Mark 2:3-5 (NLT)

9. Who did God use to tell you about Jesus? What were they like?

III. Discipleship

What is Discipleship?

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. - Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

Study this Book of Instruction (God's Word) continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. - Joshua 1:8 (NLT)

10. Who has taught you the most about following Jesus?

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. - 2 Timothy 2:2 (NLT)

*As iron sharpens iron,
so a friend sharpens a friend. - Proverbs 27:17 (NLT)*

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. - John 13:34-35 (NLT)

11. When does loving people get difficult?

12. How can you serve in God's ministry to others?

THE BASICS

Week 15

Difficult Circumstances

Why do bad things happen? What do I do with my pain? How does God expect me to respond in difficult circumstances?

Maint Point

There are two main points:

- 1.) Pain is one of God's primary methods to make us more like himself (Romans 8:28-29).
- 2.) Knowing that Jesus has experienced and understands our pain changes our attitude (Hebrews 4:15).

Introduction

*For the mountains may move
and the hills disappear,
but even then my faithful love for you will remain.
My covenant of blessing will never be broken,"
says the Lord, who has mercy on you. - Isaiah 54:10 (NLT)*

The sad reality is that most of us will not go forward until the pain of staying where we are is unbearable. - Peter Scazzero in Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

A story is told in Eastern folklore of a man who lost his horse when it ran away. And when the horse ran away the man's neighbor came to him and said, "Bad luck, isn't it? Your horse is gone."

The man said, "What do I know about these things?"

A few days later the horse came back with 20 other wild horses. The neighbor came and said "Amazing! It's not bad luck, it's good luck! You've got 20 more!"

The man said, "What do I know about these things?"

When the man's son is taming one of the new horses, the horse kicks the son and breaks the son's leg. The neighbor comes and says, "Terrible, isn't it? Your son's leg is broken. Bad luck that these horses came."

The man said, "What do I know about these things, good luck and bad luck?"

A few days go by and a bunch of thugs come through the town looking for recruits to join their gang and they're looking for all the able-bodied young men. They're about to pick the man's son, but find out his leg is broken. And they said, "We don't want him, let's move on."

The neighbor comes and says, "Good luck, isn't it? Your son's leg was broken!"

In one little series of episodes you don't know what lies ahead. Why don't you wait until you stand before God face-to-face and you will find out there were reasons why he didn't stop that trigger so you will see the heinousness of evil and see the majesty of love and good." - Ravi Zacharias answering a question on a panel in 2011

Contents

- I. The Origin of Pain
- II. Jesus Understands
- III. God's Purpose for Us

- IV. God's Part and Our Part
- V. God's Peace

Discussion Questions

1. What is something painful you've been through? (Physically, emotionally, or spiritually?) Be as specific as you're comfortable being.
2. Who are some biblical characters that went through tough circumstances? What did they go through? (Ex: Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, Jesus, Paul, etc.)

I. The Origin of Pain

The origin of pain is sin. Below are excerpts from Genesis 3.

Because of sin, physical pain was established.

*I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy,
and in pain you will give birth.* - **Genesis 3:16a (NLT)**

Because of sin, painful, grueling work was established.

*the ground is cursed because of you.
All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.
It will grow thorns and thistles for you,
though you will eat of its grains.
By the sweat of your brow
will you have food to eat* - **Genesis 3:17b-19a (NLT)**

Because of sin, death was established.

*until you return to the ground
from which you were made.
For you were made from dust,
and to dust you will return.* - **Genesis 3:19b (NLT)**

II. Jesus Understands

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. - **Hebrews 4:15-16 (NLT)**

Jesus suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross meant that no matter what a person may experience, they can have deep peace knowing that their pain is understood by God.

He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. - **Luke 22:44 (NLT)**

Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood. Medical doctors now explain that extreme anxiety can cause the release of chemicals that break down capillaries in the sweat glands, releasing a small amount of blood into the sweat. The emotional pain of Jesus was so intense that it caused him to bleed.

A Common Question

"I understand the necessity of bloodshed. It's the blood of Jesus that sets us free. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. But the mocking? The taunting? The spitting in his face? Why?"

Jesus suffered voluntarily so it must have had a purpose. What was the purpose? If the death of Jesus carries the promise of salvation, then the suffering carries the promise of compassion to those who are hurting. Knowing that he knows and cares helps us experience God as a comforter in the midst of our own pain.

III. God's Purpose For Us

God's purpose for us is to make us more like himself (a.k.a. "sanctification").

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. - Romans 8:28-29 (NLT)

1. Focus on each sentence one at a time. What is a word, phrase, or idea that stands out to you?

And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. - Romans 8:17-18 (NLT)

IV. God's Part and Our Part

Our part in difficult circumstances is to trust God instead of trusting in our own abilities, and to make ourselves available to him. **God's part** is to transform us more into his likeness.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. - Romans 12:1-2 (NLT)

Romans 12 does not say we are already transformed but urges us to be transformed, assuring us that sanctification is an ongoing process. God may not change our circumstances as much as he'll change our heart and attitude toward our circumstance.



