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THE WEEK OF

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# FROM THE EDITOR



**Andy McLean**

Editor

*The Gospel Project  
for Students*

When it comes to storytelling, there is no greater master storyteller than Jesus. His parables and stories were a tool—a means for Him to communicate certain realities about the kingdom of God to His audience then and to us today. Whether the account was about a farmer sowing seed or a merciful king forgiving his servant’s massive amount of debt, the stories compel us to gather around, take a seat, and pay attention to their message.

Of course, not only is Jesus the master storyteller—He is the master miracle worker as well. While the stories may communicate His message to us, His signs, miracles, and wonders verify both the message and the Messenger. Through every sign Jesus performed we see something unique about His character and identity. We witness His compassion toward the suffering, as well as His sovereignty over both natural and demonic forces.

Maybe it has been a while since you spent any time reading in the Gospels. Maybe it has been a while since you sat at the feet of Jesus’ teaching or listened in on His miraculous deeds of compassion and healing. If so, take your time as you work your way through this volume of *Stories and Signs*. Listen carefully to what the master storyteller is saying, and what is being said about Him through the retelling of His signs and miracles. Allow the Word to fall on the good soil of your heart, resulting in a lifelong harvest of obedience and love for God.

# AUTHORS

## UNIT 1



**ED STETZER** (Sessions 1–2) holds the Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism and is the Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College. He serves as the general editor for *The Gospel Project* and is the author of numerous books, including *Transformational Groups* and *Compelled*.



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---

## UNIT 2



**LESLIE HUDSON** (Sessions 7–8) is living her life calling to let others know the full riches of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:2-3) by teaching, speaking, and writing about God’s Word and its power. She and her husband, David, live with their children in White Bluff, Tennessee, where she works with Youth and Women’s ministries at First Baptist Church, Dickson.



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**VANCE PITMAN** (Sessions 11–13) is senior pastor of Hope Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. He also serves with the North American Mission Board as a national mobilizer, engaging and mobilizing pastors to plant more churches. He and his wife, Kristie, have four children and one son-in-law. Fellow pastors Jordan Smith and Tom McCormick assisted in writing these sessions.

# HOW TO USE

## ▶ INTRO

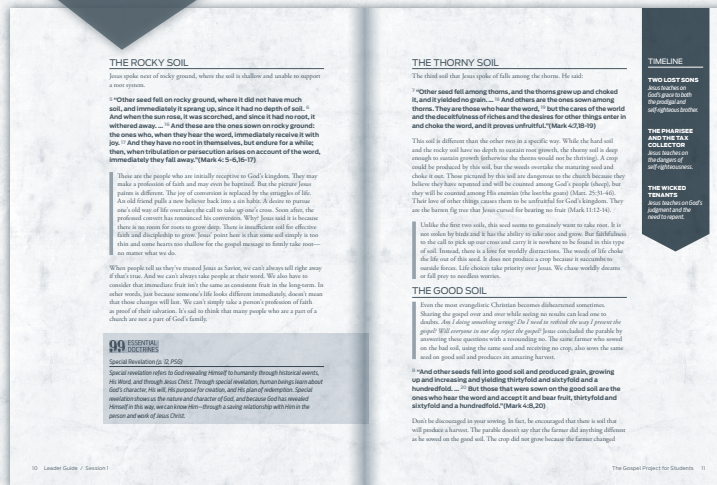
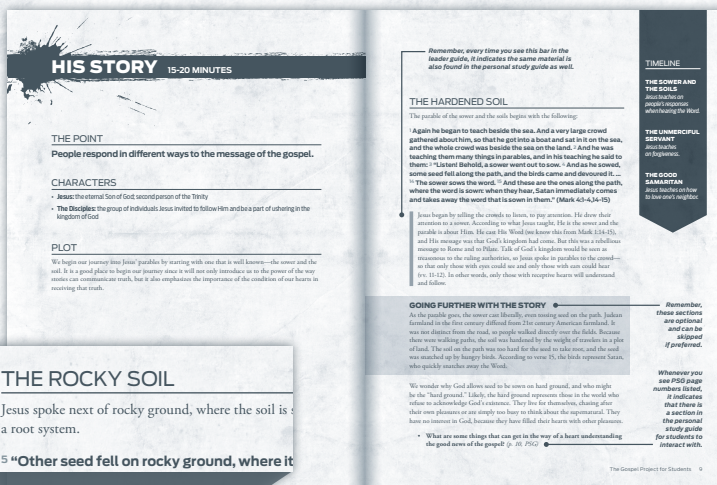
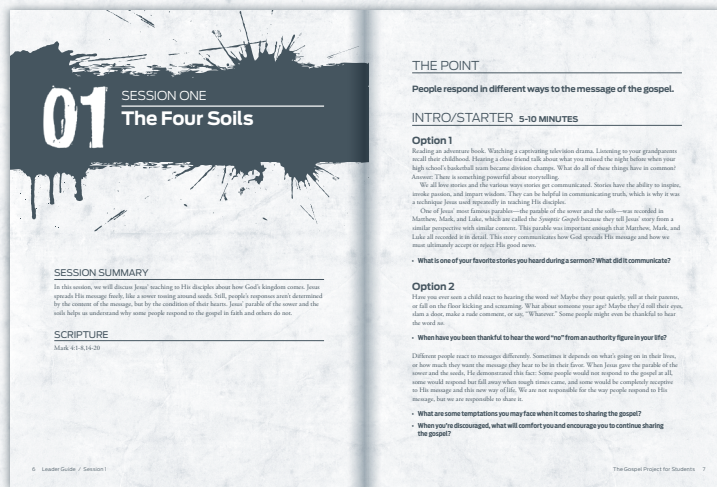
The two introductory pages begin with a summary that provides a brief overview of the session, including a list of Scriptures. The main point is also listed here, as well as two introductory options to choose from to begin the session.

## ▶ HIS STORY

The five His Story pages contain the main teaching material for each session. This section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. The first page restates the main point that is to be emphasized throughout the session and is followed by an introductory plot that serves as a transitional entryway to the main part of the session that begins on the following page.

In addition to these, there are other things to notice throughout the His Story section:

- **Personal Study Guide:** Any time you see a vertical bar in the His Story section, it indicates that the material can also be found in the student's personal study guide.
- **Timeline:** Each session features a timeline of events that corresponds to the timeline located in the student's personal study guide.
- **Going Further With The Story:** Most sessions will include at least one of these. They contain additional material that allows leaders to go deeper into the biblical story. It is up to the leader's discretion whether he or she would like to utilize this material in any way. One can simply bypass this option, however, and not miss anything vital to the session.



# THIS STUDY

- **Essential Doctrines:** Each session will also contain an essential doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material. The essential doctrine is also located in the student's personal study guide, though in an abbreviated format.
- **Christ Connection:** Each session will end with a direct look at how the content studied connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture is pointing to Him. The material in the Christ Connection will also be provided in the student's personal study guide.

## ▶ YOUR STORY

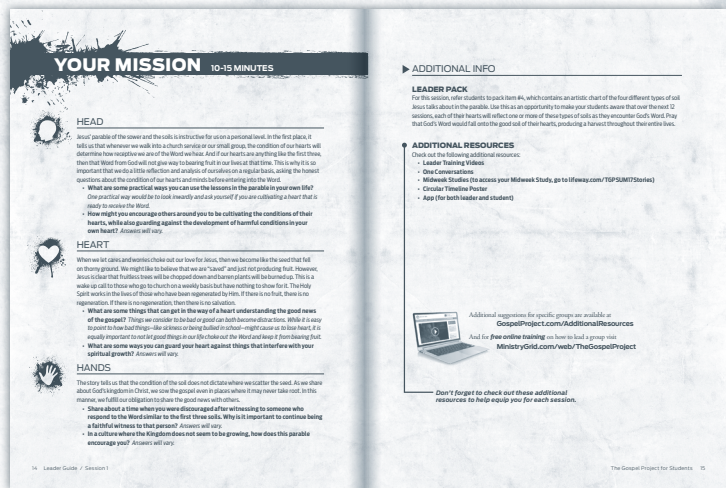
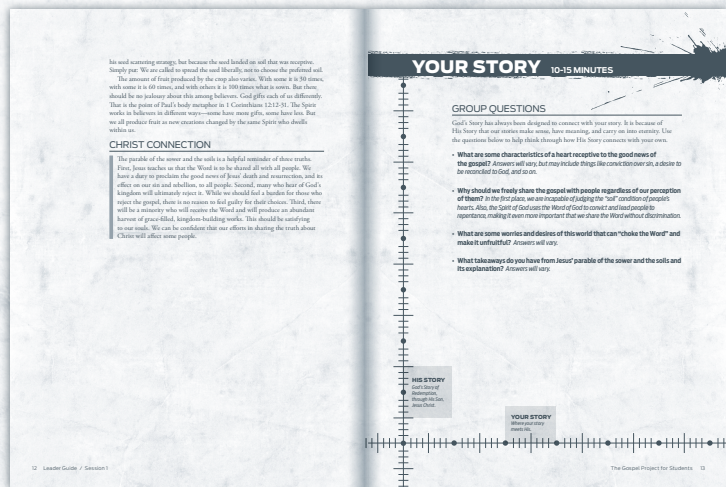
The Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to students' lives today by introducing group discussion questions that highlight how God's Story connects with their story. There are lead-ins with each question in the Leader Guide to help the leader walk students through each question.

## ▶ YOUR MISSION

The Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from day to day. By doing so, we emphasize to students that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God.

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

The final page of each session points leaders to additional resources that can be used in conjunction with each study. The resources listed, such as teaching tips videos and One Conversations, are designed to help leaders prepare for each session. There is also information about the leader pack posters that can be used with each session.





# 01

## SESSION ONE

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# The Four Soils

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will discuss Jesus' teaching to His disciples about how God's kingdom comes. Jesus spreads His message freely, like a sower tossing around seeds. Still, people's responses aren't determined by the content of the message, but by the condition of their hearts. Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils helps us understand why some people respond to the gospel in faith and others do not.

### SCRIPTURE

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Mark 4:1-8,14-20

# THE POINT

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**People respond in different ways to the message of the gospel.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Reading an adventure book. Watching a captivating television drama. Listening to your grandparents recall their childhood. Hearing a close friend talk about what you missed the night before when your high school's basketball team became division champs. What do all of these things have in common? Answer: There is something powerful about storytelling.

We all love stories and the various ways stories get communicated. Stories have the ability to inspire, invoke passion, and impart wisdom. They can be helpful in communicating truth, which is why it was a technique Jesus used repeatedly in teaching His disciples.

One of Jesus' most famous parables—the parable of the sower and the soils—was recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are called the *Synoptic Gospels* because they tell Jesus' story from a similar perspective with similar content. This parable was important enough that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded it in detail. This story communicates how God spreads His message and how we must ultimately accept or reject His good news.

- **What is one of your favorite stories you heard during a sermon? What did it communicate?**

### Option 2

Have you ever seen a child react to hearing the word *no*? Maybe they pout quietly, yell at their parents, or fall on the floor kicking and screaming. What about someone your age? Maybe they'd roll their eyes, slam a door, make a rude comment, or say, "Whatever." Some people might even be thankful to hear the word *no*.

- **When have you been thankful to hear the word "no" from an authority figure in your life?**

Different people react to messages differently. Sometimes it depends on what's going on in their lives, or how much they want the message they hear to be in their favor. When Jesus gave the parable of the sower and the seeds, He demonstrated this fact: Some people would not respond to the gospel at all, some would respond but fall away when tough times came, and some would be completely receptive to His message and this new way of life. We are not responsible for the way people respond to His message, but we are responsible to share it.

- **What are some temptations you may face when it comes to sharing the gospel?**
- **When you're discouraged, what will comfort you and encourage you to continue sharing the gospel?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

---

**People respond in different ways to the message of the gospel.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the group of individuals Jesus invited to follow Him and be a part of ushering in the kingdom of God

## PLOT

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We begin our journey into Jesus' parables by starting with one that is well known—the sower and the soil. It is a good place to begin our journey since it will not only introduce us to the power of the way stories can communicate truth, but it also emphasizes the importance of the condition of our hearts in receiving that truth.



**Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.**

## THE HARDENED SOIL

The parable of the sower and the soils begins with the following:

**<sup>1</sup> Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. <sup>2</sup> And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: <sup>3</sup> “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ... <sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word. <sup>15</sup> And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.” (Mark 4:1-4,14-15)**

Jesus began by telling the crowds to listen, to pay attention. He drew their attention to a sower. According to what Jesus taught, He is the sower and the parable is about Him. He cast His Word (we know this from Mark 1:14-15), and His message was that God’s kingdom had come. But this was a rebellious message to Rome and to Pilate. Talk of God’s kingdom would be seen as treasonous to the ruling authorities, so Jesus spoke in parables to the crowd—so that only those with eyes could see and only those with ears could hear (vv. 11-12). In other words, only those with receptive hearts will understand and follow.

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

As the parable goes, the sower cast liberally, even tossing seed on the path. Judean farmland in the first century differed from 21st century American farmland. It was not distinct from the road, so people walked directly over the fields. Because there were walking paths, the soil was hardened by the weight of travelers in a plot of land. The soil on the path was too hard for the seed to take root, and the seed was snatched up by hungry birds. According to verse 15, the birds represent Satan, who quickly snatches away the Word.

We wonder why God allows seed to be sown on hard ground, and who might be the “hard ground.” Likely, the hard ground represents those in the world who refuse to acknowledge God’s existence. They live for themselves, chasing after their own pleasures or are simply too busy to think about the supernatural. They have no interest in God, because they have filled their hearts with other pleasures.

- **What are some things that can get in the way of a heart understanding the good news of the gospel? (p. 10, PSG)**

## TIMELINE

### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

*Jesus teaches on people’s responses when hearing the Word.*

### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

*Jesus teaches on how to love one’s neighbor.*

**Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.**

**Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.**

## THE ROCKY SOIL

---

Jesus spoke next of rocky ground, where the soil is shallow and unable to support a root system.

**5 “Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ... 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.”(Mark 4: 5-6,16-17)**

These are the people who are initially receptive to God’s kingdom. They may make a profession of faith and may even be baptized. But the picture Jesus paints is different. The joy of conversion is replaced by the struggles of life. An old friend pulls a new believer back into a sin habit. A desire to pursue one’s old way of life overtakes the call to take up one’s cross. Soon after, the professed convert has renounced his conversion. Why? Jesus said it is because there is no room for roots to grow deep. There is insufficient soil for effective faith and discipleship to grow. Jesus’ point here is that some soil simply is too thin and some hearts too shallow for the gospel message to firmly take root—no matter what we do.

When people tell us they’ve trusted Jesus as Savior, we can’t always tell right away if that’s true. And we can’t always take people at their word. We also have to consider that immediate fruit isn’t the same as consistent fruit in the long-term. In other words, just because someone’s life looks different immediately, doesn’t mean that those changes will last. We can’t simply take a person’s profession of faith as proof of their salvation. It’s sad to think that many people who are a part of a church are not a part of God’s family.

### 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

#### Special Revelation (p. 12, PSG)

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*Special revelation refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God’s character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

## THE THORNY SOIL

---

The third soil that Jesus spoke of falls among the thorns. He said:

**7 “Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ...<sup>18</sup> And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,<sup>19</sup> but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”(Mark 4:7,18-19)**

This soil is different than the other two in a specific way. While the hard soil and the rocky soil have no depth to sustain root growth, the thorny soil is deep enough to sustain growth (otherwise the thorns would not be thriving). A crop could be produced by this soil, but the weeds overtake the maturing seed and choke it out. Those pictured by this soil are dangerous to the church because they believe they have repented and will be counted among God’s people (sheep), but they will be counted among His enemies (the lost/the goats) (Matt. 25:31-46). Their love of other things causes them to be unfruitful for God’s kingdom. They are the barren fig tree that Jesus cursed for bearing no fruit (Mark 11:12-14).

