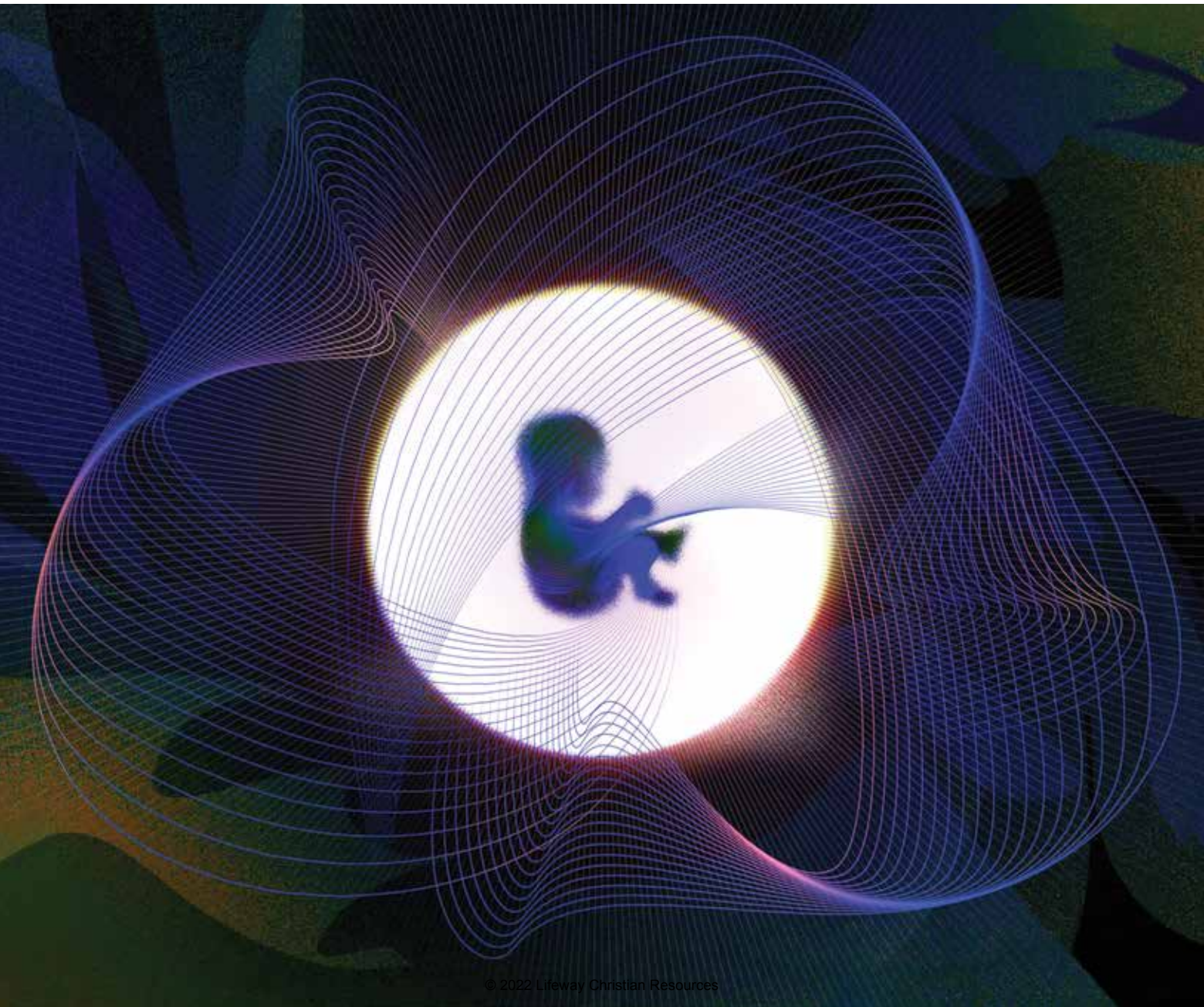




the**GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

ADULTS / LEADER GUIDE / SPRING 2023 / VOL. 7 / CSB



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SON WAS BORN FOR YOU

Isaiah 9:6: "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us."

A Son will be given—a gift, a present. Isaiah lived in days shadowed by gloom, but God granted a flicker of hope, a ray of light—a Son would be given, a descendant of King David would come, an eternal kingdom would be established, one marked by justice and righteousness.

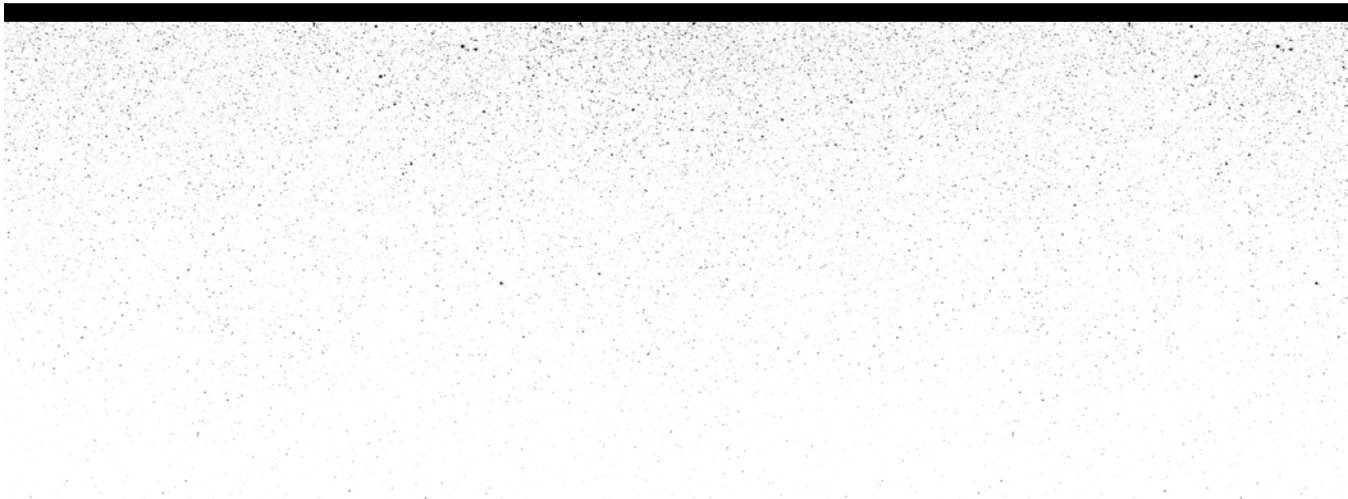
Yet God's people were shrouded in gloom for their lack of justice and righteousness. Their idolatry, their sin, brought God's judgment and their exile to the nations. They were meant to be a light to the nations; instead, they were nearly snuffed out. Still, a flicker of hope, a ray of light—a Child would be born. Through many dark days and years of God's silence, the flicker remained until the Son at last was given.

Matthew 1:21: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

God presents His gift, the Son. And this Son answers the question, He solves the problem of their gloom—He will save His people from their sins. Their lack of justice and righteousness will be made up in His fullness. Their idolatry and sin will be done away with in His sacrifice. The flicker rages; the ray bursts forth; the Light has come to His people—and more.

Luke 2:10-11: "But the angel said to them, 'Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'"

The present, the gift, is for all the people. The Savior from sins is for all the people; the Messiah-King is for all the people. Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus, who died for sins and rose from the dead that you may have life. "See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!" (2 Corinthians 6:2).



CONTENTS

The Editor	4
The Writers	5

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

UNIT 19: HERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD

	Introduction	6
March 5	Session 1 The Savior Is Born (John 1)	8
March 12	Session 2 The Savior Is Presented (Luke 2)	20
March 19	Session 3 The Savior Is Baptized (Mark 1)	32
March 26	Session 4 The Savior Is Faithful (Matthew 4)	44
April 2	Session 5 The Savior Is Followed (John 1)	56
April 9	Session 6 The Savior Is Our Sacrifice (Doctrine: Christ as Sacrifice) ...	68

UNIT 20: GOD'S LOVE WAS REVEALED AMONG US IN THIS WAY

	Introduction	78
April 16	Session 1 The Son Brings Eternal Life (John 3)	80
April 23	Session 2 The Son Offers Living Water (John 4)	92
April 30	Session 3 The Son Embodies Divine Love (Doctrine: God Is Love)	104

UNIT 21: WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD

	Introduction	114
May 7	Session 1 Rejection of the Messiah (Luke 4)	116
May 14	Session 2 Amazed by the Messiah (Luke 4)	128
May 21	Session 3 Obedience to the Messiah (Luke 5)	140
May 28	Session 4 Faith in the Messiah (Doctrine: Faith)	152

Scope and Sequence	162
--------------------------	-----

THE EDITOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

Y Bonesteele

Content Editor

The Gospel Project for Adults

The Gospel Project®

Adult Leader Guide CSB
Volume 11, Number 3 Spring 2023

Ed Stetzer and Trevin Wax
Founding Editors

Daniel Davis
Team Leader

Y Bonesteele
Content Editor

Dwayne McCrary
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Brian Daniel
Director, Adult Ministry

Ken Braddy
Director of Sunday School

Send questions/comments to:

Team Leader by email to
daniel.davis@lifeway.com or mail to
Team Leader, The Gospel Project:
Adult Leader Guide, 200 Powell Place,
Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707;
or make comments on the web
at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States
of America

The Gospel Project®:
Adult Leader Guide CSB
(ISSN 2163-0917; Item 005438061)
is published quarterly by Lifeway
Christian Resources, 200 Powell
Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN
37027-7707, Ben Mandrell, President.
© 2022 Lifeway Christian Resources.

For ordering or inquiries,
visit lifeway.com, or write
Lifeway Resources Customer
Service, 200 Powell Place,
Suite 100, Brentwood, TN
37027-7707. For bulk shipments
mailed quarterly to one address,
email orderentry@lifeway.com,
fax 615.251.5933, or write to the
above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for
its author; salvation for its end; and
truth, without any mixture of error,
for its matter and that all Scripture
is totally true and trustworthy. To
review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline,
please visit [www.lifeway.com/
doctrinalguideline](http://www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline).

All Scripture quotations are taken
from the Christian Standard Bible®,
Copyright 2017 by Holman Bible
Publishers. Used by permission.

THE WRITERS

Allyson M. Howell (Unit 19 Introduction) is a communications associate for the Patients' Rights Action Fund. She holds an MDiv from Midwestern Seminary. Allyson is a member and the deacon of Women's Ministry at Wornall Road Baptist Church and lives in Kansas City, Missouri, with her husband, Randy.

Greg Kilgore (Unit 20, Sessions 1-3) is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Oakhurst in Oakhurst, California. He and his wife, Megan, have three children: Owen, Camille, and Judson Titus. Greg is a PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also teaches as an adjunct professor.

Katie Orr (Unit 21, Sessions 1-4) is the author of *Secrets of the Happy Soul*, seven FOCUSed15 Bible studies, and is the creator of the Bible Study Hub community, where women can receive training, encouragement, and accountability to enjoy God's Word. Katie holds an MA in Discipleship from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Chris, along with their three children, live in central Florida.

Chris Poblete (Unit 20 Introduction) serves as lead pastor at King's Cross Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, California. He earned an MDiv from Gateway Seminary. He is the author of *The Two Fears: Tremble Before God Alone*. Chris and his wife, Alyssa, have three children: Geneva, Haddon, and Judson.

Daniel Ritchie (Unit 21 Introduction) is an evangelist, speaker, and author from Raleigh, North Carolina. He's written two books: *My Affliction for His Glory and Endure*. He has spoken both nationally and internationally for churches, schools, colleges, seminaries, corporations, and professional sports teams. You can visit him online at danielritchie.com.

Matt Rogers (Unit 19, Sessions 1-6) is the pastor of Christ Fellowship Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina. He and his wife, Sarah, have five children: Corrie, Avery, Hudson, Willa, and Fuller. Matt is also an assistant professor of church planting at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Director of Church Health with the Pillar Network, and a freelance author.



HERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD

“We Have Found the Messiah!”

by Allyson M. Howell

+

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

WAITING, WAITING, WAITING . . .

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

All of this was done in obedience to God while they waited for the Messiah to come. This was, of course, not done with perfect patience or steadfast obedience. Israel's history is full of failure and stories of those who took matters into their own hands. Many of the greatest men and women of the Bible decided that the perfect deliverer promised to

them was not worth the wait. They had to do something to speed up the process. So they struck the rock, gave over the handmaid, formed the golden calf, and trusted themselves over God.

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

But finally, Jesus makes His arrival.

JESUS'S FIRST COMING

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

You follow a man named Jesus, and you wonder if He might be the one spoken about your whole life. Throughout your time with Him, Jesus demonstrates

that He is the Messiah. He performs miracles, heals the sick, forgives sins, and speaks of His Father and His kingdom. Jesus calls people into a relationship with God, pours out compassion and love on those who do not deserve it, and reveals that God's desire is to be restored to His people. Upon Jesus's death, burial, descent, resurrection, and ascension, you see that all of the promises of God were fulfilled. God's people were waiting for a deliverer, a savior, one who would make a way for them to be with God forever. Jesus was that Savior who sacrificed Himself to make a way!

Now you know for sure that all who believe that their sins are paid for by Jesus's sacrifice do not have to wait to be forgiven. They do not have to wait to know God or be in a relationship with Him. All of these gifts are available now! You know that no longer do we have to make sacrifices in the temple, no longer do we have to observe Passover. We simply see what Christ has done, trust Him fully, and recognize the payment for all of our sins has been paid.

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

JESUS'S SECOND COMING

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

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

You understand that you are in what many call the "already but not yet." This means that Jesus already ushered in God's kingdom, but it is not fully completed or realized yet. You are on the other side of Jesus's fulfilling all that was promised in the Old Testament. You have already received new life in Christ. But you are not perfect yet, you are not fully healed yet, and you are not fully in the presence of God yet. Not yet, but one day.

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

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

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

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



THE SAVIOR IS BORN

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Word of God in Creation (John 1:1-5)
2. The Word of God in Redemption (John 1:6-13)
3. The Word of God in Glory (John 1:14-18)

Background Passage: John 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The Son of God put on flesh to become the sacrifice for the sins of the world. All who trust in Him are brought out from the darkness and are able to see the glory of God as His children.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME

NOTES



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

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

INSTRUCT: Reflect on a time when you experienced a situation that seemed hopeless.

DISCUSS: What made it difficult for you to imagine that anything might change? (there was no evidence that things were getting better; the issues were so complex; it had been happening for so long; there had already been plenty of time for change with no results)

TRANSITION: What must the Israelites have been feeling by the time the New Testament began? They had so many chances to honor God and follow Him, but they never did fully. The world was growing darker and darker in sin and rebellion. All of this silence from God certainly led the people to think that God could have given up on them. Would He truly send a Messiah? Would the darkness prevail? Against this backdrop, John introduced his Gospel by portraying Jesus as the light that gives life to all.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: How does Jesus give light, and specifically, how has He given light to your life? (He reveals what is wrong; He exposes; He lights the way; He helps us see what is good and right)



Listen to session-by-session training every week on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Lifeway's Digital Pass: ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

THE WORD OF GOD IN CREATION (JOHN 1:1-5)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of men. **5** That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:1-5** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 5: THE WORD** and the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to highlight the key doctrine of the Trinity and the Son's role in creation (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

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

DISCUSS: **What makes it hard for you to think about the Son of God existing as God when God created the world?** (we tend to think of the Son of God simply as Jesus who isn't present in the Bible's story until the New Testament; we have a hard time grasping what the Son of God was doing or where He was through all of the Old Testament; we don't have earthly concepts that make understanding the Trinity easy for us)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

In Jesus is **light** and **life**, and that being so, He came into the world to bring **salvation** to overcome the darkness.

TRANSITION: God the Son existed before the creation of the world. He was not created when He came into the world. Rather, Jesus is the eternal Son of God who did something specific when He came into this world—He took on human form and entered this sin-darkened world to save sinners and start the process of putting the world back together again from the terrors of sin. Jesus willingly laid aside His divine position and entered this world in the form of a servant who would lay down His life for His people.

NOTES



THE WORD

The Greek word *logos*, translated “Word,” had multiple meanings for varying people in John’s time: to the Jews, wisdom, to the philosophers, reason, and in the Old Testament, God in action—in creation and revelation. But John added more meaning in describing Jesus as “the Word”—a pre-existent, personal, powerful, and active deity. *Logos* doesn’t explain Jesus, but Jesus completes and fulfills all that *logos* is.¹

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

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

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / John's Gospel presents a change in form from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the other three writers God ordained to tell the story of Jesus's life and ministry. The other Gospels present generally overlapping stories written to different audiences, whereas John's Gospel captures scenes from Jesus's life and topics in His teaching not mentioned in the other Gospels. Also, John did this in a poetic fashion replete with visual images that fit an audience steeped in Greek philosophy. The Gospel of John does not contain a standard birth story or genealogy like the other Gospels but begins with eighteen verses, known as the Prologue to John's Gospel, that are meant to orient the reader to why Jesus came into this world.

One concept John used was **"the Word."** The Word existed with God from the foundation of the world and took on human form in the person of Jesus Christ. The concept of "the word" (or *logos*) would have been an oft-used image in philosophical discourse, used as a foundational concept for grappling with issues of ultimate truth. John's Gospel, however, doesn't present God as One who has given a word to people in the form of a philosophical discourse or a treatise on virtuous living. Instead, God sent a Person, who was the Word, to both embody and teach how a person could please God. Jesus's entire life and teaching was the Word of God in human form.

While Jesus is not named in the first few verses, the passage crescendos to verse 17, where Jesus Christ is the One to whom all the vivid descriptions of verses 1-16 point: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John traced Jesus's origin far earlier than His birth and, in verses 1-2, made three claims about the Word:

1. The Word was in the beginning.
2. The Word was with God.
3. The Word was God.

Each point is of massive importance: The Son of God, the Word of God, existed from

before the foundation of the world with God—and He was God. This passage takes full aim at any heresy that would portray Jesus as second-class or as some type of cosmic afterthought that God the Father created after He ran out of other options. Jesus is God, and He's always been God.

John then made one final point—this Word created all things. The mechanism that God used to create all things was His spoken word. "Let there be . . ." is the most often repeated command in Genesis 1. John affirmed that this Word is the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, who was the means for creation.

VERSES 4-5 / John then added two more word pictures. He said that Jesus brought **"life"** and **"light."** Again, these concepts would have been familiar to an audience who read and interacted with the philosophical discourse of the day. Light and life were concepts that the pagan philosophers sought after. They aspired to a healthy, whole, virtuous life and sought to pursue the true *logos* in order to build that type of life. Light, they felt, was a clear image for those who understood truth and were truly enlightened.

Jesus, the true Word, brings both. He didn't bring light and life through moral discourse or modern philosophy but through sacrifice. Light comes through knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ and through salvation by faith in Him. The eternal Son of God graciously laid aside His eternal standing and position at the right hand of God to enter the world and bring this salvation.

Only through Jesus, then, can people experience light and life. They cannot find this hope any other way. Through this introduction, John was claiming that Jesus is our only hope! Since Jesus is God and since He willingly entered the world to bring salvation, no matter how dark the world gets, no matter how overwhelming sin becomes, the light will ultimately prevail.

POINT 2

THE WORD OF GOD IN REDEMPTION (JOHN 1:6-13)

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. **9** The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. **11** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. **12** But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, **13** who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:6-13** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-9** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why might it be difficult to share the truth of Jesus Christ? (we think too much of ourselves and what others think of us and so we are afraid; we might not feel equipped to share; we take for granted all Jesus has done for us; our gratefulness has waned; we don't love others enough)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 10-13** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: How does this passage say people are saved from sin and darkness? (it says through faith, receiving and believing; it is not something that we earn through our moral effort or figure out from our own wisdom or insight; in our flesh, we do not possess the ability to figure God out on our own; we are born again through the work of God)

TRANSITION: It would be easy to miss the deity of Jesus amid all the details of His earthly life. The facts surrounding His birth may seem too familiar, even with the knowledge of a virgin birth and cosmic guides. Sometimes we can get caught up in the birth of Jesus as a baby born to Mary. John didn't want us to miss, however, that this One who lived among the people, though He was birthed, is fully God, had always existed, and will always exist, full of glory.

NOTES

CHILDREN OF GOD

In one sense, all human beings are children of God in that God created us in His image and likeness. But in another sense, as in John 1 and its normal usage in Scripture, the children of God are all those who in faith receive Jesus as Savior and Lord (see also Matt. 5:9; Gal. 3:26,29; Rom. 8:14; 9:8; 1 John 3:1).

COMMENTARY

VERSES 6-9 / After John tells his readers that Jesus is the light, he introduces them to John the Baptist, who **“came as a witness”** to tell others about the light. John the Baptist leveraged his voice to cry out to others to turn to Jesus, the light, for salvation.

John, the author of this Gospel (not to be confused with John the Baptist), shows the humility on display in John the Baptist’s faithful witness. John the Baptist was not the light and did not try to portray himself as such. He understood that his role was merely to point to Jesus. He was sent by God to testify that Jesus is the Messiah, **“the true light,”** and that He gives light **“to everyone”**—not just some but to all. And John the Baptist was proclaiming that the Messiah was coming into the world so that all who would listen could get ready. John the Baptist was a precursor for all faithful Christians who use their lives to declare and demonstrate that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

VERSES 10-13 / Verse 10 picks up on the preceding point that Jesus was coming into the world and begins the focus on Jesus’s mission and people’s response. John, the author, made it clear that though Jesus was coming into the world, He was already in the world and the world was made through Him. Again, John was clarifying the pre-existence of Christ.

Though the Son, as God, created the world, the world did not know Him. Here the word **“world”** is used to describe the entire creation that is broken due to Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden. The entire cosmos has fallen, and God sent Jesus to save it (John 3:16), ultimately to put the world back together again from the effects of sin and Satan. John noted the stark contrast: Jesus came to save the world, but the world did not recognize Him. John drew attention to the irony: Jesus spoke the world into creation, yet creation did not recognize its Creator. This would be akin to a child not even recognizing his or her parents. The

language isn’t merely that the world did not believe but that the world did not even recognize the Messiah.

Then John wrote that Jesus came to **“his own.”** Here, “his own” is clearly a reference to the Jewish nation, the covenant people of God. Since Genesis 12 and the great call of Abram (later Abraham), God’s saving intentions in the world came to pass through these people. They were given the covenant promises, they had the law, they had the sacrificial system, they had the temple, they had the priesthood, they had the land, they had the kings and the prophets. If anyone should have recognized Jesus, it was this group. Their entire national identity hinged on the coming of the Messiah. John lamented that they did not believe. This note at the beginning of John’s Gospel is a foreshadowing of what was to come for Jesus. John was crafting a theological treatise on Jesus’s ministry, not simply attempting to sketch a chronological map of His life. John said from the very beginning that those most prepared to recognize and respond to the good news of Jesus would not.

In contrast to those who do not believe, there is a group who will believe. They will believe the testimony of John the Baptist and John, the Gospel writer, that Jesus is the Messiah. They will come to understand who Jesus is and, through faith, submit their lives to Him. Those who do so are given the privilege to be called **“children of God.”** John then used a familial image to make his point. Those who believe are **“born . . . of God,”** not physically but spiritually. John used this imagery in other places such as John 3, where Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” to be a part of God’s kingdom (John 3:3). God’s children are born again into His family. Believers are no longer in the family of their first parent, Adam, through their inherited sin nature; rather, believers are born again into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

POINT 3

THE WORD OF GOD IN GLORY (JOHN 1:14-18)

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, “This was the one of whom I said, ‘The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’”) **16** Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, **17** for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:14-18** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 6: JESUS IS GOD**; use the handout and the **VERSES 14-15** commentary to highlight the following point and set up the following question (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

The Son of God put on **flesh** to become the **sacrifice** for the sins of the world that we may see His **glory**.

DISCUSS: What attributes of God are revealed through Jesus’s incarnation for our salvation, for which we should praise and imitate Him? (He is humble, gracious, generous, loving, kind, and forgiving)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 16-18** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus brought **grace** and **truth** to the world, revealing the Father and revealing Himself as God.

DISCUSS: Why might we find it difficult to speak and act in grace and truth? (they seem like opposites on the surface; sometimes we are seemingly hard-wired to be a person who gives grace or who speaks truth, and most people don’t do both well; sometimes it seems that people need grace in the moment or that they need truth and not necessarily both)

NOTES



COMMENTARY

VERSES 14-15 / Verse 14 concisely summarizes Jesus's incarnation. The word incarnation refers to Jesus taking on flesh ("carne") to enter the world. This is another way to speak of the conception and birth of Jesus or the process described by Paul to the Philippians, where he says Jesus "did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity" (Phil. 2:6-7).

John was trying to help us understand that the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed as God from the foundation of the world. He was the means by which all things were created, and He is the One who sustains "all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). Yet this eternal Son of God came to earth as Jesus, who was truly God and truly man, One who was born of a virgin, lived, ministered, taught, and ultimately was crucified and resurrected for the salvation of God's people.

Verse 14 plays on the image of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, using the corresponding Greek word translated "**dwelt**" to describe what Jesus did in coming to earth—He "tabernacled" among His people. Even greater than the tabernacle of old, God's glory dwelt fully in Jesus, and He is the means by which people can worship God rightly. And finally, this tabernacling was the full revelation of God's glory, as Jesus embodied both the grace and truth of God. The text says that He was "**full**" of grace and truth. Such fullness of grace and truth is only possible for God. This truly makes Him glorious. John, the author, then pointed to John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus's glory and pre-existence that uniquely qualifies Him as God.

VERSES 16-18 / We receive the grace of God from Jesus's fullness as God. John's phrase "**grace upon grace**" denotes the overflowing, overwhelming nature of the grace of God. Through Jesus, God has given fallen sinners grace they do not deserve. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection made a way

possible for sinners to be made right with God. They could experience this "grace upon grace" through faith and repentance.

John then noted that this is something that Jesus alone could do. The law of Moses brought truth to the world. In the law, sinners could see their rebellion clearly and their need for God's forgiveness. The standard was established. But the law could not bring grace. There was no means by which sinners could be permanently and perfectly forgiven. They could merely be brought to the point of conviction and need and subsequently offer a sacrifice as the law prescribed so that their sins could be forgiven for a time. Ultimately, full forgiveness was impossible apart from the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (see the book of Hebrews). Jesus did not relax this standard of truth—in fact, in many places He seemed to up the magnitude of God's law (see Matt. 5–7). He brought truth, but He also brought grace. In Him, as the fulfillment of the law, sin could be forgiven forever. He was the means by which sinners could both see their sin and be forgiven of that very sin. This was something the law of Moses could never do.

In verse 18, John concluded by highlighting that Jesus is the way humans see God. Jesus literally is God in the flesh, so the best means of understanding the nature and character of the triune God is to look at Jesus. John noted that this pleased God. God wants to be known and He loves His creation. This love compelled Him to reveal Himself to the world in a form that humans could see, with teaching they could understand, and through a life that would give evidence to the full grace and truth of God.

God revealed Himself to the world in Jesus and continues to do the same today. Though Jesus is not physically present now, God continues to reveal Jesus through His Spirit and His Word. John's Gospel is meant to put Jesus on display so that God can continue to open the eyes of those blinded in sin so that they may see His glory.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

The Son of God has always existed, and He entered the world as Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life that put on display the glory of God. The incarnation of Jesus was an act of the triune God's love whereby He did for people what they could not do for themselves—namely, revealing both the reality and horror of sin but also demonstrating the grace of God by making a way possible for sin to be forgiven.

How does Jesus's incarnation reveal God's love for human beings?

HEART:

We should be people who long to see Jesus rightly. Evidence of spiritual life is the ability to see Jesus for who He is, to acknowledge our sin and come to Him in humble worship. We should be those who do experience the joyful privilege of being God's children. We enter His family by faith, and then we begin to long to honor Him with our lives. We see His grace and truth in Jesus and we want to be people of grace and truth as well. We see Jesus's service in entering the world and we are compelled to stoop and serve others as well. Jesus becomes not only a means of forgiveness but also a model for our ongoing life of worship and obedience.

How will you respond to the glory of God seen in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ?

HANDS:

John the Baptist provides a case study in how we should respond to Jesus. He was compelled by the greatness of the glory of God. His overflowing worship was evident in his clear praise of Jesus. He directed attention away from himself—a sign of humility—and pointed that attention to Jesus Christ through his words and actions. This is what we do when we worship God through song, it's what we do when we worship God through our deeds of love and compassion, and it's what we do when we share the gospel with others.

How will you be like John the Baptist in pointing someone to Christ this week by your words and deeds?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

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

—John Chrysostom
(347-407)

POINT 1: THE WORD OF GOD IN CREATION (JOHN 1:1-5)

+

COMMENTARY

“In short, God’s ‘Word’ in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that ‘Word’ makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God’s ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son. But if the expression would prove richest for Jewish readers, it would also resonate in the minds of some readers with entirely pagan backgrounds. In their case, however, they would soon discover that whatever they had understood the term to mean in the past, the author whose work they were then reading was forcing them into fresh thought . . . One must go farther. The wealth of possible backgrounds to the term *logos* in John’s Prologue suggests that the determining factor is not this or that background but the church’s experience of Jesus Christ. This is not to say the background is irrelevant. It is to say, rather, that when Christians looked around for suitable categories to express what they had come to know of Jesus Christ, many that they applied to him necessarily enjoyed a plethora of antecedent associations. The terms had to be semantically related to what the Christians wanted to say, or they could not have communicated with their own age. Nevertheless, many of the terms they chose, including this one, had semantic ranges so broad that they could shape the term by their own usage to make it convey, in the context of their own work, what they knew to be true of Jesus Christ . . . In that sense, as helpful as the background study may be, it cannot by itself determine exactly what John means by *logos*. For that information, while thinking through the background uses, we must above all listen to the Evangelist himself.”⁴

+

ILLUSTRATION

A common and helpful teaching illustration invites the group to consider true darkness. Most of us have never been in true darkness. The closest we might come is hiking into a cave or underground cavern where the farther you go the darker and darker that space becomes. Try as you might, in such an environment, it is hard to avoid panic. In this space, even the smallest light changes everything. If someone taps their phone and the light illuminates, the experience changes in a moment. All of a sudden you are able to see, your pulse slows, and you can make sense of your surroundings.

Our world is a bit like an underground cave. The further we go and the longer we live, the more overwhelming the darkness becomes. We experience personal pain that reveals the suffering

EXTRA

that is littered throughout our world. We engage in intentional sin that reveals how sinfully broken our hearts really are. And thanks in part to modern technology, we get to witness the scope of the disaster of the world around us with stories of oppression, trauma, death, and destruction lurking around every turn. The darkness can be overwhelming.

Jesus is a light in that darkness. He came to bring light. And His is not a little bit of light, akin to the screen on a cell phone. His is a blazing flame of light, capable of illuminating the entire world. His presence and activity is the singular factor that gives hope and help in the face of such a dark world.

POINT 2: THE WORD OF GOD IN REDEMPTION (JOHN 1:6-13)

+ COMMENTARY

“John 1:10 joins with 1:9 to stand against the idea that Jesus by his coming wrought some kind of prevenient-grace change on all people. John puts into words the shocking irony that the Light of the World, the true light that gives light to all (v. 9), the light that is the life of men (v. 4), the light that the darkness cannot overcome (v. 5), ‘was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him’ (v. 10). The world here has not been lifted out of deadness in trespasses and sins to perceive reality. Rather, the world is so darkened within itself that it does not recognize the light, even though the world was made by that very light!”⁵

+ COMMENTARY

“The focus of John’s testimony was to bear witness to Jesus. In the Prologue this witness is given in terms of the Logos as the true Light (1:9). In the Fourth Gospel light is a very important theme, and Jesus refers to himself as the ‘light of the world’ (8:12; 9:5). The goal of John’s witness here is that ‘all might believe.’ The Johannine theme of believing introduced here is without doubt one of the most central concerns of the Gospel. It is crucial to the evangelist’s purpose statement for writing the Gospel (20:31).”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Option 1: Use the story of Ruth in the Old Testament to point out a situation in which a woman’s own people did not recognize her. Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, left Bethlehem with her husband due to a famine and lived in Moab for a decade. During that time, her husband and her two sons all died, and she was left destitute with a Moabite daughter-in-law. When she reentered Bethlehem after a decade away, the people looked at her and asked, “Can this be Naomi?” Her situation and circumstances were not what they expected for the lady they once knew. In a similar way, Jesus was not what His own people expected the Messiah to look like. His own people did not recognize Him as God—the glorious Creator God who is full of grace and truth.

Option 2: Tell a personal story of a time when you walked back into a context that was once familiar to you and either you did not recognize other people or other people did not recognize you. A good illustration of this could be a twenty-year high school reunion. You spent years among these people, yet you didn’t recognize the people who were once so familiar.

POINT 3: THE WORD OF GOD IN GLORY (JOHN 1:14-18)

+

COMMENTARY

“In the first chapter of his Gospel, the apostle John is talking about the amazing sufficiency of God’s grace. No one is beyond the power of God’s grace, even if he or she thinks he or she is. The Scriptures proclaim that Christ died for the ungodly. ‘Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Rom 5:20). The Greek word used is the same used for ‘fullness’ in John 1. God’s grace is adequate for anyone.”⁷

+

ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever had a conversation with someone in which you tried to balance grace and truth? We all have. If you are a parent, you have certainly done this with your child on more than one occasion. The child has done something that is clearly wrong. They have sinned against God and against you. You want them to know what they have done and why it is wrong, so you bring the “truth hammer.” You make it clear that the action is out of bounds and that they need to repent and change.

But you also want to bring grace. You love your child, and you don’t want him or her to be crushed under the weight of sin. You want your children to know that they are loved, regardless of the wrong they have done. You want them to experience the tenderness and warmth of a reconciled relationship. So you try to fill the conversation with reassurances of love and not give full vent to your frustration. You may soften the punishment that they are due for their wrongdoing in an effort to allow them to sense your grace.

This is a tough balance. You emerge from these conversations feeling unsettled most of the time. Either you led with too much grace and too little truth or you were too stern and need to up your grace game the next time around. Humans have difficulty balancing grace and truth. Even more, humans can’t be full of grace and truth. We can’t do both fully and completely, perfectly, every time. But Jesus can. And did. And does.

References

1. Daniel L. Akin, “The Person of Christ,” in *A Theology for the Church*, eds. David P. Nelson and Peter R. Schemm Jr. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007) [Logos].
2. J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 388.
3. John Chrysostom, as quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, Michael A. Thomas, and Bryan A. Stewart, eds., *John: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, trans. Michael A. Thomas and Bryan A. Stewart, *The Church’s Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 36 [Logos].
4. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; Eerdmans, 1991), 116.
5. James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, *John–Acts*, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 39.
6. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 111–12.
7. R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 37 [Logos].

THE SAVIOR IS PRESENTED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Messiah will fulfill the law entirely (Luke 2:21-24).
2. The Messiah will bring salvation globally (Luke 2:27-32).
3. The Messiah will obey the Father completely (Luke 2:41-50).

Background Passage: Luke 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. His life of perfect obedience and sinlessness pleased the Father and proved that He is the worthy sacrifice for sin. All who trust in Jesus receive life and forgiveness through His death and resurrection and are credited with His perfect righteousness.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

DISCUSS: **Why do you think the authors of the Gospels spent such little time describing Jesus's early years?** (these years were time in preparation; the focus of Jesus's work centered on His death and resurrection; Jesus spent time growing and developing like a regular man, proving His humanity; few knew of His divinity and purpose in His early years so few took note)

TRANSITION: Sometimes we feel hidden from God, like the moments of our lives are somehow lost in God's grand purposes. The life and ministry of Jesus reveals that God was at work even in His so-called hidden years to prepare Jesus for the work He would subsequently fulfill. And even during these developmental years, a time when the natural human process of maturation often leads to all sorts of rebellion and chaos, Jesus did not sin. He was growing, maturing, and fulfilling the perfect law of God as a sinless man.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: **What might it have been like to raise Jesus as His parents?** (awkward to assert a parent's authority; difficult knowing He was the Messiah and yet He was growing and changing like a normal man; uncertain because you had these great promises from the angel about who this Child would be, yet in many ways, Jesus would have seemed normal)

POINT 1

THE MESSIAH WILL FULFILL THE LAW ENTIRELY (LUKE 2:21-24).

NOTES

21 When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus—the name given by the angel before he was conceived. **22** And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord) **24** and to offer a sacrifice (according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 2:21-24** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 21** commentary to highlight that Jesus grew up from a baby to boyhood to manhood like any other man (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

KEY DOCTRINE #49: Jesus's Humanity: In addition to being fully **divine**, the Bible also affirms that Jesus is fully **human**. Not only does the Old Testament affirm that the Promised One (Messiah) would be a man (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:3), but the New Testament also affirms that Jesus's earthly life bore all the marks of being a human. He experienced the circumstances **common** to living as a human being, such as hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (Matt. 8:24), sorrow (John 11:35), and pain (the crucifixion).

