



the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

FROM WONDER TO REJECTION

ADULTS / DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE / SUMMER 2023 / VOL. 8



GOD'S WORD TO YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

When Jesus came on the scene, He ushered in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was in their midst (Luke 17:21) and Jesus performed signs to demonstrate such. He healed the blind, the deaf, and the lame. And He came to seek and save the lost to bring them into God's kingdom, offering forgiveness to those who would accept it. He came to save us from sin and death through His own sinlessness and sacrificial death that we may spend eternity with Him.

Being God, Jesus has authority over all: the storms and seas, sickness and health, even life and death. Fully trusting this, we have nothing to fear, and we live as disciples to reflect His glory that the world may know Him and find purpose, hope, and eternal life in His kingdom.

The kingdom of God is here, although it is not yet fully fulfilled. In the meantime, then, how will we respond to Jesus's offer of salvation and His anticipated return? Will we reject and scoff at Him like some of the Pharisees? Or will we accept and work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13)? Will we live for the kingdoms of this earth, or will we live for God's spiritual kingdom as children of God?

Joy awaits us when we trust in the only One who can save us, redeem us, and pay the ransom for our sins (1 Timothy 2:6). It is a narrow door but the only way. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Let us continue living for His glory alone.

Y Bonesteele

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The Gospel Project for Adults

The Gospel Project®

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ALL AGES STUDY PLAN

VOL 1: From Creation to Chaos

(Genesis) Fall 2021

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

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

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

VOL 2: From Captivity to the Wilderness

(Exodus–Deuteronomy) Winter 2021–22

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

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

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

VOL 3: From Conquest to a Kingdom

(Joshua–1 Samuel) Spring 2022

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

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

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

VOL 4: From Unity to Division

(1 Samuel–1 Kings) Summer 2022

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

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

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

VOL 5: From Rebellion to Exile

(1 Kings–The Prophets) Fall 2022

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

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

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

VOL 6: From Captivity to Restoration

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

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

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

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

VOL 7: From Heaven to Earth

(The Gospels) Spring 2023

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

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

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

VOL 8: From Wonder to Rejection

(The Gospels) Summer 2023

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

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

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

VOL 9: From Death to Resurrection

(The Gospels) Fall 2023

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

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

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

VOL 10: From Many People to One People

(The Gospels, Acts) Winter 2023-24

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

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

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

VOL 11: From One Nation to All Nations

(Acts and Epistles) Spring 2024

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

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

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

VOL 12: From This World to the World to Come

(Acts, Epistles, Revelation) Summer 2024

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

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

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

HOW TO USE THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

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

BEGIN WITH PERSONAL TIME IN THE WORD

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



DAY 1

READ:

Mark 4:35-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 4:37-39

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #21:

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful; there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

There's nothing like big water to remind you how small you are.

Our family had been preparing for months for our children's first visit to the ocean. They had seen rivers, lakes, and streams, but we figured every kid needed to see the Atlantic Ocean in all its glory. So we headed to the east coast of Florida several years ago.

My daughter, a precocious 3-year-old, had looked through every book we could find about the ocean; she was thrilled. She had declared dozens of times as we drove, "When we get to the ocean, I'm going to walk right into the water and grab a fish!"

We drove straight to the beach first thing. It was a windy, overcast day, and the ocean was roiling with stern agitation. My daughter, who had been full of boasting about the ocean not one hour earlier, grabbed my husband's hand, walked backward, and declared, "I do not like the ocean!" She barely got her feet wet.

We can only imagine what ocean explorers, overseas captains, and sailors have pondered and wondered as they gazed out at the endless sea. From the creatures to the wind and the waves, surely they wondered about the force behind the power of such an immense expanse.

It's good for us to ponder the overwhelming power and bigness of God. It encourages us to humble ourselves and be amazed by the powerful God we serve.

When have you realized your own humble status in the face of nature's glory?



STUDY THE BIBLE WITH YOUR BIBLE

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



GET BACK TO BASICS

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

7 ARROWS OF BIBLE READING

by Matt Rogers

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

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

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

What does this passage say?

←

What did this passage mean to its original audience?

↑

What does this passage tell us about God?

↓

What does this passage tell us about man?

→

What does this passage demand of me?

↔

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

↷

How does this passage prompt me to pray?

10

DISCUSS AND APPLY IN COMMUNITY

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



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What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



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



How does this passage prompt me to pray?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNIT 22

+

THE WORKS

THAT I DO IN MY

FATHER'S NAME

TESTIFY

ABOUT ME

“Who Then Is This?”

by Matt Capps

“Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:13; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). This question posed by Jesus to His disciples is the single most important question that has ever been uttered in human history. No other question has inspired greater devotion or ignited greater disagreement, and rightly so. For a Christian, what one believes about Jesus is the sum and substance of the faith. In the end all people will be judged by their Christology. Therefore, this is a question we must answer ourselves.

Throughout history, disagreements over the person and nature of Jesus Christ have rotated through the same theological issues and questions: “Is Jesus truly God?” And, “If Jesus is truly God, how could He also be truly man?”

Other world religions and philosophical systems have offered their assessments of Jesus, sometimes applauding His words and deeds while disavowing His divinity. Some have proposed that Jesus was a divine being who merely pretended

to be human. Others have taught that Jesus was a human who became divine, a type of super-venerated saint. And some have even argued that Jesus was simply called a “god” out of respect for His wisdom or courtesy for His distinctive humanitarian efforts. However, all of these attempts fall short of the testimony of the New Testament. The description of Jesus’s person and nature in Scripture is unremittingly clear: He is fully God and fully man.

WHAT SCRIPTURE AFFIRMS

First, Scripture affirms that Jesus is truly God. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Micah 5:2; John 1:4). Jesus performs works that only God performs, as only God has the authority to forgive sin (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2). Moreover,

He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

Yet, Scripture also affirms that Jesus was truly human. Jesus grew and matured; He experienced the full range of non-sinful emotions. He hungered, He thirsted, He endured pain, and ultimately He suffered death (Matthew 4:2; 26:37; Luke 2:40,52; John 2:15; 4:7; 11:35; 19:28).

Even though there is a certain element of mystery surrounding the nature of Christ, there are several divinely revealed distinct theological categories that should frame our understanding of Jesus Christ.

DISTINCTIVES ABOUT JESUS

First, Jesus was not created, but the eternal begotten Son in the position of the “first-born of all creation” (Colossians 1:15-19). The New Testament presents Jesus as being in the beginning with God as a distinct member of the Trinity, thus truly God. Paul affirms that He is “before all things,” and “in him all things hold together” as the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ. Jesus is deity and humanity in one person—God in human flesh (John 1:1-18; Hebrews 1:1-14).

Second, Jesus was born of a virgin (Luke 1:34-37). Jesus was born by conception of the Holy Spirit. Christ was conceived without Adam’s original inherited and imputed sin (John 8:29; Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22-24). For this reason, Paul refers to Christ as the second or last Adam (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Third, as the last Adam, Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life. Jesus knew no sin, committed no sin, and in Him was found no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Jesus passed the test that Adam failed, that you and I fail. While perfect, Jesus being fully human enables Him to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

Finally, God Himself testifies that Christ is His divine Son. This is affirmed by the Father at Jesus’s baptism and at His transfiguration (Matthew 3:13-17; 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36). This is also asserted in His resurrection and coronating ascension. From creation to the cradle, from the cross to the crown, Jesus is and has always been the divine Son of God.

*Jesus knew no sin, committed no sin,
and in Him was found no sin.*

From creation to the cradle, from the cross to the crown, Jesus is and has always been the divine Son of God.

TESTIMONY OF THE SAINTS

Being part of a great cloud of witnesses, we also have the testimony of Christians throughout centuries who have clarified and articulated essential biblical doctrines. We stand on the shoulders of faithful saints who have gone before us, especially the early church, regarding the nature of Christ.

Jesus is deity and humanity in one person—God in human flesh.

The Apostles Creed (AD 200) affirms that Jesus Christ is God's Son and our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, was crucified, died, and buried, to be resurrected and then ascended to heaven, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead. The Council of Nicaea (AD 325) also defends Jesus's divine nature, namely, that He shares the same essence with the Father. Jesus was not merely similar to God, but

is God. Finally, we would agree with the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) that Jesus is truly God and truly man: one person with two natures (human and divine), united without separation or division.

If Jesus were not truly human, He could not have entered our plight as our Redeemer by taking upon Himself our sins as our sinless sacrifice. Moreover, we take great comfort in knowing that Jesus, being fully human, is able to sympathize with us as He is with us in our difficulties and sufferings (Hebrews 4:15-16; 7:25). Finally, since Jesus is truly God, we must go beyond acknowledging His deity and personally submit to Him in faith and worship (Romans 12:1). So, the question before each of us is "Who do you say Christ is?"



JESUS OVER NATURE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

In calming a storm, Jesus revealed that He is the Son of God, the One who has all authority over nature.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Mark 4

+ **SETTING:**

Jesus continued to reveal Himself through His actions. Here in the Gospel of Mark, He was by the Sea of Galilee and began teaching. He eventually had to get on a boat because of the large crowds (Mark 4:1). As we consider today's passage, let this background invade your senses: smell the crowd; taste the salty air; hear the authority of Jesus; see the Sea of Galilee, vast and mighty. The disciples didn't realize it, but this lecture from the teacher would be followed quickly by a pop quiz.

DAY 1

READ:

Mark 4:35-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 4:37-39

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #21: GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

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It's good for us to ponder the overwhelming power and bigness of God. It encourages us to humble ourselves and be amazed by the powerful God we serve.

When have you realized your own humble status in the face of nature's glory?

DAY 2

READ:

Mark 4:35-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 4:35-39

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The ship carried his humanity, but the power of his Godhead carried the ship and all that was in it. In order that he might show that even his humanity did not require the ship, instead of the planks which a shipwright puts together and fastens, he, like the architect of creation, made the waters firm and joined them together solidly under his feet.”¹

—Ephrem the Syrian
(c. 306–373)

When I was an elementary-school girl, my family owned a boat. Before you get the wrong mental image, let me describe it to you: it was probably a twenty-year-old fishing boat that my dad bought for \$1,000 in 1990. Every single time we took it to the lake, the boat refused to start. Luckily, my dad was just enough of a mechanic that he could get it started again in an hour or so. My dad had grown up boating, so he knew about all the aspects, and we had confidence in his authority.

One day, the boat engine died, and no amount of magic could convince it to crank. Unfortunately, we were on the other side of the lake, miles from the dock. But a nice guy in a shiny, new, huge boat saw us in our plight and asked if we'd like a tow. We had a ball being towed back to the dock, rocking with the waves.

Well, I had a ball. When the boat was loaded and the friendly stranger gone, my dad revealed the truth: our boat had almost tipped over. We'd been towed too fast, and at one point my dad had to leap to the other side to keep us upright. But I never knew it; I had confidence in my dad, his judgment, and his boating skills. I never knew we were in danger.

Jesus did the same thing, believing His Father was in full control. He had no trouble dozing during a storm.

How does Jesus's presence give you comfort?

DAY 3

READ:

Mark 4:35-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 4:39

NOTES

In Mark 4:39, Jesus commanded the wind and waves to be quiet and still. In Exodus 14:14, Moses informed the people of Israel, upon seeing the Egyptian army approaching to return them to slavery, that the Lord would fight for them, and that they just needed to be quiet and silent.

What tone of voice do you hear from these two quotes? When Jesus commanded the wind and waves, did He speak with gentleness and care, as one would address a class of kindergarten students? Possibly not. When Moses realized he'd had enough of the complaining, blaming whininess of the Israelites, do you assume he spoke with the same tender tone he used with his flocks? Probably not either.

The commands to be quiet in Mark and in Exodus actually have a similar meaning. Though they are two different words in two different languages, both are verbs and both carry the emphasis on peace. In the King James Version, the command to be quiet is actually rendered "ye shall hold your peace." And the Greek word in Mark is actually interpreted "peace" in a number of different translations.

We as believers would be wise to hear these words in our own hearts when we feel the storms within causing us to take our eyes off God. The peace of God surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and He declares peace to His faithful people (Psalm 85:8). Regardless of the situation, we can know the peace of God because we know we have peace with Him through Jesus (Romans 5:1) because He has authority over all.

What tends to make you panic, and how do you find God's peace in the midst of it?

DAY 4

READ:

Mark 4:35-41

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 4:35-41

NOTES

When I was a child, I was afraid of lions. I lived in a subdivision in Lexington, Kentucky, but evidently my first-grade teacher did a great job of describing the ferocity of a lion to us. I would lie awake at night, afraid that a lion would break down our front door and come into my room. (After all, they were incredibly strong, right?)

When I was a teenager, I was afraid of my car breaking down. That was a legitimate fear; I had a 10-year-old clunker that was known for simply cutting off the flow of gas to my engine. Every time I headed down the road, I had to be sure I had everything I needed in case I found myself stranded.

As a college student, I was afraid of hurting my hands. That seems silly, but as a music major who played piano, my future rode on those hands: a hand injury meant no playing, which meant no graduation.

Our fears change over time. But the more we see God clearly and fear Him in a holy and reverent way, the less other fears are able to creep into our minds and hearts. I recently talked to a man in his 60s who had been diagnosed with cancer. As he talked over treatment options with his doctor, he said, "I'm not afraid to die." That's the kind of statement we can make when we have a holy fear of God that trumps all other fears.

What makes you fearful today, and what would God say to you about that fear?

DAY 5

READ:

Jonah 1:1-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Jonah 1:1-5

NOTES

You read through Mark 4:35-41 over the past few days. In it, you saw Jesus and His disciples in a boat, a great storm that threatened everyone on the water, Jesus's sleeping like a baby in the midst of it, and finally the calming of the sea by the One who created it.

Funny enough, there are several shared elements between the story of Jesus's calming the storm and Jonah 1. For starters, a great wind and a great storm threatened even seasoned sailors (v. 4). As this was going on, a man slept in a boat while everyone around him panicked (v. 5). When the sailors woke the sleeping man, they scolded his rest and asked for help (v. 6). At the end of both stories, no one wondered who was in charge of the sea: only God had the power to start the squall, and only He could put a stop to it.

For all the similarities, there are also differences: Jonah was actively and intentionally running away from God, while Jesus was smack dab in the center of God's plan. Jonah was asleep out of ignorance; Jesus was asleep out of total fulfillment and rest in His Father. Jonah had no power over the storm; Jesus as Creator of all had all power over everything and access to the Father.

Both were in a storm, both fell asleep, and both woke up to panic around them. Only One had confidence in the One who wielded the storm; the other was afraid to face Him.

When facing struggles in your life, how are you more like Jonah or Jesus?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The Son of God rests in the care of His Father (Mark 4:35-38).

Jesus sometimes _____ His disciples to places of difficulty and challenge so they can experience and _____ Him more fully.

? When has Jesus led you through times that were difficult, confusing, or overwhelming, and what did He reveal to you through that situation?

Being God and _____ over all, Jesus has no fear and can _____; thus, we, His disciples, can do the same.

POINT 2: The Son of God exerts authority over His creation (Mark 4:39).

Jesus _____ to our situations and our fears with power and _____.

? From Day 4: What makes you fearful today, and what would God say to you about that fear?

KEY DOCTRINE #21: GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has _____ and authority over the universe He _____, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Let not the wave master you in this troubled state of your heart. Yet since we are but men, if the wind should drive us on, and stir up the affections of our souls, let us not despair; let us awake Christ, that we may sail on a tranquil sea.”²

—Augustine (354–430)



How might you respond differently to a crisis if you truly believe that God is all-powerful?

POINT 3: The Son of God calls for faith from His followers (Mark 4:40-41).

Jesus calls His followers to _____, especially in response to _____ and difficult circumstances, to believe that He is truly Lord of all.



How might asking ourselves why we are afraid bring us to see our own faith honestly?

Faith sees _____ clearly, as who He says He is—God in flesh—realizing He is more _____ than anything else we might have feared.



How can we intentionally study the Bible to see God more clearly?