Unlike the first two soils, this seed seems to genuinely want to take root. It is not stolen by birds and it has the ability to take root and grow. But faithfulness to the call to pick up our cross and carry it is nowhere to be found in this type of soil. Instead, there is a love for worldly distractions. The weeds of life choke the life out of this seed. It does not produce a crop because it succumbs to outside forces. Life choices take priority over Jesus. We chase worldly dreams or fall prey to needless worries.

## THE GOOD SOIL

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Even the most evangelistic Christian becomes disheartened sometimes. Sharing the gospel over and over while seeing no results can lead one to doubts. *Am I doing something wrong? Do I need to rethink the way I present the gospel? Will everyone in our day reject the gospel?* Jesus concluded the parable by answering these questions with a resounding no. The same farmer who sowed on the bad soil, using the same seed and receiving no crop, also sows the same seed on good soil and produces an amazing harvest.

**8 “And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. ...<sup>20</sup> But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”(Mark 4:8,20)**

Don’t be discouraged in your sowing. In fact, be encouraged that there is soil that will produce a harvest. The parable doesn’t say that the farmer did anything different as he sowed on the good soil. The crop did not grow because the farmer changed

## TIMELINE

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### **TWO LOST SONS**

*Jesus teaches on God’s grace to both the prodigal and self-righteous brother.*

### **THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR**

*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

### **THE WICKED TENANTS**

*Jesus teaches on God’s judgment and the need to repent.*

his seed scattering strategy, but because the seed landed on soil that was receptive. Simply put: We are called to spread the seed liberally, not to choose the preferred soil.

The amount of fruit produced by the crop also varies. With some it is 30 times, with some it is 60 times, and with others it is 100 times what is sown. But there should be no jealousy about this among believers. God gifts each of us differently. That is the point of Paul's body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. The Spirit works in believers in different ways—some have more gifts, some have less. But we all produce fruit as new creations changed by the same Spirit who dwells within us.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The parable of the sower and the soils is a helpful reminder of three truths. First, Jesus teaches us that the Word is to be shared all with all people. We have a duty to proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and its effect on our sin and rebellion, to all people. Second, many who hear of God's kingdom will ultimately reject it. While we should feel a burden for those who reject the gospel, there is no reason to feel guilty for their choices. Third, there will be a minority who will receive the Word and will produce an abundant harvest of grace-filled, kingdom-building works. This should be satisfying to our souls. We can be confident that our efforts in sharing the truth about Christ will affect some people.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some characteristics of a heart receptive to the good news of the gospel?** *Answers will vary, but may include things like conviction over sin, a desire to be reconciled to God, and so on.*
- **Why should we freely share the gospel with people regardless of our perception of them?** *In the first place, we are incapable of judging the "soil" condition of people's hearts. Also, the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to convict and lead people to repentance, making it even more important that we share the Word without discrimination.*
- **What are some worries and desires of this world that can "choke the Word" and make it unfruitful?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What takeaways do you have from Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils and its explanation?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

---

Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils is instructive for us on a personal level. In the first place, it tells us that whenever we walk into a church service or our small group, the condition of our hearts will determine how receptive we are of the Word we hear. And if our hearts are anything like the first three, then that Word from God will not give way to bearing fruit in our lives at that time. This is why it is so important that we do a little reflection and analysis of ourselves on a regular basis, asking the honest questions about the condition of our hearts and minds before entering into the Word.

- **What are some practical ways you can use the lessons in the parable in your own life?** *One practical way would be to look inwardly and ask yourself if you are cultivating a heart that is ready to receive the Word.*
- **How might you encourage others around you to be cultivating the conditions of their hearts, while also guarding against the development of harmful conditions in your own heart?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

---

When we let cares and worries choke out our love for Jesus, then we become like the seed that fell on thorny ground. We might like to believe that we are “saved” and just not producing fruit. However, Jesus is clear that fruitless trees will be chopped down and barren plants will be burned up. This is a wake up call to those who go to church on a weekly basis but have nothing to show for it. The Holy Spirit works in the lives of those who have been regenerated by Him. If there is no fruit, there is no regeneration. If there is no regeneration, then there is no salvation.

- **What are some things that can get in the way of a heart understanding the good news of the gospel?** *Things we consider to be bad or good can both become distractions. While it is easy to point to how bad things—like sickness or being bullied in school—might cause us to lose heart, it is equally important to not let good things in our life choke out the Word and keep it from bearing fruit.*
- **What are some ways you can guard your heart against things that interfere with your spiritual growth?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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The story tells us that the condition of the soil does not dictate where we scatter the seed. As we share about God's kingdom in Christ, we sow the gospel even in places where it may never take root. In this manner, we fulfill our obligation to share the good news with others.

- **Share about a time when you were discouraged after witnessing to someone who respond to the Word similar to the first three soils. Why is it important to continue being a faithful witness to that person?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In a culture where the Kingdom does not seem to be growing, how does this parable encourage you?** *Answers will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #4, which contains an artistic chart of the four different types of soil Jesus talks about in the parable. Use this as an opportunity to make your students aware that over the next 12 sessions, each of their hearts will reflect one or more of these types of soils as they encounter God's Word. Pray that God's Word would fall onto the good soil of their hearts, producing a harvest throughout their entire lives.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

***Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.***

# 02

## SESSION TWO

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# The Unmerciful Servant

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will discuss Jesus' teaching on forgiveness through the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Jesus followers are invited to forgive others because they have been forgiven a much greater debt. Forgiving others is an overflow of God's good news, not simply an occasional act when it feels appropriate. Following Jesus means remembering we are forgiven, and extending that forgiveness to others.

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 18:21-35



# THE POINT

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**Christians are to forgive other Christians in the same manner they have been forgiven.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

We live in a world that values revenge as an ideal. Achieving revenge and accomplishing our own sense of “justice” is a common theme of popular movies, books, and stories celebrated in media. Not only do we see this around us, but we feel it inside of us as well. We consciously or unconsciously find ourselves treating others differently if they have wronged us, ignored us, haven’t returned a favor, haven’t repaid a debt, or failed to meet our expectations.

- **When and where have you recently seen or heard messages highlighting revenge in our culture? Why do you think revenge is so often celebrated?**

One of the core truths in Christianity is that we are forgiven: Our slate of sin is wiped clean because of Jesus’ work on the cross. Yet often we stop there, failing to take the next step forward by forgiving others in light of the forgiveness that has been given to us. To make it clear how important this next step is, Jesus told a dramatic story of forgiveness and judgment, turning the idea of an unforgiving heart on it’s head.

### Option 2

What comes to mind when you hear the word *forgiveness*? Some people say, “It’s as much for you as it is for the person who hurt you.” Maybe you’ve heard someone say, “I could never forgive her after what she did.” Or maybe you’ve even heard, “Forgive and forget.”

- **What are some stories of forgiveness you’ve heard?**
- **When have you made a difficult decision to forgive someone? What happened? Why was it so difficult to forgive?**

Biblical forgiveness is different from all of the definitions, phrases, and quotes you’ll hear from the rest of the world, because the kind of forgiveness Jesus calls us to is like His—completely unconditional. Jesus’ love for us was so great that He went to the cross and died for our sins to forgive us *while* we were still trapped in our sin, content to offend Him (Rom. 5:8). Forgiveness isn’t just about removing a punishment or penalties, it’s about moving toward a restored relationship with that person. Jesus calls us to forgive, endlessly, no matter what—just as He has forgiven us (Rom. 12:18).

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Christians are to forgive other Christians in the same manner they have been forgiven.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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This next parable demonstrates Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, or rather, the motivation for us to forgive others because of the forgiveness God has given us. Despite being forgiven of his own, outrageous debt, the wicked servant refused to extend that same forgiveness to the man who owed him a debt. This powerful story has a powerful message, revealing what is really in the hearts of those who reject the offer to forgive while knowing God extends forgiveness to all.

## TIMELINE

### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

*Jesus teaches on how to love one's neighbor.*

### TWO LOST SONS

*Jesus teaches on God's grace to both the prodigal and self-righteous brother.*

## JESUS TALKED ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Matthew included Jesus' teaching on how Christians should respond to other Christians who have sinned against them.

**21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matt. 18:21-22)**

- **How would you define forgiveness? How does your definition align with what Jesus said in these verses?** (*p. 16, PSG*)

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Rabbinic Judaism taught that forgiving someone three times was sufficient to demonstrate a forgiving spirit, based on Old Testament accounts of God's action toward humanity (Job 33:29-30; Amos 1:3; 2:6). But the common thought in first-century Judaism was that if a person sinned willfully, expecting to receive forgiveness, then forgiveness should not be offered.

Peter's question to Jesus demonstrated his willingness to more than double the typical requirement of forgiving someone. There seems to be some significance to Peter's use of the number seven, as if that number would "complete" the process. As a disciple, Peter seemed to attempt to understand Jesus' kingdom ethic and go beyond what was expected.

Jesus' answer is somewhat difficult to understand. Some translations say "seventy-seven times," while others say "seventy times seven." Whichever translation you read, the point is the same. Jesus did not give a specific number of offenses after which we are no longer required to forgive. The number does not matter because Jesus taught that His followers are expected to forgive completely, without limits. Jesus' parable, which followed His response to Peter, teaches this point—Christians should keep on forgiving because of the magnitude of forgiveness that has been granted to us.

## THE SERVANT'S DEBT WAS CANCELED

Jesus wanted to teach His followers what encountering His kingdom is like, so He told the following story:

**23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to**

settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.  
<sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.  
<sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'  
<sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt."  
(Matt. 18:23-27)

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God is Merciful (p. 18, PSG)

*Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.*

According to the story, a slave owed his king ten thousand talents, an amount so outrageous that the debt could never actually be paid. This amount would be more than a person could make in an entire lifetime. The story does not lead us to believe the king was being unforgiving or unfair toward His slave. He simply wanted to recover as much of the debt as he could.

How the king would legally repay himself is quite foreign to us today. In Jesus' day, the king would have a right to sell the person with an outstanding debt (along with all of his family) to pay back some of the debt. Any money earned during their slavery would go back immediately to the king, thus enslaving them for life (given the enormous amount owed).

This debt did not just affect the servant but his entire family and his family's future. Likely, generations would be enslaved because of what the man owed. Jesus painted a picture of a man so hopelessly in debt that the only value he had to the king would come if he, his family, and their possessions were sold to repay only a small part of his debt. It was a dire situation.

The slave, in begging for his life and the lives of his wife and children, made an outrageous claim. He offered to repay the debt, but only if he could be given more time. Jesus did not say how much time had already passed, but it is reasonable to believe his money had been gone long enough and the debt needed to be settled.

In a wonderful twist to the expected outcome, the king determined not to exact payment but to forgive the massive debt. No doubt Jesus' audience would have been shocked. *What just king cancels a debt, especially one of such an enormous amount?* With merely a word, an indebted slave was released from his financial bondage and his entire family escaped the approaching, lifelong, brutal punishment.

As the story relates to believers, which Jesus makes clear, we see a picture of God’s kingdom—a kingdom full of slaves that have committed countless transgressions against Him, accumulating a “debt” even more outrageous than ten thousand talents. Even if we wanted to pay God back, the amount of the offense is too great to repay.

The obvious response, with or without time, would be for God to judge us for our debts. But God demonstrates His love to us by forgiving our debts through Jesus (Rom. 5:8). In this story we see a picture of God’s undeserved grace—He helps the helpless by forgiving the ones in need of forgiveness.

## CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO FORGIVE AS THEY HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

Jesus’ ability to capture the attention of His audience was on full display here. After telling of a man whose immeasurable debt had just been forgiven, He went on to tell of that same man leaving the king’s presence and finding a fellow slave who owed him a debt.

**28 “But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’<sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’<sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.<sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.<sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.<sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’<sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.<sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matt. 18:28-35)**

One hundred denarii might have been three to four months of income, certainly no small amount, but it paled in comparison to ten thousand talents. This slave, having just received forgiveness of his own massive debt, began choking his fellow slave for the same offense. The second slave responded exactly the same way as the first slave responded—he pleaded earnestly for time to repay.

The first slave, feeling wronged by the debt owed him, did not extend grace. Instead, he had the second slave tossed in prison. Debtor’s prison was a legitimate alternative to being sold to recoup owed money. Think about the impact to this man’s family, as any money earned through work in prison would only go toward the repayment of the loan.

While this action might have been justified in normal circumstances, the fellow slaves were shocked that the first slave withheld mercy despite having received forgiveness for his own enormous debt. Therefore, they reported to the king what they had seen. In righteous anger, the king confronted his slave

## TIMELINE

### THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

### THE WICKED TENANTS

*Jesus teaches on God’s judgment and the need to repent.*

### WATER INTO WINE

*Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.*

and rebuked him for the hardness of his heart. The king chastised the slave in verse 33, pointing out that grace received should be grace extended.

The punishment we see in verse 34 is sobering: Those who receive forgiveness but do not extend it to others are “wicked” and will be punished justly and severely. The translation we are reading mentions that the servant was turned over “to the jailers,” but this is different than it seems. The original Greek word means *torturer*. So what this means is that the slave was tormented in the parable until the full payment was made—and recall how impossibly large his debt was.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Remember, a parable is a fictional story illustrating a broader truth, and here this broader truth relates to God’s actions toward the unforgiving. It is quite possible that the idea of torment in this parable is an allusion to the eternal punishment of hell for those apart from Christ. However, an unforgiving heart can create a measure of torment in the present too, leading to a life of bitterness, loneliness, anger, and resentment. In the absence of forgiveness, God allows us to be handed over to our own personal torturers and tormentors, where the people who wronged you may be long gone, long dead, long distant but still wreaking havoc in your soul.

The beautiful truth is that we can be freed from the tormentors of past wrongs by forgiving others. You do not have to be bound to the ones who hurt you. And withholding forgiveness can bring much torment and pain into your own life.

As 21st-century Christ-followers, let’s not just look at these parables as simply narrative stories. Jesus concluded this teaching on forgiveness with a very clear and pointed application in verse 35—those who have been forgiven but do not extend forgiveness will be treated as the first slave. Jesus is very forceful here: Forgive or face God’s judgment.

The measure and means by which we forgive has nothing to do with the person who wronged us. The measure and means by which we forgive has everything to do with the Savior who forgave us. When a proclaiming Christian has difficulty forgiving others, it reveals a deep problem of the heart. In the worst of cases, one must ask: If a “Christian” has difficulty forgiving others, then has this “Christian” really understood the gospel?

Though our debt before God was too great to be paid through our good works or effort, we have received forgiveness through the grace of Jesus Christ, who paid our debt through His death on the cross. God has wiped the slate clean with the blood of His Son. And a true realization of our forgiveness in Christ results in a radical heart change of forgiving others in the same manner in which they have been forgiven by Christ.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What makes it difficult to sometimes forgive others?** *Answers will vary, but sometimes it depends on the offense or how much we are hurting. Other times we don't want to forgive because the offending person doesn't seem remorseful for hurting us.*
- **What potential objections would someone have to forgiving another person again and again ("seventy times seven")?** *The most likely response is the assumption that a person who keeps offending someone will never change.*
- **How are you challenged by Jesus' addition of the phrase "from your heart" to His command to forgive?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What practical steps do you need to take in light of Jesus' teaching in the parable of the unmerciful servant?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The truth of the matter is our rebellion against God is a price too high for us to pay. We foolishly think we can repay Him by our good works or by cleaning up our act, but those things will never be enough to overcome our massive debt. Our inability to repay is what makes God's forgiveness so remarkable—He forgives us and wipes our debt clean because of Jesus. He has extended forgiveness to those most in need.