DISCUSS: What benefits might we discover in dwelling upon Jesus's humanity? (feel understood because He was like us; convicted and encouraged by His constant resistance to temptation; feel loved because He left His throne in heaven to come to earth to save us; recognize the value of being human, made in God's image, and the equal value of others, who are made in that same image)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 22-24** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

TRANSITION: Since Jesus's life was faithful to fulfill the law, He demonstrated Himself to be God, and as God, He is able to bring salvation to anyone anywhere.

CIRCUMCISION

The ritual of cutting off the foreskin of a male's reproductive organ that God prescribed to Abraham and his descendants as a sign of the covenant they had with God. Though it was meant to be symbolic of spiritual change, some thought the act itself gave them a right standing before the Lord. God, however, through Jesus and Paul, reminded the people that spiritual change and obedience was more important than this one act (see 1 Cor. 7:19).

COMMENTARY

VERSE 21 / Luke presented Mary and Joseph as obedient and faithful to the law of Moses. They waited the appropriate number of days to have their son circumcised. Even though Jesus is God, He also was human and needed to be circumcised according to the law. His physicality reminds us of His humanity. And though He was a child, we're reminded that everything about Him fulfilled the law.

What's also important is the giving of the name. Much more than in our day and culture, the name given to a child in biblical times denoted something important about the circumstances of the child's birth, his family heritage, or the parents' trust in God and prayer for their child. Throughout the Old Testament, names played a significant role in confirming God's blessing and promises. Many times, a significant change in a person's life that was brought about by God's power was signified by changing the person's name (think Abram to Abraham or Sarai to Sarah). There was no more important child ever born than the eternal Son of God, so surely His name would be of great significance. And it was. The name "Jesus" means "the Lord saves," and that's what Jesus would do—save people from their sins. Luke described the interaction between the angel and Mary this way:

Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end. (Luke 1:31-33)

These were significant promises dripping with the language of fulfillment. They show that this promised Messiah, this Jesus, is the outworking of the plan of God to save sinners and fix the world.

But it's also worth noting that the giving of the name was significant because it demonstrated the obedience of Mary and

Joseph. They did what the angel told them to do. You might imagine that this was a difficult decision. It was enough to have to try to explain that you got pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and then to name the child based on a promise that He was going to save people from their sins. Talk about big shoes to fill.

VERSES 22-24 / Verses 22-24 feel almost commonplace for a Gospel account. Why include the fact that Jesus's parents dedicated Him to the Lord and offered some sacrifices? Mainly to point to the fact that Jesus's parents were Jews who honored the law and honored God by their obedience.

Mary and Joseph obeyed the laws prescribed for them in three different ways in this passage: "the purification of a woman forty days after the birth of a child (Lev. 12:2-4,6), the presentation of the firstborn to God (Ex. 13:2,12,16; 34:19; Num. 18:15-16), and the dedication of the firstborn into the Lord's service (1 Sam. 1-2)."¹

Everything surrounding Jesus was honoring to God, even in His early years. As Mary and Joseph followed the law in all that they did to raise Jesus, no one could say that He didn't fulfill the law completely. His parents were committed, diligent, and faithful to obey God to the fullest and to raise Jesus in obedience to God's laws. Thus, Jesus in His humanity and divinity was able to fulfill the law in His growing-up years as well as in His three years of ministry to the people.

No other person was like Jesus in this way. No one could claim that Jesus was not perfect in His humanity and divinity. The obedience of Mary and Joseph and Jesus's own obedience points to His perfection. And this perfection characterizes the Lamb without blemish who would one day be the perfect and sufficient sacrifice needed for the restoration and salvation of humankind.

POINT 2

THE MESSIAH WILL BRING SALVATION GLOBALLY (LUKE 2:27-32).

NOTES

GENTILES

All non-Jews are Gentiles. The Jews tended to hate the Gentiles because they thought they were impure, or because they had often been oppressed by Gentiles, or because Gentiles during Jesus's time and before did not believe in the one true God, or because they thought they alone should have a special relationship with God. But those who studied God's Word well would have understood that God had a plan to save Israel and all nations who trust in Him.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

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

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

27 Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, **28** Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, **29** Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation. **31** You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 2:27-32** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 27-31** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What are some ways we should respond to the good news of **salvation**? (with praise to God; with a changed life; with feelings of freedom and a weight lifted; with confession of sin; with a renewed spirit to live for God; with a desire to tell others of that good news)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 32** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What do we learn about God when we see Him keep His promises? (God can be trusted; He's good and will do good in the world; He's faithful to do the things He says even when it might seem like He's forgotten; nothing can keep God from fulfilling His promises; we should trust God to continue to keep His promises because this is in keeping with His character)

TRANSITION: In order to bring salvation, Jesus had to live a perfect life. Though He is God, He was also fully man, so His obedience allowed Him to fulfill the law on behalf of His people.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 27-31 / Verses 25 and 26 introduce a seemingly skippable figure in the Bible—Simeon. He is virtually unknown, and like John the Baptist, his sole intent in this passage is to point attention to Jesus Christ. He had been told by God’s Spirit that he would live until the Messiah was born. You can imagine that Simeon was looking for that Messiah. He trusted God to keep His word because Simeon was a devout man. Among the many who might have stopped looking and lost all hope, Simeon was still holding on to God’s promise.

Then the day came, and Simeon entered the temple and met Jesus and His parents. We are not told what caught Simeon’s attention. Maybe Mary and Joseph described Jesus’s birth; maybe it was the mere mention of Jesus’s name; maybe something about His countenance marked Him as the Messiah. Somehow Simeon knew.

Verse 30 is a play on words, since the name Jesus means salvation. **“My eyes have seen your salvation”** means the same as “My eyes have seen your Jesus.” Jesus can never be separated from His purpose of bringing salvation to the world.

Simeon then attributed Jesus’s presence to God’s activity. Jesus did not merely show up of His own accord or in His own time or in His own way. Instead, Jesus was prepared by God. Everything about Him—when He was born, how He was born, where He was born, to whom He was born—everything was prepared by God in full view of the watching world for those who had eyes to see it. It was as if God was intent on putting His faithfulness on display in the most remarkable way possible.

VERSE 32 / Seeing the Bible as one consistent story that from start to finish tells of God’s work to save sinners and fix the world through Jesus Christ is essential. While Jesus’s birth doesn’t happen until roughly two-thirds of the way through the Bible, all of the stories leading up to that point are preparing the reader for His arrival.

The unity of the Bible is seen most clearly in verses like Luke 2:32. Way back in Isaiah 42, the prophet described the coming of Jesus as One who will “bring justice to the nations” (v. 1) because He will be “a light to the nations” (v. 6). Then again in Isaiah 49:6, God, through the prophet, said:

It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Simeon, a faithful Israelite, knew these promises. He knew that God’s Messiah would fulfill these promises and that God was faithful to do just what He said He would do. So when Simeon found Jesus, he knew what this Messiah would do.

And what would the Messiah’s mission be? Simeon, in quoting this Old Testament prophecy, pointed out that Jesus would do two things. 1) He would bring God’s salvation to His people, the nation Israel. Even though many of these people would not believe, Jesus would come first to the Jewish nation and declare Himself to be the long-awaited Messiah. But His mission would extend far beyond Israel. 2) He also would bring God’s salvation to the nations. While the clear epicenter of God’s activity throughout the Old Testament was Israel, and this would also be the focus of Jesus’s earthly ministry, Jesus’s saving activity was not meant to stop with Israel alone. His salvation offer extends to all the nations of the earth. Through faith in Jesus and repentance from sin, all people can be united to God and can become His children.

This mission doesn’t stop with Jesus. In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul applied this mission to himself and the church (Acts 13:47). The church continues the mission of God through Jesus to bring the offer of salvation to all the nations of the earth (Acts 1:8).

POINT 3

THE MESSIAH WILL OBEY THE FATHER COMPLETELY (LUKE 2:41-50).

NOTES

41 Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. **42** When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. **43** After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. **44** Assuming he was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. **45** When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. **46** After three days, they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** And all those who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. **48** When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." **49** "Why were you searching for me?" he asked them. "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" **50** But they did not understand what he said to them.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 2:41-50** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S EARLY YEARS MAP**, referencing the distance between Jerusalem and Jesus's likely home in Nazareth, and the **VERSES 41-47** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

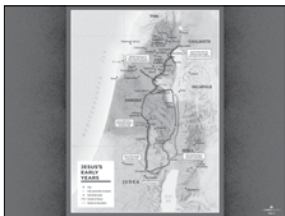
Jesus was **obedient** in thirsting for knowledge of God as He grew in **wisdom**.

DISCUSS: What character traits are demonstrated by Jesus's listening and asking questions in the temple? (humility; patience; a desire to learn; respect for elders and authorities)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 48-50** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus knew His **Father** and was obedient to Him, **first** and foremost.

DISCUSS: How should we reconcile our obedience to God and our expected obedience to human authorities? (God deserves our utmost obedience; God has told us to obey the human authorities He has placed over us; human authority must be considered as subject to God's ultimate authority; we should pray for God's wisdom and strength to know when and how to reject the unjust laws and commands of human authorities)



THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL

The Passover was a great act of God's salvation. He delivered His people, Israel, by sparing their firstborn from death. The sign of blood on the house was enough to cause the destruction to pass over the Israelites. God wrote this annual celebration into the Law of Moses because of its significance (Lev. 23:4-8). The celebration was a reminder that God saves.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 41-47 / Once again, these verses paint the picture of a faithful family honoring and obeying the Law of Moses. The law had instructions for the dedication of a child and the offerings that would be acceptable at such a time, and the law also had instructions for annual festivals. These festivals commemorated significant events in Israel's history. Foremost among these was the celebration of the Passover. This annual celebration required the people to stop and remember God's faithfulness to preserve His people during the plagues, and specifically the final plague, to help them escape from Pharaoh's rule over them in Egypt and to lead them to the promised land (see Ex. 12).

The salvation that the Passover commemorated was a foreshadowing of the salvation to come in Jesus. This faithful family brought God's greatest salvation to the temple at the time when a great salvation in history was celebrated. With Jesus's death, the perfect blood to spare sinners from spiritual death was shed, and those covered by His blood will be saved. All others face the wrath of God.

After the festival, Jesus's parents accidentally left him behind in Jerusalem. At this time, it would have been the custom for groups to make this pilgrimage together. In such an event, families often would split up and the husband might go separately, or he might even travel ahead in the journey to ensure safe travel. Somehow, Jesus was overlooked, and He did not go with the family back home, presumably to Nazareth. After some period of time when His parents couldn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to continue the search for their Son there.

You might imagine a pre-teen boy being left behind and getting into all sorts of mischief. But not Jesus. Mary and Joseph searched for Him and found Him in the temple among the teachers. Unlike the concept of adolescence today, in Jesus's day, it would have been common for boys

of this age to be settling into their family business, learning a trade, and preparing for responsibility and adulthood. Thirteen was the common age of adulthood, and here Jesus was twelve.

What's compelling in this narrative isn't merely the maturity that Jesus showed but the fact that He seemed to be settling into His Father's business already at this age. He was in the temple. He was asking questions of the religious leaders. And His questions and His answers gave some indication of unique wisdom and insight into God's will and ways. He was set apart, and others not only took notice, they were **"astounded."**

VERSES 48-50 / Jesus's parents found Him and spoke to Him, and you can almost hear the frustration in their words: **"Why have you treated us like this?"** But Jesus responded calmly, saying, **"It was necessary for me to be in my Father's house."** Luke used the term **"it is necessary"** often to show how God's plan must and will be fulfilled (4:4; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5; 22:37; 24:7,26,44).³ Jesus may not have fully known all that was expected of Him at this point, but He did know that He was to teach and point people to the Father and to His kingdom. Despite His parents' frustration, He was obeying the Father by being in the temple. The Almighty God and His will should always be our highest priority.

Jesus also knew who He was and whose He was. Jesus was making a statement of identity. He knew Himself to be the Son of God. He knew that God was His Father. His unique life and mission wasn't lost on Him. Scholars debate the exact point in time when Jesus understood who He was and what He came to do because the text doesn't say exactly. But Luke did give an indication that Jesus knew more than others, even His parents. Here, Jesus was making a statement about His identity to those who would listen, and this pattern of self-revelation would continue throughout His earthly ministry.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

Jesus was perfect, and the descriptions of His developmental years, though sparse, paint the picture of an obedient worshiper. We must not think of Jesus as some bionic being who was immune to sin and suffering. Jesus was human. Fully human. And as such, He experienced life in a fallen world and the same temptations that we all face. Yet Jesus's perfect life was necessary for Him to offer and secure for us a righteous standing before God as a gift.

Why does it matter that Jesus was perfect, even as a child?

HEART:

Perfection stirs our hearts. When we see an artist or an athlete do something perfectly, we are impressed, even awe-struck. It's compelling to see someone do something difficult and do it without flaw. Is there anything more difficult for human beings than to be perfect? It's not just difficult for us—it's impossible. We simply can't be perfect, and we know it. So when we encounter Jesus and we see Him living out faithful obedience even in the years when youthful passions tend to lead all people astray, we should be inspired to worship Him as God.

Why should Jesus's perfection on your behalf help you fight temptation?

HANDS:

We should be compelled to action by the truth that Jesus is the only hope for salvation for the nations. He is not merely the light for Israel; He is the light to the nations. He is the only One who can forgive sin and grant a righteous standing before God. Since Jesus is established as a light to the nations, we should consider how we can be involved in God's global work through His church. Whether we go, send, or support, all of God's people are called to making it known among the nations that Jesus is the Savior.

How will you be involved in testifying of Jesus to the nations?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Jesus came to set men free. By interpreting the true spiritual meaning of the Law, He released them from the legalistic bondage under which they had so long been oppressed, without lowering the standard."⁴

—J. O. Sanders
(1902-1992)

POINT 1: THE MESSIAH WILL FULFILL THE LAW ENTIRELY (LUKE 2:21-24).

+

COMMENTARY

“Vv. 22–24 generally reflect the protocol of Lev 12, where a birth mother’s purification is followed by an offering in the temple. Luke departs from Lev 12 in two respects, both of which can be explained by his interest in highlighting Jesus rather than Mary. The first is the reference to ‘their purification’ (v. 22; NIV ‘the purification’). Torah required only the purification of the mother, but Exod 34:19–20 requires also the redemption of the firstborn, which Luke appears to include in the purification of Mary, thus their purification. The second departure concerns the offering of ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons’ (v. 24). This offering, which was prescribed for Israelites of humble means and thus identifies Mary and Joseph with the lower economic classes in Palestine, was prescribed for the purification of a birth mother (Lev 5:11; 12:8). Luke ascribes this offering to the presentation of Jesus in the temple (v. 22) in a manner reminiscent of the presentation of Samuel at the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Sam 1:22–24). The two exceptions to the protocol set forth in Lev 12 thus accentuate the presentation, even manifestation, of Jesus in the temple.”⁵

+

ILLUSTRATION

“Jim was never one for following the rules until he enlisted in the military. After he graduated from boot camp, he had two days to get across country to his next assignment. On the second day, he called his father midmorning from his hotel room. “Why aren’t you on the road yet?” His father asked. “Well, I’m all ready to go, Dad,” Jim replied, “but the sign on the door says ‘Checkout at 11 a.m.’”⁶

Obedience is only right when it considers to whom you’re being obedient. First and foremost, you should be obedient to God. If others try to sway you from that, no matter who they are, you should always prioritize what God says to do.

POINT 2: THE MESSIAH WILL BRING SALVATION GLOBALLY (LUKE 2:27-32).

+ COMMENTARY

“We are not told Simeon’s vocation; all we know is that he is ‘righteous and devout’ (v. 25). Among the ‘righteous’ (*dikaioi*) of the Old Testament were Job (Job 1:1) and many of the prophets. The word ‘devout’ (*eulabes*) was used in Greek culture of statesmen (Plato, *Statesman*, 311b); Philo used this word to describe Abraham (Philo, *Who is the Heir?* 6 § 22). Whereas the shepherds symbolized the average person on the street, Simeon represents the testimony of a wise elder who has walked with God. Part of his wisdom is seen in that he is looking for the hope of the nation, the consummation of God’s promise—‘the consolation of Israel’ (v. 25). Saints in touch with God’s heart often await expectantly the completion of God’s promises. This revered saint is led to see what the arrival of this child means. Simeon, like Zechariah and Mary, is expectant that God will deliver Israel. He has not given up believing that God will complete his promise, and his living in light of that hope brings perspective to the present. The Spirit, the source of all revelation and testimony, has told him that before he passes away, he will see ‘the Lord’s Christ.’ Therefore, when the child Jesus arrives, he is there and is led by God to offer a note of praise (known as the *Nunc Dimittis*, a name that comes from the Latin beginning to the hymn). In that song, which includes some prediction, not all the notes are happy, for the career of the Lord’s Christ, though glorious, is not absent of trial and disappointment. The locale of Simeon’s prophecy, the temple, is significant for Jewish readers, for this prophet is testifying to Jesus in the midst of the nation’s most sacred locale. Simeon begins by saying that God can take him now, for he has fulfilled his call of seeing the child who is the Christ. Once again, Luke has emphasized how God has performed his word.”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

It’s easy to think of the nations as some remote bush in the back corner of Africa, and that is certainly one way to conceptualize God’s mission to bring salvation to the nations. He makes His way to places like this through the faithful witness of Christians who are willing to go and share the gospel of Jesus, and we should praise Him for their faithfulness (see Rom. 10).

But it’s also interesting to consider that many of us are in supposedly reached parts of the world. It’s easy to see places like the United States as the base of God’s operation, but this is not the case. God’s saving activity began in the Near East, and Jesus’s ministry focused on Jerusalem and the surrounding region. From there, places like the United States are about as “end of the world” as it gets. We should give thanks to God that in His good providence, testimony of the work of Jesus Christ made its way to us. Jesus is a light to our nation—to our hearts—by virtue of the faithful outworking of Jesus’s mission to be a light to the nations. And we can still be a part of that work as many people in United States, whether long-term citizens or new immigrants, still need to hear the good news of Jesus and the salvation and hope He brings.

POINT 3: THE MESSIAH WILL OBEY THE FATHER COMPLETELY (LUKE 2:41-50).

+ COMMENTARY

“As the scene opens, Mary and Joseph are the subjects of the action, but as it unfolds Jesus takes on an active role—for the first time in the Gospel. As the scene closes, he went to Nazareth, accompanied by them; he has become the subject of the verbs. This active role requires explanation, for it distances him from his parents, and this is the function of Jesus’ words in 2:49. Finally, the pericope contrasts two sorts of piety, not in order to negate the one but to underscore the preeminence of the other. It is a good thing to keep the Passover, but the sort of pious environment to which Jesus has become accustomed at home serves and must serve the more fundamental purpose of God. Not even familial claims take precedent over aligning oneself uncompromisingly on the side of God’s purpose. Jesus’ words, then, are pivotal, and contain within them both an affirmation of his particular relation to God and his commitment to God’s purpose. The first is emphasized by the dramatic development of the story, wherein Luke repeatedly refers to Jesus’ parents, Mary refers to Jesus as child and speaks of Jesus’ father, and Jesus counters by naming the God of the temple as his Father. That is, Luke has staged this interchange so as to pinpoint as the primary issue, Who is Jesus’ father? To whom does he owe primary allegiance? Jesus’ aligning himself first with God’s aim comes to the fore especially through his use of the expression ‘it is necessary’—employed regularly throughout Luke-Acts as an indicator of salvation-historical necessity.”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

Complete obedience is rare. Parents of little kids know that discipline centers around a failure to obey completely. A child is asked to clean his room and he crams the clothes under the bed, or she is asked to wipe off the kitchen table and makes a singular sweeping motion with a cloth in a general direction of the table. Half-hearted, half-way obedience is normative.

Had Jesus obeyed in this way, He would not have been able to offer perfect righteousness to sinners as a gift. Jesus had to obey all the way and perfectly. He could not cut corners or offer general compliance. He had to be faithful, completely. Imagine how this must have felt for Jesus through these years. Perfect obedience when His peers were surely being foolish. But the glimpses we are given of Jesus demonstrate that He was perfect, down to the letter of the law. This perfect, all-the-way faithfulness is necessary for our salvation and is a model for us to follow in our effort to worship God through our obedience as well.

References

1. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 92.
2. J. C. Ryle, *Luke*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), Lk 2:25-35 [Logos].
3. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary, 101.
4. J. O. Sanders, “How Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?” ed. Maze Jackson, *Golden Nuggets* 17 (1981) [Logos].
5. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2015), 82-83.
6. Jim Wilson, “Obedience” in *Reader’s Digest*, May 2002, p. 62 reprinted in 1000 Fresh Illustrations (WORDsearch/Logos, 2004).
7. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary, 92-93.
8. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 155-56.

THE SAVIOR IS BAPTIZED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The herald prepares for the Son (Mark 1:1-6).
2. The herald points to the Son (Mark 1:7-8).
3. The herald baptizes the Son (Mark 1:9-11).

Background Passage: Mark 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus obeyed God and identified with sinners by being baptized like sinners are baptized. His baptism points to His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. For those of us in Christ, the words spoken over Jesus at His baptism are also true of us: we are the Father's beloved children with whom He is pleased.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: When people write memoirs or biographies, it is impossible to tell every story with every detail involved. Writers need to pick and choose what is important to convey for the focused message they want readers or listeners to hear.

DISCUSS: If someone were telling the story of your life, what highlights might need to be focused on? (birth; family; major turning points or milestones; something that provoked suffering and produced change; key decisions made that shaped your life)

TRANSITION: None of the Gospel writers intended to tell everything they knew about Jesus. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they wanted to hit the high points and specific points so that their readers understood who Jesus is and what He came to do. Therefore, we can have confidence that the stories and teaching that are included in each Gospel are important and necessary. The story we will consider in this session, as told through Mark's Gospel, launched Jesus into His public ministry.

POINT 1

THE HERALD PREPARES FOR THE SON (MARK 1:1-6).

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. **3** A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight! **4** John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **6** John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:1-6** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]):

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

DISCUSS: How should the steady use of Old Testament prophecy in the story of Jesus's birth encourage us? (it reminds us that God was doing exactly what He said He would do; God can be trusted because He was in charge of events that spanned hundreds of years; God isn't merely interested in the big aspects of a story, He's concerned with the details; God made promises about small things so when they came to pass, it was even greater evidence of His control over all)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-6** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: How would John's practice of baptism help people understand Jesus's message? (he proclaimed that sins needed to be confessed and repented of before being forgiven; people needed to humble themselves to be baptized; people had to acknowledge sin and their need for cleansing)

TRANSITION: Like the prophets of old, John the Baptist came to prepare the people's heart for God's message and mission. He also was preparing them for God Himself come to earth as the Christ—Jesus—who would be ready and willing to sacrifice Himself to save the world.

NOTES

THE WILDERNESS

The wilderness is an ambivalent term, having both negative and positive connotations, depending on the context. It is a place of refuge (1 Sam. 23:14) and prayer (Luke 5:16), as well as a place of temptation (Luke 4:1-2) and wandering (Deut. 8:15). Sometimes it is green (Joel 2:22) and sometimes it is dried up (Jer. 23:10). Evil and rebellion lurks in the wilderness, but so does delivery and revelation.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / Mark opened his Gospel by connecting Jesus's arrival to the fulfillment of prophecy, specifically Isaiah 40:3. God had prepared for this day. He used prophets like Elijah and Elisha and now John the Baptist to help prepare people's hearts for God to move.

Mark called John a **"messenger,"** which highlighted the most important thing about John's role—the message he proclaimed. He was God's messenger for this time and place. John's role was to be a herald for the Christ and to point attention to Jesus. In so doing, he would prepare the way for the Messiah's arrival. Imagine a path through the woods poorly marked and overgrown. Someone goes ahead and clears the way to make it easier for people to walk. This is a metaphor for John's work. He lived to make it easier for people to find their way to Jesus.

Mark noted that John's voice was as **"one crying out in the wilderness"** (see Isa. 40:3). This quotation pointed to the magnitude of the message: he was not whispering or gently nudging the people around him—he was shouting! But he also was doing this in the wilderness, a desolate place with few people around. You can't hear a voice shouting in the wilderness if you are busy in the city. While John was intent on fulfilling his role as a messenger, Mark alluded to the fact that his voice would be largely missed or ignored.

VERSES 4-6 / If we start in verse 6, we get a glimpse of who John the Baptist was. He wasn't looking for popularity or power. He humbled himself, wearing camel garments and eating locusts and honey. Even though people were coming to him for baptism, John understood his baptism was different from what was to come. He performed a baptism of repentance that itself would prepare for a coming baptism for the forgiveness of sins. In the following verses, John would describe his baptism as happening with "water," but Jesus's baptism would be with "the Holy Spirit" (v. 8). John

practiced his baptism and also pointed his followers forward to a coming baptism that would be greater.

So John was a singular voice crying out in the inhospitable wilderness where many were coming out to be baptized. They came to the Jordan River and presumably were immersed in the water there, since the word **"baptism"** literally means "immersed." Notice the connection made in verses 4-5 between John's baptism of repentance and the confession of sins. It is clear that baptism was meant to be connected with the act of repentance, a pattern well established in the various Old Testament purification practices (see Lev. 15:5; Ezek. 36:25).

The analogy of baptism is this: We bathe in an effort to remove physical dirt. Symbolic washing is a picture of the need for spiritual cleansing of the contamination in our lives. We know instinctively that we are impure—dirty—due to our sin. So people throughout history, even among many religious traditions today, washed themselves before they entered their deity's presence. This act was meant to provide the spiritual cleaning people knew they needed from their sin and inherent guilt. But something was always missing from such rituals in the religions of the world.

The issue is that none of these practices actually make us spiritually clean or take away sin. Neither could the baptism of John, which is why his baptism pointed to a greater one. While his baptism was more in line with Jesus's in that he immersed people under water and proclaimed the need for repentance, his baptism could merely point his followers forward to the coming baptism that Jesus would bring. In contrast to ritual washing in the Old Testament or John's baptism, Jesus's would do something lasting to address the problem of sin. He Himself would lay down His life to defeat sin and death and then rise again victorious, never to die again, that those who trust in Him may be washed in His blood, forgiven, and brought into new life.

POINT 2

THE HERALD POINTS TO THE SON (MARK 1:7-8).

7 He proclaimed, “One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals.

8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:7-8** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7-8** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

John knew that Jesus’s baptism would be greater because it would symbolize the work of God’s **Spirit** to transform the **heart**.

DISCUSS: What does baptism do? (the act of baptism doesn’t actually do anything in regard to our salvation; people are saved prior to being baptized, but baptism does do something in the sense that it communicates our salvation publicly; baptism proclaims the work of God in our life; baptism serves as a standing reminder in our lives of what God has done to change us; baptism unites us to God’s people in the church; baptism visually pictures the gospel; baptism unites us to Christians throughout the history of the church)

EXPLAIN: Use the **BAPTISM** commentary to emphasize the following key doctrine (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #91: Baptism: Christian baptism is the immersion of a **believer** in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of **obedience** symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a **testimony** to the believer’s faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper.

TRANSITION: Not only did John practice baptism and not only did he point forward to Jesus’s baptism, a baptism of the Spirit, but curiously, he also had the privilege of baptizing Jesus Christ.

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

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

—Charles C. Ryrie
(1925-2016)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 7-8 / John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus's power and His worth. He did that by way of comparison. The One who was to come was more powerful, and by comparison, John was unworthy. How did John know this?

The answer is found in the pattern that John modeled for us. He was a person who believed God's promises. He knew that the Messiah would be powerful and worthy because God said this is who the Messiah will be. He knew that the Messiah would bring the Holy Spirit because God promised it would be so. John surely didn't understand all that would happen or how it would happen or how Jesus would step into these roles, but he determined that he didn't have to have all of the answers. Like Simeon (Luke 2:27-32), John believed God's promises and acted accordingly. Christians today would be wise to follow John's example and listen to the promises of God made in His Word and believe and act on them, even if we do not fully understand the whats, the whys, or the hows of God's plan to keep His promises.

The distinguishing aspect between John's baptism and Jesus's baptism is the focal point of the work. Water is an outward symbol. It cleans the physical, or external. In contrast, the Holy Spirit addresses the heart. Ezekiel, an Old Testament prophet, pointed forward to a day when God would give His people a new heart and put a new Spirit within them (Ezek. 36:26). When we trust in Jesus, He puts His Spirit in us, and baptism displays that reality.

BAPTISM / Various denominational traditions differ on their understanding of baptism, as they do over their understanding of the Lord's Supper. In fact, differing views on these two practices have led to the formation of many denominations. Baptists, for example, relegate baptism only to believers, those who are indwelt by the Spirit, and thus, they do not baptize children before they are converted. These groups suggest that baptism is a practice

for Christians after conversion. They believe that baptism should be closely connected in time to when one comes to faith in Jesus, but the act of baptism itself doesn't save. Baptism conveys the change of heart accomplished by the Spirit in those whom God has saved (Rom. 8).

Baptism also serves as a spiritual picture of new life that submits to God's Spirit. Paul argued in Romans 6 that God's people have died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ. Christians are immersed under the water, symbolic of their union with Christ in His atoning death and their death to sin, and they are brought up out of the water as a symbol of their new life of obedience to God's Spirit.

Finally, baptism proclaims something to the watching world. Note that many went out to the wilderness to be baptized by John. They participated in a public symbol that told the world that they understood that their sins needed to be forgiven. This was not a private act. It was public. It required someone to administer the baptism, and it implied that many were around to witness the baptism. In so doing, the person being baptized was publicly uniting with a community looking for forgiveness of sins. Baptism in Jesus's name means aligning oneself with the community grounded on His sacrifice and salvation for that forgiveness. Often such a union came with great social cost, as the one being baptized was breaking with his or her former way of life and community in order to unite themselves with Jesus and with His people. Baptism continues to play this role in the church.

Like the Lord's Supper, baptism proclaims the gospel to those watching as those who are baptized know themselves to be sinners in need of salvation. It also unites the one being baptized with others who have done the same in the local church. In so doing, they are joining the community of the people of God, centered around Jesus Christ.

POINT 3

THE HERALD BAPTIZES THE SON (MARK 1:9-11).

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. **10** As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

11 And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 1:9-11** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 9** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus was baptized, in part, as an **example** for us to follow in His steps.

DISCUSS: Why did Jesus get baptized even though He had nothing to repent of or confess? (Jesus wanted to validate John's ministry; to be an example for us; to show baptism doesn't save but is an act of obedience; to publicly proclaim the work of the Father and the coming of the kingdom)

EXPLAIN: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 7: THE TRINITY**, and use the handout and the **VERSES 10-11** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God the **Father** validated the identity of God the **Son**, Jesus Christ, and sent His **Spirit** to dwell on Him.

DISCUSS: How can growing in our understanding of the triune God help us worship Him more? (helps us have a fuller picture of who God is; helps us grow in faith even when we don't completely understand the Trinity; helps us realize how relational God is, one God in three Persons; helps us see the ways God has worked from the beginning of time until now)



THE JORDAN RIVER

The Jordan River flows north to south and has significance in the history of Israel. God parted it to let Joshua and the Israelites pass (Josh. 3:15-17), as well as letting Elijah and Elisha pass (2 Kings 2:8,14). Naaman was healed of leprosy there after dipping himself (2 Kings 5:8-14). And here we find John baptizing Jesus there. In all these stories, we see God's power and fulfilled promises at the Jordan.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 9 / Mark opened this section of his Gospel by telling us that Jesus went out to be baptized by John. Other Gospel writers made the point that Jesus participated in practices that would have been common for faithful Israelites of His day. He was taken to the temple to be dedicated, His family offered the appropriate sacrifices, they had Jesus circumcised, and the family committed to celebrate the feasts that God prescribed (see Luke 1–2). Jesus’s baptism was a continuation of this trend. Jesus was careful to obey the Mosaic Law. He humbly submitted Himself to the law that He knew He would soon fulfill.

Likely a primary basis for His willingness to be baptized was the link between His ministry and John’s. By being baptized by John, Jesus functionally aligned Himself with John’s message—the message of repentance in pointing to the coming Messiah. Jesus clearly wanted His followers to see that He willingly accepted John’s claims that He is the Messiah. And He would intentionally amplify this baptism practice in His Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). John’s manner and message connected him with the prophets of old, and Jesus’s baptism allowed others to trace that line of association through John and ultimately to Jesus as the Prophet (see Deut. 18:15-19).

VERSES 10-11 / This baptism event in Jesus’s life is one of the clearest places in all of Scripture where readers get a glimpse of each Person of the Trinity working together in the same passage. Jesus, the Son, was clearly the One who went out to John for baptism. God the Father tore the heavens and spoke from His eternal throne. And God the Spirit descended like a dove to rest upon Jesus. While the word “Trinity”—meaning one God in three Persons—is not used here or anywhere in the Bible, it’s clear that Mark ascribed divinity to each of these Persons in this passage.

There are many biblical allusions present in verse 10. God the Father tore the heavens open like He would soon tear the veil of the

temple following Jesus’s atoning death on the cross. It’s clear that through Jesus, God was coming to save His people. And the Spirit of God came down like a dove. Soon the Spirit of God would come down and rest on all God’s people at Pentecost through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2). It’s possible the shift of the Holy Spirit’s appearance in the form of a dove landing on Jesus and the form of fire landing on the people at Pentecost is attributable to the fact that Jesus had no sin that needed purification.

The voice from heaven mentioned in verse 11 accomplished a number of vital roles. First, it validated Jesus’s identity. He heard the voice from heaven declaring Him to be the Son of God. In the same way that an earthly father’s voice of love can strengthen the countenance of a child, this word of confidence and validation from God was the launching pad from which Jesus would set out on His earthly mission.

The voice also validated the ministry of John the Baptist. John’s looks and dietary habits were odd, and his message was unexpected. God had been silent for so long. Why would anyone believe that the Messiah had now come, especially when John was saying that the Messiah was Jesus? Jesus did not fit the profile that most expected. So when the Father spoke from heaven, His voice was an echo of John’s message. Those who were attentive would be forced to consider the truth of John’s claims as they heard the Father validate those claims. Later, Jesus would also make those claims about Himself.

Finally, the voice was a message to the watching world. Baptism, being a public act, was witnessed by others. Those who were there witnessed the voice speaking from heaven the moment Jesus came up out of the water. The authority of Jesus was validated. Now those who were witnesses could either choose to follow Jesus or not, choose to submit to Him or not. But one thing was clear—the Messiah had come in Jesus and the Spirit of God was on Him.

MY RESPONSE

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

NOTES

HEAD:

Jesus is God's Son. The Father's voice at Jesus's baptism confirmed His identity to the world for those who heard and those who read this true story with faith. Since Jesus is God's Son, He can be trusted and worshiped as God. The act of Christian baptism is a public proclamation of this reality of faith. Those who are baptized are saying to the world that they are united with Jesus, believe Him to be the true and living Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, and are submitting their lives to follow Him. God's people by faith in God's Son are then given God's Spirit to validate their identity as God's children.

What are some ways Christian baptism should impact believers in Christ and even unbelievers who witness a believer's baptism?

HEART:

Christians can find hope in the way God validated Jesus's identity because it provides a picture of the way God establishes our identity as well. Those who are God's children belong to Him. Therefore, they don't have to grapple for identity in secondary sources. There is no reason to look for worth and value in what we do or how others think of us or how we stack up to those around us. All we need to do is look to God and trust that what He says about us is true. From that place of worth, we, like Jesus, are then sent out into our earthly mission as believers with meaning and purpose.

In your life, what sources of identity compete with a secure identity in Christ as God's beloved child? How do you need to repent in this regard?

HANDS:

Christians should know their role in comparison to Jesus's. We are not powerful like Him, nor are we worthy of worship. Like John, we should live to point attention to Jesus as the One who is all-powerful and worthy of all worship. God gives us our lives for that very reason. We exist to point to God, the hope for salvation for the world. In our service to others, love for the church, and evangelism of the lost, we should humbly point to Jesus. We can trust that He is the One who can save, heal, and forgive, so all we need to do is use our lives to show off how great Jesus is.

How will you leverage your life this week to point others to Jesus?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"He told them he had drenched them with water which was only external, but One would come who would drench them in the Holy Spirit, which was intrinsically internal. What a beautiful metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit! When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, he permeates every part of us."²

—R. Kent Hughes

POINT 1: THE HERALD PREPARES FOR THE SON (MARK 1:1-6).