V. God's Peace

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. - **Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)***

2. Focus on each sentence one at a time. What is a word, phrase, or idea that stands out to you?

God does not promise us understanding but he does promise peace and the ability to keep trusting him with the struggle.

3. It can be very hard to trust that God is good in hard times. Based on what we've learned so far in this curriculum, what makes God worthy of our trust?

A Common Question

Why not over-indulge in things that feel good to numb the pain when things go bad? (ex. Getting drunk, doing heavy drugs, binge eating, etc.)

Numbing pain is a temporary solution. The underlying attitude that sparked the negative emotions remains unchanged. God won't give us an aspirin for a brain tumor. He wants to do major spiritual surgery. God wants to transform us, not just make us feel better.

Dear Refuge of My Weary Soul

Written by Anne Steel (1717-1778)

Dear refuge of my weary soul,
On Thee, when sorrows rise
On Thee, when waves of trouble roll,
My fainting hope relies
To Thee I tell each rising grief,
For Thou alone can heal
Thy Word can bring a sweet relief,
For every pain I feel

But oh! When gloomy doubts prevail,
I fear to call Thee mine
The springs of comfort seem to fail,
And all my hopes decline
Yet gracious God, where shall I flee?
Thou art my only trust
And still my soul would cleave to Thee
Though prostrate in the dust

Hast Thou not bid me seek Thy face,
And shall I seek in vain?
And can the ear of sovereign grace,
Be deaf when I complain?
No still the ear of sovereign grace,
Attends the mourner's prayer
Oh may I ever find access,
To breathe my sorrows there

Thy mercy seat is open still,
Here let my soul retreat
With humble hope attend Thy will,
And wait beneath Thy feet,
Thy mercy seat is open still,
Here let my soul retreat
With humble hope attend Thy will,
And wait beneath Thy feet

THE BASICS

Week 16

Prayer

What does prayer look like? How am I supposed to pray? What about all my prayers that go unanswered?

Maint Point

Prayer is continuing a conversation with God that he has already started with us through his word and grace.

Introduction

Prayer is a gift from God.

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." - Luke 11:1 (NLT)

It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. - 2 Corinthians 3:5 (NLT)

Contents

- I. Laying Our Foundation
- II. Our Attitude in Prayer
- III. Our Model for Prayer

Discussion Questions

1. What has your prayer experience been like throughout your life?
2. What motivates you to pray?

I. Laying Our Foundation

Our purpose in life is to be made more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). Answered prayers are a part of God's plan in conforming us to his likeness. Changing us is more important than changing circumstances.

1. Is there a time when God has changed your heart rather than change your circumstances?

I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will. - John 5:30 (NLT)

If Jesus did nothing on his own initiative, wouldn't this include prayer? Effective prayer always originates from God. We do not have the capability in our fallen humanness to know what we should pray for.

What is Prayer?

Prayer is continuing a conversation with God that he has already started with us through his word and grace. When we present ourselves (see Difficult Circumstances outline and Philippians 4:6-7), we are praying. Prayer is the communication piece of our dependent relationship with God.

Why Pray?

Jesus prayed, and as Christians we're called to have the same attitude as Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. - Mark 1:35 (NLT)

II. Our Attitude in Prayer

Read these segments from Matthew 6:5-8 (NLT).

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.

2. What are the hypocrites' intentions here?

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

3. What is a word, phrase, or idea that stands out to you?

When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

4. What is a word, phrase, or idea that stands out to you?

III. Our Model for Prayer

Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need,

and forgive us our sins,

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one. - **Matthew 6:9-13 (NLT)**

5. Notice how many commands relate to spiritual needs and how many relate to physical needs. Does this ratio hold true in your own life?

Jesus tells us not to just repeat a memorized prayer over and over again and hope it works. He is much more concerned with meaningful interactions, like a son or daughter talking to their loving father.

Jesus offers us a framework for prayer. Let's look at Jesus' prayer piece by piece.

**Our Father in heaven,
may your name be
kept holy.**

This is an intimate title to give God. It means we are in his family and he loves us like a father love his children.

**May your Kingdom
come soon.**

To pray "your kingdom come" is to express our desire to be involved as he establishes his kingdom in the lives of other people. Our failure to respond to God's prompting doesn't stop him from building his kingdom, but it will cause us to miss out on him using us in the process. When we pray "your kingdom come," we're making ourselves available to God. God using us in the lives of others will profoundly affect our own relationship with God.

**May your will be
done on earth,
as it is in heaven.**

To pray "your will be done" is to recognize that God is in complete control and that he knows what's best for us.

But once he has made his decision, who can change his mind?

Whatever he wants to do, he does.

So he will do to me whatever he has planned.