MY RESPONSE

Because we are loved by God, who has authority over all creation, we seek to demonstrate bold faith in Him no matter our circumstances so that others might come to trust in Jesus for salvation.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways God reveals His omnipotent power today?
- **HEART:** For what areas of your life can you confess that you are afraid to walk in obedient faith?
- **HANDS:** How can you show God’s compassion and mercy by being compassionate and merciful in Jesus’s name this week?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“For when he arose, and rebuked the sea, and silenced the storm, he plainly disclosed two things: that the storm of the sea was not simply from winds, but from the fear of the Lord who walked upon it; and that the Lord who rebuked it was not a creature, but rather its creator.”³

—Athanasius (c. 296–373)

JESUS OVER SIN

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus alone is able to go beyond physical healing and forgive sins as well.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 5

+ **SETTING:**

Jesus had been stirring up trouble in the religious world. Though His early life had little significance on Jerusalem's religious elite, the uproar began just after His temptation in the desert (Luke 4:1-13). He began a ministry in His hometown but was run out of the synagogue with His seemingly blasphemous teaching (vv. 14-30). Then He continued to perform miracles, casting out demons and healing the sick. But for the religious zealots, it was the last straw when He started forgiving sin.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 4:14-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 4:16-30

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #42: SIN'S EFFECT IN THE WORLD

Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Romans 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the gospel is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

In setting the stage for this coming week's lesson, let's consider what Luke records in the passages leading up to it. At the beginning of chapter 4, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness for 40 days. Then, "in the power of the Spirit," He returned to His hometown, teaching in the synagogues where everyone praised Him (4:14-15).

Until He made a stand, that is. People in Nazareth liked their successful hometown boy. They liked Jesus who taught well, who performed some miracles, and who was causing quite a stir for His amazing rabbi skills. But when He was handed a scroll on the Sabbath day in His home church, the opinion changed.

Jesus wasn't okay with people just liking Him for His preaching; He wanted them to know Him as King of kings. He didn't come to just lead and guide. He didn't come to start a rebellion. He came as Messiah, the promised Son of God, the Holy One of Israel. The Scripture He read from Isaiah 61 prophesied the Messiah, and He didn't mince words when He said that today, "this Scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:21). This would have been like the local kid from a garage band claiming he was the next Jimi Hendrix, or the girl at the local gym promising she'd win Olympic gold. Except that, of course, with Jesus, it was true.

You can see the looks of consternation and the stifled chuckles. Who was this local kid kidding? When He scolded them for their doubt, they were enraged and tried to kill Him. To them, Jesus "the Superstar" was okay, but Jesus the Messiah was too much.

How do we know Jesus is who He claimed to be?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 5:12-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:12-15

NOTES

Luke's insight into certain Bible passages is invaluable. In the opening words of today's passage, we see that there was a man with leprosy. This wasn't a guy who was still in the early stages, where it might just turn out to be eczema. As we say in Tennessee, he was eaten up with it.

The man saw Jesus, fell facedown, and begged Him to cleanse him. His statement of faith was profound, believing that if Jesus was willing, He could heal the man (v. 12). What complete surrender. What amazing trust in the One who most certainly can cleanse but may not choose to do so.

There are similarities between this passage and the one about the healing of the paralytic: in both instances, the ailing person was healed "immediately" (5:13,25). In both cases, the healing caused a stir. In both cases, Jesus healed with power through speaking.

But there were also differences: in one passage He touched the man; not so in the other. In one, He instructed the healed man to go make a sacrifice at the temple; none was given in the other. By comparing the two passages side by side, we see that Jesus was not only all-powerful over every disease and ailment but He had total freedom in how He would heal. He sticks to the Father's plan and glory, not just in Luke 5 but in our lives today.

What are you hoping and praying that Jesus would miraculously do in your life, and have you surrendered it to Him?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 5:17-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:17-20

NOTES

A good parent doesn't give a young child what he wants but what he needs.

As a toddler, my son loved a few things with a passion: cherry tomatoes, black olives, and Thomas the train. If I had said yes to everything he wanted, tomatoes and olives would have made up the majority of his diet, and watching Thomas movies would have filled all of his waking hours.

Did I love him? Totally. Did I meet his every want? Not at all. He could have a few cherry tomatoes and olives with his dinner, if he ate other things. And Thomas movies were a rare special treat, but reading Thomas books and playing with his wooden trains took up most of his day.

God does the same thing. With our toddler-like brains, we come to Jesus in prayer, knowing exactly what we want. He hears our requests and sometimes omnisciently says, "No." We may throw a spiritual temper tantrum, but He loves us too much to give us what we ask, giving us instead what we need.

Four friends did the same thing for a paralytic: they knew what they wanted for him, and that was healing. They sacrificially loved him enough to carry him to Jesus. Luke didn't record any words from their mouths as they ripped open the roof and lowered him to Jesus. They just thought he needed to walk. Jesus saw their faith and knew their request but realized something was more pressing than walking.

When you think about your recent prayer requests, what might be the true need behind them?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 5:17-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:21-25

NOTES

There's a big difference between knowing and believing. For instance, many people know about God and the Bible: He created everything, He led His people through the Red Sea, He established them as the nation of Israel, and He sent Jesus to die.

But if you press into what they know and press into what they actually believe about God, you'll see that the two do not meet. For example, if you ask, "If God created everything, what does that teach us about how we should live?" Many people who mentally agree that God is Creator do not live with any regard for Him as their authority.

So we shouldn't be surprised at Jesus's wording just before performing the miracle in today's verse. He doesn't say He's going to do it so that they will believe; He does it so that "you may know that the Son of Man has authority" (Luke 5:24). The word translated "know" is the verb *eido* in the Greek, which points to seeing with the eyes or the senses, to discern, to turn the mind, or to inspect something.

That's exactly what the scribes and Pharisees had done with Jesus in this setting. They had heard Him, watched Him, and paid attention to the stir He'd caused. They knew where He was living, and they were attending a local gathering. But though they watched (*eido*) the paralytic get up and walk, they still didn't believe that Jesus was who He claimed.

How do you see your knowledge of Jesus and your belief in Him lining up?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 5:17-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 5:20-25

NOTES

Just before Jesus healed the paralytic man, He looked at the skeptical scribes and Pharisees seated in the house and declared, “that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Luke 5:24). He commanded the lame man to get up, take up his stretcher, and go home; the man did that “immediately” (v. 25).

Authority is a word that causes quite a divide. If you grew up with loving, wise parents, you may not have had a problem with your parental authority. But some buck against all authority; anyone telling them to do anything incites ire. A bad boss, a snotty teacher, and a negligent official give the concept of authority a bad name.

But Jesus had a different level of authority; He didn't demand it or bribe human beings to give it or acknowledge it. Instead, all authority was given to Him (Matthew 28:18). The chronically authority-adverse might ask, “Oh yeah? Well, who gave it to Him?” The only One who has always had it all: God the Father Himself. As Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Director of everything that ever existed, God has always had all authority. And when He deemed that the Son, perfect in holiness, perfect in humanity, and perfect in His sacrifice, should receive the authority of the Father, He also had the power to give it to Him. And with that authority, Jesus was able to forgive sin, and in dying on the cross, the sins of those who believe in Him have been washed clean forevermore.

How are you obeying Jesus's authority today in going and making disciples?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“I like to define forgiveness as ‘giving up the right to punish the one who has hurt you.’ That’s what Jesus did on the cross.”¹

—Jan Silvious

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“While Christians are not spared suffering, they are promised deliverance from sin and the inner resources through the indwelling Holy Spirit to live a righteous life in Christ.”²

–Rhonda H. Kelley

POINT 1: The Son of Man brings forgiveness to the faithful (Luke 5:17-20).

Jesus’s _____ as a powerful teacher and healer spread, and those who had _____ were willing to do whatever it took to see Him.



From Day 1: **How do we know Jesus is who He claimed to be?**

KEY DOCTRINE #42: SIN’S EFFECT IN THE WORLD

Sin does not only impact our _____ with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Romans 8:20-22). Sin has _____ and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the _____ is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

POINT 2: The Son of Man brings healing to the needy (Luke 5:21-25).

The scribes and Pharisees doubted Jesus’s authority to _____ sins because they didn’t want to believe that He is _____, despite the continual revealing of His power.



Even though God has shown up for us in the past, why is it easy to doubt His presence and power when going through tough times?

Jesus revealed to the crowd that He certainly is God by _____ the man's spiritual and physical needs, resulting in God being _____ .

? How can knowing Jesus cares about all our needs (spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental) help us in our spiritual growth?

POINT 3: The Son of Man brings glory to the Father (Luke 5:26).

Upon seeing the power of Jesus displayed in the _____ of the paralytic, the entire crowd was _____ and glorified God.

? When was the last time you glorified God because of a sense of fear and wonder from something He had done?

It's not enough to see God's _____ and find it incredible; we must respond in _____ to Jesus.

? How can we respond to Spirit-filled moments so that we are not just merely awed but transformed?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced the great miracle of our salvation through Jesus, we seek to glorify God and make much of Him in all that we do.

- **HEAD:** What makes you trust that Jesus knows the most pressing need for your life today?
- **HEART:** How will you glorify God this week?
- **HANDS:** To whom is God directing you to be helpful and to serve this week?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Pierce the gloom of sin and grief, Jesus, the light of the world! Scatter all my unbelief, Jesus, the light of the world!"³

—Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

JESUS OVER SICKNESS

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus healed those who acted in faith in Him.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 9

+ **SETTING:**

Chapters 8 and 9 in Matthew's Gospel are a collection of stories showing the healing power of Jesus. He touched a leper to cleanse him, He healed the servant of a centurion who understood true authority, He cured Peter's mother-in-law, He cast out demons and sent them into pigs, and He commanded a paralytic to get up and walk. Matthew wanted His readers to clearly see that Jesus heals.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 9:9-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 9:9-13

NOTES

Don't you wish you could sit down and get to know Matthew? He seems to be quite an interesting character: A Jew but collecting taxes for the Roman government. We don't know his interaction with Jesus before he became a disciple; maybe there was none. But when Jesus saw Matthew at the tax office (Matthew 9:9), it took only an invitation, and the man left his office and followed the Rabbi creating a fuss from those around them.

Surely the Romans hadn't approved his indefinite leave of absence. Surely his Torah-following friends were suspicious of this new rabble-rouser. Surely he wondered, just for a second, how he'd pay the bills or explain to his mother what he was doing. (Moms haven't changed that much in 2,000 years.)

But Matthew's willingness to follow Jesus also got others to look His way too. Immediately after the verse telling us that Matthew got up to follow Jesus, we see Him sitting at a table in a house with many "tax collectors and sinners" eating with Him. This is actually a funny scene: God Almighty had come down to earth; the ones who should have recognized Him first had snubbed their noses at Him, while the ones who seemed furthest away were chatting with Him over hors d'oeuvres.

Following Jesus attracts attention. Regardless of what your friend group—or former friend group—says about Jesus, they will perk up if you really follow Him and as they see the change in your life because of Jesus.

From his own changed life, Matthew went on to write his Gospel, showing how Jesus heals and changes lives.

What is your life revealing to others about Jesus?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let this be your whole endeavor, this your prayer, this your desire—being stripped of all selfishness, you can with great simplicity follow Jesus only."¹

—Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471)

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 9:18-26

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Matthew 9:18-19,23-26

NOTES

Sometimes the humblest faith can seem like the craziest. According to Mark's and Luke's versions of this story, the synagogue leader first approached Jesus to ask for help when his daughter was "dying" (Mark 5:23; Luke 8:42). Asking for healing when this man Jesus had already proven He could heal didn't seem like a stretch.

But then some others arrived and reported the worst: the daughter had died; quit bothering the Teacher (Mark 5:35; Luke 8:49). After all, all hope was lost, right? Even the best healer couldn't conquer death.

Perhaps, though, this synagogue leader remembered an Old Testament story about a man who believed God could raise the dead because he'd been instructed to sacrifice his only son as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:2). We who know this story often wonder: How could he do such a thing? Why in the world did Abraham follow God in this crazy test? Because he believed God could raise the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

Now, the crazy thing about Abraham believing God could raise the dead was that no one had ever done it before; his faith was obviously off the charts. But Jesus had already raised a man, an only son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7:15). And this news was reported throughout Judea and beyond (v. 17).

So maybe the father had considered Abraham's faith. Maybe he'd heard about the miracle in Nain. Maybe he was simply a good father who wanted his little girl to live. Whatever the situation, he believed when no one else did. Maybe we can too.

Where do you want to believe God for a miracle today?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 9:20-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 9:20-22

NOTES

In this week's lesson, you'll see this woman described as one having bold faith. But at first glance, you may think her faith is anything but bold: she snuck up behind Jesus, touched the hem of His garment, and hoped to sneak back out. Not that bold, right?

But there's more to the story. You see, she had uncontrolled bleeding, which made her ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 15). So she was basically forbidden from going anywhere near people. Perhaps we can see her bold faith in the fact that she stepped out of her religious confines to grab onto God Himself.

Note that she must have been weary as well: her issue of bleeding had been going on for twelve years. Twelve years! Think about your life situation twelve years ago; seems like forever, doesn't it? And yet, after these twelve miserable years, she still had the audacity to hope. Perhaps we'll see her bold faith in her ability to persevere.

Luckily, Jesus isn't one to miss His own miracles. Instead, as soon as she touched Him, He turned and saw her. His words to her are beautiful: He told her to take heart and have courage and called her "daughter" (Matthew 9:22). This kind of statement reveals something about the woman, that she was fearful or discouraged. So maybe that bold faith shines in the fact that she took a step of faith even as she was scared to death.

This woman's story is for us too, when we feel called to bold faith, even when we're weary, or even when we're scared. Maybe we, like her, can take that bold step.

What's holding you back from a bold step of faith today?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 9:27-31

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 9:27-31

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #33: MIRACLES

A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

In reading these few short verses about two blind men, there are a few things I can apply to my own life.

First, the blind men sought out Jesus; they knew He had authority. When I was a kid, I was always that kid, front row center, asking every question on my mind to the teacher. Even in college, I wouldn't leave class until I got some answers. I've learned that we need to seek those in authority when we need answers. And no one has full authority like Jesus. Like the blind men, in times of need, we need to seek Jesus.

The men also were calling for God's mercy in a time of trouble. I remember my first few years of motherhood brought me to my knees in every way. I've learned to pray for mercy regularly from God, and I'm not afraid to ask Him for it now. God is ready and willing to give us mercy when asked.

In the story, Jesus asked, "Do you believe that I can do this?" (v. 28). Jesus is constantly asking us this, and it's something we must ask ourselves. How much do I really believe what I say I believe? If the feet of my faith are put to the fire, would I pass muster? And if the miracle occurs only "according to [my] faith" (v. 29), would it even happen at all? Though God can choose to grant our need or not, we must believe that He is able, being the all-powerful, sovereign, good God.

God can do all things, but how are we to act when He chooses not to do what we are hoping for?

DAY 5

READ:

Ephesians 2:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 2:8-9

NOTES

The synagogue leader's faith was demonstrated when he humbly asked Jesus for healing. The bleeding woman's faith was demonstrated when Jesus commended her for it. The blind men's faith was revealed when they were healed according to what they believed.

Faith is the cornerstone of our relationship with Jesus and our eternal satisfaction, but it's not something we can conjure up on our own: it is God's gift (Ephesians 2:8). So if you believe Jesus was born of a virgin, lived, performed miracles, died for your sins, and rose from the dead, you have been given a wonderful gift of faith from the Lord.

What do we do with a gift? Sometimes we get a gift that we really didn't want in the first place, and we stash it in a closet or give it to a donation center. Some gifts we cherish but don't really use, like a set of china or a delicate vase. We don't want to lose or break the gift, so it sits out of reach.

But a great gift—a perfect gift—is one we use; this is where James's words come in (James 2:20). Because if we have faith, even as small as a mustard seed, we live it. We clothe and feed those in need. We show patience to those who drive us crazy. We walk with confidence into the throne room of heaven, knowing that our prayers are accepted because of Jesus. Faith shapes our words, our attitudes, our lives, and our thoughts.