+

COMMENTARY

“The very first sentence therefore evidences that Mark’s Gospel is more than a narrative of events. It is also a theology, primarily a Christology. Although the characters in the story struggle with Jesus’ identity, the readers/hearers know from the beginning that he is the promised Messiah and the very Son of God . . . ‘Isaiah the prophet’ (40:3) supplies only that part of the quotation in v. 3. The part in v. 2 is from Mal 3:1, perhaps with an allusion to Exod 23:20 as well (the same word means angel and messenger). As a result many medieval scribes substituted ‘in the prophets.’ This reading is found in the KJV and NKJV, which are based on the medieval Greek text rather than on the earliest and now regarded best manuscripts as is the NIV. Mark and other biblical writers simply did not employ the technical precision of modern research. It was not necessary for their purpose. Furthermore, both quotations are adapted in order to apply them to John. In Isaiah, ‘the Lord’ was God, but in Mark’s quotation it is Jesus; Isaiah has ‘for our God,’ but Mark substitutes ‘for him’, i.e., Jesus. Jesus and the New Testament writers often reinterpreted the Old Testament text in order to apply it to their own situation, in addition to quoting it loosely from memory. Malachi 4:5 probably identifies John as the Elijah-like person who precedes Christ in his suffering. Also John’s preaching of repentance in v. 4 (cf. 1 Kgs 18:37; Mal 4:6) and the description of him in v. 6 (cf. 2 Kgs 1:8) recall Elijah. The significance of the quotation is that both John and Jesus appeared as a result of divine providence. Mark quotes from the Old Testament infrequently, and elsewhere his citations are part of a quotation of one of his characters, usually Jesus.”³

+

ILLUSTRATION

Any time a dignitary comes to town, much effort must be made to prepare for his or her arrival. For example, in the United States, if the president were coming to town, then you better believe there will be extensive work needed to prepare even a grand city for his arrival. Even if the President were only visiting for a few hours, the city’s rhythms would change. Days and weeks before the arrival, those who control the movement and flow of traffic would be notified. The route the President would take would be mapped out. Secret Service would show up ahead of time to make the space safe and secure. The police would guard every detail and be aware of even minor changes. Food would be prepared and lodging secured. The President would do none of this work himself, but many people would go ahead of him to make his arrival easier.

This was the work of John the Baptist. His effort to prepare the way should not imply that Jesus could not have done what He did without John, but it was God's intention that He would employ one who would step into the line of the great prophets of old and prepare the world for Jesus to come. John's message and his baptism were done in an effort to make way for Jesus to enter and build upon the work that John had already done.

POINT 2: THE HERALD POINTS TO THE SON (MARK 1:7-8).

+ COMMENTARY

"All of the Gospels begin their accounts of Jesus's ministry with his baptism by John. It was also a key point in the apostolic preaching about Jesus among Jews in the book of Acts. Scholars who have researched the aims of Jesus regard this as a vital piece of evidence. The fact that Jesus accepted and endorsed the ministry of John the Baptist and launched his own ministry from it (there were differences, of course, as observers noted at that time, but there was considerable overlap and continuity) shows that Jesus also saw his own mission in terms of the fulfillment of the great expectations of the restoration of Israel. If John was the one who had been sent to prepare Israel for its eschatological restoration by God himself, then Jesus was the one who had been sent to accomplish it."⁴

+ ILLUSTRATION

There aren't many activities more humbling than having to tie someone's shoes. We do this for kids. They don't have the fine motor skills in place to make the bow and the knot secure, so we bend down and tie them for the child, often in a double knot to avoid having to do it again soon.

It's humbling to tie someone's shoes; it's even more humbling to be told to tie someone's shoes. Imagine a superior, say an ancient king or current president, commanded someone his own age, or even older, to do this menial task. It would be the height of embarrassment to have to humble yourself in this way. Regardless of your sense of the superiority of the one commanding the act, to bend in submission to such a request would bring shame.

In our passage, John voluntarily submitted to this task. Though Jesus was younger, unproven, and at the point had done virtually nothing to substantiate Himself as superior, John knew that Jesus is powerful and mighty. While he didn't actually untie Jesus's sandal, he said that he was not only willing to do this act but that he was not even worthy to do it. Imagine that—someone who says they aren't even worthy enough to stoop to tie a sandal. This wasn't an act of worth. It was an act of humility. But John knew the greatness of Jesus, so He saw the act of humility as an honor.

POINT 3: THE HERALD BAPTIZES THE SON (MARK 1:9-11).

+

COMMENTARY

“The instant Jesus came up out of the water, a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit descended from the sky. Mark describes the visible form as ‘like a dove’ and notes that ‘a voice came out of the heavens’ addressing Jesus as ‘My beloved Son.’ These two verses and their parallels (Matt. 3:16–17; Luke 3:22) feature all three persons of the Trinity. All three persons are God—the Father speaking from heaven, the Spirit descending like a dove, and the Son seeing the Spirit and hearing the voice. Without ceasing to be fully God, the three persons are distinct in that they interact with one another. In other words, God doesn’t emerge from the water as the Son, race to heaven from the body of Jesus to utter His affirmation as the Father, and then fly down again as the Holy Spirit to become the Son again. On the contrary, God is shown in this passage to be three and one simultaneously. While we see this interchange for a mere instant, the Trinity has always existed this way. As Wayne Grudem so expertly describes the ‘tri-unity,’

God eternally exists as three persons,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
and each person is fully God,
and there is one God.”⁵

+

ILLUSTRATION

We all have stories of a time when someone or something validated our identity in a significant way. Many times these identity-formation moments come on the heels of a painful moment. You might imagine the teenage athlete who missed a key free throw that cost the team a game or a student who received a rejection letter from the most desired university. In the space following such an experience, a parent or authority figure can step into the experience and have a key conversation that goes something like this: “You know that this painful event isn’t the end. You are not what you do. You matter to me whether you make or miss the free throw or get into the school. Your worth is not found in those things. You are my child and I love you because God gave you to me.” These identity-forming conversations shape our lives in critical ways. Many adults look back on an event like this as validating them and propelling them into adulthood. Sadly, many others never had the joy of knowing a parent who could anchor their identity.

In our passage, we see God the Father do this for Jesus. This identity-formation scene defined Jesus’s ministry. One wonders how and when Jesus reflected back on this scene in places of loneliness, pain, or rejection. How many times did He call to mind the Father’s love when He was weary or oppressed? Jesus’s identity as the Father’s Son drove His activity, and so should ours as God’s children through faith in Jesus Christ.

References

1. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, rev. and expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1997), 113 [Logos].
2. R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, *Preaching the Word* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), 23.
3. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 39-40.
4. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 147-48.
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Mark*, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), 21.

THE SAVIOR IS FAITHFUL

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son of God trusts in the Father's provision (Matt. 4:1-4).
2. The Son of God trusts in the Father's providence (Matt. 4:5-7).
3. The Son of God trusts in the Father's plan (Matt. 4:8-11).

Background Passage: Matthew 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus stepped into our world and overcame the temptation to which Adam succumbed. Jesus showed He is obedient to the Father and He is the worthy One who would undo the consequences of Adam's sin and bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:3). Jesus's life of obedience led Him to the cross, the place where He conquered sin and death as our Savior.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: Temptations are a part of life. Being human means we will be tempted. Whether or not we succumb to those temptations or resist them will be a key factor in our growth as a disciple of Jesus.

DISCUSS: **What comes to your mind when you think of the word *temptation*?** (an overwhelming desire and longing for something that gives immediate pleasure; a feeling that an outside force acts upon you; the memory of past times when you've given in to temptation, so you feel a sense of shame and regret; a fear that you can't help yourself, so you give in; times when God's strength has helped you to resist)

TRANSITION: All people experience temptation, and we experience temptation all the time. Jesus came to the earth as a man. He wasn't a make-believe person. He was a real human being. As such, He experienced real temptation from Satan throughout His earthly ministry. Matthew 4 shows us a few examples of this temptation and provides both a motive for our worship of Jesus as the One who overcame temptation and a model for our own fight against sin.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: **What makes you want to grow in your fight against temptation?** (our work in the world hinges on our faithfulness, so it's important to seek holiness; overcoming the frustration of failing to temptation; not wasting time engaging in sin that we could be using for good works; our leadership in the church depends on us fighting sin)

POINT 1

THE SON OF GOD TRUSTS IN THE FATHER'S PROVISION (MATT. 4:1-4).

NOTES

THE NUMBER 40

The number 40 in the Bible has often been linked with a time of testing of character and the ability to trust and remain faithful. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights when Noah was on the ark. Moses was in Egypt 40 years, in the desert 40 years, and with Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. Saul, David, and Solomon reigned for 40 years. Nineveh was given 40 days to repent. And Jesus was tempted for 40 days.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Unbelief, just like Satan, will always take the easy way out. It will tell us to eat the fruit in exchange for knowledge, instead of fearing God to gain real wisdom. Unbelief will unravel our perceptions of both suffering and the blessedness of life and beckon us to skip self-denial at all costs with the faux promises of comfort that can't extend beyond the grave."¹

—Jackie Hill Perry

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." **4** He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 4:1-4** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-2** commentary to highlight the following key doctrine (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

KEY DOCTRINE #51: *The Sinlessness of Jesus:* While the Bible affirms the full humanity of Jesus, it also affirms that Jesus was completely **sinless** throughout His earthly life (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22). Nevertheless, because Jesus was fully human, He experienced real **temptation** of sin, as seen during His trials in the wilderness (Matt. 4). Yet even though His trials and temptations were real and similar to the rest of humanity's, Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus did not sin.

DISCUSS: What might we learn from the high point of Jesus's baptism being followed by a difficult time of challenge, such as facing Satan in the wilderness? (life comes with high points and low points, good times and challenges; Jesus seems more approachable to us because He faced the same difficulties of life that we face; following Jesus will often lead us to places of difficulty and temptation, but we have Jesus and His strength to trust God more)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 3-4** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

DISCUSS: How should we react knowing Satan is real and ready to tempt us at any time? (alert about the spiritual battles that are happening; be prepared with the armor of God and the sword of truth; prayerful, relying on God's strength and help; humble in realizing we are susceptible to sin through temptations)

TRANSITION: Matthew describes three scenes of Jesus's temptation in this narrative. The first confronted whether or not Jesus would trust the Father to provide. The second addresses Jesus's trust of the Father's providential care.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-2 / The narrative told in Matthew 4:1-11 provides a clear link between the Old Testament and Jesus. One way we see this connection is through the superscript links in our Bibles that point out the fact that much of what Jesus says in this section is quoted from Deuteronomy 6 and 8. Since Deuteronomy is a collection of teachings from Moses to Israel just prior to them entering the promised land, Jesus's quotes immediately take the reader back to the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness.

Additionally, the time and the place clue us in to this same link. Jesus was led out to the wilderness for forty days, and Israel sojourned in the wilderness for forty years. Note that Jesus didn't merely wander to the wilderness, He was **"led up by the Spirit."** God had a plan, and it included allowing Jesus to be tempted. So Jesus fasted from food for forty days and experienced hunger. This is reminiscent of the Israelites in the wilderness being hungry. God's people complained, and God still fed them manna from heaven. Jesus, in His perfection, resisted Satan's temptations and faithfully depended on God. Jesus succeeded where Israel failed.

Something else to note about Jesus's hunger is that it reminds us of His humanity. Jesus was not immune to something so basic as physical hunger. When He did not eat, He got hungry, just like all other people. It's encouraging and humbling to see the Son of God stoop to human form in all ways, and this gives substance to the genuine fight against temptation that Jesus experienced.

VERSES 3-4 / At the conclusion of Jesus's sojourn in the wilderness, Satan entered the story as **"the tempter,"** bringing the reader back to the story of the fall in Genesis 3. There, Satan tempted Eve and Adam to take and eat, much like he did here with Jesus. While Adam was not fasting, the temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit was a question of whether or not Adam

and Eve would trust God to provide. Adam, our representative head, failed. Jesus, the better Adam, however, did not.

Satan met Jesus at a point of weakness. Here is a good learning point for all subsequent Bible readers. Satan knows our weaknesses and does not throw temptation at people whimsically. Rather, he comes to us in a place where he knows we are susceptible to sin and holds out an alternative to God's design.

Jesus had the power to turn stones into bread—He is the Creator and Sustainer, after all. Whereas other people would not have this power, Satan recognized Jesus's identity at this early point in His ministry. He was aware that Jesus is the Son of God. As the Son, He could easily, with a word, make stones into bread or meet His hunger needs in any way He wanted. Yet this wasn't an issue of how Jesus would get food; the issue revolved around whether Jesus would trust God to provide or whether He would try to do things on His own.

In response to Satan's verbal temptation, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. These words were given by God to Israel following their failure to enter the promised land to remind them of the lessons of the wilderness. They were there to learn to depend on God to provide. Had they trusted God's provision—had this principle been settled in their hearts—they would have been faithful to God in conquering the promised land the first time around. But they weren't, and so they didn't. By quoting this verse, Jesus was telling Satan that He would not follow Adam's or Israel's pattern. Jesus acknowledged that it is more important to learn to depend on God's Word and not physical bread. He trusted that God would feed Him at the right time. In this way, Jesus set a model for all His followers who are faced with this decision: Will I trust God to provide in His way at His time or will I try to meet my needs on my own? The latter choice lies at the core of most of our sin and failure.

POINT 2

THE SON OF GOD TRUSTS IN THE FATHER'S PROVIDENCE (MATT. 4:5-7).

NOTES

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” **7** Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 4:5-7** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-6** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: How does succumbing to temptation lead us astray from God's mission for our lives? (it keeps us from the fullness of joy God has to offer; it leads us to dire consequences as a result of sin; it sours our witness to others who are searching for Christ; when we're led astray, we can lead others astray)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 7** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus **quoted Scripture** to reject Satan's temptation of an inappropriate use of power.

DISCUSS: Why did Jesus use Scripture to counter Satan's attacks? (Scripture records truth; Scripture is the foundation for understanding God's will and ways; Jesus did not have to make up a response in the moment because He knew God's truth; the work of God in the world is consistent, so these patterns of response that should have happened in Israel's story were still applicable in Jesus's day and in ours; this serves as a model for Christians for how they should respond to temptation)

TRANSITION: The second temptation was more vague than the first, but it hit on a temptation that we all experience as well—the thirst for and misuse of power. The third temptation also feels familiar—preempting God's plan with one of our own.

ANGELS

Angels are “messengers” of God, as is communicated by the Greek word used to refer to them. They are supernatural beings created by God. In both the Old and New Testaments, they brought a word from God or ministered to His people.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 5-6 / The “**holy city**”—Jerusalem—and the temple both connect this story to Israel’s history. Jerusalem was a symbol of God’s faithfulness to bring His people into the promised land. The temple was a tangible sign that God dwelt with His people and that His glory was among them. Both the city and the temple set Israel apart as God’s people. The nations were meant to be able to look in on the greatness of the city and the magnificence of the temple and see how remarkable God’s care was for His people. This glory would then prompt the nations to worship. But more often than not, the sin of the people unfortunately distracted others from God’s glory.

In the second temptation attempt, Satan took Jesus to the city and to the top of the temple to get Him to show off His power. Satan knew that Jesus is the Messiah, and He wanted Him to prove it by doing something that only God could do. He asked Jesus to throw Himself off the temple. More than a thrill-seeking act, this was a means to have Jesus call the angelic army to come and rescue Him before He hit the ground. Satan even quoted the psalmist to couch this temptation in biblical words (see Ps. 91:11-12).

This, again, was something the Son of God could do. He commands all and has power over all. Jesus later acknowledged this reality just before His arrest: “Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will provide me here and now with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53).

But in both cases, the display would shortcut God’s intention. Yes, Jesus could throw Himself off the temple and call the angels to His side to stop His fall, and this act would likely cause those watching to see and respond to His deity in a moment. Yes, Jesus could have called the angels to stop His arrest and even His enemies would know that He is God. But this was not the Father’s intention. There was a clear plan for Jesus’s work, and this included all of the work and teaching that would transpire

between this moment and Jesus’s death and resurrection three years later.

VERSE 7 / Jesus’s response to Satan’s temptation was simple and direct: You should not put God to the test. Here again, Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 6:16 comes from a time when the people grumbled against Moses because they had no water to drink. They had just been freed from slavery in Egypt but continued to complain: Why had Moses brought them out in the wilderness to die? Would God provide for them? There, God used Moses to provide water for the people in a miraculous way (Ex. 17). Moses renamed that place in light of the quarreling of the people who did not seem to believe that the Lord was among them.

The issue for Israel wasn’t the water, nor was the issue in Jesus’s life whether or not the angels would protect Him from harm. The issue was whether they trusted God or whether they would put God to the test. Of course, God could do something—He’s God! But to put God to the test and presume upon His actions at our sinful, selfish demand is arrogant and wrong.

Jesus was patient to trust God’s plan rather than test Him in this moment. He was surely making a statement of condemnation to Satan, who was testing the Son of God in the moment. But more so, He was making a statement of His identity and mission. He was not going to test His Father; instead, He would trust Him. This action set a paradigm for Jesus’s entire ministry. For example, in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus longed for the Father to take the cup of God’s wrath away (Luke 22:42). He could have side-stepped the process and avoided the cross, but He did not. He chose to continue the path God determined for Him rather than test Him to save some other way. Because Jesus did not test God but acted as God by submitting to the Father’s plan, He showed Himself to be God and the One who could save His people from their sin.

POINT 3

THE SON OF GOD TRUSTS IN THE FATHER'S PLAN (MATT. 4:8-11).

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me." **10** Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 4:8-11** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 8-9** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What are some occasions when we might be tempted to use our power and position **pridefully**? (if we are a leader, getting what we want without considering others; if we have authority, not humbling ourselves to do minor tasks; if we are part of the majority, not considering the situations of the minority; not grieving with those who grieve)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 10-11** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus responded to Satan's temptation by directing **worship** to God **alone** and telling Satan to leave.

TRANSITION: Jesus set Himself apart as God by facing Satan in the wilderness and winning. It was head-to-head combat but was no contest. Jesus fought and overcame temptation with the Word of God, the same weapon the Lord has given to us as well.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 8-9 / Finally, Satan took Jesus to a high place and showed Him **“all the kingdoms of the world.”** It’s unclear how this happened, but somehow Jesus was given a glimpse of all human kingdoms.

But one thing to consider: Jesus had made all of this. Not only was He ruling with His Father as these various kingdoms came to be, but He was also the One who created all things in the first place. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, as we have already seen. He upholds all and is over all. Had Jesus succumbed to pride as people do, He easily could have exalted Himself, but He didn’t.

Jesus also is the rightful owner of all of these kingdoms. He rules over them already. One day they will bow down before Him (Phil. 2:10-11; Rom. 14:11). All that Satan offered, Jesus already possessed, though He willingly laid aside the glory of these possessions to take on humanity. In essence, Satan’s temptation was to rush the process, to take the glory of His position now rather than wait for God the Father to elevate Him in due time. “Have what is Yours now,” Satan was saying.

The price for such an act was steep. Satan said that Jesus could have this position if He would merely fall down and worship Satan. This might seem like a large leap, but it was what Israel did in the wilderness. Rather than worship the rightful God—the One who saved them and provided for them in the wilderness—they continually chose to worship the false gods of the day. They fell down before idols of wood or stone that “have mouths but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk. They cannot make a sound with their throats. Those who make them are just like them, as are all who trust in them” (Ps. 115:5-8).

Worship of anything other than God is worthless. Israel proved this to be true, and therefore, they were judged for their

false worship. Jesus was presented with a similar path, but this time it was not merely to worship false gods but to worship Satan himself. Doing so could catapult Jesus to His rightful place of authority. Would Jesus follow Israel’s path? Of course not.

VERSES 10-11 / Jesus would not give in to Satan’s temptation. Looking at the different temptations, each one was compelling in its own right. You would surely want to eat if you’d been fasting for forty days, and you’d want to show off your power if you had all of the angelic armies at your command. This final temptation wasn’t any more significant, but it certainly was alluring from the human perspective. Who would want to walk the path to the cross if you could avoid that and get the position of honor another way? How easy it would be to fall for Satan’s schemes.

But Jesus knew what is true. He knew that Satan isn’t worthy of worship. Only God is. Somewhat flippantly, He was able to command Satan to go away because of the folly of the temptation. Jesus knew that there is a singular, rightful object of worship—the one, true, and living God. Once again, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 to make His point. Jesus said what His life would prove—that only God is worthy of worship. And His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection would make a way possible for all Christians to worship the one true God.

The passage then ends with the angels ministering to Jesus. The angels that Satan referenced to tempt Jesus in the second scene were now there caring for Jesus. But they didn’t come because Jesus threw Himself off the temple—they came because Jesus was faithful to obey God in the face of great temptation. Jesus’s baptism and His work in the wilderness were the basis for His claim to be God and the foundation from which He would launch His earthly ministry. Through it all, Jesus proved Himself to be sinless and perfect for our salvation.

MY RESPONSE



PACK ITEM 8: THE FIGHT OF FAITH: Pass out copies of this card to your group members to help them in their faith-fueled, Spirit-empowered fight and resistance against temptation for the glory and worship of God.

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

HEAD:

Jesus is God, and He proved He is God through His sinless life. The temptation episode in the wilderness was not the only time that Jesus experienced temptation, but it was a focus for Matthew as an introduction to Jesus's earthly ministry. Three times Satan tempted Jesus, and each time Jesus responded with the Word of God to fight sin. Because of His victory over sin, Jesus proved Himself to be worthy of our worship, and He provided a model for Christians as to how they should fight sin.

What encouragement do you find in the sinlessness of Jesus?

HEART:

Jesus is a man, and He faced temptation as a man. Satan used against Jesus the same kinds of allurements that cause humans to fall to sin and the same temptations that led to Israel's failure in the Old Testament. Since Jesus faced temptation as a man and He did not sin, He is uniquely able to sympathize with our weaknesses and to know what it's like to face and fight temptation. Because He knows, Christians should be able to turn to Him when we face temptation and find help in our own fight against sin. When we do sin, we also can turn to Jesus because He understands the difficulty of standing strong in the face of compelling temptation to sin.

What steps will you take to fight against temptation in your own life?

HANDS:

Christians need to know the Word of God. It is critical whenever we face temptation to sin, but it is true for all situations we face in life. Jesus shows in this passage that He fought temptation with the truth of God's Word. If anyone had a reason to fight in another way, it was Jesus since He is God. But He knew that the best means of protecting Himself from sin was to answer Satan with the truth of God's Word. Christians should do the same today. Whenever we face temptation to sin, or we need a word of truth, or we want to share with others the love and work of Christ, we need to proclaim what's written in God's Word.

What will you do to grow in your knowledge of and love for the Word of God so that you may share it with others?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"His whole life and death were nothing else but perfect obedience to the will of his heavenly Father, and he was always fully occupied in that task. He teaches us that if we look to be children and co-heirs by adoption along with Christ of his Father's kingdom, we must also along with our Master and Lord yield ourselves up wholly to the will of our heavenly Father and always be occupied in his business."²

—Bernard Gilpin
(c. 1517-1583)

POINT 1: THE SON OF GOD TRUSTS IN THE FATHER'S PROVISION (MATT. 4:1-4).

+

COMMENTARY

“‘Devil’ in Greek means accuser, as does ‘Satan’ in Hebrew (v. 10). Scripture teaches that he was a created being, an archangel, and the leader of the rebellious angels who became forever opposed to God and whose ultimate doom Christ’s death ensured (e.g., Job 1–2; Zech 3:1-2; 1 Chr 21:1; Luke 10:18; Rev 20). The desert location again recalls the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus will succeed as the true representative and fulfillment of Israel where Israel failed (Deut 8:2). Peirazo can mean both to test and to tempt (NIV). As something the devil does, it must here be taken as to tempt, in the sense of to try to entice to sin. But what the devil sees as a temptation, God may simultaneously use as a more positive test to prove Jesus’ faithfulness.”³

+

ILLUSTRATION

Where does my food come from? When we sit down at a restaurant and order a meal, it can be tempting to forget that food arrives at our table because of the work of another person. Actually, several people or groups of people had to be involved in getting a meal from the field to our dinner table. Parents see this in their kids far too often. The kids have done nothing to help with meal prep and then sit down at dinner thanklessly. They merely plop down as if the meal appeared out of thin air. We tend to be an entitled people. Imagine the temptation if you could just make food appear out of thin air. What would it be like if you could speak to a rock and turn it into food? Now imagine that you had this power when you were really hungry. Poof, and the food was there. Jesus had this power. He could have bypassed dependence on the Father to provide and merely fed Himself. Instead, He recognized that His provision came from the Father alone, and He entrusted Himself to the Father’s care.

POINT 2: THE SON OF GOD TRUSTS IN THE FATHER'S PROVIDENCE (MATT. 4:5-7).

+ COMMENTARY

"We all struggle with various temptations. Maybe you're tempted to cheat, lie, steal, or lust. Maybe you're tempted to look the other way when wrongdoing is done around you. Maybe you're tempted to indulge in sexual sin—when you're on a business trip, when you're all alone and no one's looking. Maybe you're tempted to indulge in sinful anger, and that tongue of yours is like a wildfire that once one spark hits the surface, you let rage consume you and anyone in your way. Maybe you're tempted to engage in pride—to think you're better than everyone else, especially the weak-willed and ill-willed, those who cheat, lie, steal, lust, and rage. In 4:1-11 we come again to our Lord Jesus Christ. We come to look at his victory over temptation. And as we do so, we'll see how his victory reinforces his identity—'Truly this is the Son of God'—and how it gives us an example, the ultimate example, of resisting the devil. Jesus was tempted in order to show us that we have a Savior who 'is able to help' us when we 'are being tempted' (Hebrews 2:18), a Savior who is able to 'sympathize with our weaknesses,' because, as Hebrews 4:15 says, he was tempted in every respect as we are, 'yet without sin.'"⁴

+ COMMENTARY

"The second temptation brings Jesus to the holy city, Jerusalem. 'The highest point' is the wing or portico, not 'pinnacle' (NASB). Portico refers to the flat-topped corner of Solomon's porch on the southeast corner of the temple complex overlooking the Kidron Valley. This time the devil asks Jesus to demonstrate miraculously God's ability to preserve his life. The devil again knows that Jesus has the power to do this, and he cites Ps 91:11-12 to justify it. There God promises all who 'dwell in the shelter of the Most High' (Ps 91:1) safeguarding and protection. The devil's mistake is to confuse the psalmist's stumbling so as to fall with Jesus' deliberately jumping off. We must not test God's faithfulness to his word by manufacturing situations in which we try to force him to act in certain ways. We dare not deliberately put our lives in danger as some kind of fleece. Jesus thus replies by quoting Deut 6:16 on not testing God. The original context alluded to Israel's rebellion against the Lord at Massah (again harking back to Exod 17:1-7)."⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

The entire industry of fishing equipment and lures is predicated on the notion of temptation. Those who fish are after one thing—they want to present the bait and hide the hook. They want to present the exact type of bait that is most appealing to that type of fish at just the right time of the day. They use all sorts of materials and smells to disguise the bait so that the fish will bite. The right bait is literally irresistible to the fish.

The same is true for the notion of temptation as a whole. Satan presents the bait and hides the hook, and he does so with bait that is uniquely appealing to different people at just the right time and in just the right way that they are most apt to bite. Since we know there is bait in the water all around us, we must be on guard lest we take the bait that God has told us to avoid, only then to find ourselves hooked.

POINT 3: THE SON OF GOD TRUSTS IN THE FATHER'S PLAN (MATT. 4:8-11).

+ COMMENTARY

"But there is something else we have to consider in this temptation of the Lord, dearly beloved. When the Lord was tempted by the devil, he answered him with the commands of sacred Scripture. By the Word that he was, he could have easily plunged his tempter into the abyss. But he did not reveal the power of his might, but he only brought forth the precepts of Scripture. This was to give us an example of his patience, so that as often as we suffer something from vicious persons we should be aroused to reach rather than to exact revenge. Consider how great God's patience is, how great our impatience. When we are provoked by some injury or threatened harm, or moved to rage, we seek revenge as far as possible. When we are unable to obtain it, we make our threats. But the Lord endured the devil's opposition, and he answered him with nothing except words of meekness. He put up with one he could have punished, so that this might all the more redound to his praise. He overcame his enemy not by destroying him but by suffering him for a while."⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

We all talk to ourselves. You might picture the young kid whispering words to their imaginary friend in their bedroom, but those aren't the only people who talk to themselves. Think about what you do when something bad happens. Maybe you get troubling news from a call when you are riding down the road in your car. You then cut the music off and sit in silence. But you aren't really silent. You are having a conversation, even if no one else is in the car. It might merely play out in your head, or you may speak the words out loud. You attempt to process pain by putting words to all that's playing out in your mind.

Christians, especially those who want to do a good job of fighting temptation, must learn to be people who use the Bible to talk to themselves. This is what Jesus did in the wilderness. He countered Satan's attacks with the Word of God. Since we can't see Satan in this way, our dialogue will look different, but the process must be the same. We simply speak God's Word to ourselves, and as we do, we remind ourselves of what's good, right, and true. The truth of God's Word, spoken to ourselves when no one else can see or hear, is the best guide for our actions and the basis for our fight against sin.

References

1. Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 171.
2. Bernard Gilpin, *A Sermon Preached in the Court at Greenewitch*, quoted in Luke, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
3. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 83.
4. Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 82.
5. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary*, 84-85.
6. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies 16.2-3*, as quoted in Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1-13, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 63.

THE SAVIOR IS FOLLOWED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Messiah invites others to follow Him (John 1:35-42).
2. The Messiah reveals His identity by His power (John 1:43-49).
3. The Messiah promises greater things to come (John 1:50-51).

Background Passage: John 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus came into the world to call sinners to repentance and to lay down His life on their behalf so that they might be saved. Likewise, as His followers, we tell others about Jesus and call on them to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: Items in nature, agricultural scenarios, and animals, among other things, were often used as symbols in ancient middle eastern culture. Symbols and picture references were used often in a culture that was more oral than written.

DISCUSS: **If you were to choose an animal as a metaphor for Jesus, what might you choose?** (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: Jews in Jesus's day would have understood the imagery of a lamb. They would have known that lambs were used as a sacrifice, especially at Passover. They would have understood the reference to something pure and blameless. But what would have been difficult for them to understand was a person being called "the Lamb of God." How or why would a person step into the role of a sacrificial lamb? Even more, why would this description be used of someone who claimed to be sent from God to be the Messiah and Savior?

OPTIONAL QUESTION: **Since becoming a Christian, how has your appreciation grown when you think about Jesus's role as a substitute?** (my understanding of my own sin has grown, and I see how deeply I need a substitute; when I see the perfection of Jesus, I'm stunned to think of how much grace it took to save us sinners; it takes a lot of love to take on the guilt of another)

POINT 1

THE MESSIAH INVITES OTHERS TO FOLLOW HIM (JOHN 1:35-42).

NOTES

35 The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. **36** When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” **37** The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. **38** When Jesus turned and noticed them following him, he asked them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” **39** “Come and you’ll see,” he replied. So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. **40** Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed him. **41** He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated “the Christ”), **42** and he brought Simon to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, he said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated “Peter”).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:35-42** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 35-39** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Discipleship includes **following** Jesus and staying near Him in response to His invitation to come and **know** Him more.

DISCUSS: What does it mean to follow Jesus for the modern reader? (do what He does and says to do; talk to Him in prayer; trust in Him not only to save us from sin and death but to lead us in holiness; worship Him; enjoy His presence)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 40-42** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why is it sometimes difficult to share about Jesus with others? (because we don’t want to be offensive or pushy; because we don’t want to sound like a fanatic or cult-like; because we haven’t realized or appreciated all that He has done for us)

TRANSITION: We get to know Jesus by following Him, and we also have the privilege of telling others about Jesus so they can follow Him. But we cannot know Jesus fully until we know that He is a Messiah with the power to save.

MESSIAH

Means “Anointed One,” *christos* in Greek and *mashiach* in Hebrew, from which we get the words “Christ” and “Messiah.” Originally, this idea referred to anointed kings, priests, and prophets called into God’s ministry. Later, it specifically referred to the expected Davidic descendant who would one day be king, ruling over the Israelites and vanquishing their enemies.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Jesus was way more than just some prophet or teacher. And to point to Him as anything less than the King of kings, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, is to reject Him and insult Him”¹

–Trip Lee

COMMENTARY

VERSES 35-39 / Every time John the Baptist is mentioned in the Gospel of John, he is pointing to Jesus. Here, the scene describes John with two of his disciples. This would have been common at the time as religious leaders gathered around them disciples who would both strive to understand the teaching of a master and train themselves in that person's pattern of life. John, as a religious leader and prophet, would have been one to have such disciples. But John's main mission was to point his disciples to Jesus. John very clearly understood that Jesus is the Lamb of God because God had given him this revelation. Since he understood this truth about Jesus, he wanted others to see Jesus as well. When you see something or someone great, you want to let others know about this greatness as well.

John's disciples clearly trusted their leader. He proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God, and they started following Jesus around. They likely were among many who were anxiously waiting for God's Messiah, so when John told them the Messiah was here, these disciples listened. Apparently they followed Jesus so closely that they got His attention, and He asked them what they wanted. What were they looking for?

The latter half of verse 38 implies that they did not fully grasp what was happening, which is predictable. They referred to Jesus as a Teacher, a Rabbi, when they asked Him where He was staying. This was a role of honor and one they knew well because it was the role John was playing in their lives at that time. They may not have known all that Jesus was, but they did know that they wanted to follow Him and stay near Him. These are the first steps of discipleship.

Jesus responded by inviting these strangers to come and see. Jesus invited people into His orbit so they could experience Him in a personal way. This is in stark contrast to how great people operate in our culture today. Great people often try to keep others out, especially if those people are total

strangers who have no business getting close. Jesus was willing to draw others close because He had nothing to hide—He is sinless and personable. When people got close to Jesus, they could see that He really was the Messiah. His actions would confirm His identity.

VERSES 40-42 / Andrew is the first disciple mentioned here. He was one of the two who pursued Jesus and went with Jesus. The reader is not told what Jesus used to confirm His identity as the Messiah to Andrew, but it did not take long for Andrew to be clear that this was the Messiah. John was right. Jesus was the One they had been waiting for.

Andrew's actions are informative. He went and got his brother and brought him to Jesus. There are three points here that are worthy of attention. First, Andrew took what he knew and told someone else. Next, Andrew did this along relational lines. He went to his brother, to the one closest to him, and brought Simon to Jesus. Finally, Andrew followed the pattern that John started. Once he was clear that Jesus is the Messiah, he served as a messenger for this message. He spoke of Jesus's identity, telling Simon that the Messiah is here. The title **"Messiah"** refers to God's appointed one. Like an anointed king in the Old Testament, Jesus is the One who was anointed by God to save sinners and fix the world that was broken by sin.

Jesus, in turn, changed Simon's identity. He gave him a new name. And Simon changed as a result of his interaction with Jesus. This transformation was public since others would know that his name had been changed by Jesus. In this way, Simon serves as an example of all those who are changed when they meet Jesus by faith.

It's also interesting to note that two of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus—one was Andrew and one was nameless. Many commentators believed the second to be John himself, the writer of the Gospel.²

POINT 2

THE MESSIAH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY BY HIS POWER (JOHN 1:43-49).

NOTES

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and told him, “Follow me.” **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.” **46** “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked him. “Come and see,” Philip answered. **47** Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” **48** “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” Jesus answered. **49** “Rabbi,” Nathanael replied, “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:43-49** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 43-45** commentary to highlight the key doctrine of God’s calling on the lives of His people (*the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

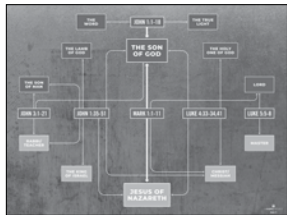
KEY DOCTRINE #66: *Calling:* The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the **gospel** and internally through the **Holy Spirit** working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are **essential**, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 46-49** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

DISCUSS: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 3: NAMES OF JESUS (POSTER)** and pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 4: NAMES OF JESUS (HANDOUT)**; then ask: **What names of Jesus resonate with you at this point in your life, and why?** (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

TRANSITION: Jesus was God’s anointed, and He pointed all those who would listen to Him to the great things that were to come in the future.



THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

This expression, and those with similar wording, were used by many in New Testament times to refer to the whole canon of the Old Testament, including and emphasizing God’s promises to His people.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 43-45 / Jesus's invitation to **"follow me"** is a common invitation throughout the Gospels. For example, in Matthew 4:19, Jesus called two disciples to follow Him so that He could make them fishers of men. Later, in verses 21-22, Jesus called out to two others who also left everything to follow Jesus. The idea of following Jesus has become shorthand for the repentance and faith that compels one to spend his or her life loving and serving Jesus. Christians often are described as people who follow Jesus.

When someone follows Jesus, there is a natural evangelistic impulse that emerges. The reader isn't told explicitly that it was Andrew or Peter who told Philip about the Messiah, but the text does say that Philip was from their town, so we may assume that word had begun to spread through Andrew and Peter. This pattern—from one brother to another and then throughout their city—is a model for the movement of the gospel message that will continue in the Gospels and through the book of Acts. When one person comes to believe, often others soon follow in that same faith. The apostle Paul invited those who have been reconciled to God to live as ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and this typically begins with sharing the gospel along relational and geographical lines.

After Philip heard the call, believed, and chose to follow Jesus, he then found Nathanael and made a direct claim by saying that Jesus is the One to whom the Law of Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament were pointing. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. When Moses recorded the law, it was clear that the payment for sin would require a substitute. As the prophets wrote and spoke, it also was apparent that the hope for the people rested not in their moral ability but in a Savior who would come. Here again, the reader sees the juxtaposition of the deity of Jesus and His humanity. He is the promised Messiah, and He is also the son of Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth. He's divine and human.

VERSES 46-49 / Nathanael heard Philip testify of the Messiah's presence, but he found it hard to wrap his mind around the fact that this Messiah was from such a backwoods place like Nazareth. Nazareth was small and off the beaten path. It was a working-class community that gave no indication of being the place from which one would expect the Messiah to come. But what was a challenging statement was met with a familiar invitation—**"Come and see,"** Philip said.

The invitation given by Jesus was now extended by another on Jesus's behalf. Others were invited to come and see if He truly is the Messiah. This type of invitation is the basis of Christian witness. Believers do not need to feel the pressure to have all the answers, but they should be eager to invite people to investigate the claims of Jesus. This invitation also serves as the basis for the corporate witness of the church. As skeptics and critics investigate the truth of Jesus, they are invited to churches where they can witness firsthand the life transformation God produces in and through His people.

Jesus then met Nathanael in his search. Nathanael had a life of integrity that marked him as a faithful Israelite, and Jesus commended him for it. When Nathanael asked how Jesus knew him, Jesus spoke of seeing him under the fig tree. This was a supernatural act of Jesus for Nathanael to respond to the fact that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah.

Verse 49 links the various descriptions of Jesus used in this passage. Nathanael used the term **"Rabbi,"** or **"Teacher,"** when addressing Jesus. But then he called Him **"the Son of God"** and **"the King of Israel."** This passage moves from Jesus being the son of Joseph to Jesus being the Son of God. Nathanael linked the reality that Jesus is the divine Son of God with the ultimate vindication of Israel. He believed that Jesus will sit on the royal throne as the rightful ruler of God's people.

POINT 3

THE MESSIAH PROMISES GREATER THINGS TO COME (JOHN 1:50-51).

50 Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” **51** Then he said, “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 1:50-51** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 50** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus promised to show His people greater things to **encourage** their faith in **Him**.

DISCUSS: What causes you to believe that Jesus really is who He says He is? (the transformation He’s brought in my life; being convinced when reading the Bible; finding answers to my questions; my faith; being raised around others who truly believed; seeing answered prayer)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 51** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Who do you say that Jesus is? (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 50 / After Nathanael's verbal declaration of faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah, Jesus asked His newfound disciple to consider the basis of his faith. Why did Nathanael believe? Simply because Jesus said He saw him under the fig tree?

Jesus did not challenge Nathanael's faith, but He did point him to the fact that the future would be filled with far greater examples of Jesus's power and deity. Jesus may have had a specific **"greater thing"** in mind, but more likely He was referring to the sum total of all of the great examples of power that these disciples would witness over the course of Jesus's ministry. They would see the lame walk, the blind see, the poor fed, and the dead raised. God's kingdom would come to earth in great power at the hands of Jesus Christ. The disciples also would witness the pinnacle of Jesus's glory on display in His victorious resurrection. This act would make Jesus's vision of Nathanael under the fig tree pale in comparison. Jesus's words remind us of the apostle Paul's invitation to Christians to trust in God and His Son because He is "able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). God continues to act in power through His Spirit in the church.

VERSE 51 / Jesus then said, **"Truly."** In other versions, "Verily, verily." This is the first of many times John records the use of this "Amen, amen" phrase to add the strength of certainty to what Jesus is about to say.³ Jesus said that it was certain that His disciples (not just Nathanael, as this statement contains a plural **"you"** in the Greek) would see the heavens open. And the mention of the **"angels of God ascending and descending"** is a reference to an important Old Testament story found in Genesis 28:10-17. In this story, Jacob went to sleep for the night while on a journey, and during his sleep, he saw a vision of a stairway to heaven with angels going up and down it. In this vision, God confirmed that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac and that He would fulfill His covenant

promises to Jacob and his descendants (see Gen 12:1-3; 28:13-15). The vision of the angels on the stairway indicated that God was, in fact, with Jacob. He promised: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you" (Gen. 28:15). These words were important to Jacob, who likely thought that God had abandoned His promises due to Jacob's sin and self-inflicted exile from the promised land.

In the same way, the mention of angels ascending and descending was meant to serve as confirmation to those listening that not only had God not forgotten His promises or His people, but He had sent His Son to demonstrate His love and do what was necessary to secure their salvation. Just as the angels ascended and descended in Jacob's vision and God confirmed His promises to Jacob, so did Jesus here proclaim and promise that His disciples, those who trust in Him, would surely see the angels ascending and descending on Him. The focus, though, is not the angels but the fact that they would truly see Him—Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world.

Here, Jesus used the term **"Son of Man"** for the first time to describe Himself. It is a reference to Daniel's vision of "one like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13-14) who was given authority by the Lord Almighty, the Ancient of Days. Jesus liked using this term to describe Himself to refrain from politically-loaded terms like King of the Jews, Messiah, or Son of David, broadening the perspective of those waiting for that conquering King, knowing that what He was going to do was not what they expected Him to do—namely, die and rise again.

Christians today, then, are witnesses to even greater things—seeing God's presence through the witness of Jesus in the Gospels, the enduring presence of the church through history, and the saving grace of God through their personal lives.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

Jesus calls people to Himself. As God, it would be right for Him to keep sinful humans at a distance. He could have moved through His life on earth without much human interaction and accomplished the work of salvation through His death and resurrection. The fact that Jesus invited people into His life and allowed them to see His deity firsthand gives testimony to the fact that God wants to be known. Also, we see clearly that those who know Him share Him with others. These stories illustrate that people who have a relationship with Jesus tell others that He is the promised Messiah—they tell those in their family and those in their city and also participate in sharing this good news with the whole world.

What are some potential risks and joys from sharing with others the good news of Jesus as the Messiah?

HEART:

The people in John 1 modeled the way Jesus changes the human heart. The reader gets a sense of the joy found in these first disciples who exclaimed, “We have found the Messiah!” This type of praise comes from a heart that has been transformed and one that knows firsthand that Jesus really is who He says He is and came to do what He said He would do. We also should have a heart of praise. We’ve seen Jesus revealed in the Bible, and God has revealed the truth of Jesus to our hearts, so our lives should consistently proclaim, “We have found the Messiah,” to anyone who will listen.

Do you view sharing the gospel as a joyful privilege or dreaded duty? Why?

HANDS:

The first followers of Jesus brought other people to Jesus. In fact, they did not seem to waste any time inviting other people to come and see the Messiah. It’s likely that many in the first century were looking for the Messiah, so it was natural for them to want to come and see. Others, however, may not have been looking but were compelled by the invitation. In our day, the same is true. We testify to God’s grace to those who are looking for hope and salvation and to those who are not but who still need the good news of Jesus.

How will you use your influence to invite others to follow Jesus this week?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Jesus has no desire to trick you into following him with a kind of bait and switch. He is utterly up front about the cost. In fact, he urges you to count the cost. ‘For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? . . .’ (Luke 14:28). Let the call to follow Jesus be clear and honest. ‘In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33). It is costly, and it is worth it.”⁴

—John Piper

POINT 1: THE MESSIAH INVITES OTHERS TO FOLLOW HIM (JOHN 1:35-42).

+

COMMENTARY

“This second cameo (another story of witness involving the Baptizer) provides the evangelist with his actual transition from John to Jesus. In this pericope there is also provided another major clue to why the evangelist must have regarded the Baptizer as an ideal witness. John had developed a following of disciples, and this text indicates that he willingly turned them over to Jesus by his repetition of the announcement to them: ‘Look! [Behold or See!] the Lamb of God’ (1:35). John here is portrayed as evidencing quite the opposite pattern from the usual human tendency to be an empire builder. Therefore he provides a genuine model of what it means to be a minister or servant of God. The human tendency is to make a name for ourselves and to attach our names to other people, institutions, and things so that people will remember us. To minimize oneself (‘to decrease’) in order for Jesus to become the focus of attention (‘to increase’) is the designated function of an ideal witness in this Gospel (cf. John 3:30).”⁵

+

ILLUSTRATION

Any time you find something of value and worth, you have a challenge in terms of how you will relay your findings to other people. Will you merely tell them, for example, that there is a bear outside of your vacation cabin or that it’s snowing outside on Christmas morning? Since these happenings are somewhat unbelievable, depending on your location, it’s unlikely that words alone will be sufficient. After all, people will think you are making it up or just trying to trick them. So, the natural impulse is an invitation. If there really is a bear outside or if it really is snowing, then all people have to do is come and see for themselves to confirm what you’ve said. Once they see with their own eyes, then, you don’t even have to tell them about what’s happening anymore. They can make sense of it on their own. You can just sit back and enjoy.

Our Christian witness functions in a similar way. We have found the Messiah—the Savior, the hope of the world. We don’t have to feel the pressure of answering everyone’s questions or providing philosophical discourse to substantiate who He is and what He’s come to do. We can invite people to check out Jesus for themselves and trust that He will confirm His identity to them.

POINT 2: THE MESSIAH REVEALS HIS IDENTITY BY HIS POWER (JOHN 1:43-49).

+ COMMENTARY

“Philip was excited! His words must have tumbled out of his mouth. Nathanael had not heard about Jesus, but he knew his Old Testament. He knew that Bethlehem was named as the birthplace of our Savior, not Nazareth. Besides, Nazareth was just four miles from Cana, which was Nathanael’s hometown, and since there was a little rivalry between the two places, he had to challenge Philip. ‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Philip gave him the best and only possible answer. He said, ‘Come and see.’ We need to make that response when we are tempted to argue.”⁶

+ COMMENTARY

“Lest Israel lose its distinctive nature, an important aspect of the monarchy in Israel is the establishment of a clear theology of kingship. With Saul and his successor David, the Lord is the one who chooses the king, has him anointed by Samuel, and endows him with the Spirit. Only then is the king publicly attested before Israel. Thus, the mortal king is firmly established as an under-king of the great King, the Lord. When Samuel the prophet anoints the king of Israel, that mortal king becomes the Lord’s messiah (‘anointed one’; 1 Samuel 2:10; 10:1; 16:13). From this imagery the future hope of a messiah will be constructed.”⁷

+ COMMENTARY

“The use of Son of God to designate the Messiah ultimately depends on passages such as 1 Samuel 26:17,21,25; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7 (linking sonship and Davidic royalty) . . . That appears to be how Nathanael used it, but readers of John’s Gospel will quickly learn that the categories ‘Son’ and ‘Son of God’ are used to depict the unique relation of oneness and intimacy between Jesus and his Father. Jesus’ sonship to God, however functionally described, involves a metaphysical, not merely a messianic, relationship . . . Nathanael spoke better than he knew. The title King of Israel was used by Palestinian Jews for the Messiah; it is again applied to Jesus in 12:13. In John 18–19 the similar ‘King of the Jews’ occurs several times. Jesus did not quickly adopt either title for himself, as both expressions were in the popular mind largely tied to expectations of a political liberator. Yet Jesus was the promised King, even if he would have to explain that his kingdom was not of this world (18:36).”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

Can anything good come from Nazareth? This question is easy to illustrate regardless of where you are from. You might not know anything about Nazareth, but you can identify a local or state-level rivalry, disdain, or hatred related to high school or college football. Sports rivalries can maintain a sense of good humor between the factions, but some rivalries are intense and heated. Imagine one college hiring on a head coach whose alma mater was that school’s bitter rival and enemy. This helps to illustrate something of the disdain Nathanael had for Nazareth.

POINT 3: THE MESSIAH PROMISES GREATER THINGS TO COME (JOHN 1:50-51).

+ COMMENTARY

“In verse 51 Jesus hints at the sort of ‘greater things’ Nathanael can expect. Jesus alludes to the episode in Genesis 28 when Jacob had fled his home, having stolen the birthright and blessing from Esau. Jacob dreamed of ‘a ladder . . . And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!’ (Gen. 28:12). Yahweh himself appeared, promising to Jacob the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 28:13–14). Jacob responded that the place was ‘none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’ (Gen. 28:17). The ‘ladder’ or ‘flight of steps’ Jacob saw may have been an ancient Near Eastern ziggurat, a point of connection between earth and heaven. Jesus puts himself in the place of that temple-like object. The reference to the Word ‘tabernacling’ in John 1:14 is now joined by this indication in verse 51 that Jesus, the Son of Man, will be the point of connection between earth and heaven. Thus verses 14 and 51 both contribute to the theme in John’s Gospel that Jesus is the replacement of the temple. Moreover, the Genesis passage addresses the blessing of Abraham, a blessing that will be realized in and through Jesus.”⁹

+ COMMENTARY

“This chapter closes not with another witness by mere humans but with Jesus’ own emphatic self-witness to be the ‘Son of Man.’ The term ‘Son of Man’ occurs thirteen times in this Gospel, and its major use seems to be closely akin to the eschatological use of the term in the Synoptics. The theological motifs that are most in focus in the use of this designation are the lifting up, raising, and glorification of the Son of Man (3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:23,34; 13:31), the descent and ascent of the Son of Man (3:13; 6:62), and the judgment role of the Son of Man (5:27).”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

There are numerous ways to illustrate the concept of “greater things” based on the teacher’s experience. One option could be to think about marriage. At the wedding, the couple professes love for one another, but in many ways, the love is just beginning. The couple has not weathered the challenges of maturing together, raising kids, experiencing loss and difficulty. If you meet the same couple after 20 or 30 years of marriage, then you will see “greater things” fleshed out in a deepened love and appreciation for one another. If you hear those couples speak, they will speak of a love that has grown, deepened, changed, and intensified through the years in a way that makes their wedding ceremony seem small and insignificant in comparison.

References

1. Trip Lee, *Rise: Get Up and Live in God’s Great Story* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 47.
2. Gary M. Burge, John, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 75.
3. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Eerdmans, 1991), 162.
4. John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 73-74.
5. Gerald L. Borchert, John 1–11, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 140-41.
6. R. Kent Hughes, John: *That You May Believe, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 50.
7. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 90.
8. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 162.
9. James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, John–Acts, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 52-53.
10. Gerald L. Borchert, John 1–11, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary*, 149.

THE SAVIOR IS OUR SACRIFICE

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus came to be the greater temple (John 2:13-22).
2. Jesus came to be the greater Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:6-8).
3. Jesus came to be the greater sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-10).

Background Passages: John 2; 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

The Passover along with the temple and its perpetual sacrifices revealed God's desire to be with His people and the way they could be made right with Him. These signs pointed to the greater way that God would restore people to Himself through Christ. All who trust in Jesus's once-for-all sacrifice are forgiven and made right with God forevermore.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

DISCUSS: What is the biggest promise you've ever made, and what makes keeping that promise difficult at times? (wedding vows would be a prominent example, and these are hard to keep because we are people who are prone to shifting emotions; difficult things happen that make it hard to keep our word; our sinful hearts make us desire to break our promises; life is long and it's hard to stay true to what we've said over a long period of time)

TRANSITION: It's hard to imagine the faithfulness of God because we struggle to keep our promises. But while our promises may last a few decades at the most, God's redemptive story started in the garden of Eden, and God began a process that would come to fruition when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Jesus was the promised answer to God's eternal plan, and this plan would run all the way through a cross and an empty tomb. This week, we will consider three major images the Bible's authors used to describe Jesus as He began His ministry and show why they matter for us this Easter.

POINT 1

JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER TEMPLE (JOHN 2:13-22).

NOTES

MONEY CHANGERS

Those in the business of selling or changing currency from foreign money to the correct currency needed. During the festivals, Jews from other countries with foreign money would need to change their money to what was acceptable for Jerusalem and what was acceptable for the temple.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Such was the holy, heavenly zeal of our Great Exemplar! His were no transient outbursts of ardor, which time cooled and difficulties impeded. His life was one indignant protest against sin;—one ceaseless current of undying love for souls, which all the malignity of foes, and unkindness of friends, could not for one moment divert from its course. Even when He rises from the dead, and we imagine His work at an end, His zeal only meditates fresh deeds of love."¹

—John R. Macduff
(1818-1895)

13 The Jewish Passover was near, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 In the temple he found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and he also found the money changers sitting there. **15** After making a whip out of cords, he drove everyone out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables.

16 He told those who were selling doves, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" **17** And his disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume me. **18** So the Jews replied to him, "What sign will you show us for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days." **20** Therefore the Jews said, "This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** So when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 2:13-22** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 13-16** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus was passionate that God's temple be used for **worship** alone, not self-serving **greed**.

DISCUSS: What do you think of when you hear the word **temple**? (a place for religious worship; a place marked by beauty, often large and ornate; many times people travel long distances to see and worship in temples; in the Bible the temple was a place where God promised to dwell with His people; a place Solomon built that was designed exactly according to God's specifications)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 17-22** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus came to be greater than the temple and to **fulfill** its true **purpose**.

DISCUSS: How is the temple of Jesus's body better than the temple building? (the resurrected Jesus is eternal, never to die again, unlike the temple, which was destroyed; Jesus cannot be corrupted like the temple; the person of Jesus is infinitely better than an inanimate object such as the temple)

TRANSITION: The temple wasn't the only Old Testament image that Jesus came to fulfill. He also came as the true and better Passover lamb.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 13-16 / The journey to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover was common for Jesus's family. Even from an early age, Mary and Joseph took Jesus there to honor the Jewish holy day, which commemorated the time when the angel of death passed over Israelites' homes in Egypt that were marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb. But now Jesus as a grown man, publicly identified as the Lamb of God, entered the city where He would one day lay down His life to spare His people from death. For now, however, Jesus entered merely to fulfill the law and worship God as was prescribed.

What Jesus saw in the temple was infuriating. It wasn't necessarily odd that people would be selling **"oxen, sheep, and doves"** since many of those who came to worship would have traveled long distances and would not have brought their sacrifices with them. They would simply wait and buy the animal when they arrived.

What was appalling to Jesus seems to be two things. First, the money changers preyed on the needy. When the worshipers came, they had to have an animal, so some Israelites would take advantage of this and mark up the prices. The money changers also may have been charging unfair rates to exchange currency to buy the animals, thus robbing the people.

Second, it seems that Jesus was concerned that all of this was happening in the temple. The location was wrong, especially since Jesus explicitly condemned them for turning His Father's house into a marketplace. This site was meant for worship. The buying and selling and trading had apparently taken over the temple, such that the temple's real purpose was hidden behind the marketplace of buying and selling.

Jesus responded by driving out those engaging in this behavior. The passion of Jesus in this moment is striking. He fashioned a whip and then drove out the money changers and overturned the marketplace. His motive was clear—He was zealous for

His Father's house. He had already made this point when His parents left Him in Jerusalem many years earlier. Jesus had to be concerned for His Father's house, and that house was to be used to worship His Father.

VERSES 17-22 / After Jesus's jarring actions in the temple, the narrative shifts to the perspective of those watching. Jesus's disciples seem to have had some glimmer of understanding, recalling Psalm 69:9, about being zealous for God's house. Others, however, asked for a sign. This contrast between those who believed and those who did not will continue throughout the Gospel accounts, with those who do not believe often asking for a sign.

Jesus answered them, but not directly. He equated Himself with the temple. He knew that those who asked for a sign would soon ask to take His life. So He told them to destroy the temple and He would raise it up in three days. Now, clearly at this point, no one understood all that Jesus was saying. John was writing years after Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, so hints like this are woven throughout the gospel story to show that Jesus was already pointing forward to His death from the beginning of His ministry.

The Jews who heard Jesus make this claim were indignant: "How can this be?" they asked. "It took us forty-six years to build this building. There's no way you could rebuild it in three days." Of course, the God who created all things can do anything He wants according to His holy will, but Jesus wasn't speaking of the physical temple. He was speaking of His body, an even more astounding feat of restoration. Jesus would, in fact, fulfill the temple's purpose through His death and resurrection. He would offer Himself for sin, once and for all, so that all of His people could worship God forever, not in a temple made with human hands but through the person of Jesus Christ.

POINT 2

JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER PASSOVER LAMB (1 COR. 5:6-8).

NOTES

6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? **7** Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. **8** Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Corinthians 5:6-8** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-7A** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

As the **church**, because of Christ's saving work and sacrifice, we are to pursue **holiness**, not letting sin continue to take hold.

DISCUSS: How should the church treat sin and sinful people? (even as we show grace to sinful people, sin should be taken seriously; though we are made righteous because of Jesus's sacrifice, our response should be a pursuit of holiness to be more like Christ; if Jesus took worship in the temple seriously, so much more should we take our holiness/sinfulness seriously being that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7B-8** commentary to emphasize the key doctrine (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #58: Christ as Sacrifice: There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the **sins** of the **world**. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the **cross** was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

TRANSITION: As the promised Passover lamb to fulfill God's plan for the salvation of sinners, Jesus proved Himself to be the sacrifice greater than any ritual or animal in all of the Old Testament. These all pointed forward to sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for us.

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Beginning the day after Passover, lasting seven days, the Jews were to eat pure, unleavened bread (Lev. 23:5-8). The Passover was celebrated in one day, like Jesus's one act of sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. But this feast was seven days, representing the disciples' continual pursuit of holiness.²

COMMENTARY

VERSES 6-7A / Here, the apostle Paul was addressing sexual sin in the church in this particular part of his letter. There was sin among the Corinthian church members that was heinous, but even worse, the sin had gone unaddressed by the church. Rather than acting to halt the sinful actions in their midst, they seemed to be going along like it wasn't even happening. The contrast is evident between this passage and the one we just looked at in John 2. There, Jesus was angry that money changers were making a mockery of the temple and no one was doing anything to address the sin. Here, Paul was concerned that sexual sin was making a mockery of the church and no one was doing anything to address it.

Paul accused the Corinthian believers of **"boasting,"** as unrepentant sin makes a mockery of God's name. Like Israel of old, the church should expect God to discipline them for blatant disregard for His name. If they go on sinning without fear of judgment, then they are boasting to God that they can get away with sin without repercussion.

Paul used the image of leaven to illustrate that just a little can make a big difference: a little leaven can spread throughout the dough and make it rise. So also, a little sin can make its way through the church and spoil it. The church of Jesus is pure, without the leaven of sin, by virtue of the righteousness that believers have been given by God through Jesus. So they must clean out the old leaven of sin so that they function as the holy people God saved them to be.

VERSES 7B-8 / Having made the point that Christians should actively seek to remove sin from the midst of their lives, both individually and corporately, Paul then declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of an Old Testament type and shadow, saying Christ is the **"Passover lamb."** First, we'll clarify what Paul was saying. Second, we'll explain why what he was saying mattered for the issue at hand.

First, Paul said that Jesus is the Passover lamb, sacrificed so that people could be spared death and judgment. Though sacrifices were offered regularly, the sacrifices during Passover were a time of unique remembrance of how God delivered His people from slavery by having the angel of death pass over the houses of those marked by a lamb's blood on the doorposts (Ex. 12). Because of their obedience and faith, those that were covered by the blood of the sacrifice were spared from God's judgment, and those who were not were judged by God.

In a much greater way, Jesus is the perfect Passover sacrifice. Only the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ can and does remove our stain of sin from the Father's presence. Jesus's death on the cross did not provide merely an escape from the physical death of a child, it provided escape from the eternal judgment of God's wrath. Those who trust in Jesus are symbolically covered by His precious, innocent blood and spared from the judgment their sin deserves. And Christ is **"our"** Passover sacrifice, meaning that it was His action that created the church. He died not only for us individually but for the church, the people He desired to create for Himself.

Second, why does Jesus's Passover sacrifice of Himself matter for the issue of sin in the church? Paul was clear: Since Jesus is our sacrifice, we should live pure and holy lives. Since Jesus offered Himself for sin to pay the price that our sin deserves, we should not placate sin in our lives or in the church. To continue to engage in our former sinful ways would be to bring the leaven of sin back into the church. Instead, God's people should pursue the **"unleavened"** ways of holiness, purity, and love. These characteristics were the marks of Jesus's life, and they must define the church for whom He died. The Israelites were expected to celebrate the Feast of the Unleavened Bread in conjunction with the Passover (see Ex. 13:1-16). This feast would serve as a precursor to the unleavened holiness that would define God's church.

POINT 3

JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER SACRIFICE (HEB. 10:1-10).

NOTES

1 Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the reality itself of those things, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year. **2** Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, purified once and for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. **5** Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said: You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for me. **6** You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings. **7** Then I said, "See—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, God." **8** After he says above, You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings (which are offered according to the law), **9** he then says, See, I have come to do your will. He takes away the first to establish the second. **10** By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 10:1-10** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-4** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: How would you feel if you had to offer sacrifices for sin year after year? (I would know that sin is serious and that it cost the life of the sacrificial lamb; I would be grossed out to deal with dying animals and bloody sacrifices; I would get tired of offering the sacrifices every year; I would probably get a little complacent offering sacrifices routinely; I might notice that there needed to be some other sacrifice that could do for people what these sacrifices could never do)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-10** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-4 / In this passage, the author of Hebrews (whose identity is unclear) mentioned **“the law”** as a summary of the Old Testament law given to Moses and referring to all aspects of Israelite worship, including the sacrificial system. The use of **“shadow”** here makes it clear that this law wasn’t the focus of God’s saving work in the world. Like a shadow, it was meant to draw attention to the fact that something else—something bigger and more permanent—was there as well.

The author then made it clear that there was a huge problem with the sacrificial system of the law because it could never make a person holy. By God’s grace, sacrifices could appease God’s wrath for a time, but they could never deal with the problem of sin in a permanent and lasting way. Case in point: The worshipers had to keep coming back each year to offer the same sacrifices.

The fact that God was not satisfied with sacrifices was a common theme through the Old Testament. For example, David said that God does not desire burnt offerings but a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:16-17). The prophet Isaiah mockingly provoked the people to consider that God did not want them trampling His courts with their half-hearted sacrifices (Isa. 1:11-13). Jeremiah also lamented the inadequacy of sacrifices and instead called God’s people to hear and obey God’s voice (Jer. 7:22-23). Amos wrote that sacrifices were not enough and that God wanted justice and righteousness instead (Amos 5:21-24). Micah stated that instead of sacrifices, the people should do what is just, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Mic. 6:6-8).

Not only was it clear that those who offered the sacrifices were not forgiven forever, the very process of offering the sacrifices meant that they were consistently provoked about the reality of their sin. Here the writer described this as having a guilty **“consciousness of sins.”** Every time worshipers would go to the temple and

offer sacrifices, they would be reminded of their own sinfulness. The death of the animal would prompt an awareness of the depth of their sin and the fact that these worshipers couldn’t do anything to satisfy God’s wrath for sin forever. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin. This was no surprise, neither to God nor to those who offered these very sacrifices.

VERSES 5-10 / How was God to remedy this problem? Quoting Psalm 40, the author connected two people: David and Jesus. Long before Jesus, God raised up a person—King David—to provide care and leadership for sinful Israel. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, David penned the words of Psalm 40, which put sacrifices in their inadequate context. Yet David’s words did more—they were a precursor to the far greater King, Jesus Christ, who could (and would) come to do what David could not—lead His people into freedom from sin. Jesus would deal with the issue of sin once and for all.

Here, the author of Hebrews took the gist of David’s words from the psalm and put them into a conversation between God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Son, knowing that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, acknowledged that the Father prepared a human body for the Son to come to this earth and do the perfect will of God (Ps. 40:6-8). This was the triune God’s perfect plan to save sinners. There would be one final sacrifice—yet this time, it would not be an animal sacrifice but the death of the very Son of God.

The author then showed how Jesus is not only the way that sinners are forgiven but also the way they are empowered for holy living. His death both justifies (makes us right with God) and sanctifies (makes us holy like God). Jesus did both of these by offering His body once and for all. This Easter, and every Easter, we celebrate because Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin to make it possible for Christians to stand before God the Father forgiven and to walk in a new and holy way of life.

MY RESPONSE



PACK ITEM 9: HE GAVE THE BELOVED: Pass out copies of this bookmark to remind your group of the great and gracious sacrifice of God in Christ.

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

HEAD:

Jesus is the perfect temple, the perfect Passover lamb, and the perfect sacrifice. He is the perfect sacrifice for sin because the death He died, He died once and for all. The Old Testament pictures of the temple and sacrifices were but a shadow of the future hope that is found in and through Jesus Christ. The temple and animal sacrifices were good, but they were inadequate because they never offered a full and final way for sin to be accounted for. Jesus, however, is a perfect temple who, through His body, brings people into a right relationship with God. He was the perfect payment for the sins of God's people because He willingly offered Himself as the only perfect sacrifice in place of sinful human beings.

How do the Old Testament shadows of the temple and the sacrificial system help you understand what Jesus did?

HEART:

Temples and sacrifices are not common images for most of us today. But these ancient images are meant to provoke the heart. They are stirring reminders of the glory of God and the price of sin. Anyone who saw the temple or offered a sacrifice within would have seen clearly that God's dwelling among men was a spectacular gift and that holiness was required to worship God as He deserved. These images can help us as well. We need to be reminded of these themes, not so we can re-create the temple or the sacrificial system but so we have a better and deeper appreciation for Jesus Christ, who came to fulfill these images through His life, death, and resurrection.

What distractions and offenses against God's holiness do you need to repent of to honor Christ?

HANDS:

Christians should pursue holy living because of what Jesus has done, but we are not saved on the basis of our perfection at being holy (since we can't achieve perfection on this side of heaven anyway). Praise be to God that though we pursue Christlikeness and holiness, our faults and sins are covered by Jesus's blood. That grace and good news of salvation despite our sin is something to be shared.

With whom will you share the good news of Jesus's perfect sacrifice and not having to achieve perfection ourselves for salvation?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

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

—Africa Study Bible

POINT 1: JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER TEMPLE (JOHN 2:13-22).

+

COMMENTARY

“From the Lord’s point of view, what he saw in the temple was an outrage! The money changers claimed their business was a necessity—changing foreign currency into Jewish currency because foreign money was not acceptable for offerings in the temple. Authorities tell us that the money changers charged as much as two hours of a working man’s wage to change a half shekel. They charged the same amount again for every half shekel they gave in return for a larger coin. So if a man came in with a two-shekel piece, he would have had to pay an entire day’s wage just to change his money! This brought a lot of money into the temple.”⁴

POINT 3: JESUS CAME TO BE THE GREATER SACRIFICE (HEB. 10:1-10).

+

ILLUSTRATION

Even though most of us don’t live in cultures that make animal sacrifices, we understand the concept of sacrifice nonetheless. Sometimes we give time and energy to worship God or serve the church, and that could be a sacrifice for us. Done rightly, these acts of sacrifice are a way that we worship God and show our love for Him. Done poorly, we can mistakenly think that these sacrifices make us right with God and we can forget that we are forgiven solely on the basis of what God has done for us in Jesus.

References

1. John R. Macduff, *The Mind of Jesus* (Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), “Twenty-Second Day: Holy Zeal” [Logos].
2. Tommy C. Hagle, *Journey Through the Tabernacle, The Journey Series* (WORDsearch, 2009), 53.
3. “John,” in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International, 2016), 1534.
4. R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 66-67.

GOD'S LOVE WAS REVEALED AMONG US IN THIS WAY

“You Must Be Born Again”

by Chris Poblete

+

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

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

WE NEED TO BE BORN AGAIN

What the church building needed was an entirely new floor made of something

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

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

Elaborating on this grim reality, the apostle Paul described us as “dead” in our sins (Eph. 2:1). The metaphor of “deadness” is appropriate when you consider the parallels between being “spiritually dead” in our sins and being “physically dead” in our bodies. For example, a physically dead person cannot feel his surroundings. He has no eyes to see and no ears to hear. He has

no senses to perceive the world around him. In the same way, part of what it means to be spiritually dead is to be blind and deaf to spiritual things. It is to be unresponsive to the truth, goodness, and beauty of God and to find other things as more interesting—be it a person, a place, a cause, a concern, or some other idol of the heart.

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

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

WE CANNOT FIX OURSELVES

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

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

come to awaken us to the way of joy, the truth of His Word, and the life we have always longed for.

GOD’S LOVE MAKES US BORN AGAIN

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

And once the Spirit “re-births” us to a new life in Christ, everything changes. We begin to seek true satisfaction in Christ alone. We begin to realize that He supplies the living water we’ve thirsted for all our life. None of us deserve this. But Jesus lived and died for undeserving sinners like you and me because He is the very embodiment of God’s amazing love. The good news of God’s love for us is not like Jesus throwing you a life raft in the sea of eternity and you having to reach out and grab it. Instead, you are dead on the bottom of the sea and needing to be quickened to new life. God sent His Son into the world to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that our hardened and dirty hearts might be made new and that we might now have new life through Him.



THE SON BRINGS ETERNAL LIFE

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son came so that people might experience new birth (John 3:1-8).
2. The Son came so that people might have eternal life (John 3:9-16).
3. The Son came so that people might escape condemnation (John 3:17-21).

Background Passage: John 3

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus taught that new birth, not religious activity, is how a person enters the kingdom of God and receives eternal life. New birth is given from the Father through faith in the Son as a work of the Spirit. Because of God's love, we are no longer condemned by our sin, but we have been given eternal life in Christ.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: Sometimes there are words that people use in the church that are unfamiliar to the new believer or to the world around us. Some of us grew up with an understanding of these words and others of us did not.

DISCUSS: What comes to your mind when you hear the words **born again?** (someone who is a church-goer; someone who is a Christian; people that relate to a particular political movement; someone spiritual or Spirit-filled; I have no idea what that means)

TRANSITION: In John 2, Jesus performed signs revealing His identity as the Messiah. Right before our text in chapter 3, it says that Jesus “knew what was in man” (John 2:25). Jesus knows what consumes us—our desires, our sin, our hope. Over the next few chapters of John's Gospel, Jesus has a number of conversations in which He reveals His knowledge of what each individual needs and His purpose for coming to fulfill those needs.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Lifeway's Digital Pass: ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

THE SON CAME SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT EXPERIENCE NEW BIRTH (JOHN 3:1-8).

NOTES

1 There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.” **3** Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4** “How can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. **8** The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 3:1-8** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to set up the following explanation for the key doctrine of regeneration or rebirth—being born again (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

PHARISEE

From an Aramaic word meaning “separated,” a Pharisee was a member of a Jewish group who felt they were separate from the elitists, commoners, and Gentiles of their times. They adhered to the strict rules of the Mosaic Law, even adding to it to secure religious purity.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“And indeed from the Spirit comes our New Birth, and from the New Birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from Whom it is derived.”¹

—Gregory of Nazianzen (c. 329-390)

KEY DOCTRINE #69: Regeneration: Regeneration takes place at the **beginning** of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the **Holy Spirit** (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person’s life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is **unable** to produce.

DISCUSS: How should a biblical understanding of regeneration inform our evangelism? (in evangelism, our goal is to be faithful in presenting the gospel, but God does the work of salvation; people need to understand their sinfulness and their need to be made new; regeneration cannot be coerced)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-8** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

TRANSITION: Jesus came to earth so that people might experience new birth. We have seen why people must be born again, and now we will look at how people might have eternal life.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / John 3 opens with a man named Nicodemus, who is described as a Pharisee and **“a ruler of the Jews.”** This means that Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish governing body called the Sanhedrin. He was someone that the Jewish people looked up to. He was in a position of leadership and likely had riches. In John 19:39, he brings expensive spices to anoint Jesus’s body for the tomb after the crucifixion. In addition to being a leader in the community, he would have been known for his morality, being a Pharisee. Nicodemus was a man the community thought had it all—authority, money, and morality.