- **Why is it important to realize we can never repay our personal debts to God? How does our inability to repay increase our amazement of God's mercy and forgiveness?** *Our amazement of God's grace and mercy will depend on our understanding of how great our debt to Him was because of our sin.*
- **Why is it important for us to always remember our own forgiveness when confronted with needing to forgive someone who has wronged us?** *Our own forgiveness provides us with the right motivation and framework for forgiving others.*



## HEART

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The world often lives by the mantra "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." Jesus' teaching is that no matter how many times a fellow believer sins against you, you are to forgive that person. There is no limit to your forgiveness because in forgiving "seventy times seven," you are demonstrating that forgiveness is essential to Christian living. And in doing this, we cultivate a lifestyle of forgiveness, though not by ourselves. That is why Jesus told a story to reinforce to His followers the importance of forgiveness.

- **Why must forgiveness begin with the heart?** *Genuine forgiveness isn't something that is simply external—we can say the words "I forgive you" and still have bitterness and anger toward someone who has sinned against us. This is why forgiveness first and foremost takes place in the heart.*
- **What would such a level of grace and forgiveness within the church communicate to unbelievers?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Is the way the unmerciful servant responded not the way we behave toward those who need our forgiveness? We who have been generously forgiven for our sins find those same sins disgusting in others. We often point out the same faults in others that we think we have mastered. This part of the parable of the unmerciful servant is the picture of what God sees in us when we fail to forgive others despite being forgiven of our rebellion. The daily discipline of forgiving others should be reflected in the lives of all those who claim to be under the forgiving grace of God in Christ.

- **What are some ways, even subtle ones, that we punish others instead of forgiving them for wrongs they have done against us?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we resist the desire for vengeance and instead practice mercy as it has been shown to us in Christ?** *Answers will vary.*



## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #5, which contains a quote poster related to the session.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# 03

## SESSION THREE

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# The Good Samaritan

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will study the parable of the good Samaritan. An expert in the law asked Jesus how to gain eternal life. Jesus summed up the message of the Old Testament in the commandments to love God and to love your neighbor. When the man asked who his neighbor was, Jesus responded with the story of a man in distress and an unexpected act of compassion. As followers of Jesus, we recognize that God's compassion toward us should motivate us to show compassion to people in need.

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 10:25-37

# THE POINT

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**Jesus' compassion leads Christians to be compassionate toward others.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

“You’re asking the wrong question.” That’s a phrase you hear every now and then during a debate, when two sides are trying to come to an agreement. Whenever someone says, “You’re asking the wrong question,” they imply that the framework for the conversation needs to change. A new window of imagination needs to open up.

Consider this scenario: A small town has a much higher number of traffic injuries than the towns around it. At first, local leaders work to improve their emergency response: They work on cutting the time it takes for an ambulance to arrive and partner with the local hospital to ensure that people get the best treatment in the fastest possible manner. All these conversations center on the emergency response and how to make it better.

Over time, however, a local leader eventually says, “We’re asking the wrong question. Instead of focusing on our emergency response, we ought to focus on the intersection where most of the accidents are taking place!” The light bulb comes on and the conversations shift to other ideas, such as lowering the speed limit near the dangerous intersection, making signs to warn people about the danger ahead, and installing mirrors around the curb to help people see.

Do you see how changing the question leads to a different kind of conversation and opens up a new window of possibilities? Jesus was a masterful teacher, and He often flipped people’s expectations upside down either by telling a story or changing a question. In this session, we’ll see how He did both.

- **When have you been in a situation in which you needed to “change the question” so you could look at things from a different angle? How did changing the question affect your thought process?**

### Option 2

Think about where you live. Do you know your neighbors? When we think about neighbors, we usually think of the people who live near us, the people who go to the same school, the same church, or who play sports with us in the local recreation leagues. Jesus made clear to His disciples and the religious leaders that the word neighbor wasn’t about location, profession, ethnicity, or denomination. Your neighbor is anyone who crosses your path. We’re called to love all people, regardless of who they are, where they’re from, or how different they are from us.

- **Who are some people you know who need to see Jesus’ love and compassion? How can you show them His love and compassion this week?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus' compassion leads Christians to be compassionate toward others.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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The story of the good Samaritan is another one of Jesus' most well-known parables. An expert in the law came to Jesus and tried to test Him by asking a pretty straightforward question: How do I gain eternal life? Jesus' response was also straightforward: Obey the Old Testament commands of loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. To clarify even further, Jesus told a story about a Samaritan who stopped to help a man that not even the Jewish leaders stopped to help. The story featured an unlikely hero who demonstrated that loving your neighbor means loving all people.

## TIMELINE

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

*Jesus teaches on how to love one's neighbor.*

### TWO LOST SONS

*Jesus teaches on God's grace to both the prodigal and self-righteous brother.*

### THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

## JESUS SUMMED UP THE LAW AND PROPHETS

In the Gospels, people often spoke to Jesus in order to “test him.” That is, they asked questions intended to trip Him up somehow or to trap Him in inconsistencies. Let’s take a look at one of these occasions and see how Jesus responded:

**25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” 27 And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10:25-28)**

An expert in the Law of Moses asked Jesus a question in order to test Him and see what His answer might be. The question itself is fine, a common question, a good question—one that we’ve seen before and will see again.

Some readers immediately think the question is about going to heaven after you die. But in its first-century context, the question would have had a different meaning. Asking about the way to inherit eternal life meant something like this: “Teacher, how can I make sure I will be part of God’s kingdom when the Messiah comes and establishes His reign on earth? How can I make sure that whenever God returns to His people and makes everything right I’ll be part of that inheritance?”

Note Jesus’ response to the expert in verse 26. Jesus basically said, “You’re the expert in the law, so tell me what you find there.” Jesus often responded to a question by asking another question. It’s a way to reveal the heart behind the question. And that’s what He did here.

Notice how the man responded. He quoted the two greatest commandments—love God and love your neighbor. Jesus Himself said on another occasion that the whole Old Testament—the Law and the Prophets—could be summed up this way (Matt. 22:36-40).

But here’s the catch, and we’ll see how the heart of the man was revealed in the next part of this passage: Who can fully and at all times love God and their neighbors as they are called to? If complete obedience to the law is required to inherit eternal life, then how could the lawyer make sure he was okay? Who can say they are without fault where complete obedience is concerned?

We’ll see how the man responded to Jesus’ command in a moment. But first, let’s consider the unbending, unyielding vision Jesus described here. Life in God’s kingdom is a life of love toward God and others. It would be impossible for someone to inherit God’s new world if the person had no love for God and others.

## JESUS SHOWED WHAT COMPASSION LOOKS LIKE

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Simple question, simple answer. “You want to inherit eternal life? Love God and love your neighbor.” But that answer implies full devotion—a perfection of love for God and people that none of us, if we’re honest, can possibly fulfill. Not surprisingly, the expert felt the sting of the law’s condemnation, namely the law’s exposure of his failure to love God and his neighbor as he ought. And so, he quickly responded with another question, one that he hoped would justify him.

**<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’” (Luke 10:29-35)**

The expert’s question about the identity of his neighbor wasn’t innocent. He realized the significance of Jesus’ words, and he felt the weight of this responsibility—to love God and neighbor everywhere, at all times. And in order to justify himself he asked a question intended to limit his love: “Tell me who it is I need to love, and I’ll make sure I love that person.” The intent was to limit the circle to a manageable group.

Jesus responded to that question by telling one of His most famous stories—the parable of the good Samaritan. This story is filled with drama from the beginning. Jesus first introduced a man, presumably Jewish, who fell into the hands of robbers on the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Next, you have the introduction of two well-respected characters: a priest and a Levite. Both were religious leaders. Both were Jews. Both would have been expected to do something to help the man in distress. But both of them passed by the wounded and dying man on the far side of the road.

Shockingly, a Samaritan man stopped to help the wounded Jew. The Jewish people in Jesus' day despised the Samaritans for religious and ethnic reasons. For the Samaritan to become the hero of the story, and for the Samaritan to be the one to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries, was scandalous. Imagine if we were to retell the story today about a wounded Christian being passed over by two Christians but helped by a Muslim! Or a white man in distress in the Deep South during the Jim Crow years being helped by a black man.

We should ask ourselves why Jesus decided to tell a story instead of just saying, "To be a neighbor, show compassion." There's something powerful in the way Jesus delivered this truth in the form of a story.

## JESUS COMMANDS US TO BE COMPASSIONATE TO OTHERS

After telling the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked a question of His own. And look how Jesus' question differed from the original question asked by the law expert.

**36 "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:36-37)**

Do you see how Jesus changed the question? Basically, the expert in the law asked, "Whom do I need to see as my neighbor?" Jesus' question was different. His focus was on to whom you can be a neighbor. Instead of limiting the circle to a few "neighbors," He widened it without limit.

The way the expert responded to Jesus' question (v. 36) may have shown hesitancy to praise the Samaritan in Jesus' story. So, the expert simply referred to the Samaritan as the "one" who was merciful. Jesus' answer was for the man to go and do the same. Be the person who shows mercy. It's not about fulfilling a quota of compassionate work for a few neighbors. It's about being the kind of person who shows mercy to those in need. Jesus' story was going for heartfelt transformation, not just list of activities people can check off as a way of fulfilling a duty.

- **What is the difference between doing acts of compassion and being a compassionate person?** (p. 23, PSG)

## TIMELINE

### THE WICKED TENANTS

*Jesus teaches on God's judgment and the need to repent.*

### WATER INTO WINE

*Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.*

### BREAD FROM HEAVEN

*Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Social Concern (p. 24, PSG)

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*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. 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 (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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While the story of the good Samaritan is certainly intended to be a story that responds to the expert's question about who qualifies as our neighbor, there remains the strong connection that this story hints at Jesus being the One who comes and, at great cost to Himself, shows us compassion. There is a sense in which Jesus is "the great Samaritan"—the One who takes charge of our welfare and shows us compassion when we are helpless.

Surely, this was one of the lessons the expert in the law needed to learn. He thought if he could simply whittle down the law to two main commandments and then limit the circle of neighbors, he might be able to justify himself. But Jesus smashed all of those assumptions with the story He told. We trust in the compassion and mercy of God for salvation, and only then are we able to show compassion and mercy to others.



# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What do you think about the man's answer to Jesus' question?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why do you think the two religious leaders passed by the man in distress? What are some modern day examples of something similar happening?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What reasons do we give when we want to "pass by on the other side" and not show compassion?** *Sometimes we say we don't have time, we don't have the resources or knowledge to help, and so on.*
- **What are some key takeaways for you personally after hearing the story of the good Samaritan?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The promise of heaven (when we die) and the new heavens and new earth (at the end of time) is that we will be forever with God and His people. Life today is preparation for eternal life in the future, and the love we will share in the future must invade the present and fill us with compassion. Jesus said, “Do this, and you are really living.”

- **Place yourself in this scene. If Jesus had told you that the way to inherit eternal life is by loving God and loving others, how would you have responded? What questions would you have asked?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What do you think these different aspects of loving God (heart, soul, strength, mind) refer to, and why do they matter?** *Put simply: Jesus calls us to love God with our entire being, all that we are. Not just with our hearts and emotions, but with every part of us we have to choose and commit to loving Him.*



## HEART

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The parable is challenging to hear, but it also opens up new perspectives and imagination. And it raises a number of questions. Why do people, even those who are religious, fail to show compassion when required? What does compassion look like? How should we consider the cost of compassion and the responsibility for other people’s welfare? The parable stirs our hearts in a way that shows us the truth, instead of just telling us. And the truth Jesus showed in this story is that compassion and love for our neighbors crosses boundaries and overcomes obstacles.

- **What can we learn from the Samaritan’s sacrificial actions on behalf of the wounded man?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some practical ways we can also show compassion to people in need?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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We cannot come to the end of this parable without feeling the full weight of Jesus’ instruction to us. Now that we have received the compassion of God, shown to us most clearly in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are commissioned to love our neighbors by showing mercy to those in need. This is why Christians have always been, or should always be, on the front lines of mercy ministry. These activities are not just things we “check off” on our to-do list. Generosity toward the needy is not something we do; generous is something we are.

- **What does it say about us as Christians if we fail to be compassionate?** *Mainly, a lack of compassion calls into question whether or not we really understand compassion and if we have truly experienced it ourselves.*
- **How does our ministry of mercy back up what we say we believe about God’s mercy to us?** *Answers will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

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And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# 04

## SESSION FOUR

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# The Father of Two Lost Sons

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will study Jesus' famous parable of a loving father with two lost sons. In the characters' attitudes and actions, we see a picture of human sinfulness, the grace-filled posture of God, and the deadliness of self-righteousness. Like those who originally heard this parable, we are called not to resent God's grace but to celebrate God's goodness in embracing any sinner who repents.

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 15:11-32

# THE POINT

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**God's grace is offered to those who repent of their sin and self-righteousness.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Have you ever noticed how many children's films are about the main character being separated from a father?

- *An American Tail* relates the story of Fievel, a mouse whose curiosity leads him to a forbidden part of a ship full of immigrants. In a terrible storm, Fievel is swept out to sea and spends the rest of the film trying to find his papa.
- *Finding Nemo* is about a little clown fish who rebels against his father's wishes, gets caught by a diver in the ocean, and ends up in an aquarium in a dentist's office. The film shows Nemo's dad, Marlin, traveling the ocean past sharks and jellyfish in order to find his son.
- *Annie* is about an orphan girl longing to be reunited with her parents.
- *Home Alone* tells the story of a boy who wishes his family was gone and comes to regret that wish!

Stories of separation and reunion, longing and fulfillment, exile and return strike a chord in our hearts. Why? Because these stories all somehow mirror the great story of the world, in which sinners who are lost and in bondage need to be found and set free.

- **What books or movies about someone who is lost and found do you like most? Why do you think these stories resonate with us?**

### Option 2

Have you ever been in a crowded space and been separated from the people you came with? There's a sense of panic when you realize none of the faces or places nearby look familiar. Then, when you find who you're looking for or the place you're supposed to meet, you feel relief, joy, and happiness at being reunited with the people you love.

- **Describe a time when you were separated from people you love. What happened? How did you find them? How did you feel when you found them?**

Being separated from friends or loved ones, trying to find our way back to them, resembles our relationship with God. Our sin is rebellion against Him—it separates us from Him. But God, in His love, offers us grace and mercy. He offers us a way home, to be reconciled with Him, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

- **How does it affect you to know that God offers us a way to be reconciled to Him through Jesus?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God's grace is offered to those who repent of their sin and self-righteousness.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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Our next story is Jesus' famous parable of a loving father with two lost sons. Most people call this the story of the prodigal son; however, the prodigal son isn't really the main character in this story. Sure, he is one of the lost sons, but there is another person who hardly gets any attention—the merciful father.

## TIMELINE

### **TWO LOST SONS**

*Jesus teaches on God's grace to both the prodigal and self-righteous brother.*

### **THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR**

*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

### **THE WICKED TENANTS**

*Jesus teaches on God's judgment and the need to repent.*

## THE SIN OF THE YOUNGER SON

The three parables in Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) were told in an environment that heightened the drama of their stories. The religious leaders were complaining about Jesus welcoming notorious sinners to His table. In response, Jesus didn't give an explanation but a series of stories, and the third one was especially pointed—casting Himself in the role of the loving father and His opponents in the role of a resentful elder brother. Watch how the story begins.