*He controls my destiny. - **Job 23:13-14 (NLT)***

**Give us today the
food we need,**

Jesus tells us to pray for our needs day by day so that he can meet them day by day. He wants us to stay in a close, dependent relationship with him. He instructs us to pray because we continually need to remind ourselves that we can't live without him providing for us. Recognizing how God provides for us lead to gratitude and joy in our hearts.

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"

	<p><i>"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"</i></p> <p><i>"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'</i> These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.</p> <p><i>"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. - Matthew 6:25-34 (NLT)</i></p>
<p>and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.</p>	<p>The truth is that we are already forgiven.</p> <p><i>So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. - Romans 8:1 (NLT)</i></p> <p>If we don't acknowledge our sin, remember that it's been paid for, and thank God for forgiving us, then we don't experience that Jesus has given us through his death on the cross.</p> <p>And when we remember how God has forgiven and loved us we are then able to forgive and love others.</p>
<p>And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.</p>	<p>We often sin without thinking about it because it comes to naturally to us. If we don't present ourselves to God for him to transform us, we'll continue to struggle with temptation.</p> <p><i>The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. - 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)</i></p>

Getting What We Ask For

But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! - John 15:7 (NLT)

The Two Conditions:

Condition #1 - "... if you remain in me..."

Remaining in God is being aware of God's presence, being available to him, and trust in his ability more than in our own ability.

6. What could this look like practically in your own life?

Condition #2 - "... my words remain in you..."

Allowing God's words to remain in us means we closely study Scripture and allow it to make us more like Jesus.

7. What could this look like practically in your own life?

Rewrite Jesus' prayer below, paraphrasing how you personally could pray for these things. Be as specific in your prayers as you can be. Make it as simple and clear as possible, as if you're writing it for a small child.

THE BASICS

Week 17

The Holy Spirit

*Who is the Holy Spirit? Why does he exist? What does he want with me?
What is the Trinity?*

Maint Point

The Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity and is invisible, life-giving, and powerful. The Holy Spirit is the power source that gives us the ability to experience God.

Introduction

If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to him, "Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large?"

*Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. - **John 14:15-26 (NLT)***

*When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. - **Titus 3:4-5 (NLT)***

*On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. - **Acts 2:1-4 (NLT)***

John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him. - Mark 1:7-13 (NLT)

Contents

- I. Who is the Holy Spirit?
- II. What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe wind to someone who had lived inside their entire life?
2. What are some effects of wind in storms? What kind of activities can you do with wind?

I. Who is The Holy Spirit?

What is the Trinity?

The Trinity is a concept that is impossible for any human being to fully understand, let alone explain. There are three parts: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that the Father is God, that Jesus is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God.

The members of the Trinity participate in different ways in our salvation:

The Father The **source** of our salvation. *(The one who "thinks it all up.")*

The Son The **way**. *(The one who comes to our world and carries out our salvation.)*

The Spirit The **power**. *(The one who applies everything to the heart of the believer.)*

Ruach | "Breath" | The Spirit

The Hebrew word behind "spirit" is "ruach," and it means "air in motion." It is the same word for "breath." It also means "life." If we just leave it with our English word "spirit," we may not get the full attributes of what the Bible is trying to describe. There is a breath involved.

In Genesis, humans are made from the breath of God:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person. - Genesis 2:7 (NLT)

Some translations call that "a living soul." It is from the breath of God and humans receive life. The Holy Spirit is very close with us.

A Deposit (or "Guarantee")

And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him. - Ephesians 1:13-14 (NLT)

What if you were written into your grandfather's will to inherit billions of dollars but there was a decade in-between the time the will was written and the time he died. How would that affect the way you live during that decade? You would see your current problems in a new light. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a small taste of eternity.

II. What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

The Holy Spirit Lives in Us

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? - **1 Corinthians 6:19a (NLT)**

1. How do you know if something is alive or not? What signs do you look for?

The Holy Spirit Instructs Us

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. - **John 14:26 (NLT)**

The Spirit is what turns head knowledge into heartfelt understanding

1. When is a time the Holy Spirit instructed you through conviction, excitement, or newfound understanding?

The Holy Spirit Empowers Us

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. - **Ephesians 3:16 (NLT)**

Because God is sovereign, the Holy Spirit is accessible everywhere, all the time.

*I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!
If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.
If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.* - **Psalms 139:7-10 (NLT)**

Will I always feel the spirit in me?

A Christian won't always feel the Spirit. Feelings are real but they're not always reliable. The promise of God's Word, not our feelings, is our authority. The Christian lives by faith in the trustworthiness of God and his Word.

Imagine a truck pulling a trailer, the truck acting as our faith and the trailer acting as our feelings. The trailer can't pull the truck; the truck pulls the trailer. In the same way, Christians can't depend on our feelings or emotions, but we place our faith in God and his Word.



THE BASICS

Week 18

Studying The Bible

*Why should I study the Bible? Where do I start? How do I stick with it?
What does the Bible say about studying the Bible?*

Maint Point

The Bible is a gift from God to us. If we want to experience truth about God and ourselves, we must develop a habit of studying the Bible.