Nicodemus went to Jesus **“at night.”** The themes of light and darkness are evident all throughout the Gospel of John. Often physical darkness hints at the presence of spiritual darkness. This event taking place at night alluded to the fact that Nicodemus was lost in spiritual darkness, but he was searching. Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus as a rabbi and teacher and saw the **“signs”** Jesus was doing. He surmised, with some skepticism, that one couldn’t do such things **“unless God were with him.”** Jesus responded with the same word “unless”: **“Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** With each “unless” there is an unspoken question being asked: “Is God really with you?” as asked by Nicodemus, and, “Are you really born again?” by Jesus. Jesus was in a teaching moment with Nicodemus.

VERSES 4-8 / Nicodemus was confused by what Jesus meant, so he asked, **“How can anyone be born when he is old?”** Being born again was a new and strange concept. Jesus, however, was not speaking about a physical birth; He was speaking about something deeper: a spiritual birth. But two questions arise out of this statement by Jesus: 1) Why does one need to be born again? and 2) How is one born again?

In response to why, all people need to be born again because of our sinfulness—how we do things in the flesh, satisfying

our sinful desires instead of God’s desires. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they did not just break a rule, they corrupted human nature at its core. All people are dead in their sins and in rebellion to God when born into this world (Eph. 2:1-3). Our sinful nature is the reason why we need to be born again and made new. Our behavior, however good, will always miss the mark of God’s perfect holiness.

And how is one born again? Jesus explained, **“Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** Jesus was speaking of a spiritual birth that cleanses us from sin and brings life to where there was only death. This was clear in the Old Testament, and Nicodemus should have known that. In verse 10, Jesus rebuked Nicodemus for being a teacher of Israel yet not knowing what Jesus was talking about. In the Old Testament, water and spirit often were used to signify a cleansing from impurity and the transformation of the heart that enables God’s people to follow Him faithfully. In Ezekiel 36:25-27, the Lord said that He would cleanse His people with water and give them a new spirit, putting His Spirit in them. Jesus was pointing Nicodemus back to this teaching of new birth that was evident in Ezekiel.

Jesus’s telling Nicodemus that he needed to be born again to be a part of God’s kingdom would have been shocking to him. Nicodemus already thought he was a part of God’s kingdom. If there ever were someone whom the Jews thought would be a part of the kingdom, it would have been a man like Nicodemus. Yet entrance into God’s kingdom does not come about by anything we can do, only by what God has done. It doesn’t matter who you are or what you have, whether good or bad, all need to be born again. To be born again is more than simply a reformation of one’s character; it is to be completely changed and made new by the power of the gospel that cleanses and purifies and puts the Holy Spirit within you.

POINT 2

THE SON CAME SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE (JOHN 3:9-16).

NOTES

9 “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus. **10** “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. **11** “Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man. **14** Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 3:9-16** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-15** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 16** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What is the present reality and future expectation for one who **doesn’t believe in Jesus?** (separation from God in this life and the next; likely a lack of purpose; a sense of hopelessness for meaning; dead in sins; God’s judgment for sin leading to eternity in hell)

TRANSITION: Continuing on in Jesus’s teaching to Nicodemus, we see a fuller gospel message, one that includes both God’s love and His holiness. Only through Jesus can one be saved. Apart from Him, no one can.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 9-15 / In the previous section, Jesus taught on the need to be born again. Here we see where the new birth that brings eternal life is found. Nicodemus was still confused about Jesus's talk of being born again and being born of the Spirit, so he asked, **"How can these things be?"**

Jesus then explained how He and His disciples, and those who believe, testify to what they have seen, including the fulfillment of prophecies and the signs and miracles Jesus was performing. But the Pharisees, and Nicodemus as their representative at this point, did **"not accept [their] testimony."** Jesus pointed to the fact that even the signs He was doing on earth weren't enough to get some to believe. Those who didn't believe these earthly signs wouldn't understand the deeper **"heavenly things."** Then pointing to His deity and understanding of the heavenlies, Jesus identified Himself as the Son of Man who has descended from heaven and will ascend into heaven.

Then in verses 14-15, Jesus pointed Nicodemus to where new birth and eternal life are found: they are found in looking to the Son of Man, who must **"be lifted up."** The statement of Jesus being "lifted up" refers to Jesus being lifted up on the cross, as well as to His resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God the Father.

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the story of Moses and the serpents that afflicted the people of Israel (Num. 21:7-9). After God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and provided for their needs in the wilderness, they began to grumble and complain. God sent a plague of venomous snakes upon them to judge them and many people died. The people then repented, and God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Those who were bitten by the snakes would look to the bronze serpent and God would heal them. In the wilderness, God graciously gave the people a way to be delivered from their sins. Jesus showed how the deliverance

God gave the people in the wilderness was meant to be a picture of the salvation He came to bring to the world. In a similar way to how the Israelites in the desert needed to look to the bronze serpent to be healed of their snake bites, so do all need to look to Christ in faith to be delivered from the punishment for our sin. The good news of Jesus Christ being lifted up on the cross shows that people who have been infected by the poison of sin that goes to the depths of their souls can look to Jesus Christ and find salvation.

VERSE 16 / So why would God do this? **"For God loved the world."** Jesus spelled it out for Nicodemus: God's love is so full for **"the world"** that He **"gave His one and only Son"** so that those who believe in Him would have **"eternal life."**

This was an interesting wording for the Jews, who mainly associated God's love with His covenant people, Israel.² Yet God's love was for the world, for those who were Jews and those who were Gentiles. He gave His Son for them all. But they still had to choose to believe or not.

John 3:16 is one of the most popular verses, but it is likely one of the most misquoted as well. Some will focus purely on God's love in order to excuse people for their sin. Others will try to say that because of God's love, everyone will have eternal life, skipping **"everyone who believes."** God's love, however, is never meant to be an excuse to sin. Rather, it is meant to drive us to true belief. As we will see in the next point, humans deserve God's righteous judgment for their sin, but the good news of the gospel is that God has not left His people in their sin but has provided eternal life through His Son.

There are only two categories of people: 1) those who believe and have eternal life and 2) those who do not believe and will perish. This should cause us to live out our mission of telling people the good news of Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life.

POINT 3

THE SON CAME SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT ESCAPE CONDEMNATION (JOHN 3:17-21).

NOTES

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

19 This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. **20** For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. **21** But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 3:17-21** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 17-18** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why should we not brush aside sins, even “small” ones? (God cannot stand sin because He is holy; sin corrupts; even though we are saved, sin breaks our fellowship with God and displeases Him; sin hinders our sanctification process; sin leads to more sin when unconfessed; being captive to sin is not God’s desire for us—He longs for us to flourish and live a life of joy free from the power of sin)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 19-21** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why is sin so tempting and desirable at times? (we have desires we want to fulfill; we are impatient and want immediate gratification; we think our desires will truly satisfy us and make us happy apart from God’s truth; Satan and the world fool us into thinking sin is worth it and not that big of a deal)

CONDEMNATION

Because humans cannot live up to God’s holy standards because of our sin and sinful nature, we stand condemned, separated from God for eternity. We deserve condemnation because God is holy and just and cannot stand unrighteousness. But God has provided a way of salvation through His Son, Jesus. For those who trust in Jesus and repent of their sin, there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

COMMENTARY

VERSES 17-18 / John continued to explain the mission that Christ was sent to the world to accomplish, namely, to bring salvation to the world. Christ came into this world to accomplish what no one could. No amount of human wisdom, philosophy, or morality could bring about salvation. Men and women are dead in their sins, and nothing could rescue them, except Jesus.

Do you find it fascinating that Jesus's mission in coming into the world was not to bring condemnation? Why did Jesus not bring condemnation? Verse 18 helps explain: **"But anyone who does not believe is already condemned."** The world, due to its sinfulness, is already under the condemnation and judgment of God. Christ did not need to come into the world and declare it is condemned because He was sent to save this lost and already condemned world.

In verses 16-18, we see an emphasis on belief **"in"** and **"through"** Christ. **"In"** appears three times, and **"through"** once. John was showing the primacy of believing in the Son. It is in and through Christ that we believe and are saved. Humans cannot believe in themselves to be saved, nor can they believe in some politician or political party. Salvation comes only through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 18 again reveals two groups: those who believe and those who do not—those who are saved because of their belief and those who do not believe and are condemned. There are many today who do not like to talk about condemnation and judgment. There are some who struggle with the idea that God is both loving and yet He condemns sin. But in that fact lies the key: God condemns sin because He is loving. He wants the best for us and knows sin corrupts us. If He did not condemn sin and evil, how could He be a good and loving God? We must not shy away from teaching both the love of God for sinners and His just condemnation of sin.

VERSES 19-21 / Have you ever been in a dark room and turned on a light? When the light turns on, things that were hidden in the darkness have now been exposed. Similarly, when Jesus, the light of the world, came down from heaven, the darkness was pushed back and sin was fully exposed.

Due to the fact that God is good and holy, He must judge the world. Part of that judgment is that **"the light has come into the world, and the people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil"** (John 3:19). Jesus is the light of the world (8:12). When Jesus came into the world, His light exposed the world's dark sinfulness. Earlier, John's Gospel says of Jesus, **"In him was life, and that life was the light of men"** (1:4). The evil of human beings is demonstrated in that they run from the light—they run from Christ. Instead of running to eternal life, sinful human beings would rather run toward condemnation.

Even Christians may be tempted to run from Christ, to run from the light. Are you tempted to hide sin? Instead of running to the light of Christ and forgiveness that is found in Him alone, are you tempted to cover up your evil? Those who love the darkness are people who are not willing to live and act in truth. These are people who value their own pride more than the light and life of Christ. Christians should not be those who cover up sin and flee from the light. They should be people of purity, integrity, and truthfulness, knowing that the transformative work in them is being **"accomplished by God."**

John 3 shows us God's love in giving His only Son, proclaims Jesus's mission to bring salvation, and confronts our condemned condition that leads to death. How should we respond? There are only two ways: you either believe in Jesus or you reject Him. You either run from the light or you run to it. You either run from Christ or you run to Him and be saved.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

Jesus came on a mission to this earth in order to bring new birth and eternal life for all who would believe in Him. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will escape eternal condemnation in hell. Jesus has called us to believe in Him for eternal life because of His love for us, the Father's love for us, and the Spirit's love for us. God's mission has always been clear: to save humankind so we can spend eternity with Him.

How have you heard about God's love in Christ? Experienced God's love? Come to believe in Jesus as the saving gift of God's love?

HEART:

God loves us. He does not simply accept us—He loves us! This truth should amaze us. When we think about our sinfulness, we should be moved by the love of God for us. We should be able to sing out, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!" We are known by God and loved by Him. When we think about how costly the love of God was—the sacrifice of God's only Son—we should seek to confess our sin, trust in the forgiveness of the God who loves us, and do our best, relying on the Spirit's power, to resist the temptation to sin again.

What sins are tempting you this week that you will ask God to strengthen you to overcome?

HANDS:

We who, apart from Christ, are destined for perishing and condemnation are able to receive the hope of eternal life through believing in Jesus Christ. This new birth and eternal life come as a free gift from God. This world is under condemnation and deserving of God's wrath, but God has a plan to bring redemption to all who would believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus's coming to this earth on the mission to bring eternal life to sinners who believe in Him should serve as a motivation for our mission of making "disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

How does knowing that everyone who does not believe in Jesus is already condemned (John 3:18) motivate you to be courageous in your witness to the gospel?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

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

—Bede (c. 673-735)

POINT 1: THE SON CAME SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT EXPERIENCE NEW BIRTH (JOHN 3:1-8).

+

COMMENTARY

“[Nicodemus] was a Pharisee. One of the primary characteristics of the Pharisees was their seriousness. They were so earnest about their faith that on the Sabbath they would carry no more food than the weight of a dried fig or no more milk than could be swallowed at one gulp lest they break the Sabbath-rest. They were serious about their faith! Of course, that got them into some rather ridiculous situations. For instance, it was determined that on the Sabbath one could not tie a knot in a rope, but a woman could tie a knot in her sash. So if a man wanted to get water out of a well and there was nothing tied to the bucket, he could tie his wife’s sash to the bucket. Ridiculous? Yes, but desperately fervent! They were not religious dilettantes! Nicodemus was not playing games, and that was one of the reasons he was receptive to Jesus’ explanation. Nicodemus was ‘a member of the Jewish ruling council.’ That means he was a member of the Sanhedrin, a group of seventy men, both lay and clerical, who had jurisdiction over every Jew on earth. In addition, our Lord’s identification of Nicodemus in verse 10 as ‘Israel’s teacher’ may mean Nicodemus was considered to be the greatest teacher in Jerusalem. There is some evidence that he came from a very aristocratic family that traced its bloodline back to the Maccabees.”⁴

+

ILLUSTRATION

Prior to your group time, enlist a volunteer to search for a string of pictures on the internet that display the life cycle of a butterfly. Determine the best way to show these to your group, whether on a TV screen, a computer screen, or texting a link to your group members so they can view the pictures on their own mobile device.

Say: Caterpillars are such interesting creatures. They start as these ugly, crawling, oblong creatures, unable to do much but crawl and eat and crawl and eat. Yet eventually, they become a pupa and envelope themselves into a cocoon. Then they become butterflies, beautiful and powerful, being able to fly and pollinate flowers. If God can transform these little creatures so mightily, how much more grand is our transformation and regeneration when we are born again!

POINT 2: THE SON CAME SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE (JOHN 3:9-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“Nicodemus’s third and final question is rhetorical in the narrative. ‘How can this be?’ likely disguises a thoroughgoing and lengthy inquiry by the rabbi, whose religious categories have now been upended. He is baffled. He is disturbed. His commitment to the Torah and obedience, to prayer and sacrifice, and his understanding of election, responsibility, and privilege have all been challenged. He should have no problem understanding that the Spirit of God can transform; but he is a man standing on the frontier, looking at a new country and wondering how such momentous events will unfold. For the third (and final) time Jesus begins his answer with (lit.) ‘Truly, truly I say to you,’ as if to underscore the importance of what he is about to say (3:3, 5, 11). The irony of his response is that he refers to Nicodemus as a rabbi (3:10), just as Nicodemus had referred to Jesus (3:2), but now we see that this teacher does not know the answers. Jesus is the only ‘true rabbi’ who can explain the deeper mysteries of God.”⁵

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus rebuked Nicodemus for his blindness (3:9-10). He then contrasted Nicodemus’ ‘we know’ (3:2) with his own we know in 3:11a. Here the ‘we’ Jesus speaks of most probably refers to his followers, who speak of what we know, and . . . testify to what we have seen. However, the ‘we’ may also refer to the joint testimony of the Father and the Son, as in passages like 5:31-32 and 8:13-18 . . . As the Son of Man, the only person who came from heaven, Jesus is the prime revealer of the knowledge of God (3:13 . . .). People find it difficult to understand the mystery of the Spirit and of rebirth, and so Jesus offered another lesson. He reminded Nicodemus of the story of Moses lifting up a bronze snake in the wilderness. The Israelites who looked to it in faith were saved from death (Num. 21:4-9). This incident offers an analogy for Jesus’ role and for saving faith. Just as the bronze snake was lifted up on a pole, so too Jesus will be lifted up—on the cross (3:14; see 8:28; 12:32). And just as turning in faith to look at the bronze snake brought healing and life to those who had been bitten by snakes, so turning to Jesus in faith would transfer people from darkness to light and eternal life (3:15). People like Nicodemus must choose to turn to Jesus and truly believe to receive eternal life.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

In Greek mythology, Asclepius is known as the god of healing or of medicine, and he is pictured as carrying a rod with a snake on it. But before him, the story of God healing the Israelites in the wilderness with a snake on a rod through Moses had already been circulating. Similar images and storylines do not negate the validity of God’s Word. Today, the symbol of the World Health Organization and other medical services is a snake on a rod. Its origins may be derived from Greek mythology, but we can point to the more ancient and true story of Moses and the ultimate Healer who continues to heal today, not only physically but spiritually in the lives of His beloved creation, humankind. Because of God’s love and grace, we know that God desires to heal us through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

POINT 3: THE SON CAME SO THAT PEOPLE MIGHT ESCAPE CONDEMNATION (JOHN 3:17-21).

+ COMMENTARY

“The essence of this self-incurred condemnation is pictured in the metaphorical terms, light and darkness. The verdict . . . is entirely negative in vv. 19–20. Light has come into the world; with the incarnation of the Word, the light shone in the darkness . . . even more brightly than at the creation. As the light of the world (8:12), Jesus is the revelation of God and the objectification of divine holiness and purity. But men loved darkness instead of light: they preferred to live without such knowledge of God, without such brilliant purity. The reason was fundamentally moral: *their deeds were evil*. They were not willing to live by the truth; they valued their pride more than their integrity, their prejudice more than contrite faith. Worse, anyone in this camp hates the light and refuses to come to it for fear that his deeds will be exposed . . . The verb suggests not only exposure but shame and conviction . . . The purpose of these three verses [3:19-21], then, is not to encourage readers to think they fall into a deterministic category bound up with their intrinsic nature, but to make them see the imminence of their danger (the verdict is being declared), and the fundamentally moral reasons why people hate the light. John stresses these points in the hope that his readers will beseech God that all they do may be done through him—in short, that they will turn to the ‘lifted up’ Son of Man with the same simple, desperate, unqualified faith as the Israelites displayed who turned to the bronze snake in the desert (vv. 13–15). By such faith and such faith alone can anyone experience the new birth (vv. 3, 5) and thereby gain eternal life (vv. 15–16).”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

“God needs our light where the world is the darkest. The blacker the night, the greater the need for a light bulb. If the bulb does not shine, it’s not because of the darkness. Darkness cannot put out a light. If the darkness increases until it is black as a cave, it is still not dark enough to extinguish a light. No one has yet smothered a light by increasing the darkness. Darkness gets darker because the light fails. When we fail to reflect Christ’s light, we let the darkness win.”⁸

Jesus is the light that came into the world to save people from darkness. As believers, we are to reflect the light of Jesus to help others out of the darkness as well. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and through the truth of His Word, our mission is to align with God’s mission in helping people get out of the darkness as they encounter the true Light of the world, Jesus Christ.

References

1. Gregory Nazianzen, “Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen,” in S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 327 [Logos].
2. Gary M. Burge, John, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 118.
3. Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 2.18, quoted in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1–10, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 126.
4. R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 74.
5. Gary M. Burge, John, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 116–17.
6. Pratap C. Gine and Jacob Cherian, “John,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1396.
7. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; Eerdmans, 1991), 207–208.
8. “Light,” in *6,000 Plus Illustrations for Communicating Biblical Truths* (Christianity Today, 2000) [Logos].

THE SON OFFERS LIVING WATER

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Son gives living water (John 4:7-14).
2. The Son enables true worship (John 4:19-24).
3. The Son provides an abundant harvest (John 4:34-38).

Background Passage: John 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that a day was coming when worshipers would not focus on the physical location of their worship but would worship God in Spirit and truth. Because of Jesus's death and resurrection, our worship is no longer confined by geography. We worship Jesus as the Savior of the whole world wherever we are, knowing that God indwells us always.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: Last week we looked at Nicodemus, and this week we look at a Samaritan woman. These two people could not be more different from each other. One, a respected leader in the spiritual community, the other probably shunned for her sexual promiscuity.

DISCUSS: Why do we often evaluate people by their public standing or by their actions? (because if we don't know them well, we go by public opinion, whether right or wrong; because sometimes we think people's actions define them and they might not be able to change; because we think good people deserve good and bad people deserve bad; because we are commanded to judge and lovingly confront professing believers by their actions for their repentance, but we mistakenly think we are to judge unbelievers rather than share the gospel with them [1 Cor. 5:9-13])

TRANSITION: Inside of everyone there is a longing for something more, for something greater than ourselves. We long to be satisfied. The problem comes when we look for satisfaction in things of the flesh or things of this world. The problem is those things never satisfy. Jesus explained that He is the only One who can quench and satisfy our desires. Jesus made a promise to a Samaritan woman that all who believe in Him will receive living water—the Holy Spirit—who completely satisfies the longings of the heart and enables true worship of God.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: Would you consider your life before Christ to be more like Nicodemus or the woman at the well? (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

POINT 1

THE SON GIVES LIVING WATER (JOHN 4:7-14).

7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. “Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, **8** because his disciples had gone into town to buy food. **9** “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. **10** Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.” **11** “Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’?” **12** You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.” **13** Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. **14** But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 4:7-14** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Point out the town of Sychar in Samaria on **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS’S EARLY YEARS MAP** as the location for the events addressed in this session; then use the **VERSES 7-12** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: With what types of people might we find it difficult to share the good news of Jesus? (the homeless; gang members; prisoners; Muslims; the neighbor who puts trash in his yard; the employer who yells or takes credit for your work)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 13-14** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

TRANSITION: Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman that she was looking for the fulfillment of her desires in all the wrong places. Her thirst for satisfaction would not be quenched by chasing after the desires of her flesh but only in the “living water” that Jesus has to offer. This “living water” brings eternal life and satisfaction in God alone. Next, Jesus taught her what the true worship of God entails.

NOTES



SAMARITAN

Samaritans were looked down on by Jews because they only believed in the authority of the Pentateuch, the first five books of Scripture from Moses. They worshiped God on Mount Gerizim in Shechem because that was where the patriarchs worshiped. Their hope in a prophet/Messiah was derived solely from Deuteronomy 18:18, where God promised to raise up a prophet like Moses. Jews and Samaritans were generally hostile toward each other.¹

VOICES from THE CHURCH

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

—Samuel Ngewa

COMMENTARY

VERSES 7-12 / In this conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus used the illustration of drinking and needing water to explain a spiritual need. Most people who live in the United States today never have to worry about water; we simply turn on a faucet and we have fresh water to drink. For those who lived in the ancient Near East, however, getting clean drinking water was a chore. They lived in an arid climate and knew the dangers of not having enough water.

Jesus went to Jacob's well "worn out from his journey" and sat down at "noon" (4:6). Noon was not a popular time for people to go to the well to draw water. Yet a Samaritan woman approached to do just that.

Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink, and she was shocked that He would even talk to her. John provided some background to the relationship between Jews and Samaritans: **"For Jews do not associate with Samaritans."** The city of Samaria was once the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which led to Jews and Samaritans having a long and troubled history. Don Carson describes their troubled past:

After the Assyrians captured Samaria in 722–21 BC, they deported all the Israelites and settled the land with foreigners, who intermarried with the surviving Israelites and adhered to some form of their ancient religion (2 Ki. 17–18). After the exile [of Judah to Babylon], Jews returning to their homeland . . . viewed the Samaritans not only as the children of political rebels but as racial half-breeds whose religion was tainted by various unacceptable elements . . . About 400 BC the Samaritans erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim; toward the end of the second century BC this was destroyed by John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler in Judea.³

Consider all those barriers that Jesus crossed when talking with this Samaritan

woman! He crossed ethnic, racial, and religious barriers in asking her for a drink.

The woman was surprised that a Jewish man would talk to her, but Jesus told her that if she knew who He was, then she would have asked Him for a drink. She responded, **"You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you?"** And of course, Jesus is greater.

VERSES 13-14 / How did Jesus respond to the woman's question? Jesus let her know that the water He offered truly satisfied because **"whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again."** Jesus was telling her that He could give her a gift that would quench her thirst and satisfy the longings of her soul.

The patriarch Jacob, from the book of Genesis, dug this well, and it had been supplying the needs of the people who lived there in Samaria for about two thousand years at the time Jesus was talking with this woman. In fact, if you go to Israel today, you can go to this site and the well still has water. Jacob provided this well that would give the people enough water for their daily needs. Jesus's gift, however, is greater because one sip from the water that Jesus offers is enough to never thirst again!

Consider the characteristics of this gift Jesus brings: It is living water. If you drink of it, you will not thirst. It becomes a well of water springing up, and it gives eternal life. This living water is a metaphor for the living Holy Spirit, springing up and giving life to all who receive Him. We again see this connection of water to the Holy Spirit in John 7:38-39, when Jesus said, "The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.' He said this about the Spirit."

The gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus came to bring is a greater gift than the water Jacob provided because it leads to eternal life and satisfaction.

POINT 2

THE SON ENABLES TRUE WORSHIP (JOHN 4:19-24).

19 “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.” **21** Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. **23** But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 4:19-24** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 19-20** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #90: *Worship:* While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the **heart** and extends to all areas of **life**. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian’s life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and **strengthen** other Christians, but it also serves as a **witness** to non-believers of the greatness of God.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 21-24** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 10: THE HOLY SPIRIT**; then ask: **Why are truth and the Holy Spirit necessary for our worship of God?** (Jesus said we must worship in Spirit and truth; if we feel the indwelling of the Spirit but lack scriptural truth, our worship lacks depth; if we know the truth of Scripture but lack the work and power of the Spirit, our worship will lack heart; we cannot worship God rightly without knowing who He is and knowing how He has commanded us to worship Him, both of which He has revealed in His Word; the Holy Spirit ensures our fellowship with the Father and Jesus)

TRANSITION: Seeing that the gift the Son of Man brings is living water, we will see He is the One who enables us to worship in Spirit and in truth.

NOTES



COMMENTARY

VERSES 19-20 / In the previous section, Jesus began speaking to an immoral Samaritan woman. He told her of how He could give her water that would quench her thirst forever. She misunderstood and thought He was only speaking of physical water. In verse 15, she asked Jesus to give her this water as she no longer wanted to have to go to the well to draw water. But in verses 16-18, Jesus told her to go get her “husband,” which exposed her sinful lifestyle since she had no husband but various sinful relationships. She had been drinking from the polluted fountains of sin rather than living water.

The woman then stated, **“I see that you are a prophet,”** and said to Jesus, **“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”** What was her reason for saying this? Remember, Jews and Samaritans were at odds ethnically, racially, and theologically. The Samaritans once had their temple on Mount Gerizim and the Jews had their temple in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. Samaritans only believed the validity of the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, while the Jews affirmed all of what we know as the Old Testament. The Samaritan woman was saying that she understood Jesus was a prophet, but she wanted to emphasize that they were different because they worshiped at different places. Some commentators think she was trying to deflect the conversation to something other than herself and her sin. Others think she truly saw Jesus as a prophet who knew her sin and she wanted to respond in confession and worship but didn’t know where she should do so.

VERSES 21-24 / Jesus responded to this woman’s statement, **“Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”** Geographical location is not of primary importance to Jesus. He then told her that Samaritans worship what they do not know. Their selective focus on the books of Moses limited their

understanding of God and His mission. So Jesus said, **“Salvation is from the Jews,”** pointing to the full Jewish Scripture as the revelation of God, including the historical books and the books of the prophets that promise a coming Savior to bring salvation to the world. He was indirectly pointing to Himself.

In this text, Jesus repeated the idea of an **“hour is coming.”** The hour is an important theme in John’s Gospel and refers to Jesus’s death on the cross, resurrection, and exaltation. Verse 21 says, **“an hour is coming,”** and then verse 23 says, **“an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.”** Jesus’s emphasis to the woman, then, is not on where to worship but how to worship because of the when that is **“coming, and is now here.”** An hour was coming when Jesus would die for our sins and resurrect and thus conquer sin and death as prophesied. This hour was coming, and when completed, worshipers would worship in the truth of the gospel and with the indwelling of the Spirit. This worship can only take place in and through Jesus Christ. Previously, John said that Jesus “dwelt among us” (1:14). The word “dwelt” could be translated “tabernacled.” Jesus is the fulfillment of the tabernacle and temple. Because of Christ’s saving work, we worship God not through a building or physical location but through faith in Him.

If we read on, we see that the woman responded, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (4:25), and Jesus responded, “I, the one speaking to you, am he” (4:26). Most of the time, Jesus was reluctant to call Himself the Messiah, most likely because of the political and military connotations the term held to the Jews. But to the Samaritan woman, He could reveal Himself as such. This woman had gone to the well that day to draw water with her soul’s thirst not being quenched by the passions of her flesh. She would leave, however, knowing the Messiah and the gift of living water that He came to bring.

POINT 3

THE SON PROVIDES AN ABUNDANT HARVEST (JOHN 4:34-38).

NOTES

34 “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work,” Jesus told them. **35** “Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest’? Listen to what I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest. **36** The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. **37** For in this case the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ **38** I sent you to reap what you didn’t labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **John 4:34-38** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 34-35** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why is evangelism so important to God? (because His main mission is to save sinners into His kingdom and family; because He desires love and worship from all; because there is an urgency to save as many as possible; because He wants what’s best for His image-bearers)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 36-38** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Whether sowing or reaping in the harvest of **souls**, all **roles** are important in the mission of God.

DISCUSS: How can we have a stronger sense of urgency in sharing with others the good news of Jesus? (praying for more opportunities for boldness; reading Scripture and seeing God’s heart to see people come to Him; putting time in our schedule to seek out people who need to know the gospel message)

TRANSITION: Jesus explained the living water that He brings in order to give eternal life, and He revealed His identity as the Messiah who leads to worshiping in Spirit and in truth. Now we are tasked to sow and reap the fields of unbelievers before us.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 34-35 / The Samaritan woman had gone and told others about the man she met at the well. Now we see Jesus interact with His disciples in order to teach them about the abundant harvest of evangelism.

After the Samaritan woman left the well to go and tell others about Jesus, the disciples returned with food for Jesus. They told Him to eat, but He told them of food “that you do not know about” (4:32). This puzzled them, so Jesus went on to explain, **“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”** Just as Jesus used the physical illustration of water to explain the spiritual reality of everlasting satisfaction in Him, here He used the physical illustration of food to explain the spiritual reality of full satisfaction in doing God’s will.

Jesus likely was alluding to the Old Testament passage of Deuteronomy 8:3-6, but specifically verse 3, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” He was speaking of the importance of keeping God’s commands (Deut. 8:6) and how it satisfies. Jesus told His disciples that there was greater nourishment in doing the Father’s will than in any food they had to offer Him. And what was the Father’s will? To save people from every nation, tribe, and tongue—all humankind—and bring them into the kingdom of God. Jesus, in revealing His identity to the Samaritan woman and telling her of the good news of living water, did just that. And she in turn would share that good news—the gospel—with others. For Jesus, there was greater satisfaction in doing that than any meal this world has to offer.

Jesus then said, **“Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest’?”** Jesus was saying that the harvest that comes from doing the will of God was already upon them. The fields were ready for harvest. The disciples were still young in learning what Jesus wanted of them. They were starting to understand but possibly were hesitant in their mission,

as many Christians today are. But Jesus wanted to throw them into the deep end, telling them the harvest was now, not later: “Your work begins now, not later when you’re more skilled or more mature or know more. Share with others like this Samaritan woman about who I am. Good news must be shared.”

VERSES 36-38 / Jesus continued, **“The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together.”** In teaching His disciples about the fields being “ready for harvest,” Jesus shows us our need to be urgent in the task of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now is the time for every disciple to be sharing the gospel. Both sowing and reaping are happening at the same time and both are necessary. The one who reaps is not more important than the one who sows. Sometimes we are given the task of sowing, other times we get to experience the joy of reaping the harvest. Sometimes we will experience the hard, ground-breaking work of taking the gospel to somewhere it has not been preached only for it to fall upon deaf ears. But other times we may experience the joy of seeing some come to saving faith.

So as Jesus was sent to do the will of the Father, so too must His disciples do the Father’s will by reaping the harvest that **“others have labored”**—the prophets of old as well as John the Baptist and those before them. The disciples would benefit from their labor.

When Jesus revealed His identity to the Samaritan woman as the Messiah, and she went forth to tell others in town, this was the beginning of the movement of the gospel going forth to the nations. Is Jesus greater than Jacob? Yes, Jesus is greater than Jacob because He is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather, that through his offspring “all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 22:18).

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

Where most Jewish men would have seen the Samaritan woman as a person to be avoided, Jesus saw an opportunity to gather one of His scattered sheep (John 10:16). We can easily look at people outwardly and make a judgment upon them. However, this is not right and it is not meant to be this way for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus's speaking to this social outcast and immoral woman was a picture of the gospel going forth to the nations. The message of the gospel is not simply for one people group or even for people whom we like but for all people that they may believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior.

How will knowing that Jesus Christ talked with all types of people help you live on mission for Him this week?

HEART:

The Jews looked down upon Samaritans for a variety of reasons. Jews believed the Samaritans were unclean and impure. Then adding to the list that this Samaritan woman lived an immoral life, she would have been seen as the lowest of the low. Jesus knew the depth of sin in her heart, but instead of passing her by, He extended His saving gift to her in order that she might come to know and worship the one true God. While most would have thought she was beyond the saving grace of God, Jesus saw her as someone needing to be saved from the polluted fountains (sinful relationships) she kept drinking from. We are wrong and sinful when we behave and think that some people are beyond the saving grace of God.

What hurtful attitudes toward a particular person or people group will you confess to God that He may restore you with the truth of His grace?

HANDS:

Jesus said that the fields "are ready for harvest" (John 4:35). There are countless times when we fail to see the same truth that Jesus tells us here. Instead of being so discouraged by what is going on in the world around you, may you see it as an opportunity to pray that the Lord would give you opportunities this week to sow the seeds of the gospel.

With whom will you sow the seeds of the gospel this week in hopes of seeing a harvest for Christ?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Jesus calls the quickening gift of the Spirit 'living water' because mere human nature is parched to its very roots, now rendered dry and barren of all virtue by the crimes of the devil. But now human nature runs back to its pristine beauty, and drinking in that which is life-giving, it is made beautiful with a variety of good things and, budding into a virtuous life, it sends out healthy shoots of love toward God."⁴

—Cyril of Alexandria
(c. 376-444)

POINT 1: THE SON GIVES LIVING WATER (JOHN 4:7-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“That Jesus and the woman are alone at the well may indicate that this woman who has had five husbands and is now with a sixth man (John 4:18) has come for water at a time when she knows she will not encounter other people. She had no idea she would meet Jesus at the well and is clearly surprised when this Jewish man speaks to her. She was a woman, a Samaritan, and her history with men granted her no esteem in that culture. Not only does Jesus ask her for a drink (v. 7), he does so in spite of the fact that no one else is present (v. 8; cf. v. 27). Jesus would do what was right, no matter the circumstances, even if the circumstances lent themselves to misinterpretations, suggesting he might be in the wrong (cf. v. 27). So often people see the right they should do, recognize it could be misinterpreted, and allow fear to prevail over courage. One aspect of Jesus’ greatness of character is that fear of man never prevailed over what virtue prompted him to do.”⁵

+ COMMENTARY

“In spite of all the risks of misunderstanding and the social stigma attached to talking to a woman in public, especially to one he did not know, Jesus, moving in God’s plan, asked her a natural question. He requested her help in drawing some water to quench his thirst (4:7b). While this was a genuine request, he was also wanting to share with her and her people the gift of living water that would quench their spiritual thirst. This encounter highlights God’s love for the Samaritans whom the Jews considered outcasts . . . The woman was astonished that Jesus, a Jew, not only spoke to her but even asked her for a drink (4:9). Jesus was breaking the centuries-old socio-ethnic barrier of Jewish-Samaritan prejudice. He was also crossing the gender barrier generally prescribed by his society. As God’s Messiah, Jesus came to draw all people, including those ‘the Jews’ considered outside of God’s favour.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Music reveals the heart of a person or a society. Songs like “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” from the Rolling Stones and U2’s “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” reveal a society shaped by longings and desires that don’t satisfy. Jesus is the only thing that truly satisfies. In a culture that always wants more because the latest fix is only a temporary one, our need to point others to Jesus Christ is not only imperative because of our obedience to Him but also because of our love for our neighbor. People need something that truly satisfies. Point them to Jesus.

POINT 2: THE SON ENABLES TRUE WORSHIP (JOHN 4:19-24).