**<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"" (Luke 15:11-19)**

In the Jesus' day, it was normal for sons to assume that upon their father's death they would gain a sizeable inheritance, consisting of the family's assets and property. But in Jesus' parable, the younger son demanded his portion early. Today's equivalent would be a teenager spitting in his dad's face and screaming, "I want you dead!" Asking for the inheritance early suggested that the son couldn't wait for his father to die. He wanted what his father could give him now, even at the expense of their relationship.

A bigger shock followed—the father gave the younger son what he asked for. In fact, he actually gave both his sons their inheritance (v. 12). In those days, the older son would be expected to build a bridge between the father and the younger son and avoid public humiliation. But instead of trying to restore the family's fellowship, the older son silently took his double portion of the fortune. There was neither outcry against the younger brother's action nor passionate defense of the father's honor. The older son pocketed his inheritance, stayed home, and stayed quiet. His silence was deafening.

Jesus painted a picture of two types of lost people. The first is openly rebellious—the “in your face” sin of the younger son. The younger son’s request illustrates the enormity and consequence of human sin. “God, we want what You can give us, but we don’t want You!” The second is a more subtle type of sinner—seen in the older son. He represents someone who appears to be near God but is actually far away. He’s the church member who wants God’s blessing but could care less about God’s name being honored or about glorifying God with his life. He doesn’t care about his father or his brother—only about himself and what he can get out of the situation.

Jesus’ dramatic parable continues with the younger son converting his newly obtained property into cash. When the disgraceful deed was done, the prodigal son headed off to a far country, where he squandered all his wealth in reckless living. The boy wasted his money and life, so when the famine came, he wound up desperate. Not only did the younger son start working for a Gentile (bad enough in Jewish culture at the time), he was also actually feeding pigs—the most despised and unclean of animals for a Jew! The Jews in Jesus’ audience must have bristled at such a terrible picture of this younger son’s sin.

## THE MERCY OF THE FATHER

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The crucial moment in Jesus’ story occurred as the son approached his hometown. Jesus said that the father saw his son while he was still a long way off. This implies that the boy was probably at the edge of town, ready to head down the main street (which was usually the road that almost everyone in the village lived on). The father had been watching diligently, hoping to catch a glimpse of his son.

**20 “And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.<sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’<sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.<sup>23</sup> And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.<sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”**  
**(Luke 15:20-24)**

- **Make a list of several characteristics communicated by the father’s actions in this parable. How are these characteristics also true of God?**  
*(p. 29, PSG)*

Through it all, the father had not stopped loving his child. He hoped to see their relationship restored. He dreamed of them talking again, laughing, and spending time together. His eagerness to see his younger son again drove him time after time to the front of the yard, where he stared into the distance to see if maybe his boy would be on his way home.



Jesus said that when the father finally did see the son at the edge of the village, he pulled up his robes and ran to him. In Middle Eastern culture, running was considered shameful for someone in a position of honor, but that didn't stop this father. The son spoke, acknowledging his sin against his God and his father, rightly admitting that he was unworthy to be a son once more. He understood his unworthiness to be part of the family and receive such love. He recognized the weight and depth of his sin and the shame and agony his father experienced because of it. But he was truly repentant. And the father responded by accepting the boy back as a son and not as a servant.

## THE SIN OF THE OLDER BROTHER

Finally, Jesus turned the focus back to the older son, who had not been mentioned since the beginning of the parable.

**25“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’” (Luke 15:25-32)**

Jesus described how the older son found out that people were celebrating because his brother had returned home. In Jesus' culture, any older son would be expected to hightail it into the house and join the feast as quickly as possible. Instead, the older son stayed outside, choosing to murmur about the apparent unfairness of his father's actions. He deemed the party unworthy of his attendance.

We've seen the way the father ran to his ragged, prodigal son at the edge of the community. Similarly, the father went out to convince his puffed up and arrogant older son to come in and celebrate his brother's return. The loving father had two sons who blocked his love in different ways. The younger one had walled himself off from the father's love by doing evil, while the older one walled himself off from that same love by doing good. The older brother went through the motions so he could gain rights in the household, not true membership in the family. The younger brother—the repentant rebel—was inside feasting while the older brother—the “good” son—stayed outside pouting.

## TIMELINE

### WATER INTO WINE

*Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.*

### BREAD FROM HEAVEN

*Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.*

### WALKING ON WATER

*Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.*

The older son refused to call the younger son his “brother.” Instead, he only referred to him as his father’s other son. Then Jesus ended His parable with the gracious father’s response to his older son’s complaint. Although the older son had lashed out and refused to address his dad respectfully, the father replied by calling him “son.” The father reminded him of their shared relationship. He earnestly wanted his older son to come inside so that the family would be whole.

The father turned the focus away from possessions, works, and obedience. The father desired the relationship. The issue was neither the faithfulness of the older son nor the reckless living of the younger one. Rather, the spotlight shone on the younger brother not because of anything he had done but because the father-son relationship had been restored.

The father’s treatment of the older brother models God’s graciousness. God has shared so much with humanity—His creation, His goodness, His common grace. He calls everyone everywhere to repentance.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Repentance (p. 30, PSG)

*Repentance is a response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one’s sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one’s sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God’s work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus ended the parable as a cliffhanger, leaving the audience waiting for the story’s resolution: *Did the older brother go in and join the family celebration?* The answer is left to the reader. You’re invited to step up onto the stage and act out the parable’s final scene. Will you enter the house of God and become a part of God’s family? Or will you stay out in the field, appearing close to God while you are actually far from His heart? Will you remain settled on working and doing without any thought about having a true relationship with the Father? Won’t you come in? Won’t you become a part of the reason for celebration? The story’s grand finale lies in your hands.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what ways might our actions whisper to God what the younger son shouted to his father?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does God's treatment of us go beyond what we might hope for?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can our "good deeds" be a way of walling ourselves off from a relationship with God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it important to guard against the sin of the older brother just as much as guarding against the sin of the younger brother?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The father in Jesus' story did more than simply accept his returning son. With the entire community likely watching the dramatic events, the father ordered that a robe, shoes, and a signet ring be brought out from the house. The son had come from the pigs—he was smelly and gross. But the father would not allow his son to walk down Main Street looking so horrid. He demanded that the best robe be brought as well as the ring that signified sonship so that the son would avoid any shame. The father bore the shame when he ran down the street; the son went home dressed with honor.

- **In what ways does the father's treatment of his son go above and beyond what anyone expected?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some specific ways this story pictures our salvation?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Jesus' parable describes two types of sin—the outward rebellion exposed in the younger son and the inward bitterness concealed in the older son. The gracious father responded to both of his children with honor and love. But unlike the younger son, who fell with tears of repentance into his father's arms, the older son simply voiced a whiny complaint. His boasting about his faithful service revealed that he saw his father as if he were only a boss to be obeyed, and he was convinced he had been treated wrongly.

- **What are some ways a heart closed-off to God will lead to a heart closed-off to sinners who find forgiveness?** *How people respond when someone outside the church becomes a believer says a lot about their own hearts. For instance, those who have experienced the grace of God in Christ will gladly rejoice when other sinners experience that grace as well. It is the same principle of forgiving because you have been forgiven or showing compassion because you have been shown compassion. However, a heart closed-off to God will clearly reveal itself in the way one relates to sinners in need of grace.*
- **How does the gospel challenge and transform the closed-off heart?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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One thing we learn from the younger son is that outwardly-rebellious sin eventually leads people to squander away their lives until they are at the mercy of whatever they have glued themselves to. People attach themselves to drugs, alcohol, relationships, TV, and so forth. We become addicted to something or someone we think will provide hope; instead, the addiction brings enslavement, reminding us to daily avoid the temptation to fall into the traps of the older brother *and* the younger brother.

- **What are some common examples today of ways we might waste God's good gifts?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does wasting God's gifts lead to slavery instead of freedom?** *Answers will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #6, which contains an interactive chart related to the two lost sons in this session. The chart contains a list of some of the sins committed by both the older brother and the younger brother, with space to note similar ways we might be tempted to sin today. As you go through the individual sins, ask students to fill in the modern day counterparts in the space provided. Feel free to come up with your own to help your students start thinking in that direction.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUMI7Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUMI7Stories))**
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- **App (for both leader and student)**



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# 05

## SESSION FIVE

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# The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we look at Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, in which we see the danger of self-righteousness, our human need for mercy, and what it means to be justified by faith. God calls us to recognize our sinfulness and our need for His mercy. He calls us to humbly proclaim the gospel of grace to those who trust in themselves.

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 18:9-14

# THE POINT

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**God exalts the humble and humbles the exalted.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

We have all had good teachers. Whether we appreciated it or not, those good teachers are the ones who focused on helping us understand the subject matter, and they would use various techniques to help us grasp the material. They used things like: stories, thought experiments, analogies, examples, pictures, and so on. Their goal was to help us store enough information to pass the test and to truly understand the subject on a deeper level.

- **Who was the best teacher you had in school? Who was the worst? What was the difference?**

One of the defining doctrines of the Christian faith is “justification by faith alone”—the teaching that we are declared righteous before God through our faith in Christ and His work, not through our own efforts. This essential doctrine is vital for our faith. (See “Essential Doctrines” on p. 52.)

Jesus taught the doctrine of justification by faith, but He didn’t teach it by explaining it. Instead, Jesus taught justification by faith through analogy. He told a story that illustrated the core truth this doctrine affirms.

### Option 2

We’re taught a lot about standing up for ourselves, being ourselves, doing things for ourselves, finding our own truth, finding the answers within ourselves, and the list goes on. People often apply this type of thinking to God as well. They think that they, within themselves, hold the good necessary to get to God. But that’s not what the Bible says.

- **In what ways are you sometimes tempted to believe your own righteousness is good enough?**

Think about this quote from Mark Batterson: “There is only one solid foundation: Jesus Christ. If you find security in what you have done, you will always fall short of the righteous standard set by the sinless Son of God. The solution? The gospel. There is only one place in which to find your true identity and eternal security: what Christ has done for you.”<sup>1</sup>

God has a perfect, righteous standard that only Christ is able to fulfill. Because of our sin, we fall short (Rom. 3:23). We cannot become righteous on our own. But, by the blood of Christ, God provided righteousness for us (Eph. 2:13). When we realize that, as the tax collector Jesus spoke of, we are humbled. We look up to God instead of down on each other.

- **How are you sometimes like the Pharisee, who believed in His own righteousness?**
- **How are you sometimes like the tax collector, who realized it is only by God’s grace and mercy that we can have salvation?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God exalts the humble and humbles the exalted.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector teaches us the danger of becoming comfortable in our own “righteousness.” The Pharisee pridefully thanked God for the fact that he wasn’t like others, especially the tax collector in the temple with him. Yet, it was the tax collector who showed the true meaning of humble repentance in the presence of God.



## TIMELINE

### THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

### THE WICKED TENANTS

*Jesus teaches on God's judgment and the need to repent.*

### WATER INTO WINE

*Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.*

## JESUS' AUDIENCE WAS SELF-RIGHTEOUS

In previous sessions, we've seen how Jesus frequently told stories within a particular context to make a certain point. He told the parable of the unmerciful servant in response to Peter's question about how many times he had to forgive his brother. He told the parable of the good Samaritan in response to a man who asked, "Who is my neighbor?" And He told the parable of the prodigal son after religious leaders criticized Him for welcoming to His table sinners who repent.

Jesus told stories that aimed for the hearts of His hearers. The parable we will look at here is similar to the others we just mentioned. Jesus told this story to address a spiritual need. Take a look at the preface that Luke gave before recounting Jesus' story:

**9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt. (Luke 18:9)**

Who was the audience here? Jesus targeted people who did two things: They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and they looked down on everyone else. Don't miss the connection between those two descriptions. Spiritual short-sightedness leads to a sense of a spiritual superiority. When you trust in yourself that you are righteous, you will look down on others. When you look down on others, you find you feel better about yourself. And on and on the cycle goes.

This is important because we live in a world that prizes personal trust and confidence. Trust in yourself. Believe in yourself. Do it yourself. All of these messages come to us in our society and encourage us to seek independence and to chart our own course in the world.

The real danger comes when we apply that mindset to salvation—when we do that, we dig our own spiritual graves. The idea that you can work your way up to God, trusting in your own power and your own efforts, may seem noble or even praiseworthy in our world today. But this idea signifies a fundamental lack of self-awareness. The only way you can think you have what it takes to become righteous—that you have what it takes within yourself to please God—is if you have lowered God's standard to something more attainable or if you have overlooked all the sin that keeps you from making the cut.

- **What are two or three signs that people are trusting in their own "righteousness"?** (p. 34, PSG)

## JESUS TOLD THE STORY OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

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Jesus' parable begins by presenting two people praying in the temple—a Pharisee and a tax collector. Let's look first at the prayer of the Pharisee:

**<sup>10</sup> “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’” (Luke 18:10-12)**

We're used to reading the worst possible motives into the character of the Pharisee. But Jesus' original listeners would not have assumed that the Pharisee was the bad guy in Jesus' story, at least not at first. They would have seen this Pharisee as a model citizen—a decent, upstanding religious man who was pious in his practice.

First, the Pharisee went to the temple to pray. That's a good thing, right? He must have been seeking the Lord, and he seemed to be a prayerful man. Second, the Pharisee thanked God for the good things he had done. That's good too, right? The Pharisee didn't take credit for his own good deeds. He thanked God that he wasn't like others.

So what's the problem here? The self-righteousness that seeped out from this man's actions and words is evident in the other aspects of his prayer. He took his stand in the temple and expresses gratitude to God, but not because God is so awesome and holy but because he saw himself as set apart from others.

Then, the Pharisee mentioned some characteristics of sinners, though it's obvious he didn't consider himself as one of them, including the tax collector in the same temple complex with him. The Pharisee was aware of the people around him. Instead of looking up to God in prayer, he looked down on the people next to him. Were he truly aware of the awesome majesty of God, he would see himself on the same level as the tax collector—a lowly sinner in need of mercy.

This story shows us just how easy it is for us to fall into the trap of self-justification. We parade all of our good works before God and before others, thinking that these works will increase our stature. And when we're called on it, instead of recognizing our self-righteous spirit, we recoil from the accusation and justify ourselves. And we constantly judge people around us more harshly than we would dare judge ourselves.

## JESUS' STORY TAUGHT THAT GRACE AND MERCY ARE FREELY GIVEN, NOT EARNED

In contrast to the Pharisee who took his stand in the temple and prayed about himself, the tax collector took a much different approach.

**13 “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:13-14)**

- **Notice the contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector. Take a few moments to read both descriptions and note the differences.**  
*(p. 36, PSG)*

The fact that the tax collector beat his chest shows just how deep his remorse was. His was a prayer for God’s judgment to pass over him. It was a prayer for atonement, for the mercy of God delivered through God’s atoning sacrifice. The Pharisee focused his attention on all of the things he had done for God. The tax collector knew his only hope was what God could do for him.

Jesus ended the parable by explaining its meaning. The tax collector went to his house justified, not the Pharisee. This would have shocked Jesus’ original listeners. You mean the religious Pharisee was the one who failed to receive salvation? And the hated and despised tax collector was declared righteous?