Introduction

In the book of Ephesians Paul describes Scripture as a sword. It's the only offensive weapon Christians have against Satan. If God's Word doesn't remain in us (John 15), we won't have anything to reach for when Satan attacks us. But if we wear it we can be warriors. Let's have the passion and discipline to study the Bible well.

Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. - Ephesians 6:17 (NLT)

*Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.
They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do. - Psalm 1:1-3 (NLT)*

*The Lord's promises are pure,
like silver refined in a furnace,
purified seven times over. - Psalm 12:6 (NLT)*

Contents

- I. Why Should I Study The Bible?
- II. How Do I Study The Bible?
- III. Application

Discussion Questions

1. What's been your experience in studying the Bible? (Good experiences, difficulties, etc.)

I. Why Should I Study The Bible?

The Bible is a gift for us to use to get to know God who created us and loves us. Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, said that knowing Jesus is better than anything.

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ -
Philippians 3:8 (NLT)

The Bible Answers Our Deepest Questions

God loves us and wants us to know him. The Bible is his primary way of communicating to us. God's Word shows us just how much God loves us. And when we learn how much he loves us, we're drawn to love him in return.

God answers a person's most important questions in The Bible: *Am I loved? What is the purpose of life? Where did I come from? Is there life after death? How do I get to Heaven? Why is the world full of evil? Why do I struggle to do good?*

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. - **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)**

The Bible Gives Us Advice

The Bible gives practical advice in areas such as: *How can I be a good friend? What do I look for in a spouse? How can I have a successful marriage? How can I be a good parent? What is success and how do I achieve it? How can I change? What really matters in life? How do I handle difficult circumstances?*

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. - **Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)**

False Teaching Exists

There is a lot of false teaching. The Bible gives us the measuring stick to distinguish truth from error. It tells us what God is like. To have a wrong impression of God is to worship a false god.

The Bible Equips Us

The Bible equips us to serve God (see Ephesians 6:13-17). We learn how to recognize sin in our lives, how to trust God with difficulties, and how to stay focused on things that matter.

II. How Do I Study The Bible?

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you understanding. Just as the Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture, he also guides us in understanding Scripture. Remember, the Bible is God's book and we need to ask him what it means. As Christians, the author of Scripture - the Holy Spirit - lives inside of us and he wants us to understand what he wrote.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. - **John 16:13 (NLT)**

A Consistent Time and Place

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. - **Mark 1:35 (NLT)**

But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer. - **Luke 5:16 (NLT)**

Be still, and know that I am God! - **Psalms 46:10a (NLT)**

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. - **Matthew 6:5-6 (NLT)**

Diligence

Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. - **Joshua 1:8 (NLT)**

III. Application

The Holy Spirit Helps Us

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand Scripture and apply it to our lives.

And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. - **1 Corinthians 2:12 (NLT)**

God Wants Transformation, Not Just Knowledge

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness. - **Matthew 23:27-28 (NLT)**

Is Studying The Bible Enjoyable?

How sweet your words taste to me;
they are sweeter than honey.
Your commandments give me understanding;
no wonder I hate every false way of life. - **Psalms 119:103-104 (NLT)**

THE BASICS

Week 19

Layout of The Bible | Part I

*How is the Bible structured and why is it put together the way that it is?
How can I become familiar with the Bible? What's God's big storyline?*

Maint Point

The goal of this meeting is to lay a foundation of basic knowledge about the Bible's structure. The purpose is for this knowledge to be a springboard in one's comfort with Scripture so that studying the Bible can be peaceful and non-intimidating. Simply put, those who come should feel comfortable holding and navigating a Bible.

Introduction

It is impossible to learn everything about the Bible in one meeting, but we can start to build a knowledge of Scripture that we can use to build a more complete understanding on in the future. It is important to know that Jesus is interwoven throughout all of Scripture.

The main thing to keep in mind here is that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of private opinion. And why? Because it's not something concocted in the human heart. Prophecy resulted when the Holy Spirit prompted men and women to speak God's Word." - 2 Peter 1:20-21 (MSG)

Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions. - Psalm 119:18 (NLT)

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. - Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

Contents

- I. Overview of The Bible
- II. The Old Testament
- III. The New Testament

Discussion Questions

1. What are some feelings you have when you think of your relationship with the Bible?
2. What has your experience been like studying the Bible?
3. After reading the quote and scriptures above, what is a word, phrase, or idea that stands out to you?
4. What do you want to understand better about the Bible?

I. Overview of The Bible

If we want to understand the Bible we have to first learn how the Bible is put together.