+ COMMENTARY

“The Samaritans did not believe that there were prophets such as Amos and Isaiah in the biblical period. Since they embraced only the Pentateuch, they understood the expectation of Deuteronomy 18:18, which said a great prophet would follow Moses (“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him”). But this was to be the messianic figure of the final day. Therefore in referring to Jesus as a prophet (the prophet?), the woman unwittingly has opened the subject of messianism for Jesus. This is a common Johannine technique, in which characters operating on an earthly plane not only fail to understand spiritual things, but occasionally use language that bears a meaning more profound than they realize (cf. 11:50; 18:37, 39; 19:19–22).”⁷

+ COMMENTARY

“The issue was clear. If Jesus had entered the age-old argument of which was the ‘right’ temple (like our arguments about the ‘right’ church), the woman would not have had to face herself and her sin. Christians who seek to be ambassadors for Christ must always be wary of falling into the trap of arguing about the ‘right’ place of worship or the ‘right’ denomination. Just as Jesus did not argue with the presuppositions of Nicodemus (John 3:2) and the paralytic (5:7), Jesus did not argue with the woman here. The point is not winning arguments but introducing people to the dimension of God in their lives. The model of Jesus is thus very instructive. He turned the conversation away from place of worship to nature of worship. In so doing, he modeled a correct evangelistic perspective. But Jesus did not leave the woman with a vague witness about God. He pushed her to think about the personal God who acts in history. First, he called her to an eschatological reality (the coming hour) that would affect all worship (4:21). Because God has acted primarily through people in the world, he is not basically building-oriented. The mention of ‘hour’ here is a Johannine theme that encapsulates the decisive moment in history of the crucifixion and resurrection that transformed and continues to transform human reality. Second, Jesus reminded her that salvation is directly related to God’s working in history (4:22). The issue was not a matter of national or tribal pride. That was the woman’s perspective on God and religion. It is also a familiar theme among many Americans. The issue, however, was understanding how God had chosen to reveal the divine purpose in history. Worship devoid of understanding God’s activity in history operates within a vacuum. To make this point clear, the evangelist employed his theme of knowledge. Jesus said that Samaritan worship lacked knowledge, the critical relational aspect of genuine worship. Third, Jesus defined acceptable worship as participating in two revealed aspects of divine reality: “spirit and truth” (4:23).”⁸

+ OPTIONAL TEACHING ACTIVITY

Pick out a few common worship songs, current or from the past, and print out copies of the lyrics for your group members. Break up into small teams and have people dissect the songs to see if they think the songs could be sung in Spirit and in truth. Answers may vary and may be graciously debated together.

POINT 3: THE SON PROVIDES AN ABUNDANT HARVEST (JOHN 4:34-38).

+ COMMENTARY

“Jesus came to do the Father’s will (5:36; 6:38), and always did no less (8:29). His works were the works of God (9:3–4; 10:25, 32, 37–38; 14:10; 17:4). No-one has ever exemplified the truth of Deuteronomy 8:3 in anything like the degree Jesus has: man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord . . . If in his dealings with the Samaritan woman Jesus was performing his Father’s will, there was greater sustenance and satisfaction in that than in any food the disciples could offer him. Indeed, all of Jesus’ ministry is nothing other than submission to and performance of the will of the one who sent him (a frequent designation for God: e.g. 5:23–24, 30, 37; 6:38–39; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 16:5). Once the cross is firmly in view, Jesus can pray, ‘I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do’ (17:4 . . .). This sense of the mission of the Son . . . becomes a dominant theme in 5:19–47, making the present passage an anticipatory link.”⁹

+ COMMENTARY

“The long walk from the south to the north, the disciples’ pressing [Jesus] with endless questions, the incessant crowds, and the constant questions and badgering made him a tired man. Then the woman came to the well. After the initial verbal sparring, the conversation began to pick up, and so did he. He was exhilarated in the service of God. He was feasting on the potential he saw in that woman’s life. He was so absorbed in what could happen to her that he forgot himself. Jesus found sustenance by being consumed by God’s work.”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

“During the drought conditions a few years ago, much of the seed that had been planted did not come up. The seed that did produced runty plants that promised a scanty yield, if any at all. Grass burned up in the intense heat, and the cattle nearly starved. Many farmers were forced to sell their cattle. Except those who faced bankruptcy or foreclosure, few farmers were giving up. In many cases they could be seen plowing up hopelessly lost crops and planting other seed. They worked in hopes of refreshing rain and an eventual harvest. If they were so persistent, should sowers of the seed of the Word of God do less? Yes, many will reject our witness. Others will receive it superficially, only to show their true colors when the going gets rough. Some will truly be saved but will yield little or no harvest as they get caught up in the temporal things of this age. But we must persist, knowing that others will be saved and will give themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the Lord, yielding an abundance of souls led to Christ (see Mark 4:1–20).”¹¹

References

1. Brian Maiers, “Samaritans,” ed. John D. Barry, et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
2. Samuel Ngewa, “John,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1286.
3. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; Eerdmans, 1991), 216.
4. Cyril of Alexandria, quoted in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 1–10, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 150.
5. James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, John–Acts, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 89.
6. Pratap C. Gine and Jacob Cherian, “John,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1398.
7. Gary M. Burge, *John, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 145.
8. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 207–208.
9. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 228–29.
10. R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 132.
11. Herschel H. Hobbs, *My Favorite Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 90–91.

THE SON EMBODIES DIVINE LOVE

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Nature of Love (1 John 4:7-10)
2. The Primacy of Love (1 John 4:11; 1 Cor. 13:1-3)
3. The Character of Love (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Background Passages: 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God, in His nature, is love. God's greatest act of love has been giving of Himself to us in Christ Jesus. Jesus took on flesh, suffered and died, and rose again to forgive the sins of all who trust in Him. Jesus's work leaves no question of God's glory and His love for people.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: We use the word "love" for all sorts of reasons, such as "I love pizza" or "I love Marvel movies" or "I love my mom" or "I love my spouse." The word *love* may have various meanings and intents to various people.

DISCUSS: How would you define *love*? (affection for someone; devotion and care for someone; putting others' needs before your own; sacrificing for the sake of the good of someone)

TRANSITION: In our session today, we will be looking at how Jesus embodies divine love. Through the saving work of Jesus Christ, we see the nature of love, the primacy of love, and the character of love. While the world is often confused about what love is, God has clearly revealed what love looks like for His people. The greatest act of love the world has ever seen was the Lord Jesus Christ being sent to earth in order to save His people from their sins.

POINT 1

THE NATURE OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-10)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. **10** Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 John 4:7-10** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7-8** commentary to highlight the key doctrine (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #13: *God Is Love:* To say that God is love is to say that God is the **essence** of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a **sign** that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in **Christ** so that we might become reconciled to Him.

DISCUSS: Call attention to the Bible passage on **PACK ITEM 11: GOD IS LOVE**; then ask: **How does the Bible's description of love contrast with the world's view of love?** (in the Bible, love is from God; in the world, love is from you and your heart; in the Bible, God is love; in the world, anything can be love; in the Bible, if you don't love, you don't know God; in the world, if you don't love, you just need to talk it out; in the Bible, love means sacrificing and putting others above yourself; in the world, love sometimes can be self-serving)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-10** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: **What are some ways people can misunderstand God's love?** (using God's love as a license to sin; thinking they must earn God's love; thinking God could never love them; thinking they could lose God's love)

TRANSITION: The nature of God's love calls us to love one another. Because God gave of Himself in sending the Son, Jesus Christ, into the world so that we might have life, we must love one another in a way that reflects this greatest gift of God.

NOTES



PROPTIATION

The act of averting or appeasing God's wrath, specifically through Christ's death on the cross. Because God is holy, sin must be dealt with. Because God is loving, He Himself provided an atoning sacrifice in His Son, Jesus, to cover sin and turn away His anger.¹

COMMENTARY

VERSES 7-8 / The apostle John directly addressed his readers by calling them **“Dear friends.”** This could also be translated as “Beloved.” More than just a term of endearment toward his readers, this word also introduced the topic that John was going to address: love. John’s appeal was that Christians should love one another for two reasons: 1) love is from God, and 2) love is evidence of one who has been born of God.

First, love is from God. John based our need to love one another in God’s nature and character. God’s actions are the ultimate displays of pure love. Ray Van Neste writes, “Love is fundamental to God’s character; thus his children must bear the family resemblance.”² The source of the believer’s love for one another is God.

The second motivation for loving one another is that genuine love for one another is evidence of being born of God. Love for our fellow Christians is a fruit of regeneration. John’s statement **“Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God”** does not mean that belief in Christ is not necessary. In fact, right before this section, John was talking about knowing the truth about Christ coming in the flesh to earth. If one is born of God, then the love of God has transformed him to have a love for the family of God.

In verse 8, John explained how those who lack love have not been changed by the transforming power of the gospel; they are said to **“not know God.”** This verse is shocking and should cause Christians to look at the state of their heart and concern for others. God does not love us and leave us in our same sinful state. No, the power of the gospel transforms us so that we can and will love one another.

What does John mean by **“God is love”**? This verse has been misunderstood and at times misused. Some have misused this description of God as a license to live however they please. They dismiss their

sinful actions by thinking that because God is love, He will let them live however they want. But “God is love” means that one of His key characteristics is love. The one true God is a loving God who cares about others. But God is not only loving, He is holy as well. John wrote earlier in his letter: “God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him” (1:5). In this letter, John was showing that two key attributes of God’s character are His love and His light—His love and His holiness.

VERSES 9-10 / John turned from the big picture of God’s love to a concrete example of how God’s love is displayed—ultimately in the giving of Himself to us in Christ Jesus. John was saying that God’s love is **“revealed among us”** in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s **“only Son,”** which shows us His unique identity—there is no one else like Him. No one else could be sent on this mission to earth to save. Notice the purpose for which God sent Jesus into the world: **“so that we might live through him.”** God sent Jesus into the world on a mission to bring life through death. John’s language here is similar to what we studied in John 3:16.

The love of God is described even further in verse 10: **“Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** John shows us how we who were destined for eternal punishment in hell could have eternal life in Christ. Jesus came and took upon Himself at the cross the punishment that we deserve for our sins. The word for **“atoning sacrifice”** has also been translated as “propitiation.” This sacrifice was done in order to bear the wrath and judgment of God. Jesus did that for us.

Therefore, we should seek to love one another because God loved us. And it is only through understanding and knowing the costly love and sacrifice of God for sinners that we are able to love and sacrifice like Him as well.

POINT 2

THE PRIMACY OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:11; 1 COR. 13:1-3)

NOTES

1 John 4:11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

.....
1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

READ: Ask two volunteers to read aloud **1 John 4:11** and **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** from their own Bibles.

EXPLAIN: Use the **1 JOHN 4:11** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Following Christ's **example**, we must love **others** sacrificially.

DISCUSS: Why do you think we find it difficult to love others? (in our sinful nature, we enjoy receiving love more than giving love; it takes much effort to love others; we're prideful and think we deserve more love; we like comfort and don't like to sacrifice in loving others)

EXPLAIN: Use the **1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Knowledge and **actions**, even if learned and done for the Lord, are pointless if we don't have **love**.

TRANSITION: As Paul needed to remind the church at Corinth to love one another, we need the same reminder today. Paul called the believers in Corinth to live a better way by exhorting them to love one another. As followers of Jesus, we should be committed to living this better way as well.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Right love of God is what enables right love of self and others. When we devote heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving [God], we perceive ourselves rightly—no room for pride or self-exaltation—which prepares us to love our neighbor freely. Rightly perceiving ourselves to be the unworthy recipients of the *agape* [love] of God, we become willing to love our neighbor in spite of himself because God first loved us in spite of ourselves. We do not wait to feel love; rather, we will ourselves to act in love whether we feel it or not. *Agape* transcends our feelings."³

—Jen Wilkin

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 4:11 / John began yet another verse by calling his readers, **“Dear friends.”** He was reminding them of why he was writing this section: Our love for others must be rooted in God’s love for us. Again we see how God’s love for us transforms us to love others. Love is meant to be a primary mark of the life of a Christian. In light of God’s amazing love, we are to love one another. Understanding the great love God has for His people should move Christians to act. When John said, **“if God loved us in this way,”** he was calling his readers to think of the way in which God loves them. When we think of the love God has for us, we must consider how costly the love of God truly is. Love is not easy, but it is good and right. God’s love for believers is not some abstract concept but real and includes action.

When was the last time you pondered the love God has for you? Think of what it cost God to love you. God loves us despite our sinful rebellion against Him. He loved us despite it costing Jesus His life. When we think of this great cost, we should be moved to love those whom God places in our lives.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 / First Corinthians 13 may be familiar to you because some verses of this chapter are often read at weddings. But this is ironic when considering the original context. In a wedding ceremony, you have a man and a woman coming together as one. The church at Corinth, however, was full of divisions and hostility toward one another. They were not united because they lacked love for each other. First Corinthians 13 is situated in a long section on spiritual gifts starting in chapter 12. Some Corinthians were causing divisions over the different gifts, saying some were more important than others. Paul wrote this section to show them “an even better way” (12:31). The better and more excellent way is love. Instead of fighting over the importance of gifts, Paul said they needed to have love for one another.

Paul’s call to love is a much needed exhortation for the church today as well. Much

like the church in Corinth, the church today faces all different kinds of division. Whether it be political or social concerns, the church can easily be divided over a number of important and unimportant issues. So we must take to heart Paul’s call to love. We must not let our differences divide us but seek to be united by our common love for Christ and submission to His Word. The call to love is not meant to be a call to compromise the truth of the Scriptures. Rather, because of the truth revealed in the Scriptures, we are called to love.

In verse 1, Paul said our words must not be empty of love. Yes, some may speak eloquently, but if they have not love, they are of no more use than an instrument with no purpose.

In verse 2, Paul talked about having **“all knowledge.”** He said that even if he knew everything and possessed all the faith needed to move mountains but did not have love, then that knowledge and faith truly meant nothing and were devoid of all worth. Remember what was happening in the Corinthian church. These believers were placing great value and worth on the spiritual gifts. However, instead of using those gifts to encourage their brothers and sister in the faith, they were creating a spiritual hierarchy that was dividing the church. The church is united by faith and knowing Christ, and at the center of that unity should be the common love for Christ that transforms us.

In verse 3, Paul spoke of taking great action: **“if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body.”** Paul was telling them that they could do all the good in the world and be known for their good works, but if they did not love, then those actions were meaningless.

Thus, we may know much and do much, even taking these steps for the Lord in our minds, but if love is not the motivating factor, then it will all be pointless.

POINT 3

THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (1 COR. 13:4-7)

4 Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, **5** is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. **6** Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. **7** It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Love is **active** and considers the other person **above** ourselves at every opportunity.

DISCUSS: Paul's list is not exhaustive in terms of what love is or is not. What would you add to the list? (love is merciful and forgiving; love is caring and compassionate; love is not harsh; love is not sarcastic; love is not apathetic)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 6-7** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What can you do to help you love better? (pray for the Spirit's power to love; understand the magnitude of Christ's love for me and others; find someone to keep me accountable on loving better; find opportunities to love others; confess my lack of love)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 4-5 / In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul assembled a number of verbs in the Greek (15 to be exact) to describe the characteristics of love. What can be seen from this section is that love is active; it is not simply a feeling or an emotion.

In verse 4, Paul used patience and kindness to describe love. Patience carries with it the idea of waiting and sticking with someone. This patience is often used to describe God's relationship to His people (2 Pet. 3:9). This means that when something goes wrong in our relationships (and it will), we are not to move on and ignore others but seek to demonstrate this act of patient love. Next, Paul said love **"is kind."** This is the only place this specific verb appears in the New Testament. Due to the loving-kindness that God has shown us in Christ, we are to be kind toward others. One of the distinctives of the early church was their kindness toward those in need, including widows, orphans, or unwanted infants. The early church's kindness was a defining mark that gave them opportunities to share the love of Christ.

Next, Paul went on to list eight characteristics of what love is not:

- Love **"does not envy."** This means that we do not think negatively of others when they experience success. Such envy seems to have been at the heart of the Corinthian church's divisions. Instead of being thankful for the gifts God had granted to other believers, they were jealous.
- Love is not boastful. This could be translated as "vainglory." Love does not seek to boast in a self-glorified way.
- Love **"is not arrogant."** Love does not seek to be prideful but humble.
- Love is not rude. This word has a wide range of meanings. It can mean anything from inappropriate sexual behavior to dishonorable actions.
- Love **"is not self-seeking."** Instead of being selfish, the way of love seeks to serve others. In 1 Corinthians 10:24, Paul

wrote, "No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person."

- Love **"is not irritable."** Love means we will not be easily angered by others.
- Love **"does not keep a record of wrongs,"** literally, "Keeps no books on evil." When people are wronged, the way of love does not seek to hold that wrong against the offender but seeks to forgive.
- Love **"finds no joy in unrighteousness."** This could also mean that love does not rejoice over injustice.

All of these words help believers understand what love is not.

VERSES 6-7 / Paul then turned back to stating what love is in a positive sense:

- Love **"rejoices in the truth."** Instead of seeking to spread lies and gossip, love seeks to delight in the spread of truth.
- Love **"bears all things."** When circumstances get hard, love seeks to be supportive and bear the burdens of others.
- Love **"believes all things."** This does not mean that love is gullible or accepts everything as fact. Love is not caught up in error. Rather, this word carries with it the idea of believing the best about others. Instead of jumping to the worst conclusion about the actions of others, we should seek to extend a gracious understanding.
- Love **"hopes all things."** For believers, we should never fall into a fatalistic mindset. We have a "living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3).
- Love **"endures all things."** The way of love does not end when something goes wrong but continues. Love never gives up.

When we read through this passage, it seems impossible to follow. But this passage is not meant to paralyze us in hopelessness. Rather, Paul's words once again point us to the One who loves perfectly—Jesus Christ. The greatest act of love the world has ever seen was the Lord Jesus Christ going to the cross to die for our sins. Now that is love in action.

MY RESPONSE



NOTES

PACK ITEM 12: GOD'S LOVE HYMN: Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together as a reminder of the wonderful love of God embodied in Jesus Christ for our salvation.

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

HEAD:

From the Bible passages in this session, we see that God desires that we be united and love one another. Unity and love are central to the life of a healthy church and to faithful followers of Jesus. Paul showed us that love is foundational to every spiritual gift that believers are equipped with. If we do not have love, then our gifts will not be used to honor God and build others up.

How might the truth that “love endures all things” help you in your relationship with other Christians?

HEART:

Love is not simply an emotion, it involves action. In fact, our actions will demonstrate if we have the spiritual fruit of love in our lives. When we realize how much God has loved us in Christ, we will seek to love and forgive others. God is not calling us to do something that He was unable to do Himself. God has loved and forgiven us in Christ. Therefore, we should love and forgive one another.

What person or group of people do you need to love better, and how?

HANDS:

God has sacrificed greatly on our behalf. His love was costly; it cost Jesus His life. So we are to love others with a sacrificial love modeled after God's love for us. Love often entails sacrifice, and we see that in the cross of Jesus Christ. There will be times when we have to love others in a costly way, but we do so because we are following in the steps of our Savior, in the way that He loves us.

What is one concrete action you will take this week to love in the way Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Love, and do what thou wilt: whether thou hold thy peace, through love hold thy peace; whether thou cry out, through love cry out; whether thou correct, through love correct; whether thou spare, through love do thou spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.”⁴

—Augustine (354–430)

POINT 1: THE NATURE OF LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-10)

+

COMMENTARY

“The meaning of the expression ‘born of God’ is best explained by reference to the Fourth Gospel. John 1:12–13 emphasizes that people become children of God, not by natural birth, but by being born of God. In John 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born ‘from above’, and this is equivalent to being ‘born of the Spirit’. Being born of God, then, is quite distinct from natural human procreation. It is brought about by God through his Spirit, in conjunction with faith in Christ on the part of those concerned.”⁵

POINT 3: THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (1 COR. 13:4-7)

+

COMMENTARY

“Structurally, 1 Cor 13 divides into three sections: Verses 1–3 expound the absolute necessity and primacy of love, vv. 4–7 describe the nature or character of love, and vv. 8–13 establish the permanence of love. Paul’s exposition of love is particularly suited to the Corinthian context. The chapter begins by establishing the preeminence of love in relation to spiritual gifts (tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith) and exceptional sacrifice (13:1–3). Paul then provides a definition of love, not in terms of mere abstract qualities but in terms of what love does (13:4–7). The chapter concludes by showing that whereas prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease, love never fails (13:8–13). Love as the ‘greatest’ of the faith/hope/love triad resonates with the exhortation of 12:31a to earnestly desire the ‘greatest’ gifts.”⁶

References

1. Donald G. Bloesch, “Expiation, Propitiation,” *Holman Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler, (Nashville: B&H, 2008) [WordSearch/Logos].
2. Ray Van Neste, 1 John, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 455.
3. Jen Wilkin, *In His Image* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 38.
4. Augustine of Hippo, “Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John,” in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. H. Browne and Joseph H. Myers, vol. 7, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 504.
5. Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 157.
6. Mark Taylor, 1 Corinthians, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 303.

WITHOUT FAITH

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

TO PLEASE GOD

“You Are the Son of God!”

by Daniel Ritchie

+

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

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

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

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

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

These assumptions and priorities led people to overlook the greatest news the world has ever known—the saving work of Jesus through His death and resurrection because of His grace and mercy. It is so important for all of us to see who Jesus is and what He has done for His church. In looking deep into the

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

JESUS, OUR GOD AND MESSIAH

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

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

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

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

relationship, the sheep will respond in faith to go where the Shepherd goes and to yield to the call of the Shepherd.

NEW LIFE IN JESUS

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

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

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



REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus is the Messiah bringing good news to Israel (Luke 4:16-21).
2. Jesus is the Prophet bringing grace to the world (Luke 4:22-27).
3. Jesus is the Son experiencing rejection by His own (Luke 4:28-30).

Background Passage: Luke 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God's plan of salvation involved the nation of Israel, but it was not restricted to them. Jesus would be rejected by His own, ultimately resulting in the cross, the means by which Jesus fulfilled God's plan. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven and accepted by the Father.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

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

INSTRUCT: Waiting is hard for everyone. Reflect on a moment, achievement, or new season of life for which you had to wait a long time before it arrived.

DISCUSS: **How long did you have to wait, and did you at any point begin to think that it may never happen?** (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: The waiting seasons of life can be difficult ones. Oftentimes we can become so hyper-focused on a specific thing we want that we can miss the answers to prayer right in front of us. Unfortunately, many people in Jesus's day, including those most close to Him, missed the message and Messiah for whom they had been watching and waiting. For over four hundred years, the Jews longed for God to break His silence. But when He did, it was not what they expected.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Lifeway's Digital Pass: ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO ISRAEL (LUKE 4:16-21).

NOTES

THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR

In Isaiah 61, from which Jesus read, the prophet Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was speaking of deliverance from bondage for God's people, who would be under Babylonian captivity. But he also was foreshadowing a deliverance through a Savior from bondage to sin. God's people would find hope and comfort knowing a time was coming (and for us, has come) for God's favor to be poured out.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The tragedy of the world is sin. The one obtruding fact in the world today is the fact of sin. The one galling yoke on human necks and hearts in the world today is the yoke of sin. Jesus came to remove that yoke. Jesus came to break those shackles. Jesus came to set men free, and to put their feet on the solid Rock, Himself, the Divine Saviour. Whoever comes to Him receives deliverance, forgiveness, redemption, salvation."¹

—George W. Truett
(1867-1944)

16 He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. **17** The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: **18** The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. **20** He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled."

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:16-21** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 16-19** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What characteristics of our triune God are reflected in this passage? (He is powerful, merciful, trustworthy, faithful, loving, sovereign)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-21** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: If Jesus fulfills God's ultimate promise and purpose, how should we view our salvation through Christ? (with gratefulness and praise; with a humility that treasures that salvation; with a desire to tell others of that good news; with a purpose to live out our salvation with grace and truth)

TRANSITION: The coming of Jesus Christ is good news! Here at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus brought the gospel to the Jews of His hometown. But they would soon struggle to accept this good news with Jesus at its center.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 16-19 / Here in the Gospel of Luke, though it is evident that Jesus had already begun to minister in the larger area of Galilee, we can see Luke kick-started his collection of Jesus stories at the origin of it all: Nazareth—a small, predominantly Jewish village and Jesus’s hometown. At the time, God’s Word, especially the larger books of the Old Testament, would be written on scrolls. So Jesus received the scroll of Isaiah to read a select passage aloud in the synagogue service. Whether Jesus selected the passage before He took the stage or someone assigned it to Him, it was no accident that Jesus read these prophetic words from Isaiah.

Luke emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the beginnings of Jesus’s life, and that emphasis remains significant here as Jesus started reading from Isaiah 61:1-2: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”** Through the reading of these prophetic words of old—and especially through His declaration of their fulfillment—Christ made several stunning claims. First, Jesus claimed the anointing of God through the presence of His Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament, the anointing of a person was indicative of God’s commissioning and empowerment through the gifting of the Holy Spirit.² Second, God’s anointing came with a purpose: to proclaim good news. Thus, Jesus claimed to be a messenger of God. Third, Jesus was not just the proclaimer of the good news, He is the One bringing the substance of this good news, bringing release, recovery, and abundance.

Throughout the life and ministry of Christ, there were, and are, physical manifestations and miracles of rescue and recovery, yet each of these benefits Christ brings to **“the poor”** are primarily spiritual (see Matt. 5:3). The original hearers of Christ’s pledge of deliverance assumed a physical salvation, however. Many assumed the Messiah was coming to rule as a physical king who would bring justice and tangible aid through the removal of Roman oppression. But the spiritual deliverance

Christ provides leads to a freedom, healing, and blessedness that surpasses any earthly, temporal aid.

In the Old Testament, the **“year of the Lord’s favor”** is a reference to a future day when God will bring salvation to His people. In the context of Isaiah 61, these words were spoken for a disobedient people in exile experiencing affliction and deep despair. The exiles would have looked forward to this promise of rescue and the return of God’s favor. By the time Jesus read these words aloud, they were widely understood as a messianic promise. Both audiences would have looked forward with hope to the year of the Lord’s favor as a time when God would inaugurate a new kingdom—one where their suffering would cease.³

The original text in Isaiah 61:1-2 continued on with a mention of “the day of our God’s vengeance.” The souls sitting in the synagogue that day likely would have recognized this omission. By stopping where Jesus did, He emphasized the immediate, present fulfillment of the prophecy. Jesus ushered in the next step of God’s unfolding plan: the time of the Lord’s favor. The day of vengeance was yet to come.⁴

VERSES 20-21 / Once a teacher read Scripture in the temple, it was customary for him to sit down to give the sermon. It is likely that Jesus taught a more expansive sermon than what we have recorded here, but the Gospel writers often provided a summary of sermons instead of word-for-word accounts. But the claim Jesus made was clear and breathtaking: *I am the fulfillment of these seven-hundred-year-old words.*

This was a definitive turning point in the trajectory of Jesus’s life and ministry. With precision (**“today”**) and clarity (**“has been”**), Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah’s foretelling. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the One they were waiting for. Thus, Jesus initiated a greater awareness and revelation of God’s kingdom coming—right in His hometown.

POINT 2

JESUS IS THE PROPHET BRINGING GRACE TO THE WORLD (LUKE 4:22-27).

NOTES

22 They were all speaking well of him and were amazed by the gracious words that came from his mouth; yet they said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

23 Then he said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Doctor, heal yourself. What we’ve heard that took place in Capernaum, do here in your hometown also.’” **24** He also said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. **25** But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah’s days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. **26** Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them except a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. **27** And in the prophet Elisha’s time, there were many in Israel who had leprosy, and yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:22-27** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 22-24** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What are some reasons why people might refuse to listen to God’s mouthpieces? (we are prideful and think we know it all; we are untrusting and doubt another person’s genuineness; we want to live in our sin; we don’t know God enough to know His words and recognize truth)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 25-27** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: How would you describe the relationship between saving faith and works? (works cannot save us, but faith without works is dead; a Christian, saved by faith, will naturally be active in works of obedience; Christians should be known for their good deeds, but in no way do good deeds save them)

TRANSITION: Jesus knew the hearts and minds of the Jews were not ready to receive Him as Messiah, yet He still gave them an opportunity to accept this good news. Unfortunately, they did not respond in the way they should have.

PROVERB

A general proverb is a short saying of wisdom, advice, or commentary that is repeated among the culture that the people would be familiar with. There are secular proverbs, rabbinic proverbs, and everyday proverbs, and then there are biblical proverbs, such as those found in the book of Proverbs, which hold a distinction of divine authority for us today.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 22-24 / At first, the response of the audience in the synagogue was one of astonishment. The crowd began to marvel at this neighborhood boy who had grown into a dynamic teacher. But the favorable reception didn't last long. The synagogue members began to question the veracity of Jesus's claims. Jesus anticipated their doubt-filled questions and began to answer their objections before they had a chance to express them.

The proverb Jesus mentioned in verse 23, **"Doctor, heal yourself,"** and the statement He made in verse 24, **"No prophet is accepted in his hometown,"** were two common sayings of the time. These expressions called attention to the historic ways Israel rejected those who carried God's prophetic messages.⁵

In essence, the first proverb was a saying used to demand proof of any prophetic claims. Jesus called out their desire to see signs and wonders before they could believe the words of **"Joseph's son."** In the second statement, **"No prophet is accepted in his hometown,"** Jesus directed them to recall a theme throughout the sad history of Israel—God's prophets, whom He sent from among His people, were again and again ignored, rejected, mistreated, and even killed. The recipients of these divine messages did not give the respect or credibility due to Jesus and the prophets of old, whom God used as His chosen mouthpieces. Thus, the hearers shunned the messages of grace God sent them.⁶

VERSES 25-27 / Continuing with His prophetic warning—that the faithless Jews would reject Jesus as the Messiah—He recalled two Old Testament stories to illustrate their lack of faith and God's willingness to save those who exhibit faith in Him, even if they are not ethnically Jewish.

First was the story found in 1 Kings 17:8-16. Many Israelites were suffering through a great famine brought about by the sin of King Ahab and the people, yet God sent

Elijah the prophet to help a poor Gentile widow in Zarephath. God commanded Elijah to ask this woman (on the verge of death) to prepare and serve him a meal. The widow only had enough flour and oil to make one last meal for herself and her starving son. But Elijah brought with him a promise from God that if she prepared her last meal for Elijah, God would provide for her throughout the rest of the famine. In contrast to the faithless Jewish Nazarenes who wanted Jesus to prove His claims, the widow in Zarephath obeyed God without waiting for a sign that He had the power to do what He promised.

Next was a story found in 2 Kings 5:1-14, where God used Elisha to heal Naaman, a Syrian army commander—an enemy who was suffering from leprosy. At first, the Gentile was angry at and resistant to Elisha's simple instructions because they required Naaman to humble himself. But Naaman eventually did as he was commanded, dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times, and he received the healing of God.

Both Old Testament stories depict great poverty and suffering, which could only be alleviated by the power and provision of God. The widow and Naaman, even in the midst of their hopelessness, latched onto the grace of God, which had been offered to them. They understood the Lord's unmerited favor as their only hope. Saving faith always leads to faith-filled actions. In both stories, there was a deliberate show of God's grace to Gentiles during a time when God's people were repeatedly disobedient and unfaithful. God passed over many faithless Jews to heal these faith-filled Gentiles.

Jesus's use of these narratives was meant to rebuke His hometown's doubt. Additionally, the specific areas of Zarephath and Syria were loathed and looked down upon by the Jews. The retelling of these two Old Testament vignettes by Jesus, then, was extremely inflammatory to those who should have listened and believed.

POINT 3

JESUS IS THE SON EXPERIENCING REJECTION BY HIS OWN (LUKE 4:28-30).

28 When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. **29** They got up, drove him out of town, and brought him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl him over the cliff. **30** But he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:28-30** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 28-29** commentary to highlight how the Jews chose to sin by casting aside Jesus and His message (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #36: *Sin as Missing the Mark:* One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's **standards** set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious **choosing** of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is **intentional**. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.

DISCUSS: **Why is admitting our sin so hard to do?** (pride makes us resist admitting we are wrong; the inability to recognize our sin stems from our small, inaccurate view of God; we don't see that we are "missing the mark" because the picture of God's perfection is fuzzy in our minds)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 30** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

TRANSITION: Sin is a big deal. It is our biggest problem. Gloriously and graciously, Christ has dealt completely with our sin dilemma. We must have faith in the work of Christ as our only rescue.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 28-29 / The Nazarene Jews did not receive the Christ-claim by Joseph's son. Beyond declaring that He is the Messiah who has come to save the world, Jesus also exposed their hard hearts and the reality that God will pass over unbelieving Jews like them to save even Gentile sinners who do believe. The crowd went from "all speaking well of him" (v. 22) to a furious flock. The citizens in the synagogue, presumably there to know and worship God, allowed the anger of their hearts to rule them. They quickly transformed from a religious family to a riotous, murderous mob.

This tragic tale is one of many to come throughout the books of Luke and Acts. Through these works, Luke painted a brutally honest portrait of how many who should have been close to God through their knowledge, tradition, and ancestry still repeatedly rejected His Son, Jesus, as the Messiah. Not only did they reject His claims, they actively sought to stamp out His message, often by drastic means.

The outrage toward Jesus quickly morphed into an attempt to end His life. Luke and the original audience would have understood the significance of the detail **"intending to hurl him over the cliff,"** especially since Nazareth did not contain such a drastic edge. At the time, throwing a person down was the first step to an execution by stoning, which was frequently initiated with throwing a person down from some sort of height. Whether it was just a few feet from his standing position or truly down a steep cliff, the motivation of the mob's actions here were clear: this "traitorous" Jesus must die.⁷

These Nazarenes completely forgot the point of Jesus's original message in verses 18-21: He had come to save them. Yet in verse 29, they understood the next point Jesus made: because of their rejection of the Messiah, the message of good news would spread to a new people, namely, the Gentiles. Sin fueled their responses to both messages. They jilted Jesus by refusing to

believe that He is who He claimed to be. Then they responded with vile vitriol to the notion that God would save the Gentiles.

VERSE 30 / There is much movement in the text of verse 29: they got up, drove him, brought him, intending to hurl him. The tension of the narrative has been building since verse 21 with the mixed responses of the people and Jesus's bold rebuke. With every word read, the suspense grows, and the narrative seems to be pointing to a tragic ending until we reach verse 30: **"But [Jesus] passed right through the crowd and went on his way."** This shocking and unexpected turn of events is not the anticipated outcome for the reader, much less for the mob!

So what happened? Did the anger of the mob simply dissipate? Did the people suddenly have a change of heart? Was there an intervention through people who are not mentioned in the text? Did Jesus shake off His assailants and sneak away? Or did the Father bring about a supernatural change that allowed Jesus to escape what seemed to be certain doom?

Luke did not explain this resolution in detail, but it is clear that though the crowd had the end of Jesus in mind, God had other plans. It was not yet time for Jesus to die. This cycle was repeated several times throughout the life of Jesus: people rejected the message of the Messiah and then sought to silence the Son of God through any means necessary, only to fail in their efforts.

Eventually, another mob would deliver Jesus up to His death on a cross, but only because God planned it so. God sent His Son to earth at the exact period in history when His glorious and saving purpose would be fulfilled. Every terrestrial moment lived by Jesus was filled with divine purpose and perfect timing. No matter the plans of human beings, the will of God reigns.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

Jesus of Nazareth, though rejected by His own, would continue His messianic ministry to bring the good news of spiritual freedom, healing, and abundance to those who would place their faith in Him. This early rejection of Jesus would be repeated, ultimately leading to His crucifixion. Yet the repudiation and pain Christ would experience did not deter Him from His ultimate purpose to seek and save the lost, which includes you and me and people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

How do the truths of God's sovereignty and grace change how you see and relate to God?

HEART:

It's tempting to point fingers at these Nazarene Jews while shaking our heads at their shameful behavior, thinking that under no circumstances would we reject Christ in such a violent and absolute way. But for the grace of God, every one of us would have been part of this outraged clan, ready to stamp out this "blasphemous" threat. Every soul's sinful default is to reject Christ. This reveals how great is the love and grace of God to take enemies with murderous intent in their hearts and make a way for them—for us—to be saved, forgiven, redeemed, and welcomed with open arms by our Creator and Savior.

How does the reality that, if not for God's grace, you would be a part of this murderous mob stir your heart toward worship?

HANDS:

Sin is not an intangible, subjective social construct. It is a matter of fact, and it is a problem. The sinfulness of every soul is an important, objective spiritual truth. The reality of our sin should lead us to personal repentance and utter dependence on the work of Christ for salvation. Then having been loved and humbled and saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we should be propelled by God's gift of the Holy Spirit to embrace the Great Commission as the most essential work of our lifetime. Because we have been saved from sin by Christ, let us recognize the presence and punishment of sin in others and proclaim the gospel of Jesus far and wide.

What steps will you take today to make the Great Commission a more integral part of your life, knowing God has saved you from sin?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We may note in passing that [Jesus] was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval."⁸

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

POINT 1: JESUS IS THE MESSIAH BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO ISRAEL (LUKE 4:16-21).