How are you living out your faith, knowing that your salvation is a gift of God?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Though sorrows, heaviness, and faintings of heart ever so much increase; yet, if your faith increases also, it will bear you up in the midst of them."²

—Isaac Penington (1616–1679)

POINT 1: The Son of David responds to humble faith (Matthew 9:18-19,23-25).

Biblical humility includes putting aside our pride, _____, and preferences to _____ ourselves in submission to God, knowing He is Lord of all.

? How can we develop our own humility, particularly in approaching Jesus in prayer?

KEY DOCTRINE #33: MIRACLES

A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the _____ order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His _____ and/or validating His _____. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

POINT 2: The Son of David responds to bold faith (Matthew 9:20-22).

Bold faith moves us _____ to Jesus, believing in His _____ and work.

? How can bold faith reveal itself in a believer's life today?

When we _____ Jesus to be Savior and Lord, we find _____ that transcends this world and this life.

? How did the woman's faith lead to more than physical healing?

POINT 3: The Son of David responds to desperate faith (Matthew 9:27-31).

The blind men in this passage were honest in their self-assessment: they needed _____ and healing from the _____.

? How do we honestly approach God with humility and still present our requests to Him in faith?

Great faith knows Jesus's _____ to do the impossible and expectantly _____ that He will act on our behalf for God's glory.

? From Day 4: God can do all things, but how are we to act when He chooses not to do what we are hoping for?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been saved through faith in Jesus, we strive to live out our faith each day, trusting in God to supply all of our needs.

- **HEAD:** In what areas do you struggle to believe the truths of the Bible?
- **HEART:** What are ways you can humble yourself before the Lord during worship or prayer time?
- **HANDS:** How can you help someone hurting or suffering today?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The Way, the Truth, the Life Thou art, This, this I know; to this I cleave; The sweet new language of my heart, 'Lord, I believe.' I have no doubts to bring to Thee; My doubt has fled; my faith is free."³

—Harriet McEwen Kimball (1834–1917)

JESUS OVER NEEDS

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus's compassion led Him not only to meet but surpass the needs of others.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Mark 8

+ **SETTING:**

In the past three sessions, we've looked closely at three stories of Jesus's miracles: His power over the storm (Mark 4:35-41), His power to forgive sin (Luke 5:17-26), and His power over sickness (Matthew 9:18-31). Today's passage is another miracle that shows another element over which Jesus is Lord, but the setting is different. The last three weeks, Jesus revealed His power inside the traditional borders of Israel; the audience that watched and listened to Jesus had Jewish lineage and knew the Old Testament laws and prophecies. Today's passage takes place outside those boundaries.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 34:1-8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 34:6-8

NOTES

“Now Jesus I like. He loves me. But I don’t think God looks at me like Jesus does.”

That’s a direct quote I heard from a woman who was attending a Tuesday morning ladies’ Bible study that I was leading. She was faithful to any study as long as Jesus was the focus; she wouldn’t sign up if our studies were from the Old Testament.

I’m not sure how I responded to her statement. That was fifteen years ago, and I would bet that my twenty-something self wasn’t as confident as my forty-plus self now. But if she’s out there reading this, I hope she can hear me clearly today: the Jesus who loves you is the God who also loves you.

It might seem that the God of the Old Testament is different from Jesus, who is fully man and fully God, but there is only one God, and He exists in three Persons. Jesus is as fully God as the Father is God and the Spirit is God. Each Person is full of the glory of the Godhead, and each Person is full of the mercies and compassions of the Godhead. The holy and eternal Trinity has existed before time and will continue to exist forevermore.

In this passage from Exodus, Moses had come up Mount Sinai with cut stones ready to receive the law from the Lord. Moses asked to see God’s glory, so God gave him a glimpse. The Lord came down in a cloud with all His glory and proclaimed that He is a compassionate, gracious God who is slow to anger and full of faithful love and truth (v. 6). The God who handed down the law and the blessings and punishments that go with it is the same God who has compassion on us today.

What are some of the characteristics of God, as described of Jesus?

DAY 2

READ:

Mark 8:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 8:1-3

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #94: SOCIAL CONCERN

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. (continued)

If you're a parent, the situation in Mark 8:1 might ring familiar where Jesus with the crowds had nothing to eat.

I'm a mother of two, and though that's not like the large crowds Jesus was with, I've certainly been in situations where it's dinner time, everyone is hungry, and I have nothing ready. Many times, after being out for the afternoon, we'd arrive home and realize there was nothing "fast" for dinner: no bread for sandwiches, no noodles for pasta, and no other ideas. Cereal became an exciting choice for our family in just such an occasion.

Hungry kids become grumpy (or crazy) kids in a hurry. The same is true for adults; we are just as guilty of being "hangry" as children. So if we step into the crowd around Jesus for just a moment, we can imagine the impatience, the growling stomachs, and the wondering if this miracle-worker would really do a miracle for them. Perhaps the kids were getting restless and the crowd was unsettled.

In the midst of it all, Jesus had compassion. Might we take a page from this example He set?

We could each take just a moment to choose compassion in the face of waiting, in the face of hunger, and in the face of frustration. It might mean we hand over our granola bar or go buy the hospital waiting room a twelve-pack of water. We may need to rock a fussy baby or cook a meal for the family who can't seem to catch a break. Each act of compassion softens hearts and causes an impulsive smile.

How can you live out compassion, knowing God gives abundantly?

DAY 3

READ:

Mark 8:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 8:4-7

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #94: SOCIAL CONCERN

(continued)

We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Years ago, I heard a Bible teacher explain that she loves to read direct quotes from the Bible using different attitudes, moods, and facial expressions. I started doing that on my own, and I realize that a situation really comes alive in different ways when I do.

So in today's passage, I considered different ways to read the disciples' question to Jesus about where and how they were to find any bread to feed the people (Mark 8:4). The first time I read it, I pretended to have a chip on my shoulder. I felt annoyed by the preposterous notion that I, a disciple of Christ, should be shouldering the responsibility of feeding a crowd. Not in the job description, Jesus.

Next I read the same question with wide eyes and an incredulous voice. I felt the tension of the disciple who would really like to help but realized there simply was no answer to the problem. I felt the stress and the pressure of trying to please Jesus but thinking it was impossible.

The last time, I read it dejectedly: hopeless and defeated, I spoke the words slowly with my eyes low. I felt like I'd failed, but I didn't even know what I did wrong.

Though we will never know for sure how they actually said it, we can understand that it may not be the way we thought or the way we would have asked it.

But the focus really is about Jesus and His response. When He asked, "How many loaves do you have?" (v. 5), everyone knew He was about to do something. He was about to perform a miracle. He was about to act on His compassion for the people. He was going to do the impossible.

As we get ourselves involved in a particular social concern in the world, how do we show that our trust is in Jesus, not in our own efforts?

DAY 4

READ:

Mark 8:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 8:8-10

NOTES

There was an ad campaign from years ago in which the marketing team from a specific candy bar assured us that this particular product really satisfies. I'm not sure if trademark issues allow me to write the name of the product here, but if you were watching commercials in the 1980s, you remember it.

My dad loved that candy bar. He would probably tell you that it was true. It really satisfied him when he wanted something sweet. I, on the other hand, was not a fan. That candy bar wouldn't have satisfied me unless I was about to pass out from a lack of calories. Our tastes were different, so our opinion about the product varied wildly.

But the satisfaction of God is different; it's not dependent upon your taste or your opinion. God satisfies, period. He satisfies the parched wasteland (Job 38:27), He satisfied David (Psalm 63:5), and He satisfies the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16). He promises always to lead us, satisfy us in a parched land, and strengthen our bones (Isaiah 58:11); He satisfies the thirsty and feeds the weak (Jeremiah 31:25).

God satisfies us with good things (Psalm 103) if we are willing to accept them. The food Jesus offered was common and unadorned, but it satisfied those who were willing to be seated and accept it. His satisfaction is thorough and free, but only if we're willing to take it. He satisfies our minds, our hearts, our bodies, and our souls.

What about God or His provision satisfies you?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Do you think that the infinite God cannot fill and satisfy your heart?"¹

—François de Fénelon
(1651–1715)

DAY 5

READ:

Mark 8:1-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Mark 8:11-21

NOTES

When you study a passage of Scripture, be sure to read a little before and a little after in order to catch the context and setting. In this week's study, Mark 8:1-10 is the focal passage, and it covers the feeding of the 4,000.

But if you read the next few verses, you'll see that "happily ever after" is not how this story ends. Jesus and His disciples head back to the Sea of Galilee and immediately encounter Pharisees (again) who want to argue (again). Ironically, they were wanting "a sign from heaven" (Mark 8:11), which is hilarious to consider when He'd just split up seven loaves for 4,000 people and satisfied every one of them.

Jesus and the disciples left and got into a boat, only to realize they had forgotten to take bread and "had only one loaf with them in the boat" (v. 14). Jesus used the topic of bread to remind them that the "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (v. 15) was real. He then pointed out their own short-term memory and their hard hearts: He'd fed 5,000 and then 4,000 with meager supplies, and yet, they were worried again about having enough bread.

This passage ends with a poignant question. Jesus asks in verse 21 if the disciples still didn't "understand." Obviously, the answer was "no." May we not find ourselves in the same situation. Let's pray that as the Lord opens our eyes and hearts, we don't forget how He's proven Himself faithful.

What memories of God's faithfulness do you need to recall today?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"If the vision of Christ be before his eyes, and the love of Christ be in his heart, the man of wealth will give his large offering, the man of learning his dear-bought knowledge, the man of business his hard-earned leisure, for the glory of God."²

—John Ellerton (1826–1893)

POINT 1: The Lord extends compassion to those in need (Mark 8:1-3).

Jesus saw the _____ needs of the crowd and had _____ on them.



How do we grow in compassion for others?

Jesus called His disciples to faithful _____ when reflecting on the _____ of others.



What should faithful action look like in the church?

POINT 2: The Lord calls His followers to serve those in need (Mark 8:4-7).

Though the disciples _____, Jesus took the little they had and used it to _____ others.

KEY DOCTRINE #94: SOCIAL CONCERN

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human _____. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the _____ grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose _____, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government,

and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:12).

? How can you act on one of these social concerns?

POINT 3: The Lord satisfies completely those in need (Mark 8:8-10).

Jesus _____ all our needs, and He calls us to share in His _____ with others.

? From Day 2: How can you live out compassion, knowing God gives abundantly?

Jesus performed a miracle for the _____, because His _____ extends to all.

? Who might seem foreign to us, but we still need to love and share Jesus with?

MY RESPONSE

Because God has met our greatest need in salvation through Christ, we seek to meet the needs of others—physical, emotional, and spiritual—through Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How does Jesus’s compassion for all people encourage and comfort you?
- **HEART:** Where can you confess that you’ve had a hard time having compassion for others?
- **HANDS:** What need can you meet in Jesus’s name in someone’s life this week?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Let us come to Holy Communion in charity with each other and with all; determined henceforth to feel for each other, and with each other . . . so much so that God shall give us that great grace; . . . to give and forgive, even as God gives and forgives, for ever, that so we may be indeed the children of our Father in heaven, whose name is Love.”³

—Charles Kingsley (1819–1875)

JESUS OVER ALL

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus's divinity is revealed in His works, His claims, and in His very nature.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

John 10; Hebrews 1

+ **SETTING:**

John 10 may not be chronological with this unit, but it is certainly thematic. Not surprisingly, Jesus is in the midst of a tense debate with Jewish authorities over His healing of a blind man (John 9). The crowd had confirmed that this man was born blind, and Jesus had revealed that those who didn't believe His miracles were spiritually blind (vv. 39-41). He went on to point out a distinct divide between those standing around Him: those who followed Him and those who didn't. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but not all Jews were His sheep.

DAY 1

READ:

John 10:22-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 10:25-27

NOTES

It always comes back to sheep in the Bible, doesn't it? Isaac had so many sheep that the Philistines were jealous (Genesis 26:14). When Jacob met Rachel, she was a shepherdess tending to her sheep, and he mustered enough strength to move the stone off of the well to access water for them (29:9-10). Jacob's sons were shepherds of sheep (37:2), and in that setting the brothers started to hate Joseph. Moses tended sheep, and a sheep was to be offered for an acceptable sacrifice so that death would pass over the houses of the Israelites who had been enslaved in Egypt (Exodus 12:5). David was a shepherd, and Psalm 23 is one of his most beloved and cherished songs.

So we shouldn't be surprised at all that God carries this theme throughout the New Testament. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us—His sheep. All the stereotypes of sheep are there: smelly, easily frightened, able to get lost, followers of herd mentality. That's sheep—that's us!

The parallels between sheep and Jesus's followers can't be missed: We must follow the Shepherd if we have any chance at all in this world. Accepting that you're a sheep to a Good Shepherd takes humility and an honest assessment of ourselves. In fact, most of our testimonies point to our wayward-sheep past compared to our Psalm 23 present. The Jewish leaders of Jesus's day couldn't stoop that low to recognize themselves as sheep. Consequently, they weren't really His sheep.

How can someone humble himself/herself to become a sheep of Jesus, a true believer?

DAY 2

READ:

John 10:22-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 10:25-30

NOTES

As a mother of young teens, I often find myself lamenting aloud to them, sarcastically, “If only someone had warned you this might happen.” For example, there is a standing rule in our household that says this: take a water bottle every time we leave the house in a car. If we get somewhere and my kids are thirsty with nothing to drink, I’ll drop my famous line, “If only someone had told you a hundred times to take water.” Or when my son realizes on a Thursday afternoon that he needs to find three sources and write 800 words for his paper due tomorrow. Again, me: “If only someone had been asking you every day if you’d been working on this project you knew about two weeks ago.”

I’m a prideful, nagging mother, but deep down I just need my kids to hear me clearly: I try to speak truth into their lives. I’m a decently smart woman who will help them through life, but they don’t always trust me or want to obey what I say.

Though Jesus doesn’t do it with sarcasm like I do, this seems to be the gist behind Jesus’s words in John 10:25 when He tells them that He did tell them but they didn’t believe Him. They had heard Him. Their ears worked perfectly fine. They had seen Him do miracles like driving out demons, raising the dead, and healing the sick. Yet they still didn’t believe. Perhaps we adults need this reminder today: Jesus speaks truth. He knows what He’s talking about. He’ll get us through life. We’ve seen it, and we’ve read it in His Word. Now, we just need to trust it.

What might Jesus be telling you that you are having a hard time truly hearing and believing?

DAY 3

READ:

John 10:22-39

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 10:30-39

NOTES

I started taking piano lessons at age 7. I had five different piano teachers throughout my childhood and teenage years, all wonderful musicians and wonderful people. They guided me musically and encouraged me to pursue that passion into a music degree in college.

I didn't realize that piano lessons continued in college until I went to register for classes and realized I had to take a weekly piano lesson that counted for two hours of credit. But I walked into that first lesson with the teacher assigned to me, Dr. Robert Marler. I didn't know him, but he greeted me with a warm smile and invited me to sit down at the piano in his office.

I had some books with me, and he asked what I'd been practicing. I showed him a couple of the pieces, and he mentioned that he particularly loved one of them. "May I?" he asked, and I slid down the bench so he could have access to the keys. He began to play the piece from heart, with expertise and precision I'd never heard. My jaw dropped. I knew immediately that I would hang on every word he said.

I can only imagine that Jesus was this masterful at everything He did. I'm sure that His prayers were works of art. His compassion was palpable. His honesty was evident to every person who looked His way. He was doing the Father's works (v. 37), revealing that He truly is the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Only a fool or a hardened heart would not believe in His identity based on His works.

What works of Christ can you praise Him for today?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 82

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 82:1-4

NOTES

This passage might seem to be out of place in the midst of all our lessons in the Gospels. But Jesus quotes one phrase from it in this week's passage, so let's take some time today to consider it in its entirety.

The Christian Standard Bible subtitles this "A Plea for Righteous Judgment." The English Standard Version dubs it "Rescue the Weak and Needy." Asaph's song is wonderfully complex and pointedly authoritative, and we might wonder that he didn't live in our 2023 political climate.