Old Testament Books			New Testament Books	
Genesis	Ezra	Amos	Matthew	1 Timothy
Exodus	Nehemiah	Obadiah	Mark	2 Timothy
Leviticus	Esther	Jonah	Luke	Titus
Numbers	Job	Micah	John	Philemon
Deuteronomy	Psalms	Nahum	Acts	Hebrews
Joshua	Proverbs	Habakkuk	Romans	James
Judges	Song of Songs	Zephaniah	1 Corinthians	1 Peter
Ruth	Isaiah	Haggai	2 Corinthians	2 Peter
1 Samuel	Jeremiah	Zechariah	Galatians	1 John
2 Samuel	Lamentations	Malachi	Ephesians	2 John
1 Kings	Ezekiel		Philippians	3 John
2 Kings	Daniel		Colossians	Jude
1 Chronicles	Hosea		1 Thessalonians	Revelation
2 Chronicles	Joel		2 Thessalonians	

There are two parts of the Bible: the Old Testament and the New Testament

Old Testament: Begins with creation and tells the story of the Jewish people (God's chosen people) up to the time of Jesus.

Books 39
 Authors..... 28
 Time Span More than 2,000 years

New Testament: The record of the birth of Jesus, his life and ministry, and the ministry of his disciples.

Books 27
 Authors..... 9
 Time Span Less than 100 years

II. The Old Testament

The Old Testament's 39 books are in three general categories: **Historical** Books, **Poetical** Books, and **Prophetical** Books. (The Old Testament is not one long, chronological story.)

Historical..... The first seventeen books are historical and tell the story of God's people (a.k.a. "Jews," "Hebrew nation," etc.) These books are a historical timeline for the nation of Israel.

Poetical The next five books are poetical and hold the poetry of God's people.

Prophetical The next seventeen books are prophetical and hold the writings of major and minor prophets.

(Note: This is somewhat oversimplified because there is some poetry in the historical books, some history in the prophetical books, etc. The point is that the books are in a primary category.)

Historical Books	Poetical Books	Prophetical Books
Genesis	Job	Isaiah
Exodus	Psalms	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Proverbs	Ezekiel
Numbers	Ecclesiastes	Daniel
Deuteronomy	Song of Songs	Hosea
Joshua	Lamentations	Joel
Judges		Amos
Ruth		Obadiah
1 Samuel		Jonah
2 Samuel		Micah
1 Kings		Nahum
2 Kings		Habakkuk
1 Chronicles		Zephaniah
2 Chronicles		Haggai
Ezra		Zechariah
Nehemiah		Malachi
Esther		