+

COMMENTARY

“According to his custom, Jesus is in the synagogue on the Sabbath, a presence that reflects his respect for the worship of God. To appreciate what happens here, one must understand the synagogue service order. Our knowledge of such a service comes from ancient Jewish sources such as the Mishnah, the Jewish codification of their oral law. To have a service, ten men must be present. The congregation recites the Shema, the confession recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Then they share in prayer—some of them set prayers, such as the Tephillah (also called the Shemoneh Esreh and the Eighteen Benedictions). Then comes a reading from God’s Law, the Torah, followed by a reading of the Prophets. These texts are read in Hebrew and translated into Aramaic, the dominant language of the region. Then follows an exposition that usually ties the readings together, and the service closes with a benediction. Presumably Jesus speaks during the exposition section of this service. This may explain a peculiarity in his citation, for he not only cites Isaiah 61:1–2, but mixes into it an allusion to Isaiah 58:6. The mixture may well represent a summary of a larger reading or set of remarks.”⁹

+

ILLUSTRATION

“Give me liberty or give me death.” –Patrick Henry
“I have a dream . . .” –Martin Luther King Jr.

Over the course of history, there are words that have initiated new eras. Some statements have proven to be sparks of revolution, seeds of cultural change, and even the origin of an outbreak of new evils. These messages, whether good or evil, have proven to be pivotal. And perhaps no statement has been more momentous than that of Jesus recorded in Luke 4:21: “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” These words were the first of many He would voice to proclaim the purpose of God to save the world through His Son, Jesus.

Yet with each pivotal comment in history, the response is often just as critical. Reactions to paramount proclamations tend to divide as individuals decide what they will do with the message sent. The words of Jesus are no exception. Throughout the life of Christ, as He brought forth the good news, individuals personally had to respond to the revelation that God sent His Son to rescue sinners. So too must we personally respond to His claim that He is the Son of God

sent with the divine invitation to repent and believe in the gospel. And once accepted, the good news of Jesus must not stop with us. The message is meant to be proclaimed to all people so many will have the opportunity to respond to His call and be saved.

POINT 2: JESUS IS THE PROPHET BRINGING GRACE TO THE WORLD (LUKE 4:22-27).

+ COMMENTARY

“The story of Naaman provides a second example of God’s grace to Gentiles. Luke 4:25–27 supplies the key for understanding this account. For Jesus these examples demonstrated that Nazareth could not make exclusivistic claims on him; and since Nazareth had in fact rejected him, he would go elsewhere. Nazareth may have rejected him, but others would receive him gladly. For Luke these examples showed that the Jewish people had no exclusivistic claims on Jesus, and since they rejected him, the gospel of 4:18–21 has been offered to the Gentiles. And just as Elijah and Elisha were better received outside of Israel, so the gospel message would receive a better hearing among the Gentiles.”¹⁰

+ COMMENTARY

“If someone has a message from God to give, the natural place to deliver that message is the place where people come together to worship or to hear the word of God. That is precisely what Jesus did when he began his campaign in a synagogue. He has described the nature of his ministry, saying that its content is preaching ‘good news to the poor’ and setting at liberty those that are oppressed (4:18-19). Its basis is the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit (4:18). But Jesus is also clear about the results of his ministry (4:23-30). He will be rejected by his own people and he hints that there will be a wider mission to all kinds of people (4:23-27).”¹¹

+ ILLUSTRATION

There are countless stories of congregations who (seemingly) happily coexist until a dividing issue emerges that may cause a church split. Occasionally it’s a serious issue like what is being taught from the pulpit. Sometimes it’s as silly as what substance and style that physical pulpit should be. Whatever the problem, there is typically a “before” and “after” the conflict. And the aftermath is full of pain, rejection, and brokenness.

It’s tempting to see certain issues as the main concern. So some churches attempt to keep the peace at all costs by squashing any potentially problematic discussion before it can happen. But eventually, a hill to die on will emerge, and when it does, members of the church learn much about one another. Through the battle, some will emerge that you didn’t realize had such depth of character and devotion to Christ, while others who seemed to be solid followers of God will show that their first allegiance is not actually to Jesus and His bride.

Church conflicts often prove the reality that you don’t actually know someone well until you disagree with them. Thousands of years ago, the Nazarene response to Jesus illustrated this truth. Though they had “worshipped” God together for decades, suddenly that supposed fellowship was broken.

POINT 3: JESUS IS THE SON EXPERIENCING REJECTION BY HIS OWN (LUKE 4:28-30).

+ COMMENTARY

“Before Jesus finishes speaking, the townspeople have cast their vote against him. Their wrath in v. 28 anticipates—and repeats in virtually the same Greek phraseology—the wrath of the Ephesians at Paul’s preaching of the gospel (Acts 19:28). The townspeople ‘drove [Jesus] out of town’ (v. 29). The Greek expression behind this phrase . . . is used in the LXX for ridding a (Jewish) city of defilement, such as plague (Lev 14:40–41, 45), foreign gods (2 Chr 33:15), or a (supposed) evil person (1 Kgs 21:13). The phrase is a ritual anathema and a gauge of the outrage against Jesus. Jesus has become like a Gentile pollutant . . . We should not be surprised if Jesus was rejected by outsiders and enemies. The unsettling truth of this story is that the greatest danger to the way of God in this world is posed by those who are closest to it. Jesus is rejected not in Sodom and Gomorrah, but in Nazareth. He is betrayed not by the devil, but by one of the Twelve whom he chose. He is crucified not in pagan Rome, but in the heart of Israel at Jerusalem. The rejection of Jesus repeats the rejection of God in the history of Israel, whose ultimate adversary was not Baal worship or foreign nations, but ‘my own people who are bent on turning from me, declares the Lord’ (Hos 11:7). ‘Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him’ (John 1:11).”¹²

+ ILLUSTRATION

In recent years, more and more people are trying out the idea of a staycation. There are many benefits of a staycation. They are often cheaper, easier to plan, and much less stressful than a week away at a new-to-you destination. Another purpose and benefit of a staycation is to see the sights that are typically overlooked by locals. When stuck in the rut of the day-to-day, people often miss out on the beauty, history, and wonder that is in their own local backyard. Staycations can help us stop and smell the roses we rush past, when it comes to the physical features that surround us. Yet we can also frequently miss out on the value and significance of the people right around us. It may be an elderly neighbor who has incredible stories to share that bring the info of history books to life. It can be taking for granted the presence of a loved one right under our roof. Unfortunately, it may not be until these treasured souls have left us that we realize their true value.

The Bible tells us that if we are in Christ, then we have the very presence of God within us. Let us not be like the Nazarenes, who didn’t recognize the miracle right in front of them. Let us not miss out on all that Jesus promises us. Let us not neglect and grieve the person of the Holy Spirit, who is ever present and able to help us in our every moment.

References

1. George W. Truett, *Who is Jesus?*, ed. Powhatan W. James, vol. 6, George W. Truett Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952), 32.
2. Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, vol. 15B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 633.
3. *Ibid.*, 635.
4. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 157.
5. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2015), 139–40.
6. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 4:16–30 [Logos].
7. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary*, 159.
8. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 168.
9. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 135–36.
10. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary*, 159.
11. Paul John Isaak, “Luke,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1239.
12. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 141–42.

AMAZED BY THE MESSIAH

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's powerful teaching prompts astonishment (Luke 4:31-32).
2. Jesus's power over unclean spirits fuels amazement (Luke 4:33-37).
3. Jesus's proclamation of the gospel reveals His mission (Luke 4:38-44).

Background Passage: Luke 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When Jesus approached the man who was possessed by demons, even the demons recognized His authority. Jesus would later demonstrate His authority over sin and evil in a greater way through His crucifixion and resurrection. Sin no longer has power over all who trust in Jesus.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

DISCUSS: What is the most awe-inspiring, powerful thing you've experienced? What emotions were present during this event? (this could be something in nature like viewing a vast mountain range, enjoying the unique beauty of a national park, or standing on the edge of the ocean; this may also be something more personal, like the birth of a child or watching someone accept Jesus as his or her Savior; emotions will vary, but these acts of God often propel us toward humble appreciation of His power, creativity, and grace)

TRANSITION: Awe-inspiring acts filled many of the moments of Jesus's life, leading those around Him to experience astonishment and amazement. Ultimately, His purpose was not to impress people but to save them. Jesus came to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom to rescue people from their sin.

OPTIONAL QUESTION: Looking back on your salvation, what are some details that lead you to astonishment at God's powerful hand of grace on your life? (people He puts in our path; healing He brings to our hearts; bondage of sin He breaks)

POINT 1

JESUS'S POWERFUL TEACHING PROMPTS ASTONISHMENT (LUKE 4:31-32).

NOTES

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbath. **32** They were astonished at his teaching because his message had authority.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:31-32** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S EARLY YEARS MAP** and the **VERSE 31** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus's move to Capernaum was not to avoid the Nazarenes but primarily a **strategic** move to proclaim the **gospel** in a more diverse, catalytic space.

DISCUSS: How should we balance strategy with faith in and dependence on the Holy Spirit in our ministry efforts? (Jesus and the apostles thought strategically often; there is a place for utilizing our God-given intellect and ingenuity; however, we must also be careful not to rely solely on our idea of the "best" strategy; there are times when the Holy Spirit leads us to what may seem, by the world's standards, an ignorant way to do something; we must balance savviness with prayer, faith, and looking for the Lord's leading)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 32** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

DISCUSS: What does it mean to teach with authority today? (on one hand, Jesus is in a category all His own; yet in the Great Commission, Jesus commands us to make disciples by teaching all that He has commanded in Scripture; in essence, Jesus grants His authority to His followers; also, the same Spirit is within us, empowering us to help forward the mission Christ began)

TRANSITION: Though Luke has already sufficiently demonstrated the authority of Jesus through His birth story, genealogy, anointing, teaching, and more, there is much more to be added to the proof-pile of Jesus's authority as Christ, the Son of God.

AUTHORITY

Being God the Son, Jesus already has divine authority to do whatever He wills and wishes. But in the eyes of the people hearing His teachings and witnessing His miracles, Jesus demonstrates this authority, and it is recognized by the crowds. Jesus taught with a greater authority, with more knowledge and insight, than other priests and teachers before Him, contemporary with Him, and after Him.



COMMENTARY

VERSE 31 / Luke 4:31 reads very similar to Luke 4:16, where Jesus taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath in the city of Nazareth. But here He is teaching people on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Capernaum (see Luke 4:33). In juxtaposition with the Nazareth encounter, entering into this next episode of Jesus's ministry, there is a sense of suspense. This leads the reader to wonder: How will the members of the Capernaum synagogue respond to Jesus?

As can be seen clearly through the lens of all four Gospel accounts, Jesus used Capernaum as the base camp of His ministry. Nazareth was less geographically accessible than the border town of Capernaum. Situated on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was a trade route that connected nearby areas, making it a stellar spot from which to travel. Jesus's move to this city was not only to avoid the hot-headed Nazarenes. This was a strategic move that would allow Christ to proclaim the gospel in a more diverse, catalytic space.

The original Greek construction of the word for **“teaching”** suggests Jesus's instruction in the synagogue was continual. It is possible that Luke meant to present a period of time when Jesus routinely taught the people in Capernaum on successive Sabbath days.¹

VERSE 32 / One theme highlighted throughout the book of Luke is that of the authority of Jesus. In the first ministry scene supplied by Luke (4:16-30), he included a summary of the content of Christ's first sermon, in which Jesus claimed the anointing and thus the messianic appointment, affirmation, and authorization from God. In this second ministry scene, Luke skipped over details about the actual content and focused on how the delivery, the ways and means by which Jesus delivered the gospel message, proved His supremacy as the Son of God.

At the time, it was customary for synagogue teachers to simply regurgitate the teaching they had received from their rabbinic predecessors. Departures from the traditional schools of thought about how to interpret Scripture were not acceptable, as clearly seen through the Nazarenes' response to Jesus's teaching on the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha, when He presented them as being sent to the Gentiles because of the unfaithfulness of the Jews. To have Jesus expound Scripture anew would have been astounding to the hearers in Capernaum. Jesus preached from the absolute authority of God the Father, through the divine power of the Holy Spirit, and with perfect knowledge of God's plan. It is no mystery why the people were astonished at His teaching.

The original Greek word for **“message”** here is *logos* (translated literally as “word”), which Luke used dozens of times in his Gospel. In the Greek world, this term often connoted a revelation of something or a metaphysical law that defined human life.² The Gospel writers, however, used this term to present Jesus as both the actual *logos* and the courier of *logos*. He brought a revelation, a message of life, and He is the embodiment of that revelation. We've already seen this dual meaning in John 1:1-5. Thus, Jesus as the authoritative Word brings an authoritative word.

Recall that Satan had tempted Jesus with the promise of authority over all kingdoms of the earth (Luke 4:6), but Jesus rightly rejected him. The evil one had no authority to give to the Son of God what already belongs to the Son in eternity.

Jesus's deeper and more informed teaching, His revelatory message of life, and His ability to heal through the power of God (through the miracles Luke recorded in 4:33-44 and beyond)—all these demonstrated Jesus's authority as the Messiah. If this were all we had, there already would be enough in Jesus's authoritative teaching for the soul filled with faith to trust.

POINT 2

JESUS'S POWER OVER UNCLEAN SPIRITS FUELS AMAZEMENT (LUKE 4:33-37).

NOTES

33 In the synagogue there was a man with an unclean demonic spirit who cried out with a loud voice, **34** “Leave us alone! What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” **35** But Jesus rebuked him and said, “Be silent and come out of him!” And throwing him down before them, the demon came out of him without hurting him at all. **36** Amazement came over them all, and they were saying to one another, “What is this message? For he commands the unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out!” **37** And news about him began to go out to every place in the vicinity.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:33-37** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 33-34** commentary to highlight the following doctrine about demons (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #35: *Demons:* Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and now continually work **evil** in the world today (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons **oppose** God and seek to destroy His work, as seen in the Bible’s description of Satan, the head of demons, who seeks to “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). Though demons have power, they are **limited** by God’s control and can only act within the constraints of what God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.

DISCUSS: **Why might we struggle to recognize the work of demons today?** (tempting to think demons are no longer active; some “modern Christians” discount biblical accounts of demon possessions as actually cases of epilepsy or mental illness; we are so focused on the material realm that we forget the spiritual realities)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 35-37** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

DISCUSS: **What does it say about us when we don’t obey God’s command?** (we are in sin; we are in rebellion against our Creator; we don’t rightly fear the Lord; we should examine our hearts to see if we are indeed in Christ)

TRANSITION: The authoritative message of Jesus prompted astonishment. The powerful works of Jesus fueled amazement. Yet it was His urgent drive to proclaim the good news to all that revealed His mission.

SYNAGOGUE

A location where Jews gathered locally for teaching and assembly in the inter-testamental and New Testament times. Many communities had one or more synagogues with a large inner room for the men to gather and a loft above for the women.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Satan can do nothing in this world, and nothing in your life, apart from the sovereign permission of God. Satan is a lion (1 Pet 5:8), but he is a lion on a leash. And God holds the leash. Demons decidedly do not have all authority; Jesus does.”³

—David Platt

COMMENTARY

VERSES 33-34 / The Bible presents many details about demons. As fallen angels, they are servants of Satan. They carry out the same purpose as the evil one: to steal, kill, and destroy (see John 10:10). Through acts of deception and destruction, they attempt to pervert God's purpose and oppose God's work.

In this passage, it is notable that from within this group of synagogue-goers, a man with a demonic spirit began his outburst. The evil one and his minions are crafty and cunning. We should not be shocked that they attempt to attack God's people from within.

Although Jesus was interacting here with only one demonic spirit, several times the demon used the word **"us."** The demon demanded for Jesus to leave **"us"** alone, questioned what Jesus had to do with **"us,"** and also inquired if Jesus had come to destroy **"us."** This demon recognized Jesus in a way most of the people surrounding them had yet to internalize. This Jesus—the Holy One of God—had come to defeat the darkness, all of it, including all its minions and workers. "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works" (1 John 3:8).

During this era, most believed the presence of demonic forces to be a work of magic. To overcome these powers, necromancers and the like would attempt to control spiritual powers through the calling out of their names. Many scholars believe this was what the demon attempted to do with Jesus. Specifically, the use of the phrase **"I know who you are"** was connected with this sort of conjuring and attempts to conquer spirits.⁴

The demon declared two titles of this synagogue Teacher: 1) **"Jesus of Nazareth"** and 2) **"the Holy One of God."** Whether the unclean spirit recognized it or not, it affirmed what the synagogue members of Nazareth could not: Jesus of Nazareth is the Holy One of God.

This demon, compared to the unbelieving Nazarenes, knew intellectually that Jesus is the Christ, but this didn't mean that the demonic spirit submitted to the Holy One of God. As James so rightly pointed out, mere recognition that Jesus exists is not sufficient to save. "You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder" (Jas. 2:19). Intellectual belief is a step in the right direction, but only a dependent faith in Christ's exclusive and complete ability to atone for our sins can save a soul.

VERSES 35-37 / Rebuking and removing the demonic spirit by the command of Jesus's voice alone would have been novel—indeed a show of Jesus's authority and power. The practice of exorcism existed before this, typically using one of two methods: one, already mentioned above, was the invocation of the spirit by name; the second was attempting to force the demon out by making the possessed body an inhospitable dwelling place.⁵ Yet Jesus did not need either of these means of exorcism. Just as He, being God the Son, spoke this world and its creatures into being, Christ commanded the demon to submit to His will. And He did it **"without hurting him at all,"** without having to make the body inhospitable, unlike those before Him.

When Jesus rebuked the demonic spirit, He commanded it to be silent. As we will see again in Luke 4:41, Jesus hushed the demons because their declarations were premature in His timeline. He knew that once the masses truly grasped the spiritual nature and reality of Jesus as the Christ, events would progress quickly to the cross. Throughout the Gospels, this pacing of Jesus's perfect timing is evident.

Previously, the authority of Jesus's message astonished the people. But now they were amazed at the authority and power of Jesus Himself—Jesus commanded and the spirits come out. Thus, it is both the words and the works of Jesus that are astounding.

POINT 3

JESUS'S PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL REVEALS HIS MISSION (LUKE 4:38-44).

NOTES

38 After he left the synagogue, he entered Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her.

39 So he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and began to serve them. **40** When the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases brought them to him. As he laid his hands on each one of them, he healed them. **41** Also, demons were coming out of many, shouting and saying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah. **42** When it was day, he went out and made his way to a deserted place. But the crowds were searching for him. They came to him and tried to keep him from leaving them. **43** But he said to them, "It is necessary for me to proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because I was sent for this purpose." **44** And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:38-44** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 38-41** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: How did the actions of Christ reveal His mission? (purpose filled His every move, even if not originally understood; the healings were demonstrations of His power over both the physical and spiritual realms; all of Jesus's miracles led up to the truth that Jesus also has the power to save, not just from the immediate problems we face but from our biggest problem—sin)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 42-44** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

TRANSITION: Through embracing the Great Commission, all who are in Christ have the same purpose and mission. With this call to proclaim the gospel, we also carry with us the same power of Christ that brought healing and hope.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 38-41 / After back-to-back accounts of Jesus within a synagogue, Luke then provided a more personal portrait of Jesus as a powerful healer. This narrative of events in Simon's, or Peter's, house occurred immediately after Jesus left the synagogue on the Sabbath. In verse 40, we are told **"the sun was setting"** when many came to Jesus for help. Because of the prohibitions on the Sabbath, the Jews were unable to approach Jesus right away with their needs. From sundown to sundown, they observed Sabbath rest. As soon as they were able, the eager people lined up to see if this Jesus could heal them and their loved ones.

Luke, who was a physician (Col. 4:14), noted that Peter's mother-in-law's fever was a high one. Of course, at the time, there were no thermometers to measure her numerical temperature. As a doctor, Luke's wording indicated this was not a case of insignificant sniffles. This was a serious illness.⁶ Yet by the powerful word of Christ, this concerning mega-fever left the woman's body, and **"she got up immediately and began to serve them."** There was no recovery required, no time off needed to recuperate from a life-draining ailment. This was yet another miracle performed by Jesus. In an instant, Peter's mother-in-law seemingly went from death's doorstep to carrying out her day-to-day duties.

After spotlighting this personal account of healing, Luke zoomed back out to the crowds in verses 40-41. Instead of recounting every healing, Luke simply mentioned that there were various spiritual and physical healings. The spiritual healing within the Capernaum synagogue and the physical healing in the home of Peter were not isolated incidents. A pattern had emerged—one which would continue to demonstrate the life and ministry of Jesus and the manifestation of His miraculous power and divine nature.

Luke gave an additional detail in verse 40. Jesus not only healed various ailments,

He chose to perform that healing through various means. Though Jesus had already demonstrated that His word was powerful enough to heal, He also cured some with the laying on of His hands. This was a personal touch.

Earlier in verse 35, Jesus "rebuked" the evil spirit possessing the man in the Capernaum synagogue. Then in verse 39, Jesus **"rebuked"** the fever. Luke used the same Greek word in both instances and again in verse 41, where Jesus rebuked many demons, not allowing them to speak of His messiahship. Through this word connection, Luke demonstrated that Jesus has power and dominion over not only spiritual forces but also physical processes.

VERSES 42-44 / During the time of Christ, it was common for dozens of people to live under the same roof, and those dwellings sometimes shared a small yard with several other houses.⁷ It was no small task to find a deserted place to be alone, especially for Jesus, who was now sought after by people desperate for healing. The crowds were relentless, but Jesus did not allow the pressure to deter Him from His purpose.

Jesus was steadfast in His purpose, what some theologians call the "divine must."⁸ Jesus wholeheartedly accepted the will of the Father to bring the good news to all who would receive it. Jesus also knew the way God's will would unfold, and to deviate from the Father's plan was implausible for the Son. Back in Luke 2:49, even twelve-year-old Jesus held this purpose, this "divine must." Once Mary and Joseph found their son, Jesus declared, "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" The Father's perfect plan and the Son's abiding obedience always comes through. Jesus knew what must be done. It would have been easy for Him to just build a movement centered around His power. But He knew He came to **"proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God."**

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

God's power displayed is often more than our brains can fully perceive. During His time on earth, Jesus repeatedly demonstrated His divine power over both the physical and spiritual realms. Ultimately, through the resurrection, He proved His dominion over sin and death. But when we are faced with what is seemingly insurmountable, it can be easy to forget or doubt the power of God to save. Yet the acts of Jesus today are still just as powerful and purposeful, and we can trust Him to care and to save.

In what areas of life do you need to remember the reality of God's ability and power to save?

HEART:

The life of Jesus is not a sweet bedtime story or inspirational folktale. Jesus is a living, breathing human. He is also the Messiah who came in power to usher in God's kingdom. Authority filled Jesus's actions, demonstrating His dominion over every aspect of human life, both seen and unseen. No evil spirit could overpower His resolve to obey God's plan. No earthly need could thwart His mission to proclaim the gospel.

In what areas of life do you need to repent and submit to the authority of our powerful, loving, and caring Savior?

HANDS:

Jesus lived with great purpose and clarity. He did not waste moments. He did not waffle in His direction. He did not neglect God's ultimate goal. After Jesus defeated sin and death, He appeared to His people before He ascended into heaven and provided a clear and compelling commission: Go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). With this command, Jesus attached the promise of His power-filled presence, which we experience through God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, filled with the same power and authority that rebuked the sickness and the spirits, we are abundantly equipped to proclaim the good news of Jesus to all nations.

What are some ways you will walk forward in the authority of Christ and proclaim the good news today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The life of a believer is a series of miracles wrought by 'the mighty God.' He is mighty to keep His people holy after He has made them so, and to preserve them until He brings to completion their spiritual existence in heaven."⁹

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834-1892)

POINT 1: JESUS'S POWERFUL TEACHING PROMPTS ASTONISHMENT (LUKE 4:31-32).

+

COMMENTARY

“Luke has already mentioned Capernaum (v. 23) as a center of miraculous activity in the ministry of Jesus. Capernaum was on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke adds a geographical note for Gentile readers. The ruins of a later (probably third-century) synagogue may be seen today in that vicinity. The expression ‘went down’ reflects the descent necessary from the elevated situation of Nazareth to the coastal plain . . . The incident Luke next gives is perhaps more striking than the parallel in Mark (1:21–34) because it exemplifies the liberating work described in the preceding Isaiah quotation (vv. 18–19). The reaction of the people, though comparable to that in the preceding incident (vv. 20–22), differs from it in one important aspect. Now they are astonished that this teacher, who in their eyes was not even a rabbi, taught with authority (v. 32). The contrast is sharpened in Mark 1:22 by the additional words ‘not as the teachers of the law.’ The majority of rabbis would base their teaching on the chain of tradition, citing the opinions of their predecessors. By omitting this specific comparison, Luke may simply be deferring to his Gentile readership, who would perhaps not be as aware as Jewish readers of rabbinical custom. But it may also be that Luke is emphasizing the absolute authority of Jesus. In support of this is Luke’s use of the word ‘message’ (logos, lit., ‘word’) . . . Keeping in mind that the parallel passage in Mark does not use ‘word’ but says ‘he taught them,’ Luke would seem to be emphasizing the ‘authority’ of Jesus’s ‘word’ (cf. v. 36).”¹⁰

+

ILLUSTRATION

Over the centuries, people have utilized various tools to present an authoritative message. In medieval times, many used signet rings, which they would press into a wax seal. This unique mark and sealing applied to a letter provided authority and authentication to the message within. Today, important legally binding documents require the seal of a notary. This stamp of approval by the authority of the notary provides credibility to the document and sets it apart from any potential forgeries. Even some social media platforms have a verification process for accounts to achieve verified status and receive the award of a check mark symbol, preventing scammers and pretenders from falsely impersonating a public figure. Throughout the years, these seals, symbol, and stamps have been symbols of authenticity that carry authority.

At the time of Jesus’s baptism, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to anoint Jesus as a symbol of

God's favor, power, and authority bestowed to Jesus. This gave a visual verification that Jesus is the Messiah to all who witnessed His baptism and to all who would then hear about it. Then Jesus's unique, power-filled, authoritative teaching provided further proof of His authenticity. As believers, we too have the seal of the Holy Spirit, who bears witness of our authenticity as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Additionally, through the Great Commission, Christ has bestowed upon us His power and authority so we can carry out His commands with boldness.

POINT 2: JESUS'S POWER OVER UNCLEAN SPIRITS FUELS AMAZEMENT (LUKE 4:33-37).

+ COMMENTARY

"In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon. This last expression is nowhere explained. Some take it literally and think the man was dirty and dishevelled. Others hold the reference to be moral and think of a wicked spirit. It is possible that both are in mind. In the ancient world it was widely held that many troubles are caused by evil spirits. The Bible says little about demon possession before or after the incarnation, but much during Jesus's ministry. In Scripture this phenomenon is part of the conflict between Jesus, who came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and evil . . . On this occasion the demoniac 'shrieked at the top of his voice' (neb). Have you come to destroy us? is usually taken as a question, but it might be a statement, 'You have come . . .'. The demon recognized the opposition between Jesus and all of his kind. The Holy One of God (elsewhere only Mark 1:24; John 6:69) is an unusual title, stressing the thought of consecration to God's service. In this place we should see it as an example of what James had in mind when he wrote 'the demons believe—and shudder' (Jas 2:19). Ryle comments that the demon's knowledge was 'unaccompanied by faith, or hope, or charity'."¹¹

+ ILLUSTRATION

There are moments in our lives that leave us speechless. Whether it be the magnificence displayed by an idyllic spot in nature, the miracle of life demonstrated at a birth, or a near-death experience from which God rescued us, we've all been amazed by important incidents. These moments are often more than mere stops. They are encounters with the grandeur of God, and they can become significant turning points in our lives.

Jesus provided many of these opportunities throughout His life and ministry. He left no room for doubt when it came to His power. In a world full of superstitions, Jesus Christ brought clear control over the spiritual realm. Through His mere words alone, He exerted dominance over the demonic. Over and over, throughout His life, Jesus would display His power to deliver humankind from what ails them. Even today, whether it be a spiritual force, a physical ailment, or a sin-soaked soul, Jesus's omnipotent command can forever change our direction and destiny. Our only part is to respond rightly to His glorious rule and merciful salvation by submitting to His kingship and placing all our trust in His power and authority.

POINT 3: JESUS'S PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL REVEALS HIS MISSION (LUKE 4:38-44).

+ COMMENTARY

"The expression ['kingdom of God'] occurs thirty-one times in Luke, and 'kingdom' occurs another six times. Luke made no attempt to define this expression here, for he anticipated that his readers already possessed some understanding of its meaning. Furthermore the preceding material in Luke 1:1–4:42 should help further clarify what his message of God's kingdom entails. The expression 'kingdom of God' should be interpreted dynamically rather than statically, for it involves the dynamic of God's reign rather than a territory with static borders. The term 'kingdom' in the Bible usually refers to the rule of someone rather than the territory controlled (cf. 19:12, 15; 23:42). Understood this way, God's kingdom was proclaimed by Jesus and Luke as a present reality (11:14–22; 16:16; 17:20–21) as well as a future hope (11:2; 13:22–30; 22:16–18). The alternatives of either a 'realized' understanding of God's kingdom (the kingdom already has come) or a 'consistent' understanding (the kingdom is still entirely in the future) are therefore unnecessary. God's kingdom is both present and future. It already has been realized in fulfillment of the OT promises but awaits the final consummation when Jesus returns."¹²

+ ILLUSTRATION

There are tales that challenge our linear thinking, especially true of psychological thrillers and mysteries that leave us stumped until the end. Many of these films and books capitalize on our desire to figure things out before they happen. But once we view the revealed plot twist, it cannot be unseen by our mind's eye. The story can be enjoyed again, but it will never be the same as the first time when we found ourselves on the edge of our seat.

When it comes to enjoying the biblical narrative, we have the benefit of being able to observe the life of Jesus with the end of the story in view. We already know the singular purpose and ultimate plan of Christ to rescue humankind through the cross. Therefore, it would be easy to shake our heads at the crowds in Jesus's time, yet it's very likely that many of us would be like them, those who just couldn't see or understand what Jesus was doing and why He was doing it. While we do have the perspective of hindsight when it comes to the life of Jesus in the first century, we must learn to trust in His plan in our day. This is especially true for the places in our lives where we just can't understand what He is doing. Regardless of how we feel, He is always in control, just as He was two millennia ago. God is always working out His will in perfect ways and with impeccable timing.

References

1. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2015), 144.
2. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 506.
3. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew: Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), Matthew 8:1-34.
4. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Luke 4:33-34 [Logos].
5. *Ibid.*, Luke 4:35-37 [Logos].
6. Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke–Acts* (Revised Edition), eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 113.
7. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Luke 4:42-44.
8. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 556.
9. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2000), January 14.
10. Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 871.
11. Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 129.
12. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary*, 165.

OBEDIENCE TO THE MESSIAH

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Disciples are called to act in faith (Luke 5:1-4).
2. Disciples are stirred to confess in faith (Luke 5:5-8).
3. Disciples are invited to follow in faith (Luke 5:9-11).

Background Passage: Luke 5

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

When Peter experienced the power and majesty of Jesus, he recognized his own sinfulness and unworthiness. Because of our sin, no one is worthy to stand before holy God. All who trust in Jesus receive forgiveness and His righteousness and enjoy a relationship with God forevermore.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

DISCUSS: Have you or someone you know experienced something that has changed the trajectory of life forever? If so, share it with us. (many events can lead to significant changes in our life: a health scare, car accidents, losing a loved one; it can also be small, seemingly insignificant decisions that end up being a big deal: whom we date in high school, a class we decide to take, an errand we go on where we meet a life-long friend, etc.)

TRANSITION: Though we don't always see it, God is always and faithfully working to lead us to the abundant life He promised us in Scripture. Yet we can often be so caught up in our daily duties and "common sense" that we fail to recognize what God is up to. Thankfully, God works in and through us frequently despite our foolish decisions.

POINT 1

DISCIPLES ARE CALLED TO ACT IN FAITH (LUKE 5:1-4).

1 As the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear God's word, he was standing by Lake Gennesaret. **2** He saw two boats at the edge of the lake; the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. **3** He got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the land. Then he sat down and was teaching the crowds from the boat. **4** When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 5:1-4** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Show Gennesaret on **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S EARLY YEARS MAP**; then use the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

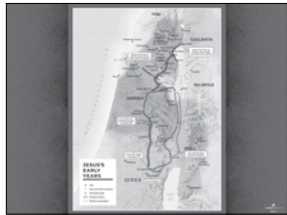
Jesus asked a **small** request of Simon, perhaps to gauge his obedience in light of a larger request to come. Those who are **faithful** with little will be **entrusted** with much.

DISCUSS: When we obey God, what is that saying about our understanding of Him? (He has authority; He is all-knowing, so we know He knows what's best; He is good and wants our good; He is worthy to be obeyed)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 4** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

TRANSITION: With this odd request, Jesus set the stage for Peter to follow the commands of God, even when they are costly and illogical from our vantage point.



COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / While in Capernaum, Jesus declared His mission to preach to other towns the good news of God's kingdom (Luke 4:43). Thus, He traveled southwest from Capernaum to Gennesaret, which is along the Sea of Galilee at a section of the sea called Lake Gennesaret.

The crowds continued to gather around Jesus, probably having heard of His fame. Some likely arrived with good motives, others more likely out of curiosity. Though the text says, **“to hear God's word,”** this probably was not their primary motive. In Greek, the word is a participle, literally meaning “hearing or listening.” The crowds were pressing upon Jesus, while listening to His word. It was so crowded and chaotic that Jesus sought a solution to put some distance between Himself and the crowd so all the people could hear Him. He **“saw”** two boats, got into one, Simon's boat, and **“asked him to put out a little from the land.”** Earlier in Luke, we saw Jesus heal Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39), so He was familiar with who Simon was. We can assume Simon did exactly what he was told. Jesus asked, Simon obeyed. This was the first of two requests of Jesus in this passage. As a first request, it was a simple one. Perhaps Jesus wanted to see if Simon would act in obedience on a small task first to set the stage for the larger request Jesus would ask of him.

Because Simon acted in obedience, Jesus was able to continue teaching the people. Being on the boat gave Jesus a make-shift stage since being in the boat at a distance carried the sound of Jesus's voice to the people.¹ So Jesus sat down to teach. This was the normal practice of teachers at the time. Instead of standing to signify the beginning of a talk, as we do today, the act of sitting was the cue.

VERSE 4 / After His teaching, with the crowd still watching, Jesus put forth a strange request. Jesus charged Simon Peter to take his boat back out to sea to start fishing again. The first command to **“put**

out” is singular, noting Jesus's command was directed toward Simon. The second command, **“let down,”** is plural, implying an involvement of the whole crew.² But clearly, Jesus was putting out His second request to Simon to see if he would respond and act.

This directive of Christ put Simon Peter back into the deeps, not just a short skim of the shoreline. These instructions Jesus gave made no sense at all. First of all, after a night of fishing, the fishermen had already beached their boats and the crew had already begun cleaning their nets. They were done fishing for the day and were closing up shop. There was a particular type of fishing practiced in ancient times that utilized three layers of nets of varying mesh width. Known as trammel nets, these multi-layered nets would be used at night for maximum effectiveness. Unlike the nearly invisible nylon nets of today, the fibrous nets of ancient times could be more easily avoided by schools of fish. Nocturnal fishing provided the greatest yield, as the fish were unable to see the layers of nets.³ Now it was daytime, the worst time for fishing with these nets.

Also, Simon was a professional fisherman, and Jesus was not. Would he listen to this non-fishermen about fishing? It would take a lot of faith to do so.

Next, it would take time, effort, and labor to put out into deep water and let their nets down again at this time of day, especially when the fish likely would see the nets and not be caught. It was the worst opportunity to go fishing at this time at Jesus's command. From an earthly perspective, this was a fool's errand.

Sometimes God's commands don't make sense to us, and we simply need to obey. He may start with little requests, and as our faith grows, He will give us bigger responsibilities to test and grow our faith. So how did Simon Peter respond to Jesus's request?

POINT 2

DISCIPLES ARE STIRRED TO CONFESS IN FAITH (LUKE 5:5-8).

5 “Master,” Simon replied, “we’ve worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I’ll let down the nets.” **6** When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. **7** So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. **8** When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’s knees and said, “Go away from me, because I’m a sinful man, Lord!”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 5:5-8** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-7** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: What are some reasons we have to trust the wisdom of God and obey His commands? (He is God and we are not; as the Creator, God’s ways for living in this world are good and best; God is omniscient, so we can know that He knows what is best for us; God has given us Jesus, so we know He loves us)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 8** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why would encountering holiness cause us to see our sin more clearly? (any time something is better than us, we see our faults clearer; when we see perfection or close to it, imperfections are more pronounced; holiness and sin are opposites, so their contrast will be clearly seen)

TRANSITION: This miraculous act of God stopped Simon Peter in his tracks. He rightly responded to the glory of Jesus with repentance and humility. But this first act of worship was just the starting point for following Jesus.