The setting is revealed in the opening lines: God stands among other gods, pronouncing judgment on them. So we see that God Almighty has authority over these lesser gods, and He states it plainly in verse 2: they have judged unjustly and shown partiality to the wicked. His commands to earthly rulers have never changed: defend the poor, aid the fatherless, rescue the widow. He commanded these in Deuteronomy (14:29; 24:17-19; 26:12) but had to continually command them through the prophets (Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3).

God made humanity in His image and gave us authority over the earth. And while there have always been human rulers who take advantage of the poor and needy, we are called to be like God in our authority. Whether you have authority over a kingdom or a household, a company or a classroom, your challenge is the same as mine: defend the ones who have no defender. Jesus, the Word who became flesh (see John 1:14), asks us to love the lowliest. How do we stand up to that test?

How do you help defend the poor, the fatherless, and the widow?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"'Up and be doing,' is the word that comes from God for each of us. Leave some 'good work' behind you that shall not be wholly lost when you have passed away. Do something worth living for, worth dying for."¹

—Arthur P. Stanley (1815–1881)

DAY 5

READ:

Hebrews 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 1:1-3

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #48: JESUS'S DEITY

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Micah 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

When life gets full and busy, it's easy to forget that we live in a spiritual realm and in a spiritual kingdom with Christ as supreme.

I'm a homeschool mom right now, and it's easy to get caught up in all the homeschool mom things: Which math literature is best? What teaching style will help my child? How can I incorporate non-scholastic activities into our homeschool plan? Are my kids getting enough socialization? Too much socialization?

Sometimes I have too many things on my mind, but Hebrews 1 brings my attention back to Jesus.

There are seasons of life when our focus turns to other things: In December, we make sure we find the joy of family and friends. In the summer, we do our best to spend time eating outside and getting wet to escape the heat. In the fall, our attention goes to hiking and falling leaves and pumpkin spice lattes.

But Hebrews 1 would say, "Don't let your attention wander from the Son."

Jesus deserves our worship, our attention, and our praise. He is the heir of all things, He shines the glory of God, He is the very nature of God, and He maintains the universe. And while we live in this world and must function in it, we should never lose sight of the One who created all there is, keeps it all moving with His powerful word, walked into sacrificial death for His ungrateful creation, and sat down on the throne next to the Father.

What can you do to turn your eyes to Jesus every single day?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The Son's works reveal His deity
(John 10:22-28).

The Jews _____ Jesus about His identity, but they were not seeking understanding but rather a way to convict Him of _____.

? How can we be prepared for situations in which others are hostile toward us because of our faith?

True believers obey and _____ Jesus as Lord, and with that comes _____ life and security.

? From Day 1: **How can someone humble himself/herself to become a sheep of Jesus, a true believer?**

POINT 2: The Son's claims reveal His deity
(John 10:30-39).

KEY DOCTRINE #48: JESUS'S DEITY

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the _____ nature and the _____ nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Micah 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

Jesus knew His _____ as God and _____ such, even at a risk to His life.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable."²

—John Duncan (1786–1879)



When trials come because of your conviction as a child of God, how do you stand firm?

POINT 3: The Son’s radiance reveals His deity (Hebrews 1:1-3).

God the Father has given all _____ to God the _____ .



How should the truth of these verses shape your personal worship time?

_____, being in very nature God, controls all things, and only through Him and His saving work can we be _____ from sin.



Why do you think some people don’t believe that Jesus is God?

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus is God, we live in full submission to Him, not only turning to Him in faith as our Savior but following Him in obedience as our Lord.

- **HEAD:** What attributes of Jesus’s deity comfort you the most, and why?
- **HEART:** How can you praise Jesus for His divine work in your life?
- **HANDS:** How is your life pointing others to Jesus, and thus to the Father?



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

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Looking at Christ is the way we see most fully the glory of God. . . . No human son is the exact representation of his father. There is a close relation, but not an exact representation. Christ, however, is an ‘exact representation.’ He and God are of the same divine essence.”³

–R. Albert Mohler Jr.

UNIT 23

+

THE KINGDOM

OF GOD IS

IN YOUR MIDST

“Let Your Light Shine”

by Jonathan Hayashi

I was born into a broken home. By age fifteen, I became very embittered and depressed. Somewhere deep inside, a part of me longed to know that there was more to life than the hard, angry world that surrounded me.

At age sixteen, I received Christ and began a lifelong process of learning how Jesus is the source of life and the answer to my quest for purpose. The change in my life was so radical, things haven't been the same since. From a point of despair, I was drawn to the rich promise Jesus makes of a life of fulfillment and complete satisfaction in Him.

Even as a teenage convert, I knew the mission. I did not want to waste even a day, hour, minute, or second of my life; instead, I wanted to minister to those who had not heard the good news. Why? Once Christ came into my life, all my desires and dreams changed. Jesus became not only Savior over my life but Lord over every part of my life. That is the very

reason why I am so passionate about the local church, for it is the heartbeat of God.

DISTRACTED CHURCHES DRIFT FROM THE MISSION

However, as I invited people at church to have a gospel conversation with others, it seemed like all I heard were crickets chirping. Soon, I was frustrated with the system that seemed disconnected from the mission of Jesus. I felt like I was rejected by many of my old friends like Jesus had been rejected as a prophet in His own hometown. What I struggled with most was what I saw within the church concerning the kingdom opportunity outside. It seemed like Christians often became customers of religious goods and services distributed in their church rather than co-laborers in the ministry and message of Jesus.

If Jesus is king, then He has a kingdom. His kingdom has citizens. The question is “Are you a faithful citizen of God's kingdom or are you in defiance of your

As Christians, we all are called to the sweet stewardship of His kingdom in whatever God has entrusted unto us.

King?” As Robby Gallaty said, “The gospel has come to us because it is heading to someone else. We are just another link in the chain, and each of us is either fumbling the handoff or passing the baton.”¹

DILIGENT STEWARDS SERVE FAITHFULLY

“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21). I long to hear those words from the King at His return! Those words consume me and drive me in everything I do here on earth. These words are similar to Jesus’s message to His disciple in Matthew 24:45-51, asking them, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant?”

Note that Jesus reminded the disciples that God’s kingdom is present today and will be established in full when He returns. As Christians, we all are called to the sweet stewardship of His kingdom in whatever God has entrusted unto us. Unfortunately, not every servant proves to be wise and faithful. We can easily become a bunch of lackadaisical servants just “enjoying fellowship” until the Master returns.

Wherever and whatever the Lord has given you, may you be faithful and wise servants as kingdom workers! Whatever age or stage of life, you are on a mission. Jesus asks us today as servant leaders, “Are you faithfully stewarding what I have asked you to do here on earth?”

DEVOTED DISCIPLES EXPAND THE KINGDOM

There are a lot of people who do not know how much God loves them, and a lot of them live right around us. They have no idea whatsoever that God sent His Son. And thus, His Son has sent you to make the gospel known!

Let us spend our lives making His love known amongst those around us. You may be thinking, “That is for the mature, not for me,” but this is a basic element of discipleship for Christians. This is Luke 9:23. You and I don’t have to start a large ministry, a new organization, a new initiative, or an incredible book. You don’t even have to start a blog. You have the authority of the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed in you to share about Jesus with whomever you meet, wherever you are.

Kingdom people have a clear vision of the future; they point toward eternity, not just toward tomorrow.

Kingdom people have a clear vision of the future; they point toward eternity, not just toward tomorrow. Kingdom people are single-minded people. Kingdom living is living Christ's way. Are you living the kingdom way today? Do you and I reflect on God as the sovereign, supreme King of the universe?

As kingdom workers, to live in obedience is the key to being a faithful and wise servant. As Jason Allen said: "I believe faithful leadership is remarkably simple. Not easy but simple."² The key to leadership is stewardship of faithfulness. Despite all the hardships, we must endure faithfully to the end.

Let us be careful about placing confidence in past successes or religious monuments rather than in continued faithfulness to the Lord. The world will laugh at the church, yet the kingdom is well worth the investment, even if it costs our lives. By God's gracious guidance, we find the kingdom, and we realize that it is what we have been searching for all along. Because of God's power and the work of His Spirit, each of us serving faithfully can make a significant impact on God's kingdom.

Are you living as faithful and wise servants of Christ? Are you working diligently and faithfully as kingdom workers to expand His kingdom? Are you prepared for Christ's return at this moment? That answer is ultimately only between you and God. But ask that very fundamental question right now: "Am I ready?" We as faithful stewards must always be alert and ready for the return of Christ.



By God's gracious guidance, we find the kingdom, and we realize that it is what we have been searching for all along.

DISCIPLES ARE BLESSED

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus has called His disciples to live in such a way as to reveal God's glory to the world.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 5

+ **SETTING:**

As people waited for the Messiah, they expected Him to bring the promised blessings of the covenant—wholeness, a restored land, health, and prosperity. When Jesus came and brought healing over sickness and cared for people's needs, many associated His actions with being blessed. What Jesus brings in His blessing, however, is greater than physical wellness and material prosperity. When Jesus blesses His followers, He brings the saving rule and reign of the kingdom of God to them while they wait for the consummation and restoration of all things.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 5:3-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:3-9

NOTES

In 2017, the Irish band U2 released their album *Songs of Experience*. Between the songs “Get Out of Your Own Way” and “American Soul,” the band included lyrics that were a play on words of the Beatitudes in the Bible, a type of anti-Beatitudes, calling out the values of arrogance, pride, narcissism, celebrity culture, and the bullying power of wealth in our modern culture.

In the midst of a world where people are made out to be insignificant, the pain produced from greed, the bullying culture, and the awkwardness of truth in a world of lies and spin, you can’t help but be reminded of Jesus’s words: the kingdom of God belongs to those who are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, merciful, peacemakers, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and more. This is so antithetical to our current culture’s understanding. Yet it speaks truth and life.

The blessed life is not found in the accumulation of wealth or self-importance but in being a child of God who lives with the values and norms of another kingdom—God’s upside-down kingdom. In this kingdom, the first will be last and the last will be first; the proud will be put down and the humble will be lifted up.

God’s kingdom’s values run countercultural to those of this world. By giving up your life, you save it. By sacrificing it all, you gain all. When you lose, you actually win. Because in this kingdom, Christ is our example, and His character is exemplified in these Beatitudes.

What values seen in the Beatitudes do you need to display more of in your life?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 5:3-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:10-12

NOTES

Imagine test-driving a new vehicle and the salesperson is explaining all of the benefits of this vehicle that you are looking to purchase, but then he begins to tell you, “After a few hours in the driver’s seat, you will find your back aches, and you’ll need therapy. The repairs on this vehicle could pay for your child’s education. But you’re going to find that this car is a real blessing!”

Who in their right mind would ever purchase this kind of vehicle? It would be ridiculous to consider this type of purchase. For some people, when they read in the Beatitudes that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed for they will receive the kingdom of heaven, they wonder why anyone would sign up for the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus, however, is not selling us a defective life; rather, He is proclaiming the comforts of the kingdom for repentant sufferers. Just as the prophets faced persecution for proclaiming the message of the kingdom, Jesus declares that His followers will receive the kingdom as the blessing for following in His ways and being suffering servants who proclaim the good news to the world. For those who have yet to experience persecution, Jesus gives assurance that though suffering will come, it will not last forever. Persecution is not a sign of the absence of God’s love; rather, the kingdom is promised for those who are despised and rejected for Christ’s sake.

How does the promise of the kingdom give you comfort in the face of trials?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 5:3-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:13

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #89: EDIFICATION

Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Ephesians 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.

Throughout human history, humans have found various methods to preserve food. One critical method that has been common has been the use of salt. When applied to meat, cheese, or produce, salt draws out the water, resulting in a process of dehydration. With the absence of water, harmful bacteria lack the necessary components that are required for them to grow and spread, specifically those bacteria which can cause food poisoning. Whether in meat or butter, salt preserves foods so that they can last much longer periods of time and be consumed at a later date.

In the same way, Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth. As we live our Christian lives and follow the values of the kingdom described in Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus says that we function as those who preserve this world. As Christians, our words and witness function to keep evil from spreading. Our good deeds, our confession of sin, our mourning over evil, our hunger and thirst for righteousness, our pursuit of peace, our love for purity, our compassion, and our willingness to suffer for what is right display heavenly values. Though some people will oppose the way of the kingdom, Jesus promises believers that our lives will have an impact in this world and point people to the realities of a more blessed way to live.

In what ways has your life made a difference to the people around you?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 5:3-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:14

NOTES

Along the coastal regions of the United States and Canada are several prominent lighthouses. Situated in significant locations, these tall, narrow buildings have been erected close to the shore and are elevated with a beacon of light rotating from the top. In the dark nights or in stormy weather, the lights pierce through the dark to give ships guidance and warning—guiding them away from danger, and warning them not to get too close to the rocky shores. In years gone by, lighthouse keepers were tasked with maintaining the light to ensure the safe passage of ships out on the ocean.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to be beacons that shine. When Christians live as repentant sinners, seeking to walk in the new ways of the kingdom of heaven, others notice the light from our lives. Like a light keeper, the responsibility of every believer is to ensure that the light of Christ continues to shine clearly from their lives to the world around them. As Christians live in light of the kingdom, the light of our good deeds warns people of sin's danger and guides people toward the safe passage of the good way in Jesus Christ. While these good deeds are not sufficient to save anyone, they are able to point people in a different direction and give them a vision of something different—a better path that can navigate through the darkness and storms of life to the safe harbor of Christ's presence.

How can you shine for Jesus Christ today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Only where hands are not too good for deeds of love and mercy in everyday helpfulness can the mouth joyfully and convincingly proclaim the message of God's love and mercy."¹

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906–1945)

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 5:3-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 5:16

NOTES

In days gone by, Christians were known for their active social work in many areas of life. Prison reform, medical care, the development of trade unions, the control of alcoholic sales, the abolition of slavery, the banishment of child labor, the establishing of orphanages, changes to the criminal code, the development of urban sanitation systems—in all of these areas of life, Christians were the driving force behind societal change. People who believed that the good news of Jesus Christ should have a social impact worked tirelessly to bring about practical social changes. Men like George Whitefield, John Wesley, Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, and women like Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward, and others sought to make a practical difference alongside of their gospel proclamation.

God has given every Christian good works to do (Ephesians 2:10). While not everyone will contribute to a massive societal shift, God has prepared deeds for us to do that add credence to our gospel proclamation. When more Christians have concern for the blessed life of the kingdom of heaven and less concern for personal prestige and fame, they can shape lives and generations with profound good.

While we all would love to do something great for God, He has prepared tasks for us that may seem inconsequential and insignificant in comparison to the great social goods already mentioned. However, a cup of cold water given in Jesus's name (Matthew 10:42) is not insignificant, for God knows how the simple act of obedience of His disciples can open doors to greater works and conversations about the glory of Jesus Christ.

What are some simple ways you can do good to glorify the Lord each day?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Salt of the earth! ye virtuous few, Who season human kind; Light of the world! whose cheering ray Illumes the realms of mind."²

—Anna Laetitia Barbauld
(1743–1825)


POINT 1: Jesus's disciples are blessed (Matthew 5:3-12).

The first and last Beatitudes point out the nature of _____ before God and the blessing of _____ for doing right.

 **Why is it difficult to see suffering as a blessing?**


KEY DOCTRINE #89: EDIFICATION

Edification refers to the progressive growth and _____ of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of _____ (Ephesians 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the _____ of Christ, equipping people to live on _____ for the kingdom of God.

 From Day 1: **What values seen in the Beatitudes do you need to display more of in your life?**

POINT 2: Jesus's disciples are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13).

The salt of believers _____ out over this world, preserving it and offering it as an _____ offering to God.

 **In what ways can we be salt in the world?**

To cease to be salt is to become _____
disciples whose role of displaying the values of the
kingdom is worthless, resulting in _____ .

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples are the light of this world (Matthew 5:14-16).

Being the light of the world, _____ cannot
hide; they must _____ .

? In what ways do people hide the light of Christ?

The main reason we are to shine in good works
is not for our own _____ but for the
_____ of God.