Jesus’ listeners would have been shocked at the conclusion of the story based upon the social fact that tax collectors were quite despised during this time—they were seen as bullies and thieves that were closer to the Roman establishment than Jewish culture. *How could a thief go home justified over a religious leader?*

We are supposed to feel puzzled over this story because this story is all about the shocking truth of justification by faith alone—that it is not by works but by grace we are saved (Eph. 2:8-9). If we are no longer offended by this story, it’s because we have lost sight of just how revolutionary this doctrine is. But this is the scandalous beauty of grace. “God, have mercy on me, a sinner. God, turn Your wrath from me. God, my only hope is in You.” It was the Pharisee who protested God’s gift of grace. It is the repentant heart that basks in this gift of love and is then transformed by it.

### TIMELINE

#### **BREAD FROM HEAVEN**

*Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.*

#### **WALKING ON WATER**

*Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.*

#### **THE PARALYTIC**

*Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Justification by Faith (p. 35, PSG)

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*Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ and not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The tax collector's cry was for God to turn away His wrath from a sinner. Through His sacrificial death as our substitute, Jesus took the wrath of God that our sins deserved. Like the tax collector, we too can cry out to God to have mercy on us and put aside His wrath because Christ has absorbed the wrath in our place.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is it easier to judge other people more harshly than we judge ourselves?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can become more self-aware of our own need for grace and mercy?** *Instead of looking at other people as the standard for how we should be living, we need to look to God as our standard of righteousness. Once we look to Him, we will quickly realize we aren't as "good" as we believed we were, leading us to call out for grace and mercy like the tax collector.*
- **What do the differences between the Pharisee's prayer and the tax collector's prayer tell us about their attitudes?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does this story challenge you personally?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Like the Pharisee, people who trust in themselves also look down on everyone around them. Their lack of self-awareness about their own sin is what led them to a posture of self-righteousness. This happens once people lower God's standards down to a standard that is reachable. And once that happens, they no longer compare themselves to Him, but to those around them. As long as you feel like you are doing better than the people around you, your sense of superiority grows.

- **What are two or three signs that someone is looking down on others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When have you found yourself falling into this trap? How do you avoid thinking this way?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Self-righteousness wears many disguises. The scary thing about self-righteousness is that we usually don't recognize it in ourselves. We think that we are okay with God because of our religious practices. We think that we are trusting in Him, not in ourselves, because of how we pray. We think that we are doing better than the people around us because of how we live. Self-righteousness starts with the heart, which is why it must be dealt with at the heart level.

- **If someone were to accuse you of self-righteousness, how do you think you would respond?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can be self-righteous without knowing it?** *It is easy to be blind to our own self-righteousness at times. Like the Pharisees, we think all is well because of the way we live or act, but we never realize that our hearts are full of pride rather than being full of love for God.*



## HANDS

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Among other things, this story teaches that God calls us not to look down on others, but to look up to Him for salvation. When we look to God for help and mercy, others take notice. This humility and grace not only makes much of God and His willingness to forgive, but also becomes attractive to those who are still trusting in themselves.

- **What are the marks of people who know their need for grace?** *Those who know their need for grace are broken over sin; recognize their need to be made right with God; don't play the comparison game with others; and so on.*
- **How do these marks differ from people who trust in themselves?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #7, which contains an informational chart describing the difference between the proud Pharisee and the humble tax collector. After going through these differences, read the quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Challenge your students to examine their own hearts to see what characteristics they are displaying in their own lives, rather than focusing on what others are doing or not doing.

### SOURCES

1. Mark Batterson, *All In: You Are One Decision Away from A Totally Different Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 48.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
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# 06

## SESSION SIX

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# The Wicked Tenants

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will look at the parable of the wicked tenants, one of Jesus' most famous parables about judgment. In this story we see the privilege and responsibility that comes with God's calling on our lives. We also see the grace of God in His warnings to sinners and the judgment of God in His retribution toward those who reject His Son. This parable's stark imagery reminds us that we are called to bear the fruit of repentance and mission, thus fulfilling our purpose as God's people.

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 21:33-46



# THE POINT

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**Judgment comes on those who reject God's commands, God's warnings, and God's Son.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Sometimes people who have only a general knowledge of the Bible make a sharp distinction between Jesus in the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament. They see Jesus as a mild-mannered man of goodness and grace, as opposed to the Old Testament God who executed judgment and vengeance upon His enemies and even punished His own people for their sins. Jesus' command "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged" becomes a statement that seems to override all of His teaching.

But when we read the Gospels, we discover that Jesus is not the quiet, mild-mannered man sharing folksy wisdom; He's the King who turns over tables in the temple, criticizes the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, and challenges the kingdoms of this world until He becomes a threat and is taken away to be executed. To see Jesus as no more than a good, nice teacher is to flatten Him out, to make Him a one-dimensional person.

In our study so far, we've seen that many of Jesus' parables emphasize grace. But we don't do justice to Jesus' parables until we see that many of His stories get right to the heart of God's judgment: The parable of the wicked tenants is one of the strongest and most pointed of Jesus' parables. Although it may not be as famous as the parables of the prodigal son or the good Samaritan, it shows up in three of the four Gospels. Together with the parable of the sower and the soils, this story becomes a good bookend to our study of the parables. The parable of the soils was told early in Jesus' ministry, and the parable of the wicked tenants came during the week before His crucifixion and resurrection.

- **Why do you think so many people see Jesus as just a good, nice teacher and fail to consider His teachings about judgment?**

### Option 2

*A judgment is a final decision that carries weight.* Judges make rulings. Coaches, police officers, teachers, and others make "judgment calls." People say things like, "Don't judge me" or "Stop being so judgmental." These kinds of words are thrown around so often that their meaning has become unclear, and it's difficult to know what God's judgment means or looks like.

- **When you hear the words "God's judgment," what typically comes to mind?**

God's judgment is perfect, righteous, fair, and works to display His glory and goodness. God's judgment in today's session is not how people often view judgment today, but is a heavy ruling on those who reject Him, His commands, His warnings, and His Son. Only through Jesus can we escape God's judgment and wrath.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Judgment comes on those who reject God's commands, God's warnings, and God's Son.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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Our last story before turning to some of Jesus' miracles is the parable of the wicked tenants, one of Jesus' most famous parables about judgment. In this story we see the privilege and responsibility that comes with God's calling on our lives. We also see the grace of God in His warnings to sinners and the judgment of God in His retribution toward those who reject His Son.

## TIMELINE

### THE WICKED TENANTS

*Jesus teaches on God's judgment and the need to repent.*

### WATER INTO WINE

*Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.*

### BREAD FROM HEAVEN

*Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.*

## THE WICKED TENANTS REJECTED THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AS STEWARDS

Let's take a look at how the parable of the wicked tenants, one of Jesus' last parables, starts out:

**33 "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another." (Matt. 21:33-35)**

The image of a vineyard instantly brought to mind Isaiah 5 for Jesus' hearers. The parable is about God and His people. As Jesus retold the vineyard story, He made it clear that the religious leaders (tenants) who had been called by God (owner) to watch over Israel (the vineyard) had failed. The people had received the great privilege of being chosen by God. But they had failed to live up to the responsibility that accompanies that blessing. God was looking for fruit from His people, especially from the religious leaders, but no fruit was found.

Instead of apologizing for their lack of fruit, the tenants of the vineyard treated the owner terribly. They resented the interruption of the vineyard owner through his sending of messengers. Their problem was not that they didn't bear any fruit; it was that the fruit they bore was bad! Instead of offering the good fruit of repentance for their failures, they offered the bad fruit of rebellion.

Already in this story we see a challenge to the religious leaders of Jesus' day. But what about us? The apostle Paul claimed that those who believe in Jesus are grafted into Israel. As part of God's people, we are God's vineyard, given the privilege of being His people but also the weighty responsibility of fulfilling His call on our lives. Until we see ourselves as stewards, we will never understand the nature of our call.

- **What are the responsibilities that come with our privilege of being God's people? What kind of fruit are we to bear as Christians?** (p. 40, PSG)

## THE WICKED TENANTS REJECTED GOD'S WARNINGS AND GOD'S SON

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As we mentioned earlier, the parable of the wicked tenants is one of judgment. But the judgment was a long time coming. As the story progressed, the vineyard owner exercised an astounding level of patience and restraint. He sent messenger after messenger to claim what was rightfully his. Take a look:

**<sup>36</sup> “Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” (Matt. 21:36-41)**

Although the main point of this parable is the judgment of God, we shouldn't overlook the shocking display of patience on the part of the vineyard owner. He kept sending messengers to the tenants, and the tenants continued to mistreat the messengers.

The people in Jesus' day would have made the connection between these servants and the prophets in the Old Testament. The prophets came with God's message: "Thus says the LORD!" or "This is the LORD's declaration!" The prophets held the people accountable for their sin, pointed them toward God, and encouraged them to repent.

Just as the wicked tenants mistreated the servant-messengers, the religious and political leaders of Israel also mistreated the prophets. You'd expect God to respond immediately after having one of His prophets mistreated. Instead, God continued to warn His people of the consequences of their sin. He continued to send prophet after prophet, no matter how badly they were treated.

This doesn't seem logical, does it? How many times did the vineyard owner need to send servants—who were mistreated and beaten and killed—before realizing that perhaps something more drastic should take place? How many times did God need to send prophets to warn His people before He took more decisive action? Logic and reason aren't the focus here but the grace and patience of God. It's not logic that drives God but love.

The parable continued with the vineyard owner sending his own son and, for those of us reading and listening to Jesus' story now, the analogy is crystal clear. Just as God's people had rejected the warnings that had come from love, they would also reject the Son who came in love. The wicked tenants saw the son and coveted his inheritance. Instead of responding respectfully and rightly, they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The same week that Jesus uttered this parable, the religious leaders would conspire to throw Jesus out of Jerusalem and crucify Him on the outskirts of town.

## THE WICKED TENANTS WERE REJECTED BY GOD

This parable of judgment ends with Jesus quoting from a psalm. The parable's analogy blurs into reality as it becomes clear Jesus was issuing a strong judgment against His people's failure to bear fruit. The religious leaders recognized how this parable was spoken against them.

**42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? 43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. 44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. 46 And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet. (Matt. 21:42-46)**

It would be easy for us to misinterpret a couple of points in Jesus' parable, perhaps due to our pressing the parable for too many details. First, the vineyard owner seemed like he didn't know what would happen if he sent his son to the wicked tenants. In seeing the vineyard owner as an analogy for God, we might think that God was taken aback or surprised at how the prophets and His Son were treated. In contrast, God knew His Son would die, which is precisely the reason He sent Him—to be "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Second, we might think that Jesus' words about the vineyard being taken away and given to others is a full-blown rejection of Israel. Instead, what is taking place here is not God rejecting Israel altogether but reestablishing Israel around His Son, the Messiah. Jesus is the cornerstone for God's new people.

Let's summarize the main truths we've learned from this parable. Craig Blomberg sums up the teaching this way: "God is patient and longsuffering in waiting for his people to bear the fruit which he requires of them, even when they are repeatedly and overtly hostile in their rebellion against him. A day will come when God's patience is exhausted and those who have rejected him will be destroyed. God's purposes will not thereby be thwarted, for he will raise up new leaders who will produce the fruit the original ones failed to provide."<sup>1</sup>

## TIMELINE

### WALKING ON WATER

*Jesus demonstrates his sovereignty over creation.*

### THE PARALYTIC

*Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.*

### THE DEMONIAK

*Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Nature of Hell (p. 42, PSG)

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*For those who are not found in Christ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their deeds done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits unbelievers in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever separated from God.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The portrait of a mild Jesus who spoke only of grace and never of judgment is a figment of the imagination. We serve a Savior whose scandalous grace was matched with the ferocious roar of judgment. In this parable, we see a glimpse of God's patience but also His swift retribution. Let this story from Jesus shock your senses and lead you to see yourself as a steward of His blessings.

If we were to place ourselves in this story, we would need to see ourselves as the wicked tenants. We are the ones who have rejected God and ignored His warnings. We are the ones who have turned on His only Son. The question now remains: On which side of this furious judgment of God will we be found? It is only in embracing God the Son and humbly trusting in Him that we find salvation. Instead of being the cornerstone that crushes us in judgment, Jesus becomes the cornerstone of our new life in Him, the cornerstone of the new people of God to whom we belong. The story of the wicked tenants is a parable of judgment, but its purpose is to bring us to repentance and faith in the Son.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **We tend to think of warnings as something bad, a message of judgment. How are God's warnings to us a sign of His grace?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What words would you use to describe the vineyard owner if he had decided not to judge the wicked tenants?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why does punishment seem so proper in this case? How does this influence the way we view the judgment of God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How would you use this parable to explain to both people who are religious and non-religious that our only hope is in knowing the Son, Jesus Christ?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Notice just how religious the rejection of Jesus and the prophets was in this parable. Sometimes we tend to think of people in categories of religious or irreligious, as if the former is good and the latter is bad. But in this case, the people who received the strongest condemnation from God were the religious leaders and the people who bore no fruit.

- **What are some ways we might use religious devotion to mask our lack of fruitfulness?**  
*Answers will vary.*
- **What aspects of this parable's warning apply to us today?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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We fail to apply this parable well if we do not consider our own hearts and lives. We cannot rely on our religious devotion or our sincerity to escape the wrath of God. We must rely only on Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith, who incorporates us into His people. Belonging to God's people is both a privilege and a responsibility, just as it was in Jesus' day.

- **Why is it tempting to think you are safe from God's judgment because you are "religious" or "spiritual?"** *Answers will vary.*
- **According to this parable, what does true religion look like?** *It looks like the tax collector—recognizing our sin and calling out to God for grace and mercy.*



## HANDS

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Where do we fit in this story? On the one hand, the parable serves as a warning to all who reject the Son of God. Reject Jesus and you invite the judgment of God. On the other hand, the parable serves as a warning to those who think they belong to God's people but continue to ignore His warnings. We show we truly belong to God by obeying Him, heeding His warnings, and embracing His Son. By failing to heed God's warnings, we take our stand against the prophets and against Jesus Himself.

- **How does this parable challenge us in our efforts of sharing Christ with others?**  
*Answers will vary.*
- **What role does "bearing fruit" play in our mission to share and show the love of God?**  
*Answers will vary.*



## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCE

1. Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentary, Vol. 22: Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), accessed December 1, 2016, available online at [www.mywsb.com](http://www.mywsb.com).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
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# 07

## SESSION SEVEN

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# Water into Wine

### SESSION SUMMARY

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John did not recount the story of Jesus turning water into wine for our entertainment. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John intentionally presented the truth that Jesus' miracles revealed God the Father. Through the details of this miracle, Jesus revealed His compassion for our needs, a glimpse of His identity, and His ability to reveal God in all He does.

### SCRIPTURE

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John 2:1-12

# THE POINT

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**Jesus' miracles reveal His divine authority and power.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

It's extremely helpful to know and understand what something is made to do—its purpose. Maybe you've used something in a way it wasn't intended to be used. Some put fingernail polish on a bug bite, used fingernail clippers to snip a hair that was just a tad too long, or used a rubber band to temporarily repair a broken button. (All of these work, by the way.) Such uses might get the job done, but that doesn't change the item's purpose.

- **When have you used an item in a way that was not its intended purpose? How did it work?**
- **How would you describe our purpose as human beings? As believers in Christ?**

Too often we are confused about our own intended purpose. One of the most common questions humans ask is: "Why are we here?" Or better yet, "Why am I here?" While we struggle with this question, Jesus did not. He knew His purpose. As we look closely at Jesus' first miracle, we will see that He did not perform miracles in order to bring attention to Himself (though they sometimes did), to make His life easier (though He could have), or to impress His disciples (though they were impressed). Every miracle brought glory to God the Father, specifically by confirming Jesus' identity as God's Son and the Savior of the world.