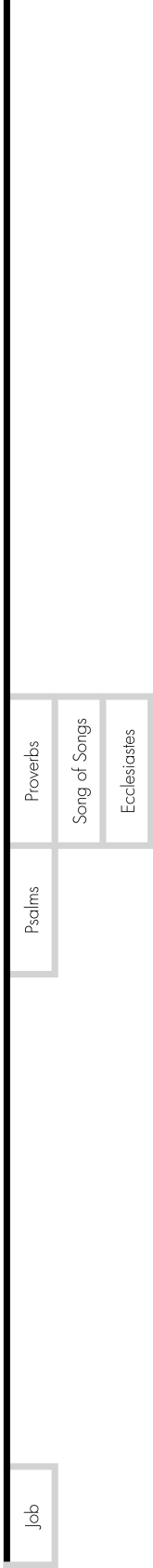
Chronological Old Testament Timeline



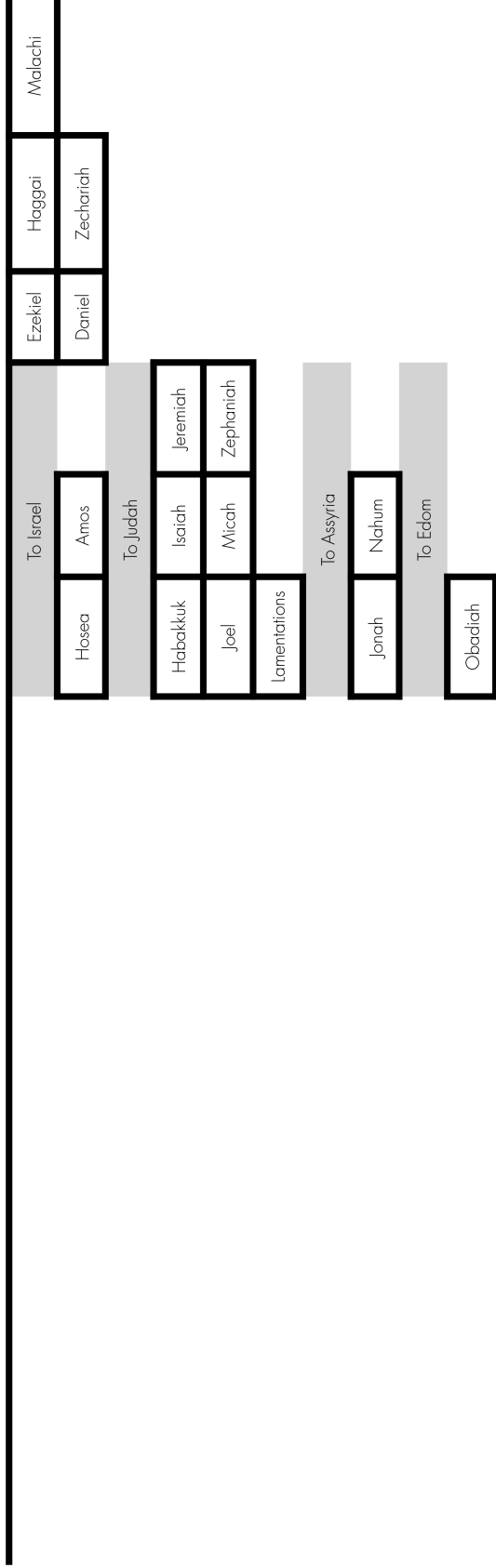
Historical Books



Poetical Books

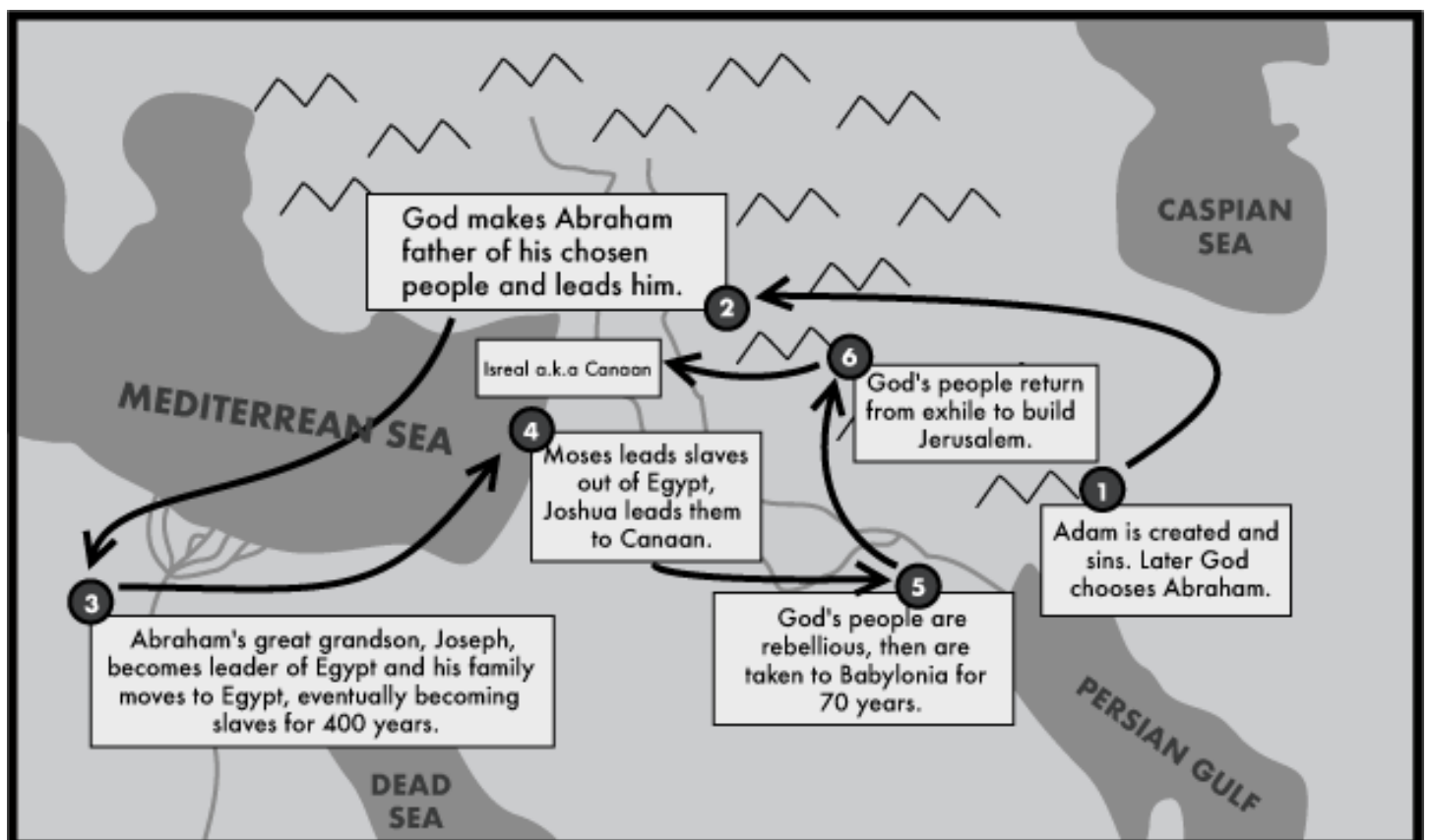


Propheical Books



Old Testament Storyline

ERA	MAIN PERSON	SETTING	SUMMARY
Creation	Adam	Eden	Adam is created by God, but he sins and destroys God's original plan for man.
Patriarch	Abraham	Canaan	Abraham is chosen by God to father a people to represent God to the world.
Exodus	Moses	Egypt	Through Moses God delivers the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and then gives them the Law.
Conquest	Joshua	Canaan	Joshua leads the conquest of the Promised Land.
Judges	Samson	Canaan	Samson and others were chosen as judges to govern the people for four hundred rebellious years.
Kingdom	David	Israel	David, the greatest king in the new monarchy, is followed by a succession of mostly unrighteous kings and God eventually judges the nation of Israel for her sin, sending her into exile.
Exile	Daniel	Babylonia	Daniel gives leadership and encourages faithfulness among the exiles for the next seventy years.
Return	Ezra	Jerusalem	Ezra leads the people back from exile to rebuild Jerusalem.
Silence	Pharisees	Jerusalem	Pharisees and others trap the Israelites in legalism for the next four hundred years.



III. The New Testament

The New Testament's 27 books are in three categories: **Historical** Books, **Epistles**, and **Prophecy**.

Historical..... The first five books are historical (The four Gospels and Acts) and are the story of Jesus and the Church he established.

Epistles..... The next thirteen books are **Pauline Epistles**, letters written by Paul to individuals and churches. The next nine books after are **General Epistles**, letters written by different people to individuals and churches.

Prophecy..... John, a follow of Jesus who wrote the Gospel of John, was exiled to an island called Patmos and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation. Revelation is a book of hope and of warning. Some of the symbols may seem strange, but they become more clear when seen in context of a first-century setting.

Historical Books		Epistles	Prophecy
Gospels	Narrative	Paul to Churches	Revelation
Matthew	Acts	Romans	
Mark		1 Corinthians	
Luke		2 Corinthians	
John		Galatians	
		Ephesians	
		Philippians	
		Colossians	
		1 Thessalonians	
		2 Thessalonians	
		Paul to Individuals	
		1 Timothy	
		2 Timothy	
		Titus	
		Philemon	
		GENERAL	
		Hebrews	
		James	
		1 Peter	
		2 Peter	
		1 John	
		2 John	
		3 John	
		Jude	

New Testament Storyline

ERA	MAIN PERSON	SETTING	SUMMARY
Gospel	Jesus	Palestine	Jesus comes in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a savior and offers salvation and the true kingdom of God. While some accept him, most reject him and he is crucified, buried, and resurrected.
Church	Peter	Jerusalem	Peter, shortly after the ascension of Jesus, is used by God to establish the Church, God's next major plan for man.
Missions	Paul	Roman Empire	Paul expands the church into the Roman Empire during the next two decades.



THE BASICS

Week 20

Layout of The Bible | Part II

Does the Bible have a continuous theme? What does the Old Testament have to do with Jesus?

Maint Point

The person of Jesus is interwoven throughout all of Scripture.