? How do we make sure we are shining our light for God's glory and not our own?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been blessed by God with salvation through Jesus, we live as salt and light in the world so that others might come to trust in Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How does knowing Jesus by faith change your life so that you can live for God's glory?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you can express your joy for the blessings Christ has purchased for you?
- **HANDS:** Whom can you pray for and talk to this week about the joy of Christ's forgiveness?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first."³

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(1899–1981)

DISCIPLES LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

The actions of those who follow Jesus are done not for their own notoriety but rather so that they might grow in their faith and please the Father.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 6

+ **SETTING:**

As Jesus taught His disciples about the nature of the kingdom, He was pointing them to the reality that His kingdom was a different kind of kingdom than what they were expecting. While many wanted the physical kingdom, the overthrow of Rome and the liberation of the promised land, Jesus's message in the Sermon on the Mount offered a better kingdom—a heavenly kingdom that had come to change the way followers of Jesus live, reorienting their practices and purposes for doing their righteous deeds.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 6:1-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 6:1-4

NOTES

Oswald J. Smith, founding pastor of The People's Church in Toronto, Canada, recounted a moment when he learned how to give sacrificially. At the church's annual missions convention, the ushers went up and down the aisles, handing out envelopes to each congregant present. Suddenly, one of the ushers approached him and gave him an envelope. Written on it were the words, "In dependence upon God I will endeavor to give toward the missionary work of the church \$_____ during the coming year."

Smith was unfamiliar with the practice, and with a salary of \$25 per week during World War I, he had never given more than \$5 to missions at any one time previously. With nothing in the bank and without a cent to spare, he began to pray, asking the Lord to show him what to give for the coming year. He sensed the Lord was asking him to give \$50, a total of two weeks' salary to missions. Putting the amount on the front and signing his name on the envelope, he began to trust the Lord for an extra \$4 a month. And to his amazement, the Lord provided each and every month.

When the next year arrived, Smith had received more from the Lord, and he raised his gift to \$100 at the next missions conference. As a result of his desire to glorify the Lord, he was able to lead The People's Church to become a hub of generosity for missions.¹

This is the kind of giving that pleases the Lord—one that prays, seeks God, and trusts Him for more.

How can you grow in trusting the Lord to be generous to His work?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 6:1-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 6:9-10

NOTES

In an *Industry Week* article, CEO Art Byrne shared how he was aiming to cut machine set-up time in his plant from 14 to 10 minutes. When talking to engineers and plant supervisors, the advice that he received was that it could not be done. But by walking the plant floor, seeing the methods of production, and talking with those who were on the front line of the manufacturing, Byrne was able to get his team to reduce the set-up time of one of the units to six minutes. Instead of managing from the conference room or the board table, an intimate knowledge of the plant floor and what was going on enabled Byrne to get better results.²

When Christ Jesus came to earth, He did not come to walk the plant floor to see how we might be more productive. He came to rescue us from sin and death. He humbled Himself, glorified His Father, doing only what His Father said and told Him to do (John 5:19; 12:49), and He came and walked among us to fulfill all righteousness. Where we had failed and could not save ourselves, Christ came by leaving His throne of glory and doing all the righteous deeds that the Father has asked of us. And by going to the cross, Christ was able to take the punishment of sin for us so that we might be freed from our chains of sin and death.

By His humility, by His willingness to glorify His Father, Jesus came to us, not to get better results but to bring salvation.

In what ways does Christ's saving work enable you to serve others for the glory of God?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 6:5-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 6:9-15

NOTES

When the Lord's Prayer was banished from schools, many people were appalled that this practice had ceased. But for many school-aged children, the practice made very little difference in their lives. The daily repetition of a formulaic prayer could be recited without thought to what was being said and could be rushed through hurriedly in a mindless fashion.

While it is right to lament the public's loss of knowledge of the Lord's Prayer, it is also ironic that the context of this prayer is Jesus's condemnation of public prayer with meaningless repetition and heaping up thoughtless words. The Lord's Prayer is a beautiful expression of trust in God, but for many it has become nothing more than a public expression of piety that was repeated like a formula, with several phrases that can be said with an empty heart in a futile way.

The purpose of the prayer, Jesus says, is to instruct us on the method of secret prayer. We are to pray "like this." By using each phrase from His model prayer, Jesus gives us a tool to focus our thoughts and direct the form of our prayers. Beginning with God's glory and moving to our good, Jesus teaches us to pray not like the pagans do but with thoughtful words and God-glorifying motives.

How might you use the Lord's prayer to shape your personal prayer time?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 6:1-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 6:5-6

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Secrecy at its best teaches love and humility before God and others. And that love and humility encourages us to see our associates in the best possible light, even to the point of our hoping they will do better and appear better than us. It actually becomes possible for us to ‘do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than ourselves,’ as Philippians 2:3 advises.”³

—Dallas Willard (1935–2013)

In today’s world of social media self-promotion, branding yourself has become the new fad. Whereas in days gone by people had to seek you out, social media offers you the ability to put yourself forward—your book, your speaking engagement, your political agenda, your product. While we live in a world of marketing and the competition for recognition is important, the danger to the spiritual life is very real. Does it really matter if I post a picture of my Bible with my coffee? Why don’t I share a story about spending time with my kids and how they latched onto some spiritual truth with a cute saying?

While social media has extended our relationships and brought people closer to us, it has also brought the added temptation to put our righteousness online to be seen by others. A simple photo might look harmless, but suddenly our “righteousness” is on display for all to see.

By practicing our righteousness in private, outside of the watching eye of anyone else, we practice the humble, quiet reverence that does not seek our own promotion. Instead, the noise of our souls is quieted, the temptation to exalt ourselves is removed, and the aim of our lives is redirected: to enjoy God and glorify Him forever. In that place we find our happiness, the blessed life, and the joy of the Lord, who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

What are some ways you are tempted to do your righteous acts to be seen by others?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 6:1-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 6:17-18

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #86: DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

For many people, the practice of fasting is connected with certain seasons, such as Lent (the forty days preceding Easter), or with other religious groups (such as Muslims during Ramadan). But for many Christians, the practice of fasting is not usually discussed or practiced in their churches today and can cause them to feel uncomfortable.

To go without food in a world where we are told that we should always have what we want, when we want it, and how we want it is to be countercultural. Because of the false idea that having much is to be blessed, many people do not see the spiritual benefit of going without. To fast seems more like something a medieval monk would practice, not a busy twenty-first-century Christian.

Jesus, however, says that this is a practice we should embrace: "When you fast" assumes that we are fasting. To fast is to feel the physical hunger that reminds us of a spiritual hunger for God, His Word, and His will. It is to confess that we need God more than we need anything else.

When we fast, we are seeking to draw near to God through humble contrition (James 4:8,10). And as we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. As the London pastor Charles Spurgeon would confess about his church's practice to corporately fast: "Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."⁴

How might you practice a fast in the coming month?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"If only our hidden life with God is in order and there is within us a secret place of prayer and spiritual discipline and struggle! By this secret stillness and by this alone will God calculate the value and consequence of our life when the hour of reckoning and recompense comes."⁵

—Helmut Thielicke (1908–1986)

POINT 1: Jesus's disciples give secretly
(Matthew 6:1-4).

KEY DOCTRINE #86: DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. _____ in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal _____ from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

? How does Christ's example enable us to live for God's glory alone?

Jesus told His _____ not to be hypocrites in giving merely for others to _____.

? From Day 1: How can you grow in trusting the Lord to be generous to His work?

POINT 2: Jesus's disciples pray sincerely
(Matthew 6:5-15).

Jesus tells His disciples to pray _____ as the Father already knows their _____.

Jesus gives His disciples a _____ of _____ to focus their prayers.

? What changes might we experience by beginning with a focus on God in our prayers?

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples fast humbly
(Matthew 6:16-18).

Jesus tells His disciples not to _____ in obvious ways to seek their own _____ .

? **What are some ways people seek to draw attention to their righteous deeds today?**

Jesus continues telling His disciples that fasting, like other spiritual _____ , should be done humbly and not _____ .

? **How might you grow in the discipline of fasting?**

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to recognize the world's rewards as fleeting and unfulfilling, we seek to live each day in view of eternity, joyfully sacrificing what is temporary for that which is eternal.

- **HEAD:** How does Christ's sacrificial death free you from living for yourself?
- **HEART:** How can you rejoice in the freedom that Christ brings to your soul?
- **HANDS:** What sacrifice can you make for someone else this week to point them to Christ for God's glory?



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VOICES from THE CHURCH

"O, how easy it is to do religious things if other people are watching! Preaching, praying, attending church, reading the Bible, acts of kindness and charity—they all take on a certain pleasantness of the ego if we know that others will find out about them and think well of us. It is a deadly addiction for esteem that we have."⁶

—John Piper

DISCIPLES ARE FOUND

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

In telling the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son, Jesus expressed God's heart, one that seeks after lost people.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 15

+ **SETTING:**

The kingdom of heaven that Jesus brings reorients all of humanity's priorities, understandings, and thoughts. By realigning human hearts to God's ways about what it means to be blessed and how to practice righteous deeds, Jesus turns His disciples' attention to why He has come to bring about this radical reorientation: namely, to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10).

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 15:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 15:3-7

NOTES

When people's pets escape from home, people scurry out in their vehicle, driving through the neighborhood in hopes of finding their pet right away. Neighbors are notified, calls are made to pet shelters, and flyers suddenly appear around the neighborhood. The picture of the animal is printed out, the number of the owner is prominently displayed, the pet's name and description are carefully listed so that all those who might see this wandering animal would know that it has a home and is missing.

There is a sense of urgency in locating a missing pet. Time is of the essence. Since the pet could be in danger or continue to wander further away, the urgency feels high.

Jesus said that this is what His mission was: to urgently come to those who are lost. In a world where spiritual leadership often neglects those who stray from the fold, Jesus said that this was the very task that He came to do.

Today, there are people all around us who have spiritual questions. Many have grown up in religious homes and have had experiences of church that left them wanting. Adrift and lost, Jesus invites us to be ministers of reconciliation, taking the good news of the forgiveness of sins through His death to those who desperately need to know that there is great joy in belonging to God.

With whom might you share the good news this coming week?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 15:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 15:8-10

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #65: ELECTION

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

If you have ever misplaced your wallet or purse, you know how diligently you look for it. When personal information, credit and debit cards, and any other personal items might be lost, we retrace our steps. We look diligently in all of the places where we might have left it. We search high and low, often going back two, three, even four times looking to ensure that we did not overlook a single spot. With each passing search, there is a slower, more deliberate effort to make sure that our wallet or purse is found. We recruit others, asking for their help, wanting them to search alongside of us until we locate the missing item. And when it is found, we heave a collective sigh of thankfulness, a shout to the others that they can stop looking, and a sense of relief that the lost item has been found and is now safe and secure.

The sense of diligence in finding sinners is described in Luke 15:8-9. A woman who loses a coin lights a lamp so that she can see in the darkest corners of the house. She sweeps the floor from corner to corner, leaving no spot untouched. And when she finds it, she calls out with great joy that the lost coin has been found. This is what Jesus does in coming to us—He finds us when we are lost and brings us home to God with great joy.

How can you be diligent in seeking after those who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 15:11-24

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 15:11-13

NOTES

There's no place like home. After a long trip, coming home feels wonderful. The smell is familiar. The bed feels just right. The routines return back to normal. But if you return to your childhood home after many years of being away, it doesn't feel like home. The trees have grown. The neighbors have moved. Things feel different. The fond memories of the place where we grew up don't match with the reality of our sight.

Even with our experience of certain holidays, we hope for that nostalgic feeling that we once had. We long for the comfort, the happiness, the sense of belonging we had at one time. And when it doesn't happen like it once did, we feel a disappointment.

In the Bible, the theme of exile—the idea that we are far from home, in a distant land—is a strong one. From the days of Eden to Abraham's descendants going to Egypt to the Jews being exiled to Babylon, the story of the Bible is the story of people being separated from God and living in exile. Even the prodigal son goes to a distant land and ends up exiled when famine strikes.

We are all like the prodigal son. We all long for home. The memory is strong, but yet it remains illusive. But Jesus leaves His "home" and comes to us so that He might bring us home. And at the end of the Bible story, home comes to us. The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, and home never leaves us again (Revelation 21:1). Instead, we are promised that we will be home forever.

What longings do you have for heaven?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 15:11-32

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 15:11-24

NOTES

After reading the first two parables, where the shepherd goes out to find the lost sheep and the woman diligently searches to find the lost coin, you might expect to read that when the prodigal son leaves home, someone will set out to find him and bring him back.

If you have ever had a child go missing in a store or shopping mall, you know the frantic feeling of finding them. Knowing they are helpless, vulnerable, and unable to find their way back, your heart races and you begin to search for them.

We would expect that someone—maybe the older brother—would go looking for his younger sibling after leaving home. But instead, he lets his brother go wandering out from the land of promise to a distant land.

Christians celebrate the gospel, which tells us that Jesus Christ left the land of promise and came in search of us. He went to the distant country. He sought out the ones who squandered all of the Father's good gifts. And He paid our debt that we accrued through sin by His death on the cross so that He might bring us back to God.

This is the good news. Jesus did not wait for us to come to our senses. He comes to us when we are far from the land of promise, living a morally unclean life, and unable to come back home.

How did you feel when you lost something and then found it?

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 15:11-32

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 15:25-32

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"It is in the highest degree unreasonable that we should disdainfully reject those whom the Son of God has so highly esteemed. And even if the weak labour under imperfections which may expose them to contempt, our pride is not on that account to be excused; for we ought to esteem them not for the value of their virtues, but for the sake of Christ."¹

—John Calvin (1509–1564)

When the Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn read the parable of the prodigal son, he was so moved by the story that he began a work of art to celebrate this great parable. In "The Return of the Prodigal Son," Rembrandt portrays the young prodigal kneeling before his father in contrition for his rebellion, bowing and wishing to be accepted as a servant in his father's household. Standing to the right of the prodigal is the older brother, hands crossed in displeasure, objecting to his father's gracious reception of the younger son.

When the Dutch priest Henri Nouwen considered the parable along with Rembrandt's painting, he wrote a small book that reflected what many have thought about this remarkable piece of art:

Rembrandt is as much the elder son of the parable as he is the younger. When, during the last years of his life, he painted both sons in 'Return of the Prodigal Son,' he had lived a life in which neither the lostness of the younger son nor the lostness of the elder son was alien to him. Both needed healing and forgiveness. Both needed to come home. Both needed the embrace of a forgiving father. But from the story itself, as well as from Rembrandt's painting, it is clear that the hardest conversion to go through is the conversion of the one who stayed home.²

The prodigal, in other words, is not just the one who ran away but also the one who was pharisaical in his heart and hated the repentance of his brother. For this reason, it may be that Rembrandt painted himself into his work of art as the older brother.

How do you respond when someone who seems undeserving of salvation comes to faith?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The lost are sought with urgency
(Luke 15:3-7).

Jesus _____ every one of His sheep and will do anything to find one that is _____ .

? What kind of people do some perceive to be beyond redemption in our day?

When the lost are found, God and _____
_____ .

POINT 2: The lost are sought with diligence
(Luke 15:8-10).

**KEY DOCTRINE #65:
ELECTION**

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He _____ , justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's _____ goodness and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

? How does the doctrine of election humble us and keep us from exalting ourselves?

Joy is the expected result over even _____ sinner who _____ .

? How might we rejoice with those who come to faith in Jesus?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God; he, to rescue me from danger, bought me with his precious blood."³

—Robert Robinson (1735–1790)

POINT 3: The lost are sought with compassion (Luke 15:11-24).

The son was _____ at his own doing but was _____ by the father's doing.

? What are some reasons people seek restoration?

The Father runs to us and _____ when we _____ to Him.

? From Day 5: **How do you respond when someone who seems undeserving of salvation comes to faith?**

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been forgiven of our sin through Jesus, we celebrate the Father's goodness in welcoming home any repentant sinner.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can thank God today for how He saved you?
- **HEART:** What do you need to confess and repent of in your life this week?
- **HANDS:** Who has God put in your life who is lost and needs to be found?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch; like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see."⁴

—John Newton (1725–1807)

DISCIPLES LIVE FOR THE KINGDOM

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

In telling the kingdom parables, Jesus taught that His kingdom is unique and of unsurpassed value.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Matthew 13

+ **SETTING:**

Having come to seek and to save the lost, Jesus now tells His followers what a life devoted to Him looks like. Those who have been pursued and rescued by God will now in turn pursue His kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus illustrates this discipleship by telling His listeners several parables about the kingdom of heaven. By telling these stories, Jesus is provoking His listeners to think deeply about the growth, value, and purity of His kingdom.