### Option 2

Take a few minutes at the beginning of group time to ask students who their favorite superheroes are and why. Lead them to discuss the traits or superpowers these heroes have. Share with students your own favorite superhero, tell why that hero is your favorite, and what kind of superpowers that hero has. Then ask:

- **What do all of these superheroes have in common? What makes people respect them?**

Our favorite superheroes have amazing powers like super-strength, x-ray vision, and the ability to move objects with their minds. But, even the TV shows teach us that every superhero has a flaw. And superheroes, as much as we might want them to be, aren't real.

Jesus isn't a superhero—He's more than that. He is perfect, flawless. He knows everything. He is omnipotent (all-powerful). He cannot be defeated, instead, He defeated even death. His miracles demonstrate His power and authority as God's Son.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

---

**Jesus' miracles reveal His divine authority and power.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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After having looked at Jesus' stories and parables, we now take a closer look at His signs and miracles. The first one has to do with Jesus turning water into wine. As this story unfolds, we will see Jesus' compassion, identity, and one of the many ways He would reveal God throughout His earthly ministry. Although this miracle only gave a snapshot of Jesus' authority and power, we will begin to see these two themes in His work as God among us.

## TIMELINE

### WATER INTO WINE

*Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.*

### BREAD FROM HEAVEN

*Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.*

### WALKING ON WATER

*Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.*

## MARY WENT TO JESUS WITH A NEED

In John 1, John declared Jesus' identity as the Lamb of God, and Andrew testified that Jesus was the Messiah (1:40-41). When Jesus revealed His knowledge of Nathanael's character and location, Nathanael called Him the Son of God and the King of Israel (1:49). These men had correctly identified Jesus and even told others about Him, who in turn followed Him as well.

Though many had given Jesus a title or description in John 1, it isn't until chapter 2 that we actually see the physical proof.

**<sup>1</sup> On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:1-5)**

Here we have a scenario where Jesus, along with His mother and disciples, were invited to a wedding. From all appearances, Mary was not just a guest at this wedding—obviously she was involved in the serving, planning, or at the very least a trusted member of the family or a close friend. She could have been like the cousin or aunt who shows up on the morning of the wedding and asks, "How can I help?" We know Mary was intimately involved because she became aware of a need that was not public: The wine had run out.

The fruit of the vine used to make wine grew well in Palestine. Wine was a common drink that was also used as a medicine and disinfectant. Though drunkenness is condemned throughout Scripture, wine was a common Jewish drink and obviously provided at weddings. Running out of wine was likely a statement either of poor planning by the hosts or entertaining more guests than expected.

The need was there, and Mary plainly presented it to Jesus. What did Mary expect Jesus to do? We can't be entirely sure. Some speculate that adding Jesus and His disciples to the wedding feast may have overloaded the need for food and drink, causing the embarrassment. Some suggest that perhaps Jesus could have acted as a helper, going to purchase more wine. But Jesus' response to His mother shows that she knew He was capable of a supernatural response.

Mary told Jesus the need and entrusted the result to Him. She didn't give Him money to go get more or a list of three possible solutions. She simply stated the concern on her heart and instructed the servants nearby to do as He said.

## JESUS CHANGED THE WATER INTO WINE

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Later in His ministry, Jesus would say these words: “Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit” (Matt. 7:17-18). In essence, Jesus was saying we can be identified by the fruit we produce.

This is helpful because we learn that Jesus’ miracles were often used to validate who He was and the message He was proclaimed. Peter expressed this truth when he said that God did signs, wonders, and miracles among the people through Jesus, which affirmed Him as God’s Son (Acts 2:22). God enabled and instructed Jesus to perform miracles to identify Himself through them, and those miracles began with a kind gesture from Jesus when He turned water into wine.

**<sup>6</sup> Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” (John 2:6-10)**

These large jars were empty and evidently unused until the time Jesus needed them. Jesus never said a magic word or touched the jars. He simply instructed that the jars be filled with water and that some of the water be taken immediately to the chief servant. Somewhere between the filling and the tasting, the water became wine. And not just wine but the best wine, according to the chief servant. Given his position, we can be certain that the servant knew good wine from bad. This wine was good enough that the servant went directly to the groom to comment on its high quality.

But the focus of this passage is not the fact that Jesus made good wine. After all, we know that all things are made by Him, through Him, and for Him (Col. 1:16) and all of His creation is deemed “good” by the Father (Gen. 1). Look at who was allowed to see this first miracle. It wasn’t the groom or the chief servant (they appear to be confused about the entire event). The servants were the ones in the know.

How fitting of our Lord to first reveal His identity as the Son of God to servants. In Mark 10:45, Jesus explained the concept plainly by saying He came to serve instead of being served. Only Jesus and the Father knew Jesus’ identity, and Jesus alone chose who else got to see His identity (Luke 10:22). In this first miracle of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the servants and the disciples were the only ones who knew what happened.

## HIS MIRACLES HIGHLIGHT HIS DIVINE AUTHORITY AND POWER

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This miracle was so much more than turning water into wine. Maybe you've seen magicians or conjurers. You've watched them at a county fair or maybe on a street corner. You've seen the woman sawed in two or the rope that has been cut in half miraculously appear whole. You know there's a trick—just because you don't know how it's done doesn't mean you believe your eyes.

Not so with Jesus. There was no sleight of hand or special effect lighting. There was no mistake of pouring something that may have tasted like wine into the jars. The wine at the wedding was gone. Jesus gave the command to put water into jars. The water changed to wine. The wine was amazing. And this revealed Jesus' glory.

**11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. (John 2:11-12)**

When Jesus turned the water into wine, it was as holy, set apart, and as glorious as any other of God's miraculous displays. The amount of wine and the quality of wine were not missed: John wanted to make sure we grasped that the 100 plus gallons were considered the best by the chief servant (John 2:6,10). God's perfect holiness and glory was revealed through the perfection of the outcome.

The wine was perfect. And isn't it funny that the secret never escaped? The chief servant raved about the wine to the groom but didn't look too hard for the source. The groom may have never known about the miracle. The servants and the disciples seemed to be the only ones privileged enough to know the real story. Jesus met the need of one He loved and still His "hour" (His mission to go to the cross) did not come; no one of power or influence was any wiser. Surely the servants and disciples were blown away by the miracle, but they didn't run around shouting it from the rooftops.

This wouldn't be the last time one of Jesus' miracles caused someone to believe in His true identity. Yes, He met needs. Yes, He healed. Yes, He touched, loved, cared, and helped. But every miracle was solely focused on one purpose: to glorify the Father. The servants who saw the miracle may have had no idea who Jesus was and why He had followers, but the miracle changed them forever. The disciples certainly knew who He was and had agreed to follow Him, but this miracle gave them a deeper connection in believing He was who He said He was.

- **Imagine you were one of the servants at the wedding. How would you have responded to Jesus' command? His miracle?** (p. 50, PSG)
- **Now, imagine you were one of the disciples. How would this strengthen your faith and confirm your decision to follow Him?** (p. 50, PSG)

## TIMELINE

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### THE PARALYTIC

*Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.*

### THE DEMONIAK

*Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.*

### POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

*Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Miracles (p. 50, PSG)

*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.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

For some, the story of the Roman centurion's faith in Matthew 8:5-13 may come to mind: The military leader understood that one with authority only had to speak and the command would be carried out. Mary understood this exact power that Jesus held, not only over the situation at hand, but also over all of His creation (Col. 1:16).

Though the lack of wine did not affect Jesus' identity, power, or purpose, Mary's need and the need of the hosts moved His heart. Someone He loved was coming to Him with a need. The wedding itself may have had no eternal implications other than the fact that God's Son was there, meeting the needs of a beloved one, but His act of glory would not go unnoticed.

Like Mary, we are needy and unable to solve our problems alone. But do we approach Jesus as Mary did, simply stating our need, or do we tell Him how to solve it and feel He didn't hear us when the need is not met as we prescribed? Let's come boldly before Him and state our needs. We approach God's throne with confidence, not because of who we are or because of our good deeds but because we know He is rich in mercy and grace and powerful to help.



# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why do we sometimes find it difficult to bring our personal needs to God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this story teach us about Jesus' concern for us, even in the small areas of life?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When have you seen God reveal His glory outside the walls of your church? How were the observers changed?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can God's work of salvation in your own life be used to glorify God to those around you?** *People can recognize authenticity when they see it. If they see that God has changed your life from the inside out—changed your desires, habits, and purpose for living—then people will take notice and see God's supernatural work of salvation.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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God's glory is uniquely displayed in various ways throughout Scripture. When Moses saw His glory in the burning bush, the old shepherd knew it was more than a plant on fire (Ex. 3). When the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai as a cloud, no one mistook it for your everyday cumulus clouds (Ex. 24:16-17). When Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall, he knew he wasn't seeing things (Dan. 5:5-9). When God announced the birth of Jesus, it was to lowly shepherds, and the announcement was enhanced by the angelic host.

- **When have you witnessed something that was unmistakably God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How has that experience affected you?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Though she was a mature woman, full of faith, Mary was childlike in her request. When a young child has a need, she goes to her parents confident they can meet her need. Children don't try to bargain or instruct their parents when a true need arises; they simply state the need. The irony of this scenario at the wedding is that the mother comes to the Son, acknowledging His authority and divine power.

- **What are some areas of life where you need to recognize and submit to Jesus' divine authority and power?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does your confidence in Jesus' authority and power reveal itself in your prayer life?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Just as Jesus considered His purpose before each miracle, we should consider our purpose before each conversation, each relationship, and each trial: *Am I reflecting Christ? Do I point others to Him? Can others tell by my words and actions that Jesus is King of kings, Lord of lords, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?* When you tell others how Jesus won your heart, called you by name, and changed you from the inside out, you are just as amazing and awe-inspiring to unbelievers as the turning of water into wine.

- **Share about a time when you were personally amazed by Jesus because of His work in someone else's life.** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some intentional ways you can be sure Jesus is displayed in your life this week to those around you?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #8, which contains an informational chart listing the majority of Jesus' signs and miracles found in the Gospels.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUMI7Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUMI7Stories))**
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- **App (for both leader and student)**



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And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# 08

## SESSION EIGHT

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# Bread from Heaven

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will see that Jesus provides not only for physical needs, but also for spiritual ones. He showed compassion for the crowd following after Him. He took what was available and worked an amazing miracle to feed a multitude, and He chose to communicate that blessing to the crowd through His disciples. Jesus' miracle of feeding the 5,000 demonstrated His deity by providing bread for the crowd, as He is "the bread of life" (John 6:35).

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 14:13-21

# THE POINT

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**Real compassion leads to addressing both physical and spiritual needs in others.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Nobody looks forward to filling someone else's shoes. Nobody. For example, do you want to be the small forward in Cleveland when LeBron James retires? Do you want to be the volleyball player who fills Kerri Walsh Jennings' slot at the next Olympics if she decides not to return to Tokyo? Do you have the comedic skills to follow Jimmy Fallon when he retires?

Now, let's think for a minute about who probably wore the biggest shoes in the Old Testament—Moses. Saved by the hand of God as a baby (Ex. 2) and called by God from a flaming bush to set His people free (Ex. 3). Long story short, he did just that.

But the miracles didn't stop there. The Red Sea parted at Moses' raised staff, and after the Israelites walked through on dry land, its waves crashed back down, killing every last Egyptian soldier who pursued them (Ex. 14). Though God's people spent the next 40 years wandering in the desert because they didn't believe and obey Him, He still revealed His glory when He provided water from a rock (twice) and manna that appeared like dew every morning of their wandering.

*Manna* is translated "What is it?" which was what the Israelites called it because they didn't know what it was. Just when the Israelites decided they would die of hunger and should go back into slavery in Egypt, God told Moses that He would send bread from heaven (Ex. 16:4), not simply to fill their bellies but to fill their souls with the truth that He is Yahweh (16:12). God commanded them to preserve some manna in a jar in the ark of the testimony as a reminder of His provision for them (16:32-34). As great as Moses was, he only prepared the way for this One to follow after him.

- **Whose shoes would you dread trying to fill? Why?**

### Option 2

Gather students together before you begin this session. Discuss some different needs in your church, your community, and your schools. Then ask:

- **What are some ways we can help meet these needs?**
- **As we serve people in their physical needs, how can we let them know about Jesus?**

Jesus provided for people's physical needs before He ministered to their souls. He gave them food, then spoke truth to them about being the Bread of life, and how He would forever satisfy our spiritual hunger.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Real compassion leads to addressing both physical and spiritual needs in others.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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This next miracle is one that is very well known—the feeding of the 5,000. What’s interesting is that the text tells us that the 5,000 only referred to the men who present during this miracle, and what most people don’t realize is that the number doesn’t reflect the women and children who were there. In other words, this miraculous feeding could have extended to more than 15,000 people (assuming each man had a wife and at least one child with him). Whatever the exact number was, we do know it was miraculous, and communicated Jesus’ compassion for the multitudes.

## TIMELINE

### BREAD FROM HEAVEN

*Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.*

### WALKING ON WATER

*Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.*

### THE PARALYTIC

*Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.*

## JESUS HAD COMPASSION ON THE CROWDS

There are times of deep grief and sorrow when you just want to withdraw from everyone. Jesus experienced this. John the Baptist was His cousin, His prophet, His forerunner, His Elijah. And because of John's willingness to share God's commands without fear, he found himself beheaded at the hand of a ruler who would rather make a tragic mistake than admit he was wrong. After John's disciples heard about his death, they gave him an honorable burial and then went to tell Jesus. This is where we begin:

**13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. (Matt. 14:13-14)**

When Jesus stepped off the boat, the crowd was there waiting for Him. He alone had the power to heal them inside and out. He alone brought the words of eternal life. They weren't seeking simple entertainment; they were seeking Jesus to work the miracles in them that they had only heard about from the stories of long ago. Their parents had taught them about Moses, the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, water from a rock, and manna. And this Man seemed to be just as strong as Moses in the power of God. And so, though no doubt tired, worn, and emotionally spent, Jesus had compassion on them.

The Greek word translated *compassion* in this verse denotes a deep inward compassion that leads one to physically respond. Perhaps you felt it when you saw photos of children rescued from a natural disaster or got the call from a loved one who just received a grim diagnosis from the doctor.

This same Greek verb for Jesus expressing compassion to the crowd He used to describe the compassion of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33). It was also used to describe how Jesus felt toward the widow whose only son had died when He told her not to cry (Luke 7:13).

Before He ever provided the crowd with a meal, Jesus provided them something far more valuable—Himself. The bread from heaven in the exodus nourished God's people, but the Bread of Life satisfies forever (John 6:35-38). So, in His compassion, He healed their sick.

- **Jesus went away to be alone, but the crowds followed Him. He could have been frustrated or angry, but instead He showed compassion. Think of a time when you needed to be alone. What would your response be if a crowd had approached you with their needs? (p. 54, PSG)**

## JESUS PROVIDES BY DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

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Do you remember Katie Ledecky from the 2016 Rio Olympics? At 19 years old, she won one silver and four gold medals, obliterating her competition and even her own records. According to her coach, she doesn't look like much of a swimmer. She's shorter, her hands are smaller, her feet are pretty normal, as is her form. An athlete profile found that she was "remarkably unremarkable."<sup>1</sup>

But Katie Ledecky is not the only athlete, musician, artist, or student (you get the point) who is able to do more than she's "supposed" to be able to do. Maybe that person was you. Maybe the coach told you that you'd never be good at ball or the teacher told you that you'd never pass that subject, but you did it in spite of their predictions.