Introduction

A person can read the Bible as either all about them or all about Jesus. If it's about us, we'll never have true security and certainty because we'll always see that we're not up to God's standards. If the Bible is all about Jesus then everything is not about what we do but about what Jesus has done to make us right with God. Understanding that the Bible is all about Jesus changes the way we study and apply God's word to our lives.

He (Jesus) existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. - Colossians 1:17 (NLT)

Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus said, "Listen, we're going up to Jerusalem, where all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true." - Luke 18:31 (NLT)

Then Jesus took them (two of his disciples) through the writings of Moses and all the prophets (the Old Testament), explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. - Luke 24:27 (NLT)

Contents

- I. Isaiah 53: A Foreshadow of Jesus
- II. Jesus Throughout the Old Testament

Discussion Questions

1. When you think of the Old Testament, what thoughts come to mind?
2. What is one of your favorite stories that involves a hero? (Book, movie, etc.)

I. Isaiah 53: A Foreshadow of Jesus

There are many passages that foreshadow Jesus. This one was written by the prophet Isaiah about 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

*Who has believed our message?
To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful
arm?
My servant (Jesus) grew up in the Lord's
presence like a tender green shoot,
like a root in dry ground.*

*There was nothing beautiful or majestic about
his appearance,
nothing to attract us to him.
He was despised and rejected—
a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest
grief.*

Who has believed our message?
To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful
arm?
My servant (Jesus) grew up in the Lord's
presence like a tender green shoot,
like a root in dry ground.
There was nothing beautiful or majestic about
his appearance,
nothing to attract us to him.
He was despised and rejected—
a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest
grief.
We turned our backs on him and looked the
other way.
He was despised, and we did not care.
Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;
it was our sorrows that weighed him down.
And we thought his troubles were a punishment
from God,
a punishment for his own sins!
But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.
He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.
All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our

own.
Yet the Lord laid on him
the sins of us all.
He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.
Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.
No one cared that he died without
descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.
But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.
He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.
But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.
But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him
and cause him grief.
Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,
he will have many descendants.
He will enjoy a long life,
and the Lord's good plan will prosper in his
hands.