DAY 1

READ:

Matthew 13:31-33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 13:31-32

NOTES

In a culture that is increasingly secular and easily distracted, Christians are tempted to think that what is needed is to gain people's attention through big programs, big names, big churches, and big activities. Lights, sound, production, and an emphasis on performance and cultural credibility are all tempting in light of the greatness of the kingdom we serve. If God is great, shouldn't we do something great for Him?

An obsession with being attractive by our performance and big productions often reveals that we have misunderstood how the kingdom of God works. In the first of two similar parables, Jesus says that the way the kingdom grows is not with human fertilizer and human ingenuity. Rather, the kingdom starts off incredibly small, like a tiny mustard seed. The beauty of the kingdom of God is that it does not depend upon the greatness of our clever ideas or creativity but upon the power of the message of the Savior who has come to rescue people from sin and death.

You don't have to do something great for God for His kingdom to advance and grow. Our confidence is not in big names, big events, or big programs. Instead, we trust in the power of the One who promised to build His church and overthrow the gates of Hades. The power of the kingdom is in the message of life, forgiveness, joy, and hope of the crucified and resurrected Savior.

How are some tempted to trust in large productions in the way they view discipleship or evangelism?

DAY 2

READ:

Matthew 13:31-33

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 13:33

NOTES

During the recent pandemic, people found themselves at home and in isolation. The result was many people returned to previous homemaking practices, including baking bread. With supply chain issues and yeast in high demand, yeast was in short supply, so many people ventured into the realm of sourdough. By capturing the natural yeasts in the environment within a jar of water and flour, people could make their own bread at home without having store-bought yeast.

When making sourdough bread, a small portion of the starter is used to combine with the other ingredients necessary for making the bread. Even though a small amount of starter seems insignificant to cause the bread to rise, the result is the same as it has been for generations: a large, risen loaf of bread that is tasty and enjoyable.

In the same way that yeast overtakes the entire batch of dough, so it is with the kingdom of God. The Lord's salvation comes to those near and far, in small yet substantial ways that bring about a radical transformation of the heart and soul. Just as Jesus promised, He will build His church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). And just like we wait for the dough to rise before we bake, so we wait for God's kingdom to come in greater degrees of glory.

Where have you seen the growth of the kingdom of God?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 13:44-46

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 13:44

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #68: FAITH

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

If you have ever found yourself shopping in a store and found that there was only one remaining item that you really wanted, then you know people will go to great lengths to ensure that they get what they want. They may hide the item on a different rack or shelf; they may ask the store manager if they can have the item laid away; others will make a call for someone to bring them some money while they hold onto it to ensure that no one else might pick it up and buy it.

When the man who found the treasure in the field buried it again, he acted in a way that was far more radical than a shopper who found a precious item they wanted. He went to great lengths to purchase this field, making sure that what was valuable could be secured, giving up everything for the sake of this treasure.

Our behavior shows the value that we place on something. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Our hearts will go to great lengths to secure the things we love. We will act in irrational ways to the common person.

Jesus, however, says that this is what happens when someone discovers the value of the kingdom: they act in a radical way, willing to lose everything else in order to have this one thing. To have Christ and to belong to His kingdom is worth more than anything this world could ever offer, and it is worth losing everything else to gain the greatest joy that exists!

What sacrifices might you need to make for the kingdom of God?

DAY 4

READ:

Matthew 13:44-46

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 13:45-46

NOTES

In 1904, William Borden graduated from high school, and his wealthy family gave him a remarkable gift: a trip around the world. As heir to the Borden family fortune, his future was promising and looked bright. But upon seeing the plight of the poor in Asia and in the Middle East, Borden wrote to his family that he wanted to become a missionary.

Friends thought young Borden had lost his mind. He would attend Yale University, yet he remained focused on this one aim: to know Christ and to take Him to those who were in need of help. Although he was a millionaire, Borden had made it his aim to pursue Christ and not be distracted by the amusements of the world.

Even upon his graduation, Borden was offered some well-paying jobs. But Borden boarded a ship to China. But when his ship stopped in Egypt, where he planned to study Arabic, he contracted spinal meningitis and died within a month.

In the back of Borden's Bible were inscribed three phrases: No reserves. No retreats. No regrets. These three phrases characterized this young man's life. He would not be reserved about his calling. He would not retreat from going to those who were in need. And he had no regrets about following Christ.¹

When the treasure of the kingdom grips you, as it did young Borden, there is no loss in following Christ even to the ends of the world.

Where might Christ be calling you to bring the good news for the growth of His kingdom?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 13:47-50

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 13:47-50

NOTES

Hell has come on hard times. To talk about it is to sound harsh, judgmental, and not nice. Certainly there have been those who have talked much about hell without proclaiming the good news of the glories of heaven. It is possible to have an unhealthy fixation on judgment and damnation, but it is also unhealthy to avoid the topic altogether.

To talk about hell and the seriousness of the final judgment in the context of the goodness of God's saving grace is what Christians have done throughout history. Consider the eighteenth-century pastor Jonathan Edwards's thoughts about why we should consider and warn others about hell:

If there be really a hell of such dreadful and never-ending torments, as is generally supposed, of which multitudes are in great danger—and into which the greater part of men in Christian countries do actually from generation to generation fall, for want of a sense of its terribleness, and so their danger of it, and so for want of taking due care to avoid it—then why is it not proper for those who have the care of souls to take great pains to make men sensible of it? Why should they not be told as much of the truth as can be? If I am in danger of going to hell, I should be glad to know as much as possibly I can of the dreadfulness of it. If I am very prone to neglect due care to avoid it, he does me the best kindness who does most to represent me the truth of the case, that sets forth my misery and danger in the liveliest manner.³

Whom should you warn about the dangers of the final judgment?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Beware and do not be deceived: Although the punishment is hidden, it is nonetheless certain and will not fail to come."²

—Martin Luther (1483–1546)

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: The Growth of the Kingdom

(Matthew 13:31-33)

The _____ of God may have started in meager ways, but it grows _____ .



From Day 2: **Where have you seen the growth of the kingdom of God?**

The kingdom of God may seem insignificant, but it has the _____ to _____ the world.



For what reasons might God be pleased to build His kingdom through small and insignificant things?

POINT 2: The Value of the Kingdom

(Matthew 13:44-46)

KEY DOCTRINE #68:

FAITH

Biblical faith is the resting, or _____ , 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 _____ 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.



In what ways have you radically embraced the kingdom of heaven in faith?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"His kingdom cannot fail, He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus giv'n: Lift up
your heart, Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!"⁴

—Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

The kingdom of heaven is _____ the _____
of giving up everything else for it.

? How has following Christ brought you great joy?

POINT 3: The Purity of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:47-50)

The kingdom of _____ will only have those
who have put their _____ in Jesus as Lord
and Savior.

? Why is judgment a necessary part of God's
final work?

_____ will come at the end times for those
who have _____ Christ.

? What should be our response to the warning of
God's judgment?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know the unmatched
value of God's kingdom, we live willing to sacrifice
everything so that others may be part of the kingdom
through faith in Jesus.

- **HEAD:** Based on Scripture, how would you describe the kingdom of God?
- **HEART:** How can you praise and thank God for the growth and advance of His kingdom across the world and throughout history?
- **HANDS:** Who is someone you can tell about the great joy of the kingdom of God?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Mission begins with a kind of
explosion of joy."⁵

—Lesslie Newbigin (1909–1998)

DISCIPLES LONG FOR JESUS'S COMING

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God's kingdom is present today and will be established in full when Christ returns.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Matthew 24; Luke 17

+ **SETTING:**

Sometimes we can wonder when things are ever going to change. If Jesus's disciples live according to the values, norms, and conditions of the kingdom, and if they are going to the lost with the good news, then when will the arrival of the kingdom come? Shouldn't we see a more dramatic impact than what is going on today? Since the kingdom is going to come differently than expected (Matthew 13), Jesus prepares us for the arrival of the kingdom as both already among us and not yet fully here.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:20-24

NOTES

In 2011, a well-known Christian radio host stated publicly that the rapture and judgment day would occur at precisely 6 p.m. on May 21, 2011. Six months later, he said, the end of the world would come. Soon after, billboards went up around North America, warning people of the coming judgment.

Yet many Christians rejected this assertion, planning Sunday worship for May 22 as normal. Many Christians denounced the date-setting as mere speculation and rejected it out of hand, citing Jesus's words in Matthew 24:36, saying that no one knows the date nor the hour.

As tempting as it is to scoff at those who set dates and times, as long as people have lived, they have looked for the end of the world. The longing for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done (Matthew 6:10-11a) are realities in every heart, for God has set eternity in the hearts of humanity (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Instead of looking for signs that the end of the world is coming, Jesus and His disciples taught that we should purify ourselves as we await the blessed hope of Jesus's coming. For when Christ appears, we will be like Him as we will see Him fully and completely as He is (1 John 3:2b-3).

In what ways do you need to purify your heart to prepare to see the Lord?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The vast majority of men are utterly deceived in their expectations with respect to the kingdom of God. They are waiting for signs which will never appear. They are looking for indications which they will never discover."¹

—J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:22-24

NOTES

Lightning is beautiful to watch from a distance but terrifying up close. If you have ever been out in nature when a storm has swept through, you know how the flashes of lightning illumine the darkest sky and its thunder resounds with a reverberation that can rattle the bones. A storm that appears to be miles away can suddenly roll up with lightning traveling miles unexpectedly. Out of the blue, a bolt's strike and the clap of thunder can shake windows, wake sleeping babies, and terrify the strongest of men.

So it will be, Jesus says, when He comes again at the end of time. His return will be like lightning from the sky. With glory's strike and the clap of wonder, He will suddenly appear. There will be no doubt nor rumor that He has arrived. When He comes, no one will need a sign to know that He is coming. It will be as evident as a bolt of lightning announcing its presence with the crackling of the air.

To think about Jesus's second coming may seem pleasant from a distant observation, but consider that His return will be sudden and abrupt, bright and glorious, universal to all, and powerful in all of His glory. This is how the kingdom will arrive in all of its fullness—with the Son of Man gloriously and victoriously returning to rule and reign forever. Will we be ready?

How do you think you will react when the Lord returns?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:26-30

NOTES

It was an ordinary morning on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. New Yorkers went about their normal routines: children were taken to daycare, adults were heading off to work. Coffee shops were full, people were talking on their phones and getting ready for another day of work. Then, in the busyness of the morning, terrorists flew two planes into the World Trade Center, and in an unexpected turn of events, thousands of people lost their lives.

This was how the people of Noah's day were: eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, going on as if life would always be the same. But then, the rain fell and consumed the world. The same was true in Sodom. People were doing their everyday business, planting crops, building and renovating, and reveling, when suddenly fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and consumed everyone except Lot and his household.

Jesus said that when He comes again, people will be going about their lives as normal. Some people will be eating dinner, out for a walk, playing soccer, working in their office. The everyday, ordinary events will consume their attention when He will suddenly appear. And at that moment, the opportunity to turn and trust in Him will be no more. Judgment will have come, and they will be overtaken in that moment.

How have you responded to the Lord's warning that a day of judgment is coming?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:20-21

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #77: CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the reign of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's mission is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the gospel through good works so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.

Sometimes it is difficult to grasp how the kingdom of God is already present but not yet fully realized. When we stop and consider the way we live, we realize that the pattern is not so foreign to our daily experiences.

Consider the periods of waiting that people often experience. In many places across North America, graduated licensing has been adopted. Recognizing that a beginner driver needs someone experienced with them, a learner starts off driving with another licensed driver beside them. After a certain period of time, the young driver has some of the restrictions lifted: they can drive alone, but not after dark; they can have others in the vehicle, but no one under a certain age. It isn't until they receive their full license that all restrictions are lifted.

Similarly, the period of engagement is a time of waiting. The question has been popped. The ring has been placed on the finger. The planning for the wedding day is underway. But the couple has not yet fully realized the joy of the security of the covenant of marriage.

In a greater way, believers have the promise of a certain future: Jesus has given us His Spirit as a down payment guaranteeing our future with Him (Ephesians 1:14). We are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places now (Colossians 3:1), but we have not yet seen Him face to face.

Yet we have the promise of a sure and certain future now. The promise that the kingdom will be ours in full one day means we can live with a heart full of assurance now and trust the Lord that there is a better day ahead.

How does the knowledge that the kingdom is here now give you hope for tomorrow?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 24:45-51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 24:45-47

NOTES

Upon the news that my wife was expecting our first child, we were excited. The due date seemed far off at first, but so much had to be done. The baby's room had to get a new coat of paint and a fresh rug needed to be laid. Soon we purchased and assembled furniture, and each piece was put in the room. We began discussing various options for names and finally agreed. Meals were put into the freezer and plans were made to get some help for those first few weeks.

As the due date approached, I worked more closely from home. The hospital bag was packed and ready to be put into the car in a moment's notice. I would check in with my wife to see how she was feeling, calling on occasion and getting updates from her.

While life didn't go on hold, we had worked hard for the arrival of our first child. The days were counting down, so when the contractions began late in the middle of the night, we were ready to go to the hospital to welcome our new child. I was excited to meet this little person and felt so much love.

Christ's second coming should prompt us in a similar way. We do not wait with passivity, but we wait with eagerness and work as though the time is very short. Because we love the Lord, we work actively.

How are you working as you actively wait for Christ's return?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Christ's followers recognize that God's kingdom is here in part (Luke 17:20-21).

Unlike the expectations of the Jews, the kingdom of God was not _____ in by grand triumphs but by the birth and _____ of Jesus.

? In what ways do you long for the kingdom of God?

KEY DOCTRINE #77: CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the _____ of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's _____ is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the _____ through good works so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.

POINT 2: Christ's followers anticipate that God's kingdom is coming in full (Luke 17:22-35).

Jesus had to suffer and die so He could resurrect and ascend to heaven to one day _____ in a sudden and _____ manner.

? What are some unhelpful ways people have speculated about Christ's return?

Jesus _____ His disciples to be alert and ready for His return, anticipating _____ coming.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"At the end time of the world, he will not descend from heaven obscurely or secretly, but with godlike glory."²

—Cyril of Alexandria
(c. 375–444)



From Day 5: **How are you working as you actively wait for Christ's return?**

POINT 3: Christ's followers work for God's kingdom to be known by all (Matthew 24:45-51).

Waiting for Jesus's return, we continue to live _____ lives in _____ to the King and kingdom.



What are the marks of a faithful and wise servant who follows Christ?

_____ will come to those who don't live with faithfulness and _____ of Christ's return.



Why is it easy for some to think Christ won't come back in their lifetime?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know God as our good and perfect King, we live joyfully and obediently under His reign, proclaiming Christ to the world so that others might enter into the kingdom.

- **HEAD:** How do we explain to others how evil still exists even as the kingdom is here?
- **HEART:** What are things we can praise God for regarding the good works He is doing through the kingdom today?
- **HANDS:** In what ways do you need to connect your words and actions together in a greater way to show Christ's rule in your life to point others to Christ?



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

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"At his call the dead awaken,
Rise to life from earth and sea;
All the powers of nature shaken
By His look, prepares to flee.
Careless sinner, what will then become of thee?"³

—John Newton (1725–1807)

UNIT 24

+

GOD'S GLORY

IN THE FACE OF

JESUS CHRIST

“Our Struggle Is Not Against Flesh and Blood”

by Kevin M. Jones Sr.

God’s glory is revealed in many ways. One way in which His glory is revealed is through the softening of hearts and the writing of the laws and commands on our hearts. God’s Spirit dwells in us. This imparting of His Spirit brings us from death to life. Because God is with us, we should have faith in Him. Yet placing faith in God does not free us from conflict from the world and actually frustrates Satan. Satan’s desire is to kill, steal, and destroy. God’s desire is to give us life and peace.