Sometimes we do the same thing with Jesus. Unfortunately, we don't tend to give Him control—we simply tend to blame God for not doing what we think He should do. The Israelites had accused Moses and Aaron of bringing them into the wilderness just so they could die from hunger (Ex. 16:3). Instead of seeking God for food, they blamed Him because they were hungry. Instead of presenting their requests to God, they handed Him their frustration.

Of course, God had the meal plan and was just waiting for the request. Even though the Israelites lacked faith and approached God with their anger, God was faithful to meet their needs.

After Jesus' long day of grieving and healing, His disciples approached Him somewhat like the Israelites did with Moses—less belligerently but with a similar faithless message:

**<sup>15</sup> Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup> But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me." (Matt. 14:15-18)**

Can't we picture the disciples whispering to each other: "Doesn't Jesus know how late it is?" In the wilderness. A late day. Hungry people. Only enough food for a poor boy (John 6:9). The disciples had already taken a quick inventory of the food on hand, and somehow only one boy in the huge crowd of 5,000 men had planned ahead. A hopeless situation, right? Only one thing could help, so Jesus told the disciples to bring the fish and loaves to Him.



## JESUS PROVIDES BY MEETING NEEDS THROUGH HIS FOLLOWERS

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When the disciples first approached Jesus about the need to send everyone away to buy food, Jesus told them to give the people something to eat instead of sending them away. *What?* Jesus' intention all along had been to use His disciples to meet the needs of the crowd. He knew the masses were physically hungry for a meal, but their spiritual hunger was even deeper. Sending the crowd away would only meet the physical hunger; using His followers to meet the physical needs of the crowd as He met their spiritual needs would bless everyone.

**19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. (Matt. 14:19-21)**

Though the power and the miracle came through Jesus, it was carried out by the human hands and feet of the disciples. Jesus blessed the food but turned over the heavenly meal to the very men who had complained about the time, the lack of food, and the amount of people still sitting around them (Matt. 14:15,17). And before their very eyes, the five loaves and two fish became food for thousands. These were not snack-sized portions, either—the people ate and were satisfied!

The same men who attempted to come up with a very human and logical answer to their problem watched the miracle unfold over and over again as they handed out the food. And just in case they didn't fully appreciate Jesus' miracle, they gathered 12 baskets of leftovers. Each disciple had an entire basket of heavenly bread that wasn't even eaten. More than the manna that disappeared at the heat of each day, this bread sat in baskets as a visible reminder of God's provision.

### TIMELINE

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#### **THE DEMONIAIC**

*Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.*

#### **POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH**

*Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.*

#### **THE RAISING OF LAZARUS**

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Jesus' Deity (p. 56, PSG)

*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; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 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 (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus did not set out to upstage Moses when He fed 5,000 men (plus women and children) from the meager supplies of five loaves of bread and two fish, but He did. The Jews understood the gift of manna to be Moses' miracle, but Jesus was clear that Moses was just the messenger who explained what the manna was (Ex. 16:15). The Father gave the gift of bread from heaven for His people (John 6:32).

Both Moses and Jesus were involved with miracles of bread being provided from heaven. On both occasions, the bread was nourishing. Both filled stomachs and strengthened hearts to believe God and the men He sent. But Jesus completed the lesson that began with Moses' manna when He claimed that He is the Bread of life (John 6:35).

Physical bread can fill anyone, from the poorest to the greatest, but it will not last. Jesus' bread at the feeding of the 5,000 was surely a miracle, but those who ate of it would be hungry again. However, this bread from heaven opened hearts to hear and believe the message about the Bread of life.

Manna and miraculous bread would be wonderful to see and taste, and sometimes we long to see those things we only read about in the pages of God's Word. But the truth is we have something more, something much greater—Jesus. The Bread of Life—not the bread for a meal or even bread for 40 years. Forever. He alone is the bread that sustains us from this life on earth and through death into our life forever (John 6:35).

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some reasons we might refuse to show compassion to others? Are any of these justified? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some circumstances for which people blame God?** *While answers may differ, people usually blame God during difficult or bad circumstances. Blaming God is often an emotional reaction to some difficult experience occurring.*
- **What does blaming God say about a person's understanding of who God is?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does this story help us to trust Jesus more in our daily lives?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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This story reminds us that similar to Jesus' command to bring to Him whatever food and resources the little boy had, He tells us to bring all we have to Him. He says to bring Him our stress, our lack of patience, our insecurities, and our pain. He tells us to trust Him with all of it and to not hold back, thinking we can handle some of it on our own. This is the opposite of the Israelites. They grumbled and complained and blamed. They yelled at Moses and wanted to go back to Egypt. Their human assessment was that they were hopeless, so their solution was a return to slavery. But with God in control, everything is possible for those who believe in Him (Mark 9:23). He alone can do the impossible with what you have. But you've got to bring it to Him. All of it.

- **What is your impossible situation today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What would it mean for you to take your situation fully to Jesus?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Compassion was not just something Jesus had, but something we as His followers should have as well. When we see people desperate, hurting, grieving, and full of sorrow, our compassion for them leads us to share our resources, our meals, and our homes. We give words of peace, comfort, and hope. And even when we're exhausted or grieving ourselves, we don't harden our hearts, but look to God as our example. The love of the Father and the Son and the Spirit was not limited to emotions—God acted on it. Likewise, we as followers of Christ are not called to *feel* compassion but to *be* compassionate.

- **What situation led you to feel compassion recently? How did you act on it?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What difference did your act of compassion make in the life of another? In your own life?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we learn that we're called to be servants, but sometimes that servitude leads to much more—sometimes He works through us in pretty amazing ways. Sometimes we step out in faith, leaving our comfort zone and everyday routine, only to find out that God is allowing us to be used to magnify His glory to those around us.

- **How has God used a person to reveal Himself to you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How has God used you to love or lead someone in His name?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

I. S. L. Price, "Back to her roots: How Katie Ledecky became so dominant in the pool," *Sports Illustrated*, June 1, 2016, <http://www.si.com/olympics/2016/06/01/olympics-2016-road-to-rio-katie-ledecky-swimming>.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
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# 09

## SESSION NINE

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# Walking on Water

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In the Christian life we face various struggles and circumstances that test us. However, because we are Christians, we know we don't face them alone. Jesus—the Son of God—is sovereign over all things, and He calls us to a place of deep comfort and courage as we face struggles in this life. He is sovereign even over the wind and the waves, so we can worship Him no matter what and call others to do the same.

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 14:22-33

# THE POINT

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**Jesus has control over all of life's storms.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

The word *sovereign* carries the idea of someone having complete authority and control. It is not easy to accept the doctrine of someone, even God, being sovereign over us. Our desire for independence makes it difficult for us to submit to someone telling us what we should or should not do. However, if we humble ourselves and admit our need for salvation, we will see that our sovereign Savior is greater than we are and can sustain us through any circumstance that life brings.

For Christians, it is easier to accept the doctrine of sovereignty when it is discussed in the context of salvation. We all know that we cannot save ourselves. We will die in our sins unless God intervenes. Rarely do we have any issue with this line of thought, but there is usually tension when we work through God's sovereignty in the more specific areas of daily life—issues such as school, time management, relationships with parents, diseases, and ten thousand other struggles. In other words, we have difficulty with sovereignty when it presses in on the things that are not dealing with “church life” or “theological discussions.”

We are so tempted to refuse or reject someone's authority over us because it overrides the control we think we should have over ourselves. Therefore, it is important that we regularly remind ourselves that Jesus is not only the Lord of our salvation, He is also the Lord of every area of our lives. Jesus is Lord when it comes to the way we spend our time, use our words, or take a test during school. There is great comfort in knowing that Jesus is sovereign over every circumstance in life because of who He is—the Son of God.

- **What human forms of authority do we see in the world? Why might we have such a difficult time accepting someone else's authority in these circumstances?**

### Option 2

When someone tells us what to do or gives us instructions, sometimes we find ourselves shouting, “You're not the boss of me!” Or “I don't have to listen to you.” Or asking, “Says who?” Obedience is tough. We want to know who's in charge, or who thinks they're in charge, while we all really want to be in charge. But is that what's best for us? Thankfully, God knows what's best for us. He sent Jesus—His best—for us. And He is in complete control of our lives. We may try to wriggle out of His grasp, itching to make our own decisions and control our own ways. We need to remember that God's way is always the best way. We can trust Him to be in control of our lives, because He is in control of all of life.

- **Why do you think we want to control our own lives?**
- **How does it comfort you to know that God is in control of your life and everything else?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus has control over all of life's storms.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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What happens when you face various struggles and fears? What happens when trials and adversities test what you really believe? However you answer those questions, the fact remains that if you are a Christian, you have the confident assurance that you do not face those trials alone. Jesus—the Son of God—is sovereign over all things as this next miracle teaches us, and He calls us to a place of deep comfort and courage as we face struggles in this life.



## TIMELINE

### WALKING ON WATER

*Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.*

### THE PARALYTIC

*Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.*

### THE DEMONIAK

*Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.*

## THE DISCIPLES FACED A STORM

After Jesus fed a crowd of about five thousand men, besides women and children, He instructed His disciples to get into a boat and set sail while He retreated to the mountain for a time of prayer.

**22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. (Matt. 14:22-25)**

As the disciples departed, Jesus was not in the boat with them. In verse 23, we see Jesus' motivation for retreating away from the crowd was to get alone with God the Father and pray. Jesus, being fully human, needed time to rest and recuperate. It's amazing how He found retreat, refreshment, and rejuvenation by spending time alone with God the Father.

This took place in the evening, and the disciples were out in open water (vv. 24-25). While Jesus was with the Father enjoying time for rejuvenation, the world kept turning, and His disciples found themselves in the midst of a storm.

When the disciples got in the boat and initially set sail, it would have been in the afternoon, and Jesus was praying by Himself late into the evening. In other words, Jesus was in prayer when the disciples began struggling to navigate their course during a violent storm.

During difficult times in our lives, we may be tempted to wonder if God has forgotten about us or even doubt that He loves us. Mark's Gospel account of the real storm battering the disciples mentioned that Jesus saw how the wind was working against them and they were struggling with the oars (Mark 6:48). Jesus did not deliver them immediately—it is possible that the disciples were struggling in the storm for nearly 12 hours—but He saw them, and He came to them walking on the waves.

- **When have you had to endure a struggle in your life that God did not immediately resolve? How were you challenged to grow in your faith through that struggle? (p. 60, PSG)**

## JESUS PROVED HE WAS IN CONTROL OF THE STORM

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After coming out to meet the disciples, the story picks us by telling us the following:

**26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” (Matt. 14:26-27)**

When Jesus showed up, the disciples were not expecting Him. In fact, the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost! We have to remember that the last time they saw Jesus, He was standing on the shore. Even more so, I doubt any of them expected to see Jesus walk on the water toward the boat. So, Jesus comforted the disciples by assuring them of His identity. He then invited them to exchange their fear for courage. It would be good for us to remember this truth: When Jesus is near, there is no reason to be afraid. And we can rest assured Jesus is always near and will never leave us (Heb. 13:5).

When Jesus came to His disciples walking on the water, they were understandably frightened, thinking He was a ghost. Jesus responded by telling them to be courageous, confirming His identity, and relieving their fears (v. 27). Jesus’ words “It is I” directly echo God’s revelation of Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14, when God revealed His name as “I AM.”

According to the Bible, there is no question that God sovereignly ordains trials in our lives at various points in order to reveal His character and nature to us in ways that we would never know apart from the storm (Rom. 8:28-30; Jas. 1:1-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). And it is in the middle of the storm that the presence of Christ becomes all the more real. Because Jesus is the great “I AM” and He is with us always, we can have courage and faith in the midst of our storms. But what if our faith falters?

**28 And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matt. 14:28-31)**

Jesus heard Peter's request and told him to come out and meet Him in the middle of the water! This must have been amazing for all of the disciples to witness. Remember, Jesus had not yet calmed the storm, so the winds were still raging and the water was still churning. And still, Peter obeyed Jesus by going to Him. However, on the water Peter began to focus on the strength of the wind, and his courage retreated. He once again embraced fear and lost his focus on Jesus.

As soon as Peter cried out to Jesus to save him, Jesus did just that. Jesus then exposed Peter's lack of faith and asked him why he doubted. Little faith? From our vantage point, it probably seems that Peter had a pretty great amount of faith because he was willing to step out of the boat, yet Jesus said Peter had little faith. Jesus' rebuke meant Peter's faith was weak and needed to be strengthened. This only comes with having greater dependency on Jesus.

## JESUS IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE DOES

Although Jesus' calming of the storm was a display of His supernatural power over creation, the key factor to this passage is found in verse 33 when the disciples worshiped Jesus.

**32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matt. 14:32-33)**

At that moment, the disciples confessed that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Their worship of Jesus, who was standing right before them, shows that they were fully convinced of His divine identity. The same can probably be said of us, that our worship of the Lord becomes more meaningful and sincere after we have seen Him do great work in our lives.

Reflecting on Jesus being sovereign over our circumstances as well as our supplier of courage will allow our hearts to have an attitude of worship rather than worry. Philippians 4:6 tells us not to worry, but to pray about everything, letting God know our requests.

## TIMELINE

### POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

*Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.*

### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.*

*\*Beginning Fall 2017*

### ANointed FOR BURIAL

*Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### The Goodness of Creation (p. 62, PSG)

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*In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God’s judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator. Therefore, sin and evil should not be seen as a foundational part of the creation but rather as a corruption of it. While the creation has been marred and distorted as a result of sin, it is still good in the hands of God and serves His purpose of proclaiming His glory in the world. God’s people should affirm and seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (Gen. 2:15).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Jesus is always in control, always present with us, and He alone is powerful enough to calm the raging sea. What else can we do but worship Him as the Son of God? But not only did He still the wind and the waves, He consumed the wrath of God against our sin on the cross. What else can we do but trust Him to preserve us through the storms of life?

Our security in this world is not based on the strength of our faith but on the object of our faith. Our faith may waver in the storm, but Christ is solid and will not move—the storm is His footstool, for He rides on “the clouds of heaven” (Dan. 7:13).

Our faith grows in strength when we reflect on the precious message of the gospel, which reminds us that Jesus alone is worthy of our worship because He alone is mighty to save. These truths serve to fuel our hearts and drive us toward living as faithful witnesses on mission for the Lord God, no matter what situations we find ourselves in.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What benefits have you experienced from spending time alone praying to God?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How are you encouraged by knowing Jesus walks on top of the raging storms of life?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How might this story challenge the way you view current "storms" of life you may be dealing with?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What should we learn from Peter's mistake of taking his eyes off of Jesus during the storm?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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This passage should help us recognize that in what we might call the storms of life, we can often find our minds clouded with doubts and fears. Sometimes mental storms have greater impact and more collateral damage than physical storms. Although physical storms come and go, mental storms seem to remain. Regardless of the kind of storms we may experience, knowing Jesus provides us with peace in the storm. The gospel reminds us that because of our relationship with Jesus, we have peace with God as well as access to the peace of God.

- **How does prayer reflect our understanding of God's sovereignty over our circumstances?** *By praying and asking God to intervene in our circumstances, we are expressing our belief that God is sovereign and is bigger than whatever experience.*
- **Which do you find more significant: physical storms or metaphorical "storms of life"? Why?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Think about it—Peter was about to step away from the only means of protection he had in the midst of the storm, namely, the boat he was sitting in. Peter had been in storms like this before and knew how dangerous they could be. But he stepped out on faith, trusting in Jesus' words calling him to come forward. Today, the story teaches us that God often uses a storm to bring us to a place where we humbly cry out, "Lord, help us!" It is in those moments that we are reminded of Jesus' power to hold up disciples of weak faith and keep them from being swept away by the waves.