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look to ourselves only, and not to the Lord also—He being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced.”⁴

—John Calvin (1509-1564)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 5-7 / In response to Jesus's command to put down their nets in deeper waters in verse 4, Simon Peter first referred to Jesus as **"Master,"** denoting submission to Jesus's authority, even amidst his doubt about this ridiculous request.

Simon Peter, however, then explained the situation with a recap of their evening of fishing: they had been hard at work chasing fish, to no avail. But even knowing the oddity of the request and telling Jesus so, Simon declared that he would do what Jesus wanted. That's faith. Simon Peter responded in trust that Jesus must have known something that he didn't. Faithful obedience places the authority and sovereignty of Christ over the proficiency and experience of the expert, even if what meets the eye is beyond our understanding.

Any average fisherman would be able to recognize that this was a miracle, not mere beginner's luck. Peter and the crew knew the best time and place to catch fish: the quiet evening waters. Their livelihood and families depended on it. Though the situation made no sense, Simon followed the instructions of Christ and they **"caught a great number of fish,"** so much so that their fishing tools were overwhelmed. The provision of Christ was staggering. Even after they called in reinforcements, both boats began to sink, denoting how overwhelming was their catch of fish.

Jesus has dominion over all. Though Peter was the expert in the fishing department, Jesus is the ultimate provider of fish, being their Creator and Sustainer. His work may seem illogical to finite minds, but His infinite, omniscient wisdom can be trusted.

In this passage (specifically Luke 5:3-11), Luke employed a literary device known as a chiasmic structure to highlight the climax of the story, namely, verses 6-7, where Jesus performed the miracle and the plethora of fish were caught.⁵ In this climax, we see Jesus's authority and power displayed for those who trust in Him.

VERSE 8 / As Simon Peter witnessed this physical miracle of nature, it opened his spiritual eyes. He understood the worthiness of the Lord and his own unworthiness in His presence. In response, Simon demonstrated his submission through throwing his entire being at the knees of Jesus, whom he now declared as **"Lord."**

Throughout the Old Testament, there are records of theophanies—an experience in which the presence of God is revealed in a special way to a person or persons. In all theophanies, the people rightly respond to God in physical ways, most often in prostration and a declaration of God's amazing character. Simon's response was similar to Isaiah's response to God's presence as recorded in Isaiah 6:5, "I am a man of unclean lips." Simon wasn't literally asking Jesus to go away here; rather, he was realizing how unworthy he was to be in Jesus's presence. When presented with holiness and purity, one can only sense one's own unholiness and impurities. Simon thus acknowledged, **"I'm a sinful man."**

For true repentance to occur, admission of sins is crucial. In response to seeing Jesus the Christ more clearly, Simon Peter was completely humbled, contrite, and overwhelmed by his unworthiness to witness such a powerful display of God's goodness and grace.

In the same way today, when someone new encounters the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, acknowledgment and repentance of sin should be one of his or her immediate responses. True faith leads to repentance and obedience and, as we will see, a total submission to Christ in our lives as we continue to follow Him and share with others about the good news of Jesus Christ for salvation and hope.

POINT 3

DISCIPLES ARE INVITED TO FOLLOW IN FAITH (LUKE 5:9-11).

NOTES

9 For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they had taken, **10** and so were James and John, Zebedee's sons, who were Simon's partners. "Don't be afraid," Jesus told Simon. "From now on you will be catching people." **11** Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 5:9-11** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 9-10A** commentary to highlight this key doctrine (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

KEY DOCTRINE #73: Imputation: When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or **transferred** to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's **righteousness** was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of **Christ** as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 10B-11** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Call attention to the Scripture on **PACK ITEM 13: CATCHING PEOPLE**; then ask: **What are some ways believers participate in the mission of catching people with the gospel?** (praying for the Lord to bring in the harvest; giving of time and money to support Great Commission causes; going to share the gospel on the mission field but also with our families and in our neighborhoods and workplaces)

TRANSITION: The reality of who Jesus is demands a response. He has clearly come to save souls and has victoriously paid for our sins and conquered the power of sin and death along the way. Those whom Jesus has saved now get to follow Him in worship and service for the rest of our lives as we partner together to fulfill the Great Commission.



JAMES AND JOHN

Zebedee's sons, they were part of Jesus's inner circle, along with Peter, being able to witness Jesus's transfiguration, the raising of Jairus's daughter, and be with Jesus in His sorrow in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of His arrest. They were close to Jesus, but they were also strong-tempered, so much so that Jesus called them "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17).

COMMENTARY

VERSES 9-10A / After documenting Simon's response of fear and repentance in verse 8, Luke explained why Simon reacted that way: **"For he and all those with him were amazed."** Just as Jesus's teaching amazed the people in the synagogue and His works of healing and power over demons astonished those in Capernaum, so does this miracle in nature produce astonishment. All present would have understood that the abundant catch was a supernatural one. Never had they seen such a watery harvest. Amazement, however, doesn't lead everyone to repentance. Only those with faith will continue to follow Jesus.

Interestingly, while other individuals were present for this miracle, Luke's telling doesn't name them until now. Throughout this story, Luke provided a special focus on soon-to-be disciple Simon Peter. But here Luke mentioned two other members of this group of fishermen, two other early disciples, James and John, sons of Zebedee. Luke referred to them as partners of Simon Peter. The nature of this partnership was likely that of a co-op of sorts. Through partnering together then splitting the profits, they could benefit from one another's crew and equipment. These synergistic efforts would have boosted both businesses.⁶ Thus, they were all friends and co-laborers and were amazed at Jesus's power.

Although there was a pause in the storyline for Luke to mention the response of others who were there, we are reminded that Simon had just said, "Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord!" Simon in encountering Jesus's acts of power, realized his own sin and insufficiencies. Jesus, however, calmed the storm within Simon Peter's soul with these powerful words: **"Don't be afraid."** The One who brought forth an impossible yield of fish released Simon Peter from his guilt. And though Jesus had yet to die for the sins of the world, He gave Simon a glimpse of what was to come and why there would be nothing to be afraid of. This response of Jesus follows the pattern of theophanies seen in the Old

Testament, in which God provided words of comfort—a guarantee of sins forgiven. Jesus knew His mission, what He would have to do to save the world from sin and eternal death and separation from God. His mission was eventually to sacrifice Himself and not only die but take on and transfer our sins onto Himself that we might take on His righteousness to live with Him. As the reader understands this with the full storyline in mind, Jesus's words "Don't be afraid" hold even more weight.

VERSES 10B-11 / As in other recordings of theophanies, like the one for Isaiah (see Isa. 6:8), God did not simply console and bring peace through His presence and work, He also commissioned. Thus, Jesus said, **"From now on you will be catching people."** This was a new assignment, a new career, a new lifestyle—a call to partner with the work of Jesus to save souls. This catcher of fish would become a fisher of men. Interestingly, the Greek word for catching connotes a capture for the purpose of life. Whereas men catch fish to kill and consume them, Jesus catches people to rescue them from their sin-stained doom to give them new spiritual life. In the same way Jesus powerfully and sovereignly brought forth an abundant ingathering of fish, Jesus will bring in a catch of souls. Those who follow Him as His disciples will be a part of bringing in this yield.

Luke then recorded the response to this call: **"they"** brought the boats, left all, and followed Jesus. Simon Peter was not the only one changed by Christ. Others also took up the call to follow Jesus and become fishers of men. In following Jesus, they parted with everything. They left behind their boats filled with the largest catch they'd ever experienced. Transformed by Jesus, they let go of their livelihood and renounced it all to be Jesus's disciples (see Luke 14:33). In this snapshot, Jesus completed His first fishing quest with this inaugural catch of souls.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

Jesus is sovereign over all and worthy of our worship. Following Jesus involves a deep trust in who He is and also in His ways. Often, to go where He leads can seem illogical or foolish—to both us and the watching world. A faithful disciple of Jesus holds fast to the trustworthiness, omniscience, and infinite wisdom of His character, even when the path ahead looks weird or uncertain.

What steps will you take so you can be confident about how God is leading you and then be faithful in obedience?

HEART:

Having experienced the miracle of Jesus, Simon Peter rightly reacted with humble submission, contrite confession, and utter surrender. God is still in the business of miracles, but all too often we explain them away with science and logic. We have lost our awe of who God is and the great and wondrous deeds He accomplishes every day. Therefore, we often miss out on opportunities to praise God for all He has done for us.

What are some wonders you've seen God accomplish lately for which you will praise Him?

HANDS:

If we are Christians, then we, like Simon Peter, have seen the glory of God, repented of our sin, and received grace upon grace. Therefore, we get to follow God with all we are and all we have. This is the right response to God's grace. Obedience is the life of the believer. We get to follow the calling of Christ: to go and make disciples, be fishers of people, and carry the good news to as many who will listen to it that they too may be saved.

What will you change in your life this week in order to be a better fisher of people with the gospel of Jesus?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Here is a holiness that comes to sinners. Rather than going away, Jesus says, 'Join me.' Here is a holiness that uses a confessing sinner in its mission. Here is holiness that not only calls the sinner but commissions the sinner to become a fisher of men. Here is holiness so stunningly beautiful it causes a man to leave everything for its sake. It gives the former sinner a new purpose, direction, and call."⁷

—Thabiti Anyabwile

POINT 1: DISCIPLES ARE CALLED TO ACT IN FAITH (LUKE 5:1-4).

+

COMMENTARY

“5:2 Two boats. This prepares us for the miracle in 5:6–7. By the fishermen. Luke did not mention Andrew (cf. Mark 1:16), but the plural leaves room for him. He may have omitted mentioning Andrew in order to focus the readers’ attention on the central figure—Simon Peter.

5:3 And asked him to put out a little from shore. Even though more disciples than Simon Peter would be involved in this (for the command to ‘let down [5:4]’ is plural as is ‘the nets’—literally your [plural] nets), Jesus’ conversation was directed to Simon, who was the leader. One should not see in the expression ‘put out [into the deep]’ any allegorical nuances.”⁸

+

ILLUSTRATION

There are moments in life that are difficult to capture in words. These could be overwhelmingly happy moments, such as the surprise of a proposal, the joy at the birth of a child, or the thrill of accomplishing a long-awaited lifetime achievement. The pain-filled moments in life are often hard to describe as well. The moment the news arrived of a loved one’s death—especially if it is a sudden, unexpected death—is typically etched upon our souls in a way unspeakable. There are natural wonders—from the early morning rays of sun across the mist-filled Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone to a summer evening field full of fireflies in Kentucky—which are simply too amazing to convey in a conversation. There are certain events in our lives that are full of intangible qualities we need to see and experience for ourselves to fully appreciate.

Jesus understood this about our humanity. We are limited beings, and sensory ones at that. There are some things we need to encounter personally before reality can sink in. In these cases, there are no words that could make us understand. Jesus went beyond simply teaching about His power and purpose; He demonstrated it. Every wonder He produced was another grace-filled opportunity to understand and respond to the gospel. Each miracle performed was a display of His divine power and merciful love. Jesus provided ways beyond words to proclaim and illustrate His message of grace.

POINT 2: DISCIPLES ARE STIRRED TO CONFESS IN FAITH (LUKE 5:5-8).

+ COMMENTARY

“Perhaps surprisingly Peter did not welcome the great catch. He recognized the miracle and reacted as one in the presence of God . . . Peter’s next words, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord, remind us of the experience of great saints in the immediate presence of God, such as Abraham (Gen. 18:27), Job (Job 42:6), or Isaiah (Isa. 6:5). Cf. also Israel’s ‘let not God speak to us, lest we die’ (Exod. 20:19). Peter had experienced ‘the unimaginable grace of God’ (Schweizer) and that drove him to realize his own sinfulness. The address, Lord, replaces ‘Master’ of verse 5 and this is probably connected with this heightened apprehension. While it can be used as no more than a form of polite address (like our ‘Sir’), the word is also used consistently of God in the LXX and is common in many religions in referring to deity. On the change Plummer comments, ‘It is the “Master” whose orders must be obeyed, the “Lord” whose holiness caused moral agony to the sinner (Dan. 10:16).’ This reaction, when nothing is recorded as taking place after earlier miracles, is probably not due to Luke’s recording of the miracle out of order, as some suggest. Rather it will be because this was a miracle in Peter’s own area of expertise. He knew fishing; and therefore he knew what this haul implied.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

A group of middle-aged women signed up for a half-marathon and started their training. The busyness of life got in the way, and when it came time to run the race, they were not prepared. Instead, they sent their adventurous (and more fit) teenage sons to run in their place. When the day of the half-marathon arrived, the boys grabbed their mother’s running bibs and enjoyed a morning of competition. Several weeks later, one of the women started getting invitations to some of the premier marathons in the country. Apparently her time in the half-marathon qualified her for these invite-only events. Yet the time was not actually hers; it was her son’s. She was awarded for a race she didn’t run. She qualified for one of the most sought after marathons based on work she didn’t do.

This is the picture of Christ’s work on our behalf. He has run (and won) the race we couldn’t even successfully prepare for. His perfection has been recorded as ours. The righteous recognition and heavenly access He earned has been given to us. The sin-defeating work He accomplished on the cross has been credited to our accounts. Our only part is faith that He is our only hope for salvation—the only One who can rescue us from a life separated from God. Hallelujah for the imputation of Christ’s pardon and perfection!

POINT 3: DISCIPLES ARE INVITED TO FOLLOW IN FAITH (LUKE 5:9-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“Vv. 9–10a seem slightly intrusive in the storyline, due perhaps to Luke’s weaving threads of additional source narratives into the account. The verses are important, however, for they guard against an overly individualistic view of discipleship. Peter is not simply a solitary disciple, but also representative of the other fishermen, including James and John. Capitalizing on the miracle, Jesus bestows on Peter a new commission: ‘From now on you will fish for people’ (v. 10). The word for ‘fish’ . . . means to ‘capture alive’; what Peter will do in service for Jesus will cause life to flourish. The metaphor of ‘fishing for people’ does not appear in Jewish literature, perhaps because of connotations of scheming and conniving. It is nevertheless an appropriate (if inelegant) incarnational metaphor, for it describes the life of discipleship in everyday human terms. The call of Peter demonstrates what ‘fishing for people’ means: Jesus has ‘caught’ Peter by a miracle of grace, and he commissions Peter to ‘catch’ people likewise. Although Luke does not specifically say that Jesus ‘called’ Peter, the call is implied and inescapable, for when the boats reached land, Peter and partners left ‘everything’ and followed Jesus. The other Synoptics record that the disciples left ‘their boat and father’ (Matt 4:22; Mark 1:20), but Luke’s account specifies the ultimate claim of Christ on believers: they left everything and followed Jesus.”¹⁰

+ ILLUSTRATION

Teenage boys can become easily consumed with a pursuit, even though their fascinations don’t typically last long. For a time, they eat, sleep, and breathe their mania of the moment. It could be learning how to solve a Rubik’s Cube in under thirty seconds, eating ramen noodles with chopsticks, or playing their favorite song on the piano. It could be a passion for cars or clothes or the latest pop artist. If they do have a pursuit, you would be able to tell from their passion.

When it comes to Christian discipleship, from our pursuit of Jesus, others should be able to see our passion as well. Yet some Christians go through their day without this passion. No one can tell that Jesus is their all, unlike the passions of the aforementioned teenager. Discipleship demands all of ourselves and ought to be carried out with the same fervor as a youthful obsession yet with the steadfastness of the wisest sage. Our faith in Christ merely initiates our journey with Christ. It is the starting point, not the finish line. From the moment of our salvation, we then have our lifetime to passionately pursue Jesus as a person. Christian discipleship involves centering our lives around Christ, becoming more and more like Him and inviting others into the joy of the pursuit.

References

1. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Luke 5:3 [Logos].
2. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Nottingham, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2015), 154.
3. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 153; J. Carl Laney, “Fishing the Sea of Galilee,” in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, eds. Barry J. Beitzel and Kristopher A. Lyle, *Lexham Geographic Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 170.
4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1813), 1.ii., 47.
5. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 151.
6. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Luke 5:7 [Logos].
7. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke: Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), Luke 5:1-11 [Logos].
8. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 168-69.
9. Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 133-34.
10. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 156-57.

FAITH IN THE MESSIAH

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Faith in Christ changes a person's standing before God (Rom. 5:1-2).
2. Faith in Christ changes a person's relationship with God (Heb. 11:1-6).
3. Faith in Christ changes a person's actions for God (Jas. 2:14-26).

Background Passages: Romans 5; Hebrews 11; James 2

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

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

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Salvation is a free gift of God that comes only through faith in Christ. Through His sinless life, His death, and His resurrection, Jesus did all that is needed to provide salvation for all who place faith in Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

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

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

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

EXPLAIN: There are a lot of things we can say about what faith in Christ looks like. Fortunately, we have inspired writings and letters from Paul and other disciples to show us what they wanted to teach Jesus's early disciples in the church.

DISCUSS: **If you had to explain the basics of Christian faith in a letter, what would you include?** (the reality of humankind's sin; the penalty of death and separation from God that sin causes; the death of Christ as the only sufficient provision for salvation; faith in Christ as a means of salvation; loving God and others)

TRANSITION: There are many who claim the label of Christianity. Yet there is more to the Christian faith than simply stating that you are a Christian. Wearing a religious badge is not the same as following God in faith. Christian faith is more than a mere acknowledgment that God exists—it is a declaration of our sin, our need for a Savior, and our dependence on Jesus, the only One who can save. It is this faith in God's grace that God uses as a means to change a soul's situation for eternity.

POINT 1

FAITH IN CHRIST CHANGES A PERSON'S STANDING BEFORE GOD (ROM. 5:1-2).

1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Romans 5:1-2** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 1** commentary to highlight the following key doctrine on faith (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #68: *Faith:* Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in **Christ** alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and **confession** of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as **Lord** and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

DISCUSS: What are some signs we might be leaning toward a works-based salvation instead of justification by faith? (many identify with feeling they need to clean themselves up before coming to Jesus; when asked to give a definition of how to become a Christian, anything more than repentance and faith in Jesus may be a sign of works-based salvation; sometimes in our sin, we try to do good works to make up for it)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 2** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

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

DISCUSS: How can our lives reflect the joy we have in the hope of the glory of God? (our joy should lead us to share the gospel more; our joy in God's glory should help us worry less; our joy in God's glory should help us be more obedient to Him)

TRANSITION: There are so many glorious transformations that happen instantly when we place our faith in Christ. But that first moment of faith opens the door to an even deeper relationship with God.

NOTES

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ and not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We can picture faith as a connection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the power at work in our new nature. Faith is a wire that conducts a current called grace that flows from the Spirit so that the new nature receives power."¹

—Tony Evans

COMMENTARY

VERSE 1 / Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome as they wrestled with many questions dealing with their faith and standing before God. Written to this specific gathering of Jews and Gentiles, some holding onto the Law of Moses and some unsure of what significance it still held, one underlying question Paul answered in Romans was “How can sinful man enter into a saving relationship with a righteous God?”

The apostle was clear: for both Jews and Gentiles, righteousness comes apart from works of the law. To make this point, he started first with the reality that each soul has a sin-stained heart (see Rom. 3:23) and that all sin leads to death (see Rom. 6:23). Thus, all humankind needs something to save them from sin and death, and works are not the answer because they can never perfect our sinful state (see Rom. 3:20).

Thankfully, this is not the end of the story. Paul demonstrated how God provided a way to escape His wrath through the sacrifice and righteousness of Jesus, the perfect Son of God. Jesus died on the cross to pay the death penalty we all owe for our own sin. By faith, one can be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). The word for “redemption” carried the idea of the purchase of freedom for slaves. So God redeemed us—He paid to deliver us out of slavery for we were slaves to sin and death.

God redeems the faith-filled soul, and then He imputes (transfers/credits) to us the righteousness of Christ, resulting in justification, the passing over our sins (Rom. 3:25). God’s wrath against the sin of the individual has been satisfied in Christ and justice has prevailed “so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). This act of justification—being made right—results in our being declared righteous before God. Thus, our Savior changes the wrath-deserving status of a sinner to that of a justified, righteous child of God because of our faith and trust in Jesus’s saving work.

“Therefore,” after explaining these things in the previous chapters, confirming to the church in Rome that they indeed **“have been justified by faith”** because of the sacrifice of the Son and the gracious redemption of the Father, instead of being at war with God, the soul is now at **“peace with God.”** Believers in Jesus Christ are in right standing with the Lord Almighty despite our sinful state because Jesus has taken that sin from us.

VERSE 2 / We not only have peace with God through faith, but justification by faith also provides **“access.”** There are three things Paul highlighted about this gifted access. First, it is obtained through Christ and by faith. Paul continued to hammer this truth. One cannot be saved from sin by any other means.

Second, the access given leads to **“this grace in which we stand.”** God has granted the believer abounding grace—undeserved gifts. The good news of Jesus is that His grace gives us glorious transformation, bringing us from spiritual death to life, orphaned to adopted, sinner to saint. These are merely the first glimpse of His grace! It is this foundation of grace on which we stand that we are propelled into an eternity of future graces.

Salvation, then, also leads to **“hope,”** the third piece of our access. With right standing before God, peace with God, and a foundation of grace, there is much in which the believer may **“boast,”** or “rejoice,” as the Greek word here means both. And so, **“we boast in the hope of the glory of God.”** This hope is assured hope, not just wishful thinking, for we know that God’s glory will prevail, His will will come to pass, His kingdom will be established, and He will call His people home as His family forever. Knowing He calls us His own and desires to be in relationship with us through the work of His Son, we can celebrate and rejoice for the day He is fully glorified by all nations and victorious over all evil at Christ’s return.

POINT 2

FAITH IN CHRIST CHANGES A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (HEB. 11:1-6).

1 Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. **2** For by this our ancestors were approved. **3** By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. **4** By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith. **5** By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God. **6** Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 11:1-6** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-5** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

DISCUSS: Why might we try to prove ourselves to God by means other than **faith**? (some relationships in the world are based on what we can do for other people; we don't trust God to overlook our sins and shortcomings; we feel like we should bring something to the table to be acceptable to God)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 6** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

TRANSITION: True faith in God, whom we know through faith in Christ, always leads to action. Works cannot save a soul, but a saved soul will work out his or her salvation for all around to see.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-5 / The book of Hebrews is all about the supremacy of Christ. Through the first ten chapters, the author set out to demonstrate how Christ is better than the prophets, priests, angels, and patriarchs. Jesus is the image and Word of God, who sustains “all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:3). He is the eternal rest (4:1-11), the great high priest by whom we receive mercy and grace for our every need (4:16), our forerunner who firmly anchors our souls in the Father’s presence (6:19-20), and more. He is indeed “considered worthy of more glory” than all who came before Him (3:3).

Just as important as His supremacy is the sufficiency of His work on the cross, which trumped the works of the law and the sacrificial system. This is the good news and grace Jesus came to proclaim. No longer would God’s people require a sinful human advocate to make petitions of God. Nor would they have need for a mediator to make continual reparations for their sins (9:11-28). Because of the blood of Christ, sinners can now draw near to a holy God through the perfect Son of God (10:19-22), changing our relationship with God forever. And we draw near simply by faith.

But what is faith according to the author? He gave us a definition: **“faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen”** (v. 1). Like **“our ancestors”** before us, there are many things we haven’t seen, either in the past or the future in terms of God’s work and glory, but by faith, we believe because God’s Word tells us so. For example, the author started with creation in verse 3. No one saw the creation in action, but we believe God did it.

Then in verse 4, the author began an account of the faithful in history, which is why this section is often titled “the Hall of Faith.” First was Abel, who may only have heard of God and Eden from his parents. Still he believed God and worshiped Him rightly (Gen. 4:3-5). He was approved, or commended, as a righteous man, and

because of his faith, his life and story still speak.

The next example of faith is Enoch (v. 5), who walked with God and, because of his faith, did not die naturally but was taken up supernaturally by God to be with Him (Gen. 5:22-24). The people in these examples were **“approved”** by God—God was pleased by them and was pleased to have a relationship with them and all because of their faith—their trust in things that were hoped for yet not seen.

VERSE 6 / Verse 6 provides a summary of the author’s main point: **“Without faith, it is impossible to please God.”** Faith opens up the way to a relationship with God, a God who draws us near into His presence. This verse goes on to provide two details about this drawing near. First, one **“must believe that [God] exists.”** Faith begins with the acceptance of the testimony of the Bible that God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Benefactor of all we see and experience. Through nature and His Word, we can know the Creator as the Almighty God, sovereign and powerful in all His ways.

The second element of this faith is the belief that God **“rewards those who seek him.”** Faith trusts in the truths set forth about Jesus and the spiritual blessings of God that include salvation and a relationship with Him. Ultimately, what we’re believing is that God is good and faithful. Even in our darkest moments, by faith we draw near to the presence of God and hold onto the truth of His goodness and faithfulness. He desires to reward us. Because of the great exchange—our sin for Christ’s righteousness—the Father takes pleasure in His relationship with us, as He no longer sees our sin.

Those in the Hall of Faith “were approved through their faith” (11:39). God accepted them based on the faith they demonstrated, not the deeds they displayed. Their actions were the fruit of faith, but it was their faith that pleased God.

POINT 3

FAITH IN CHRIST CHANGES A PERSON'S ACTIONS FOR GOD (JAS. 2:14-26).

NOTES

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed,” but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? **17** In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself. **18** But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder. **20** Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless? **21** Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac his son on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete, **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** In the same way, wasn’t Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? **26** For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **James 2:14-26** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 14-19** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Saving faith is displayed through active **obedience** and **works** done for the Lord.

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 14: WHAT IS FAITH?**; then ask: **How is saving faith different from the belief the demons have in God?** (a belief that God is the only true Sovereign versus a mere acknowledgment that He exists; a dependence on God for salvation versus a knowledge of what God has stated about salvation; a faith that leads to God-glorifying actions)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-26** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

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

TRANSITION: Our faith in Christ is critical for our eternal salvation, and so it is for the salvation of those around us. May our faith-fueled actions and words help point people to Jesus so they too can believe and be saved.



JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS

Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works (Eph. 2:10). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 14-19 / The earliest of the letters in the New Testament, the book of James is a practical one. In it, the half-brother of Jesus (who was an influential leader in the early church at Jerusalem) set out to provide God's people with concrete directives on how to live a life of consistency. James's written work contains the highest frequency of commands in the New Testament. Aimed toward a primarily Jewish audience, James infused his letter with a call for Christ-followers to move beyond a mere statement of faith. He asserted that a saving belief in God always leads to godly behavior.

Earlier in his message, James exhorted his readers to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (1:22). Hearing about God is not enough to be in a relationship with Him. But the one who goes beyond hearing and embraces the truth within the Word of God—the gospel—will also receive salvation (1:21).

In chapter two, James continued his commanding admonition toward exhibiting an active faith. A mere claim of conviction does not confirm conversion. Words without actions are dead. A well-wisher is of no practical use to someone in great physical need. Happy thoughts and good vibes don't clothe bodies or fill bellies. They are empty, useless affirmations. So this statement is true: **"Faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself"** (v. 17). Such "faith" has no substance or significance. Saving faith, however, is living and growing and evidenced by activity.

To drive the point home, James declared a startling truth: **"even the demons believe,"** so much so that they tremble. But a mere acknowledgment of God's existence and power is not enough to deliver from sin. A living faith in Jesus as Savior is a revolutionary belief that leads to liberation, a salvation that produces transformation. The seedlings of spiritual change that are birthed from faith in God's grace always result in living, active, growing Christians.

VERSES 20-26 / On the heels of his assertion that saving faith always leads to actions, James turned his attention to Abraham. The author knew his audience would be well versed in the life of Abraham and look to him as a paragon of piety. With the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his long-awaited and treasured son, Isaac, James provided a powerful illustration of active, saving faith. Yet it wasn't the physical work of placing Isaac on the altar that saved Abraham. Every step of obedience up that mount proved Abraham's faith to be real.

Abraham's trek was more than a mere acknowledgment of God's existence. It was a soul-level trust in and devotion to the One who knows best. The Hall of Faith passage puts it perfectly: Abraham "considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). The actions of Abraham in response to this test justified—proved complete—his faith in God as a redemptive one. A faith without works would never have made it to the altar. Yet the willingness to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22) was not what made Abraham righteous. Years before this sacrificial test, God declared Abraham righteous due to his faith in God's promises (Gen. 15:6). If Abraham's faith had never effected any sort of endeavors to worship God, that faith could not have been a justified one. This was James's point. Faith without fruit is fake. But the faith that leads to action is authentic.

In case the point was not clear, James also called to mind the story of Rahab (Josh. 2). As a woman, a prostitute, and a Gentile, many faithful Jews may have had a harder time viewing Rahab as an example of faith and righteousness. However, James called her forward as another example of justified faith. She had placed her trust in a God she barely knew. Then she proved her faith when she worked to rescue God's messengers. Regardless of background, vocation, past mistakes, or heritage, God saves the soul who actively worships Him through an outworking of faith.

MY RESPONSE

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

HEAD:

It is possible for scholars, pastors, and leaders who know the Bible better than most to be unsaved. It is not knowledge alone about the God of the Bible that saves. It is the faith of trusting in the Bible's gospel—the truth about the sufficient work of Christ—that provides eternal rescue. A mental acknowledgment of history and biblical narrative is not enough, as beneficial as these may be. Facts without faith are worthless when it comes to salvation.

What are some ways you can continue to learn more about God as an act of faith rather than simply gathering facts?

HEART:

Though our faith-based salvation and grace-given righteous positions before God are secure, it is easy to fall into the trap of simply filling our heads with facts about God instead of relating to God. Listening to a sermon and completing a Bible study mean nothing if they don't lead us toward a deeper intimacy with God. Knowing God better is a crucial part of our spiritual growth, but maturity in Christ is proven in our responses to what we encounter on the pages of Scripture.

What are some practices you can add to your time with God that will help you respond in faith and worship?

HANDS:

Though faith in Christ as Savior can be simple, Christianity is not simply about faith. A saving faith will lead to observable actions that can only be explained by the internal, spiritual transformation that occurred at the moment of our salvation. Justification always leads to sanctification. The obedient working out of our faith is the outward evidence of an inward reality. Faith-filled works are the worship-filled response to all God has done for us in Christ, and these are part of what God uses to draw others into a relationship with Him.

What specific faith-filled works are you being called to do this week by God as acts of worship and evangelism?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Faith gives us peace with God, not the law. For it reconciles us to God by taking away those sins which had made us God's enemies. And because the Lord Jesus is the minister of this grace, it is through him that we have peace with God. Faith is greater than the law because the law is our work, whereas faith belongs to God."²

—Ambrosiaster
(c. 4th century)

POINT 2: FAITH IN CHRIST CHANGES A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (HEB. 11:1-6).

+ COMMENTARY

"Real fellowship with God cannot exist without faith. Two convictions must characterize the lives of believers. First, they must believe that he exists. Anyone wanting to commune with God must have the deep conviction that God is real. Second, God's servants must believe that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Faith is not selfish; rather, faith has confidence in a God of love and goodness."³

POINT 3: FAITH IN CHRIST CHANGES A PERSON'S ACTIONS FOR GOD (JAS. 2:14-26).

+ COMMENTARY

"We must recognize that Paul's 'faith' and James' 'faith alone' are entirely different concepts. Paul has a strongly dynamic concept of faith, by which the believer is intimately united with Christ, his Lord, and which includes a commitment of obedience to that Lord. Thus Paul can speak of 'the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5) and say that it is 'faith working through love' that avails in Christ (Gal. 5:6). In other words, faith for Paul includes the commitment to obedience; it is confessing that Jesus is Lord that is the true content of faith and that brings salvation and justification (Rom. 10:9-10). While James' own concept of faith may not be entirely different from this, he has spoken throughout verses 14-26 of a 'faith' that certain people claim to have (v. 14). This 'faith' is a matter of speech without action (vv. 15-16); verbal profession without trust and commitment (vv. 18-19). It is this dead, barren faith that James designates by 'faith alone' in verse 24. Paul himself would have been second to none in condemning anyone who thought that this faith could justify."⁴

References

1. Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009), 96.
2. Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*, quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 122-23.
3. Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews, James*, vol. 10, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 201.
4. Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 16, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 118-19.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

VOL 1: FROM CREATION TO CHAOS

(Genesis) Fall 2021

- Unit 1:** The Heavens Declare the Glory of God
- Unit 2:** Let Us Make a Name for Ourselves
- Unit 3:** I Will Make Your Name Great

VOL 2: FROM CAPTIVITY TO THE WILDERNESS

(Exodus–Deuteronomy) Winter 2021–22

- Unit 4:** Out of Egypt I Called My Son
- Unit 5:** To Dwell in the House of the Lord
- Unit 6:** Be Holy, Because I Am Holy

VOL 3: FROM CONQUEST TO A KINGDOM

(Joshua–1 Samuel) Spring 2022

- Unit 7:** Lord, Teach Me Your Statutes
- Unit 8:** Fear the Lord and Worship Him
- Unit 9:** There Is No Fear of God Before Their Eyes

VOL 4: FROM UNITY TO DIVISION

(1 Samuel–1 Kings) Summer 2022

- Unit 10:** Because of Your Hardened Heart
- Unit 11:** Create a Clean Heart for Me
- Unit 12:** If You Walk Before Me with a Heart of Integrity

VOL 5: FROM REBELLION TO EXILE

(1 Kings–The Prophets) Fall 2022

- Unit 13:** Your Passions Wage War Within You
- Unit 14:** Seek the Lord, All You Humble of the Earth
- Unit 15:** He Has Made Every Nationality

VOL 6: FROM CAPTIVITY TO RESTORATION

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

- Unit 16:** The Lord Keeps His Eye on Those Who Fear Him
- Unit 17:** Take Refuge in the Lord
- Unit 18:** For Look, the Day Is Coming

VOL 7: FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

(The Gospels) Spring 2023

- Unit 19:** Here Is the Lamb of God
- Unit 20:** God's Love Was Revealed Among Us in This Way
- Unit 21:** Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God

VOL 8: FROM WONDER TO REJECTION

(The Gospels) Summer 2023

- Unit 22:** The Works That I Do in My Father's Name Testify About Me
- Unit 23:** The Kingdom of God Is in Your Midst
- Unit 24:** God's Glory in the Face of Jesus Christ

VOL 9: FROM DEATH TO RESURRECTION

(The Gospels) Fall 2023

- Unit 25:** Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Who Kills the Prophets
- Unit 26:** The Hour Has Come
- Unit 27:** The King of the Jews

VOL 10: FROM MANY PEOPLE TO ONE PEOPLE

(The Gospels, Acts) Winter 2023–24

- Unit 28:** I Am with You Always
- Unit 29:** You Will Be My Witnesses
- Unit 30:** Every Day the Lord Added to Their Number

VOL 11: FROM ONE NATION TO ALL NATIONS

(Acts and Epistles) Spring 2024

- Unit 31:** Every Knee Will Bow
- Unit 32:** The Power and the Wisdom of God
- Unit 33:** A Prisoner of Christ Jesus

VOL 12: FROM THIS WORLD TO THE WORLD TO COME

(Acts, Epistles, Revelation) Summer 2024

- Unit 34:** Ambassadors for Christ
- Unit 35:** That I May Gain Christ
- Unit 36:** A New Heaven and a New Earth



A better way to order (and teach) The Gospel Project

Enrich your group meetings and simplify your life with the *Adults Group Box*. It has everything you need to deliver a great group experience. Plus, you save money, and you save time by only having to order and distribute one item per leader (instead of 12). The Box even includes a Quick Start Guide that explains how all the items work together:

- 10 Daily Discipleship Guides (CSB)
- 1 Leader Guide (CSB)
- 1 Leader Pack (which includes a variety of visual aids for better learning)
- 1 Quick Start Guide
- All for \$75.99 (15% savings)

Order one *Box* for each group. (If a group has more than 10 people, simply add extra *Daily Discipleship Guides* to the order.)

Price and availability subject to change without notice.

lifeway.com/gospelproject

Lifeway

FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

Heaven met earth in the most profound way when the Son of God, the Creator of everything, in the fullness of time, entered into His creation as a human being. From His miraculous conception and birth to His temptation and ultimately to His saving work on the cross, Jesus remained faithful to His mission to fulfill the Law and the Prophets as He embodied the love of God for His image-bearers. Groups, therefore, will be challenged to respond to this Savior with faith and with God's love for a lost and dying world.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

WEEKLY HELPS:

gospelproject.com/resources

WEEKLY PODCAST:

Look for The Gospel Project for Adults and The Hero of the Story on your favorite podcast app.

Lifewayadults

gospelproject.com

RELIGION/Biblical Studies/Bible Study Guides