KNOWING GOD AND HIS GLORY

Personal knowledge of God should cause us to want to know more of Him. The more we know of Him, the deeper the roots of love and knowledge grow. The more we know of Him, the more we want to serve Him. The more we know of Him the more we should hate our sin and fight for righteousness. We do all of this by faith. Ephesians 2:1-2 tells us that we were

once dead in our sins, in which we walked according to the ways of this world. But this new way of life in God is different than the way we previously walked. The old, sinful ways in us should be daily put to death as the new, Christ-filled way flourishes.

All glory belongs to God, yet 2 Corinthians 2:18 reminds us that we are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into His image. Believers get to experience the glory of the Lord now and later. The world was opposed to Christ because Christ’s glory revealed the sinfulness and hostility of the human heart toward God. The world opposes believers today because as we walk by the Spirit, we reveal the ways and truth of God and the sinfulness bound in the human heart. We must remember when we are speaking the words of Christ that it is He who is being rejected, not us.

FIGHTING THE GREATEST BATTLE

Did you know we are in the middle of the greatest battle ever? Historians will point to the Civil War fought in the United States, WWI, and WWII as battles that devastated the world, and these historians are correct. Yet there is a cosmic battle that preceded all earthly wars, a battle between God and Satan. Although we cannot see this battle, it is happening around us. God is busy trying to prompt us by the power of the Spirit to walk in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control, and Satan is trying to get us to walk in darkness, hate, ungodliness, sexual immorality, and division. We must remember that there is a battle we cannot see. Forgetting this can cause us to place attention and emphasis on the wrong things.

Unfortunately, we do forget that we are fighting this invisible fight. I love camp games. Whether tug-o-war, soccer, tag, or other relays, it is usually easy to know who is on what team. Why? It's because each team usually has a color scheme associated with their team. These color schemes may include bandannas, ribbons, silly string, T-shirts, and face

*It's a bizarre yet
comforting reality
to have an active
enemy that is
already defeated.*

paint. Camp teams are easily identifiable. Sadly, Satan, others who reject Christ, and the work that they're doing are not usually as clearly identifiable. It's sometimes difficult to see the spiritual battles going on in the world and around us. So we need to be alert and on the lookout for activities that are in opposition to God's Word and way. We need to be aware of the underlying evils that attempt to dethrone God as sovereign.

But all is not lost. It's a bizarre yet comforting reality to have an active enemy that is already defeated. But that is the truth we live by. Derwin Gray reminds us: "Jesus resoundingly won the battle against humanity's great enemy, the dark powers of sin and death. Sin and death are invasive species that do not belong in God's good creation. Messiah

*We need to be aware of the underlying evils that
attempt to dethrone God as sovereign.*

Since we are free from the penalty of sin and death, we should, with ambitious affection, seek to serve and snatch others from the fire as well.

Jesus triumphed over and disarmed these dark powers with his death and resurrection.”¹ So although we have an enemy, the enemy is already defeated. We further defeat the enemy by placing our faith in God and not ourselves.

BRINGING OTHERS FROM DEATH TO LIFE

In response then, because Jesus is triumphant and the kingdom is already here though not yet fully complete, we are called to tell others of the good news of Christ.

It is healthy for us as believers to remember we also once walked in sin as we try to bring others from death to life. We once were unable to break free from the snares of this world, but we now have been born again.

We must remember, though, that we now have life, and we did not give life to ourselves. We are victorious, but we did not win the battle ourselves. First John 5:4-5 reminds us that those born of God, those who have faith and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, have

conquered the world. This is only because Christ has conquered the world and now lives in us. His power is in us.

It is wonderful to know that God is perfect, omnipotent, righteous, holy, loving, worthy, and is in pursuit of us and our best interest. So we should place our faith in Him and not in things of the world.

To know God is to know that the blood of Christ powerfully purifies us from pride, profaneness, falling in love with perishable things, and the penalty of sin. Since we are free from the penalty of sin and death, we should, with ambitious affection, seek to serve and snatch others from the fire as well. This is a delightful fragrance, pleasing to our Father, and is faith in action that is commanded by Christ.



JESUS IS THE WAY

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Jesus taught that entrance into His kingdom is difficult and only comes through Him.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Luke 13

+ **SETTING:**

The Gospel of Luke is a literary masterpiece, beautifully depicting the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The climax of Luke's Gospel is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, but the heart is the "travel narrative" (Luke 9:51–19:27), where Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). While journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus performed miracles and taught about the kingdom of God and the way of salvation. In Luke 13:22-35, Jesus portrayed Himself as the narrow door of salvation who saves sinners through His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, which would be accomplished in Jerusalem.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 13:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 13:22-27

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #9: GOD IS ONE

The Bible affirms that God is one, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, otherwise known as the *Shema*. In both Old and New Testament times, the advocacy of monotheism (belief in one God) was contrary to the surrounding culture. Where most cultures practiced polytheism (belief in multiple gods) or henotheism (worship of one god with the belief in multiple gods), the people of God knew, based upon God's self-revelation, that Yahweh, the Lord, is the only one true God.

The Winchester Mystery House is a notorious “haunted house” in San Jose, California. Once inhabited by Sarah Winchester, the widow of William Wirt Winchester (owner of Winchester Firearms), the house is a tourist attraction and contains many novel features. One of the most unique features is the doors in the house that lead to nowhere. Some have claimed the doors were designed to confuse “ghosts” and keep them away from Sarah Winchester, who was superstitious. Others claim the structure of the house was altered by an earthquake in 1906. Regardless of the reason for their existence, the doors in the Winchester Mystery House are pointless; they lead nowhere.¹

In Luke 13:22-27, Jesus described Himself as the “narrow door.” No other way of salvation or forgiveness exists. Like the doors in the Winchester Mystery House, every door other than Jesus leads nowhere. This reality has two implications for believers. First, those who profess to be Christians must examine themselves and make sure their faith rests in Christ alone for salvation. He is the only way of salvation. Second, those who profess faith in Christ must share about Him with others. There are not many ways to be saved. There is only one way to be saved, and His name is Jesus. Christians should resolve to tell unbelievers about Jesus, the narrow door of salvation.

How are you pointing others to Christ alone for salvation?

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 13:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 13:28-30

NOTES

In *The Wingfeather Saga*, Andrew Peterson tells the story of the Igiby children: Janner, Tink, and Leeli. Janner Igiby, the oldest child, discovers his deceased father was Esben Wingfeather, the king of the Shining Isle of Anniera. As the oldest son, readers expect Janner to possess a rightful claim to the throne, but the traditions of Anniera are unique. The throne belongs to the younger brother, Tink. The last becomes first. Janner assumes the role of Throne Warden and is responsible for protecting Tink and Leeli. The first becomes last. Throughout the series, Janner resents this reversal and wrestles with his calling as Throne Warden. He eventually makes peace with the role and embraces his responsibility of family protector.

Jesus described the upside-down nature of God's kingdom in Luke 13:28-30. Many of the religious Jews assumed they would be first in God's kingdom, while the Gentiles would be last. Yet Jesus said many who ate with Him and heard Him teach would be cast out of the kingdom of God, while people from the North, South, East, and West would enter God's kingdom and share in His banquet. The first would be last, and the last would be first. This reversal reminds us of two things: (1) familiarity with Jesus is not a substitute for faith in Jesus, and (2) God's grace upends expectations and extends to all people.

What are some other examples of "reversal" in God's kingdom?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 13:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 13:31-33

NOTES

The movie *Unbroken* portrays the real-life story of Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic athlete who was shot down during combat in WWII. Zamperini spent 47 days in a raft with fellow soldiers before being captured by the Japanese navy. Zamperini was taken to a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, where he was harassed and beaten. The movie highlights Zamperini's indomitable will, as he refused to let the cruelty of his overseers break him. It also highlights the power of forgiveness, as Zamperini forgave the soldiers for their criminal acts.

Like Zamperini, Jesus was resolved to endure suffering and abuse. The Pharisees and religious leaders questioned His miracles and challenged His teaching. Herod threatened to kill Him if He went to Jerusalem. Yet Jesus would not be swayed. He was committed to completing the mission on which His Father had sent Him. In order to finish His work, Jesus had to travel to Jerusalem, die on the cross, and rise from the dead. He knew the suffering that lay ahead, but He pushed ahead anyway. Why? Because of His love for His Father and us.

How might you express your gratitude to Christ, who endured the cross in order to save you?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 13:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 13:31-33

NOTES

In the children's book by L. Frank Baum titled *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a farm girl from Kansas named Dorothy and her dog, Toto, are transported from their home to the land of Oz when a tornado hits their town. Dorothy follows the yellow brick road and eventually arrives in Emerald City, where she meets the wonderful Wizard of Oz. At first, the Great Oz seems powerful and impressive, but Toto knocks over a curtain and reveals the Wizard of Oz is a fraud! The Wizard of Oz is revealed to be a normal man from Omaha, who arrived in Oz via a hot-air balloon.

Christians might be tempted to view God like the wizard in Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*: an unseen being who is pulling levers and making things happen from some unseen place. Yet the Bible does not depict God's sovereignty this way. His care is personal and gracious. In Luke 13:31-33, Jesus reveals God's plan to redeem humanity, which involves His death on the cross. The journey to Jerusalem is not coincidental. The opposition of Herod is not accidental. These things are all part of God's good plan to save sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we can take comfort in the fact that God is in control, He is good, and He is working all things out for His glory and our good.

How can Christians take comfort in the truth that God is in control of everything?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"God is sovereign Lord and King, and exerciseth a dominion over the whole world, both heaven and earth. This is so clear, that nothing is more spoken of in Scripture."²

—Stephen Charnock
(1628–1680)

DAY 5

READ:

Luke 13:22-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 13:34-35

NOTES

Eeyore is a character in the A. A. Milne children's series Winnie the Pooh. He is a donkey that seems to always be the pessimist. To him, everything seems catastrophic or will lead to some bad news. Even still, he is a beloved character.

In Luke 13:34-35, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem's rejection of the Messiah and pronounced judgment on them. Yet He did not leave them without hope. He was not an "Eeyore," focusing exclusively on the negative response of Israel.

Jesus pointed to a future time when His people would recognize Him as Lord and praise Him. He was hopeful and optimistic. As Christians, we can be hopeful and optimistic as well.

Jesus promised to return for His people, and we eagerly anticipate the return of Christ. When He returns, we will receive Him as Lord and worship Him forever!

How can the future return of Christ motivate you to live hopefully and optimistically in the present?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"He died to take away our sins for the simple reason that we cannot remove them ourselves. If we could, his atoning death would be unnecessary."³

—John Stott (1921–2011)

POINT 1: The Narrow Door (Luke 13:22-30)

Jesus is the _____ door, the only way to _____.



Why do people seem to bristle at “exclusivity”—the biblical claim that Jesus is the only way of salvation?

KEY DOCTRINE #9: GOD IS ONE

The Bible affirms that God is one, as seen in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, otherwise known as the Shema. In both Old and New Testament times, the advocacy of _____ (belief in one God) was contrary to the surrounding culture. Where most cultures practiced polytheism (belief in multiple gods) or henotheism (the worship of one god with the belief in multiple gods), the people of God knew, based upon God’s self-revelation, that _____, the Lord, is the only one _____ God.

POINT 2: The Coming Death (Luke 13:31-33)

Jesus faced _____ from Herod and the religious leaders, but He refused to _____ His mission of salvation.



What are some ways obedience to God’s mission might lead to opposition for Christians?

Jesus announced His upcoming death, revealing His _____ and _____ to His mission.



From Day 4: How can Christians take comfort in the truth that God is in control of everything?

POINT 3: The Future Adoration

(Luke 13:34-35)

Jesus _____ over Jerusalem, expressing His desire to _____ for the people of Israel, yet they were _____ to come to Him.



What are some ways people reject God's compassion?

Jesus pronounced _____ on Israel, but He also announced _____ for a future moment when they would call Him _____.



How does the gospel and the coming of Christ give us hope?

MY RESPONSE

Because the way of salvation is narrow, we keep Jesus central in all we do, helping others fix their gaze on Him and trust in Him alone for salvation.

- **HEAD:** How can you communicate the “narrowness” of salvation in a compelling and convincing way?
- **HEART:** In what areas can you confess to God concerning your lack of compassion for others or lack of obedience in sharing the gospel?
- **HANDS:** Who needs a reminder of the good news of the gospel this week that you can share with?



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

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“As we worship we celebrate our salvation through Christ who will bring us to glory, we pray for that kingdom to come, we quicken our hope by praises and anthems that direct our thoughts to the next life, and through the ministry of the Word we build our faith in this eternal hope.”⁴

—Allen Ross

JESUS IS THE LIFE

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus revealed that He has power over life and death, both physically and spiritually.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

John 11

+ **SETTING:**

The Gospel of John is often considered the most evangelistic Gospel in the New Testament. John explicitly stated the evangelistic nature of his Gospel toward the end of the book, stating how Jesus did many other signs unmentioned in his writing, but that the signs written were to help people believe Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God that they might have life (John 20:30-31).

John 11:1-46 records the final, climactic sign that Jesus performs—the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

DAY 1

READ:

John 11:1-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 11:14

NOTES

Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* book series, written by Daniel Handler (whose pen name is Lemony Snicket), recounts the unfortunate lives of three orphan children: Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire. The series is comprised of thirteen books, and each book is full of misfortune and bad luck. Throughout the series, the Baudelaire children experience few moments of happiness while constantly trying to escape the clutches of Count Olaf, the villain who is determined to steal their fortune.

Like the Baudelaire children, Christians live in a broken world. Sin and evil exist, and the consequences of sin and evil are real and tangible. We can see them and feel them all around us.

One of the consequences of sin is death. Death entered the world through man's first sin and has spread to all humanity (Romans 5:12).

In John 11:1-16, we read about the death of Lazarus. Mary and Martha, his surviving sisters, sent Jesus news of Lazarus's sickness (vv. 1-3), but Jesus waited until after Lazarus died to go visit (vv. 4-16). Jesus would ultimately raise Lazarus from the dead, but his death still reminds us of the reality of sin and the devastating consequences of sin.

How can you remind yourself of the consequences of sin and the need to look to Christ regularly?

DAY 2

READ:

John 11:17-27

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 11:20-27

NOTES

In Aladdin, poor and homeless Aladdin falls in love with a princess but is unable to pursue her due to his social status. After finding a magic lamp and receiving three wishes from the genie inside it, Aladdin wishes to be a prince. As Prince Ali, Aladdin visits the palace to woo Princess Jasmine but is rebuffed for failing to consider Jasmine's feelings. To apologize, Prince Ali invites Jasmine on a magic carpet ride with him. When she initially refuses, Aladdin sticks out his hand and asks if she trusts him. Jasmine decides to trust him, so she takes his hand.

Jesus asked a similar question of Martha in John 11:25. Martha knew Jesus could have prevented Lazarus's death if He had been there (v. 21), but He did not arrive in time. Jesus reminded her that Lazarus would rise again, which Martha thought was a reference to the end times (vv. 23-24). Then Jesus responded that He is "the resurrection and the life" and asked Martha if she believed (vv. 25-26). She replied that she did believe He is the Messiah, the Son of God (v. 27). Despite her sorrow, she still believed in who Jesus claimed to be. Her faith should serve as a model for us. In the middle of pain and loss, we can cling to Christ in faith.

In what areas of your life right now do you need to trust God?

DAY 3

READ:

John 11:28-44

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 11:28-37

NOTES

C. S. Lewis wrote *A Grief Observed* after the death of his wife, Joy Davidman. The book is broken into four parts, but each major part reveals the deep grief and inner struggles of Lewis. The raw honesty of Lewis might make some readers uncomfortable, but he manages to communicate his spiritual, emotional, and mental anguish in a clear and profound way. Readers who are familiar with grief will find points of commonality in his work, even if their grief is different in many ways.

Like Lewis, Martha and Mary experienced intense grief and sorrow over the death of Lazarus, their brother. Martha lamented that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if He had been there (John 11:21). Mary fell at His feet, crying, and said the same thing (v. 32). The Jews with Mary cried as well. When Jesus saw their tears, He was moved emotionally and wept (vv. 33-35).