II. Jesus Throughout the Old Testament

The following are a few major stories from the Old Testament that point to Jesus.

Adam and Eve (Genesis 3)

Adam and Eve both lived in Eden in a perfect, close relationship with God. Satan, who hates God, disguised himself as a snake, hid in the garden, and told Eve that God didn't really love her because God wouldn't let her eat from one special tree. Eve ate some of the fruit and so did Adam. At that point sin entered the world.

Jesus | God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden because something perfect can't be with something imperfect. But God would come back, rescue his people, and give people access to himself again.

Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-9)

Everyone on Earth had forgotten about God and were all running away from him except for Noah and his family. God told Noah to build an ark and God sent a storm to wash away all of the hate and wrongness in the world. God destroyed everyone and everything and promised never to do it again. Then there was a rainbow in the clouds as a symbol of the promise.

Jesus | Our English word "rainbow" is translated from a Hebrew word, "qesheth," meaning a bent war bow, ready to shoot. The rainbow is cocked and aimed toward God. It foreshadowed God's future rescue plan when he would send his own son to sacrifice himself for our wrongness.

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

The world was populated again after Noah's ark and everyone wanted to build a city and a tall tower to reach up to Heaven where they could be like God. They were building a tower higher and higher until one day God gave each

Adam and Eve (Genesis 3)

Adam and Eve both lived in Eden in a perfect, close relationship with God. Satan, who hates God, disguised himself as a snake, hid in the garden, and told Eve that God didn't really love her because God wouldn't let her eat from one special tree. Eve ate some of the fruit and so did Adam. At that point sin entered the world.

Jesus | God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden because something perfect can't be with something imperfect. But God would come back, rescue his people, and give people access to himself again.

Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-9)

Everyone on Earth had forgotten about God and were all running away from him except for Noah and his family. God told Noah to build an ark and God sent a storm to wash away all of the hate and wrongness in the world. God destroyed everyone and everything and promised never to do it again. Then there was a rainbow in the clouds as a symbol of the promise.

Jesus | Our English word "rainbow" is translated from a Hebrew word, "qesheth," meaning a bent war bow, ready to shoot. The rainbow is cocked and aimed toward God. It foreshadowed God's future rescue plan when he would send his own son to sacrifice himself for our wrongness.

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

The world was populated again after Noah's ark and everyone wanted to build a city and a tall tower to reach up to Heaven where they could be like God. They were building a tower higher and higher until one day God gave each person a new language to speak. No one understood anyone else and they stopped building, so they scattered all over the world.

Jesus | God knew, no matter how hard they tried, that they couldn't get into Heaven by themselves. They couldn't reach Heaven, so Heaven would have to reach down to them. And one day it would in Jesus.

Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22)

God wanted to test Abraham so he asked Abraham to make a sacrifice; not an animal, but his only son whom he loved - Isaac. The next morning Abraham and Isaac climbed the mountain with Isaac carrying the wood on his back. Isaac didn't know what was going on, he just lay there quietly on the altar. Abraham lifted his knife to kill Isaac and God said, in effect, "Stop! It's okay, now I know you trust me." Then God gave Abraham a ram to sacrifice instead.

Jesus | God wanted to rescue his people, so years later he would send another son - Jesus - to a new hill, carrying wood on his back to be sacrificed. Like Isaac, Jesus would trust his father. He would be the "Lamb of God" and die.

Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 37-46)

Joseph's brothers were jealous because Joseph was his father's favorite son. They sold Joseph to Egyptian slave traders and Joseph was eventually imprisoned about 17 years. God made him into a dream interpreter and he became the second most powerful man in Egypt. Joseph's family came to Egypt to get food because of a famine, and instead of punishing his own family for selling him off, Joseph welcomed them to live safely with him in Egypt.

Jesus | God would send a prince - Jesus - and he would leave his father and home. His brothers would hate him and sell him and want him dead. He'd be punished even though he didn't do anything wrong. And everything painful that would happen would be used to forgive the sins of the whole world.

Moses and the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15)

God chose Moses to lead his people out of slavery. As they were all leaving, Pharaoh and his army started chasing them down. God's people came to the edge of the Red Sea with no way to escape Pharaoh's army. Then God separated the sea and made a smooth, dry road in the middle of the sea for his people to walk on. When the Egyptians followed, the water crashed down and they all died.

Jesus | For Moses and the people there was no way out. Years later, when God's children had no way to get back to God, God would make a way to himself by coming down to the world as Jesus.

Group Handout for Story Time

Scripture used:

Our title for this story (Choose the title after you've read the story):

Group Discussion Questions

Who are the main characters in this story?

What's the setting? (i.e. time period, location, events happening at that time, etc.)

What is the conflict in this story?

What were some of the characters' feelings throughout the story? Why did they feel this way?

What is the resolution and the denouement (the final "scene") of the story?