Thankfully, Jesus did not let death or grief have the last word. He raised Lazarus from the dead, turning their grief into an exhibition of God's glory, and He promises to transform our grief into glory as well. We find comfort in the fact that those in Christ will one day be raised and reunited with all believers in the presence of the Lord, together forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

How can Christians display compassion and help others who are struggling with grief?

DAY 4

READ:

John 11:20-44

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 11:38-44

NOTES

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Thor is a god from the planet Asgard and an Avenger devoted to saving his planet and Earth. Known as the god of thunder and wielding the mighty hammer Mjölnir, Thor is portrayed as a prideful hero with a chiseled physique. However, in *Avengers: Endgame*, Thor is portrayed as an overweight alcoholic who is depressed after failing to stop Thanos and save Asgard in *Avengers: Infinity War*. In many ways, Thor is a “god” who has all the negative tendencies of a human but all the strength and power of a god. The instability of Thor—while humorous in the movies—serves as a stark contrast to the one true God who never changes and perpetually displays His glory.

Twice in John 11, Jesus stated the resurrection of Lazarus was intended to glorify God (vv. 4,40). All of the signs in the Gospel of John—including the resurrection of Lazarus—prove that Jesus was sent by the Father, who is eternally glorious and possesses all power. Unlike Thor, who fails in his mission and changes for the worse, God always accomplishes His will and continually displays His glory through His creation and His Son. The unchanging glory and character of God is good news for Christians because we know God will always keep His promises, He will always accomplish His purposes, and He will never stop loving us.

Why would it be bad news for us if God could change or fail in His purposes?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“On the whole, I think it is pretty manifest that Jesus Christ sought the glory of God as his highest and last end.”¹

—Jonathan Edwards
(1703–1758)

DAY 5

READ:

John 11:38-53

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 11:45-53

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #60: CHRIST AS SUBSTITUTE

At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.

A *Tale of Two Cities*, a famous novel by Charles Dickens, is set during the period of the French Revolution and focuses on Doctor Manette and his daughter, Lucy. Manette spent eighteen years in the Bastille, a fortress in Paris used as a prison, before being released to live with Lucy. Lucy falls in love with and marries Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat who has renounced his family and moved to London. When Darnay receives a message that one of his uncle's former servants has been imprisoned in France, Darnay returns to rescue him but is imprisoned himself. Darnay is sentenced to die by guillotine, but his friend, Sydney Carton, bears a strong resemblance to Darnay and swaps places with him in prison. Darnay is able to escape from Paris with his family due to Carton's sacrifice.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some of the Jews believed Jesus was the Messiah, but many other Jews rejected Jesus and reported the miracle to the Pharisees (John 11:45-46). The Pharisees were worried that people would see Jesus's signs and begin to follow Him, which would lead to increased Roman hostility (vv. 47-48). Caiaphas responded by saying it was better for one man (Jesus) to die than for the entire nation to die (vv. 49-50). Caiaphas was willing to sacrifice Jesus to spare the nation, but he actually spoke truer than he knew. Jesus was going to die for the nation but also for the world (vv. 51-53)! On the cross, Jesus died as the substitute for sinners, and through faith in Him, those who are dead in sin can be made alive.

When was the last time you paused to thank God the Father for sending His Son to be your substitute?

Do so now.

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“There is no spiritual life of which he is not the author, and there never will be. When you and I come to deal with men for their salvation, we discover our inability; for we perceive that the creation of life is out of our power, since it remains the sole prerogative of the Son of God.”²

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

POINT 1: The Messiah brings life from death (John 11:20-27).

Amid sorrow, Martha clings to her _____ in Jesus and remains _____ of His power.

? How can Christians cling to Jesus Christ in the midst of difficult circumstances and situations?

Jesus is the resurrection and the _____—those who trust in Him will _____ death and live forever.

? What are some reasons Christians should trust Christ to give them eternal life?

POINT 2: The Messiah brings glory from grief (John 11:38-44).

Jesus was moved by the grief of Martha, Mary, and the crowd, which reveals His _____ and _____.

? From Day 3: How can Christians display compassion and help others who are struggling with grief?

The resurrection of Lazarus was intended to display God’s _____ and to inspire _____ in the hearts of those who witnessed it and read about it.

? What are some other ways God has made His glory known?

POINT 3: The Messiah brings salvation from rejection (John 11:45-53).

Many Jews _____ in Jesus, but the Pharisees rejected Him and plotted to _____ Him.



Why might someone reject Jesus as the resurrection and the life?

KEY DOCTRINE #60: CHRIST AS SUBSTITUTE

At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament _____ system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the _____ of humanity from sin.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been given eternal life in Christ, we glorify God always, even in sickness and in death, trusting in His power to raise us from the dead.

- **HEAD:** Why must we as Christians affirm the historical nature of the resurrection? (See 1 Corinthians 15, especially verses 12-19.)
- **HEART:** When facing difficult circumstances, how can we continue to praise God?
- **HANDS:** With whom can we share this message of hope this week?



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VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Christ assumed our identity, as it were, and endured the retributive judgment due to us . . . as our substitute, in our place, with the damning record of our transgressions nailed by God to his cross as the tally of crimes for which he was now dying."³

—J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

JESUS IS THE TRUTH

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Believers are to have nothing to do with the evil powers of the world and their fruit but are to share the one true gospel with the people of the world.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

2 Corinthians 4; Ephesians 6; 1 John 2

+ **SETTING:**

The world will say truth is one thing and Jesus will say truth is another. Jesus taught that He is the truth (John 14:6) and that His Word is truth (John 17:17). But the world and Satan's forces will try to tempt us toward their false truths. As disciples of Christ, we are to resist these temptations by holding onto the truth of God, living and proclaiming the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

DAY 1

READ:

Ephesians 6:10-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 6:10-13

NOTES

In March 2020, the United States ground to a halt due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The initial “fifteen days to flatten the curve” turned into a months-long battle to reduce surging numbers of people impacted by COVID-19. While the virus was invisible and could not be seen, its effects were felt as various parts of the country were hit hard by the virus. Hospitals and healthcare workers were overrun in some places. The impact of an unseen sickness was incredibly disruptive to the job market, the economy, and a host of other sectors.

In Ephesians 6:10-13, Paul talked about an invisible enemy. Satan and his followers—rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of darkness, and evil spiritual forces—are opposed to God and wage war against Christians. These spiritual enemies cannot be seen, but their presence can be felt in the culture and in the pressure on believers to conform to the present age.

For this reason, Paul encouraged Christians to rely on the Lord’s strength and to put on the armor of God in order to stand against Satan. God is stronger than Satan and can empower His people to stand firm against the adversary. Christians must simply depend on His strength and use the equipment He provides to stand strong.

What can you do to remind yourself of the reality of spiritual warfare and the need to rely on God’s power to resist sin and Satan?

DAY 2

READ:

Ephesians 6:10-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 6:14-17

NOTES

When people sign up to serve in one of the branches of the U. S. military, they are given government-issued uniforms and operate government-owned equipment. The army, for example, issues several different types of uniforms. Soldiers receive an army green service uniform, a combat uniform, a service uniform, and a physical fitness uniform. Moreover, the soldiers operate government-owned equipment. The radios, drones, tanks, rifles, and other tools belong to the military but are provided for soldiers to fulfill their duty and complete their service. Soldiers engage in battle while wearing the uniform and operating the equipment provided by the military.

Similarly, God has provided the uniform and equipment for Christians to stand firm in spiritual battle. In Ephesians 6:14-17, Paul outlined the various pieces of the armor of God. This equipment was “issued” by God to help believers resist Satan and his attacks. Paul mentioned the following items: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel sandals of peace, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, as well as the sword of the Spirit. The Christian does not have the strength or the resources to resist Satan on his or her own. However, by utilizing the resources God has provided, Christians can be successful in their fight against Satan and sin. Therefore, put on the armor of God and stand against Satan!

What are some ways we can use God’s armor well on a daily basis?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“God can overcome His enemies without help from anyone, but His saints cannot so much as defend the smallest outpost without His strong arm.”¹

—William Gurnall (1616–1679)

DAY 3

READ:

1 John 2:15-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 John 2:15

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #46: THE WORLD OPPOSED TO GOD

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Ephesians 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by faith in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

In J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* series, an unusual group of friends embark on a dangerous mission to destroy the ring of power. The corrupting power of the ring is a major theme in the books. Each person who possesses the ring feels the pull of the ring and struggles to resist it. The person most noticeably affected is Gollum. In the series, he is obsessed with the ring and cannot resist its power. He calls the ring “my precious” and waits for his chance to steal it from Frodo. Tragically, the ring eventually leads to his destruction.

Gollum is a warning for Christians who are tempted by the things of the world. They may feel a pull toward the things of the world—much like Gollum felt the pull of the ring—but we must resist it. In 1 John 2:15-17, John told Christians not to love the world because everything in it is opposed to God and will be destroyed. The things of the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride that comes with possessions—do not originate with God. They come from the world, which is opposed to God and will be destroyed. Only those who know God and do His will are promised eternal life. Therefore, Christians should reject the things of the world and seek to do God’s will.

How can Christians discern God’s will and obey it?

DAY 4

READ:

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

NOTES

If you've ever played Marco Polo on the ground or in the water, you know that one person closes her eyes, sometimes with a blindfold, while trying to find the other people around her. She can only say, "Marco," while others are to respond, "Polo," so that she may try to find their location. Being blind is no fun. It can make you stumble, lose your way, and not find what you are looking for. People can misdirect you, and it's possible to believe their lies.

Blindness is a bad thing. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Satan—a fallen angel and the god of this age—works to keep unbelievers from seeing the light of the glory of Christ. He wants them to remain blind to the truth of the gospel. If they remain blind to Christ, spiritual death and eternal destruction are certain.

However, if their eyes are opened to the gospel and they believe in Jesus Christ, they will experience forgiveness and eternal life. Thus, the blindfold/veil needs to be removed so they can see and believe. Christians must remember that Satan works to keep unbelievers blind to the gospel, and so, they must ask God to open the eyes of unbelievers to see Christ in glory and faith.

How do we keep ourselves and others from being blind to the truths of God?

DAY 5

READ:

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Corinthians 4:5-6

NOTES

Tales of the Kingdom, by David and Karen Mains, is a collection of allegorical stories designed to teach children valuable lessons about God and His kingdom. The main character is named Scarboy—later he is called Hero—an orphan from Enchanted City. The Enchanted City is controlled by the Enchanter, a villain who keeps the residents of the city under his spell. Before she dies, Scarboy's mother tells him about the King and a safe place called Great Park. Scarboy escapes to the Great Park, but he struggles to see things that long-term residents of the Great Park see. Slowly the Enchanter's power is broken and the King helps Scarboy see himself and others as they truly are.

These truths in Tales of the Kingdom are supported by 2 Corinthians 4:5-6. The Enchanter—Satan—has blinded the minds and hearts of unbelievers (4:3-4). But King Jesus died and rose to open blinded eyes and save sinners. Everyone who trusts Christ will be saved. The Enchanter's spell will be broken. Therefore, Christians should resolve to share the message of the gospel. Through the preaching of the gospel, God opens blind eyes and softens hard hearts. He calls people from darkness to light. He works through our efforts to tell others about the glory of Christ. Let's be faithful to share His message with the world.

Whom can you tell about the truth and power of the gospel this week?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: We are to resist the powers of the world (Ephesians 6:10-17).

While engaging in _____ against spiritual _____, we must rely on God's _____ to prevail.

? In what areas is Satan currently “attacking” Christians and the church?

God provides spiritual _____ and a spiritual _____ for Christians to stand firm against _____ and his followers.

? From Day 2: **What are some ways we can use God’s armor well on a daily basis?**

POINT 2: We are to reject the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

Christians cannot love the _____ and the _____; these two are mutually exclusive.

? How can Christians keep themselves from falling in love with worldly things?

KEY DOCTRINE #46: THE WORLD OPPOSED TO GOD

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and _____ spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Ephesians 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and _____ that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Those who seek happiness from [the world] make a wretched and miserable provision for themselves, especially when God calls us to the ineffable glory of eternal life.”²

–John Calvin (1509–1564)

this world of spiritual evil by _____ in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

POINT 3: We are to proclaim Jesus to the world (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Unbelievers do not _____ or _____ the beauty of the _____.



In what ways does sin affect a person?

Christians share the _____ in hopes that God will open the _____ and _____ of unbelievers.



Why should Christians share the gospel even if many will reject it?

MY RESPONSE

Because the world is opposed to God, we stand against the world's evil systems, rejecting anything that is contrary to God's truth and good design.

- **HEAD:** How can Christians use the Bible to learn and embody truth?
- **HEART:** What temptations of this world have you fallen for recently that you need to confess to the Lord?
- **HANDS:** How can you prepare to share the gospel more clearly and confidently?



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

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We're living in a culture that is seeking what the gospel promises. The times are ripe for Christian witness, and we dare not shrink back."³

—D. Scott Hildreth and Steven A. McKinion

RECLAIMING THE REACHING MINISTRY OF SUNDAY SCHOOL

by Dwayne McCrary

In his book *Fuel the Fire*, Chuck Kelley notes that Sunday Schools began with a focus on nurturing believers more than reaching outsiders during the early 1920s.¹ People living during that time endured the Spanish Flu with quarantines, mask mandates, and confusing news accounts. They also faced economic hardships as soldiers returned from World War I without a reentry plan and navigated through social unrest during the Red Summer of 1919. Believers had been away from each other and missed the support provided in a regular Bible study group. That support included a safe place to share and talk about what was going on in the world in light of Scripture. We can certainly understand how and why this shift took place.

However, Kelley also notes that some church leaders made an intentional decision to use their Bible study groups as a tool for reaching people who were far from God. These church leaders realized that all people wanted the support of a group where they could interact with others about substantial issues.

These church leaders appear to have benefited from three streams intersecting each other:

- a desire for truth
- a desire for interaction with others
- a place where anyone was welcome.

In short, they created open Bible study groups that were small enough for people to interact about the Bible and then created new groups as needed to keep the dynamic of the three streams present. These were churches that made a difference not only in the lives of believers but also in the lives of people who were far from God. By the end of the decade, they had become the standard for an effective church in the West.

One wonders if we are not at the same intersection today. We could certainly circle the wagons and focus on Bible study groups for believers. The people in our churches might applaud us and be very content. But doing so fails to make room for those who are far from God and ignores the opportunity being placed before us.

We could certainly circle the wagons and focus on Bible study groups for believers. The people in our churches might applaud us and be very content. But doing so fails to make room for those who are far from God.

REACHING PEOPLE FAR FROM GOD

What does an ongoing Bible study group focused on reaching people far from God look like?

- They invite people who are not in a Bible study group. With the invitation comes an offer to pick them up or meet them so they know where to go.
- They leave space for new people. That means empty chairs and additional study resources.
- They are smaller. By smaller, I mean a maximum group size of a dozen at the most. Discussion and interaction starts to decline once a group surpasses that number.

- They look to start new groups. This involves preparing people to lead those new groups and current leaders continually recognizing the importance of starting new groups.
- They look to the Bible as the authority. This is what gives the group value and distinction. The value proposition is studying the Bible with a group.
- They make sure everyone can participate. Questions are crafted so everyone can answer, and lessons stand on their own (not dependent upon the participants being present the previous week).

These actions will get our groups down the road to reclaiming the reaching element of Sunday School or ongoing Bible study groups. What steps do your groups need to take in reclaiming the reaching ministry of Sunday School?

Dwayne McCrary is the manager for adult ongoing resources at Lifeway. He also serves as an adjunct professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, teaches an adult group and a preschool group in his church, reads history books, and is a road bicyclist.

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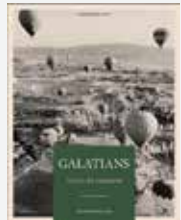
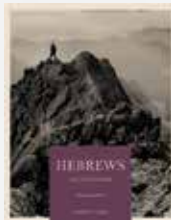
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