- **What are some current life storms where Jesus is calling you to step out in faith?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can show courage and faith in Jesus in the midst of our difficult life situations?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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It's crucial we see Jesus engaged in ministry on a full-time basis during this season of life. He was fully dedicated to the mission God sent Him to fulfill. Jesus ministered to others with all of His heart, mind, soul, and strength. Therefore, to ensure physical endurance to complete the mission, He carved out the needed space to be alone with the Heavenly Father, which is something that all believers can learn from when it comes to being on mission with God.

- **How does this session challenge your own prayer life?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it so important for us to realize that spending time alone with God helps us to rest, regroup, and be refreshed?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #9, which contains an artistic poster of Jesus walking on water.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



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**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 10

## SESSION TEN

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# The Miracle of Forgiveness

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will see that true faith seeks Jesus for physical and spiritual healing. Jesus is not only able to heal the sick physically but, being fully God, He is also able to forgive us for our sins and heal us spiritually. The gospel of Jesus Christ is able to heal sinners completely and make them whole.

### SCRIPTURE

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Mark 2:1-12



# THE POINT

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**Faith in Jesus results in forgiveness of sins.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Drop in on a Christian prayer meeting and you are bound to hear some prayer requests for some sort of physical healing. We know this to be true from our own experience of participating in group prayer at church. Not only that, but we likely know it to be true in our own private prayer lives as well.

But then again, this shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us—the Bible instructs us to come to God with our prayers and requests because He cares for us. And because God is a loving Father who does good on behalf of His children, it is right for us to come to Him and pray for the physical healing of loved ones and friends.

Of course, even though praying for physical needs is important and shouldn't be neglected, it is just as important to be praying for our spiritual needs and spiritual healing. Every person on Earth suffers from the same spiritual disease of sin. And as a result, every person has suffered an estranged relationship with God.

In our story today we learn that Jesus, while wanting to heal and restore people who were broken physically, also offers spiritual healing to those that have faith in Him.

- **Why is it important to pray for spiritual needs just as much as we need to pray for our physical needs?**

### Option 2

In the Old Testament, God spoke to His people through His prophets. Many prophecies are called Messianic prophecies, meaning they foretell about the birth, life, and death of the Messiah. He would be a king and a priest. Isaiah was one of the Old Testament prophets, and specifically spoke of the way Jesus would die and the spiritual healing He would bring to the world through His death. Jesus took on our sin so that we could be healed of our sin sickness eternally.

- **Knowing that Jesus was punished for your sins and offers you forgiveness, how will you live your life differently?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Faith in Jesus results in forgiveness of sins.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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In Jesus' next miracle, four men brought their friend—a paralytic—to see Jesus. The crowds were so large that there was no room in the house or in front of the house. The four men didn't let the crowds stop them; instead, they removed the roof and lowered their friend to where Jesus was. Jesus first told the paralytic his sins were forgiven, then told him to get up and walk. Jesus not only healed the paralytic physically, but spiritually as well.

## TIMELINE

### THE PARALYTIC

*Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.*

### THE DEMONIC

*Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.*

### POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

*Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.*

## THE CROWDS GATHERED AROUND JESUS

Our text opens with Mark providing important background information regarding Jesus: He was coming off of a preaching/ministry tour and was returning to His home base in Capernaum. In other words, Jesus was returning home to rest and recuperate from being on the road for an extended amount of time. While He was on the road doing ministry, He was healing, casting out demons, and preaching in various synagogues. Shortly after Jesus arrived home, word got out that He was back in town and a crowd found Him.

**<sup>1</sup> And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup> And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. <sup>3</sup> And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. <sup>4</sup> And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. (Mark 2:1-4)**

If we were honest, we would all be extremely frustrated if this happened to us. Imagine you have just returned from a lengthy mission trip and have been away from the comforts of your own home, away from your family, and just want time alone. Wouldn't it be challenging to engage a house full of people when you are exhausted and expecting time to relax in the peace and quiet of your own home? Or imagine you have stressful day at school, and by the time you get home, there are cars lined up down the block with people waiting to speak with you. Wouldn't you be tempted to drive right on past and just go somewhere quiet and solitary?

What we see on display in this passage is Jesus demonstrating absolute selflessness. It is true that Jesus is fully God, but He is also fully human. There are several places in the Gospel accounts where Jesus is tired from His journeys (John 4:6) or seeking solitude for communion with His Father (Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12). This seems to be another moment where He would have been exhausted and looking forward to relaxing. Yet when people came to see and hear Him in Capernaum, He did not turn them away. In fact, Mark said so many people came that there was no room in the house or the doorway (Mark 2:2). Jesus was always ready to engage with the crowds of people who sought Him out because He had a deep compassion for the lost.

With the stage set for this scene, Mark introduced new characters to the narrative, men carrying a paralytic to Jesus. These men could not enter the house in a traditional way because of the overcrowding. It's amazing that their desire to see the paralytic encounter Jesus fueled the innovative idea to lower him through the roof of the house. Imagine a house that has a fire escape on the side of it. These four men would've carefully and strategically made their way up the fire escape on top of the roof, all the while carrying the paralytic on his mat.

## JESUS FORGAVE THE PARALYTIC

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At this point in the narrative, we see a plot twist. In Jesus' other encounters with healing people, He clearly restored them physically. But this time He went the extra mile, and it caused quite a controversy.

### **5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5)**

Jesus moved beyond physical restoration to actual spiritual restoration by dealing with the man's sins. Jesus' expression of forgiveness for the man is sins was a bold proclamation that He was God.

In our day, it is imperative we preach the superiority of spiritual restoration over physical restoration. That is why Paul reminded the church (and us) that they are Jesus' ambassadors who lead others to Him and ask them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). It should be our main concern that sinners are aware of the fact that they need to be reconciled to God by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:1-10).

For this reason, God the Son left the comfort of heaven to seek and save us who were lost and give His life as a ransom (Mark 10:45). Isaiah 53:1-12 provides for us a detailed description of how Jesus dealt with our spiritual state, which included our "sin sickness." Isaiah 53:4-5 says: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

These prophetic words uttered by Isaiah provide us with clarity as to why Jesus the Messiah would endure suffering. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, He did not endure the cross because of His personal sin (Heb. 4:15). The sins the Messiah dealt with on the cross were those of the fallen descendants of Adam. Isaiah is very clear that the Messiah suffered in the place of those who should have suffered for sin, which is all of fallen humanity (Isa. 53:6).

- **Jesus healed this man physically and spiritually. While only Jesus can heal, He uses us to spread His message of reconciliation with God. What are some ways you can share His message with others?**  
(p. 67, PSG)
- **How does it affect you to know that Jesus was punished for you?**  
(p. 67, PSG)

## JESUS HEALED THE PARALYTIC

The scribes who were present in the house recognized with shock that Jesus was claiming He could forgive sins. Take a look at their response:

**6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk?’ 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—<sup>11</sup> “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” <sup>12</sup> And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:6-12)**

This claim made Jesus distinct from all other previous teachers and prophets. The scribes arrived at the conclusion that Jesus was blaspheming because He was claiming equality with God, who alone can forgive sins. The irony of their accusation was made plain when Jesus backed up His claim to forgive sins by healing the man’s paralysis as well.

Jesus displayed His omniscience (ability to know all things) by addressing the internal thoughts of the scribes. He then challenged them by asking a question about which was easier: healing somebody physically and restoring their ability to walk or simply saying the person’s sins were forgiven. It would be safe for someone to claim the ability to forgive sin—how could such a person be proven wrong? It’s much more difficult to claim to be able to heal someone’s paralysis because it would require immediate proof of movement, evidence of walking. But if Jesus were to heal the man and provide him with the physical ability to get up and walk, then it would show evidence of His claim to have the ability to forgive the man’s sins as well.

Therefore, Jesus told the paralytic to get up, take his mat, and go home. Jesus gave the paralytic man three simple commands. Can you imagine what the people around them were thinking? Here you have Jesus claiming to be equal with God, claiming to be the Son of Man—the Messiah, saying He has the ability to forgive sins like God does, and telling the paralytic man to get up and go home! The room was probably filled with tension.

What’s amazing, is that Mark said all of the people were stunned, but they gave glory to God because they’d never seen anything like Jesus’ healing (2:12). Every person who witnessed this miracle was absolutely astonished. They had probably never seen anything like this. The Man whom they knew to be a traveling teacher proved He was the Messiah and was equal with God. Jesus had the power to forgive sins and restore the broken—both physically and spiritually.

## TIMELINE

### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.*

*\*Beginning Fall 2017*

### ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

*Mary anoints Jesus’ head with oil.*

### JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

*Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Priest (p. 67, PSG)

*As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

There is a world filled with people who have never heard the good news of Jesus, even people who attend church. Many of them have no idea that they have inherited a sin sickness from our first father, Adam. We should personify the compassion of Christ by seeking to engage with the lost and sharing with them the good news of what Jesus has done; He has removed their sins to reconcile them to God and give them a new life in Christ.

The greatest need every human being has is to be forgiven for our sins in order to receive complete spiritual restoration to God. Redemption and forgiveness for our sins are only found through the shed blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan to save sinners from the wrath we are all due. This is the core message of the gospel.

As we have looked in this text, we have identified the fact that Jesus healed the paralyzed man in order to demonstrate His authority and power over human suffering and sinfulness. It must be understood that when Jesus claimed to forgive the sins of the paralytic, He made the public declaration that He was equal with God. In doing this, He signified to the witnesses at the house not only His deity, but also the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies they had been waiting for. Only Jesus was qualified to heal them from their spiritual sickness entirely.

All of these truths should ignite passion in our hearts to bring nonbelievers into contact with Jesus. He is the only one who can heal our spiritual sin sickness by forgiving us of our sins.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does Jesus' compassion toward the multitudes challenge the way you show compassion to those nearest to you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is spiritual healing more beneficial than physical healing in the long run?** *Physical healing only lasts for this lifetime. The person healed will eventually still die a physical death. However, spiritual healing—the forgiveness of sins that Jesus offers—applies to this life and the life to come.*
- **What does this story teach us about seeking physical healing for others?** *Like all of Jesus' displays of physical healing, it teaches us that we should always be advocates for addressing others' physical needs and challenges.*
- **How has this story challenged you personally?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The primary blessing that those who embrace Jesus as Savior receive is complete spiritual healing for our sin sickness. In light of this, we must understand that while we are not promised physical healing from all sickness on this side of eternity, those who trust in Jesus will never face the wrathful consequences of their sin. Believers will never face separation from God, the outpouring of His wrath, and the eternal sickness and death awaiting those who do not believe (Rev. 21:4).

- **What are we to believe about Jesus because of His claims and His miracle in this narrative?** *We can believe that He is God, because only God can forgive sins.*
- **What are some ways we can help others understand the priority of having our sin sickness healed, even over our desire for physical healing?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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The men were motivated to go to great lengths to see Jesus engage the paralytic by their desire to see their friend healed. These men had strong faith because they truly believed Jesus would restore the man physically. We can learn from these men as it relates to our family members and friends. What lengths are we willing to go to in order for them to encounter Jesus and be restored not only physically, but also spiritually?

- **How does this story strengthen our own faith in Jesus' ability to restore us?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Like the friends in this story, what motivates you to help people encounter Jesus? Why?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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The crowd gathered at the home where He was staying obviously knew Jesus would not turn them away. This should be a reminder for us that we should pray that the masses of lost sheep in our world would seek out and trust the compassion of Jesus. When we engage with the lost, may the compassion of our Savior be felt through our tender words, engaging eye contact, and openness to meet their needs. In doing this, we will reflect our Savior who has loved us in the same way.

- **What are some excuses and objections we can come up with for not engaging with the lost in order to share the gospel with them?** *We might say that we're too busy, maybe we think we'll share the gospel wrong, and so on.*
- **How does the compassion of Jesus Christ coming to us in the gospel overcome our excuses and objections?** *Answers will vary.*



## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
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# 11

## SESSION ELEVEN

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# The Demoniac

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we witness the power and authority of Jesus Christ over evil spirits. Jesus showed His care and concern for a man who was isolated from society and controlled by evil spirits. After delivering the man from his bondage, Jesus called him to testify to the goodness of God. As those who trust in the authority and power of Jesus, and who have been delivered from our bondage to sin, we are also called to testify to the goodness of God.

### SCRIPTURE

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Mark 5:1-20

# THE POINT

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**Jesus has power and authority over evil spirits.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

There is one thing all of jobs have in common—there is always a boss. Everyone has someone in authority over them, or they are in authority over someone else.

However, bosses have limited authority. No city council member has universal jurisdiction over all of the cities in the state, only the city he has been called to serve. A senator for the state of California is not responsible for citizens in the Midwest. Even the person who holds the powerful office of President of the United States cannot make decisions on behalf of any other country. Authority exists, but authority is limited. There isn't a single person on planet earth who possesses all authority.

In contrast to bosses with limited authority, Jesus has all authority. He didn't have an impressive appearance while on earth (Isa. 53:2). He didn't have all the luxuries you'd expect to come with such authority (like a corner office). Yet He had, and still has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).

Not only that, but Jesus' authority is also universal and all-encompassing. Nothing compares to His power and authority. The extent of Jesus' power and authority is too vast to comprehend. And today, we will see how His sovereign control extends to the spiritual forces of evil that wage war in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

- **Have you ever had a “boss” from a summer job? If so, what was that experience like?**

### Option 2

At home, our parents are the main authority we obey. At school, our teachers are the main authority. After school, maybe a band director or coach is the authority. During youth or small group, your youth pastor is your authority. What this means is that these people set the standard to keep us safe—they have the authority to make sure we obey those standards or face consequences. The rules they set aren't to harm us, but are for our good. They keep us safe, teach us how to respond or play the right note, and so on.

- **Who are some of the authorities in your life?**

Maybe it seems strange to say these people have power or authority over you, but that's actually a good thing. Their power and authority helps and protects you. Unlike your parents, teachers, coaches, and youth pastor, Jesus has unlimited authority—over everything. His power and authority aren't limited to the physical either; He has power and authority over the spiritual as well. Even evil spirits have to obey Him.

- **How does it affect you to know that Jesus even has power and authority over evil?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus has power and authority over evil spirits.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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Chances are you have seen a recent Hollywood movie or network show that contained demons or demonic activity as part of the story line. While these television portrayals can be quite disturbing, most of us probably would have been a bit worried if we were with the disciples and Jesus as they encountered this next individual—the demoniac. Even if fear would have struck our hearts at the sight of this man, Jesus would have quickly eased our fears by demonstrating His sovereignty over all things.

## TIMELINE

### THE DEMONIAK

*Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.*

### POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

*Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.*

### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.*

## JESUS ENCOUNTERED THE DEMONIAK

Christ demonstrated great power while He walked on earth. And He did so in many ways. Several stories in the Gospels tell of Jesus encountering people who were demon-possessed. Let's take a look at one of the most memorable exorcisms Jesus performed:

**<sup>1</sup>They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup>And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. <sup>3</sup>He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, <sup>4</sup>for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. <sup>5</sup>Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. <sup>6</sup>And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. <sup>7</sup>And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." <sup>8</sup>For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (Mark 5:1-8)**

Can you imagine running into this guy? Scary! He was a man alive among the dead. Although people tried to bind him with chains, he broke out of them. He was what many today would label a "crazy person," which is one of the reasons he was isolated from society.

People were fearful of this man for obvious reasons. First, they were afraid because he had incredible strength. They tried everything they could to restrain him from harming others. They put chains around his hands and feet, but nothing they tried could overcome him. The shackles were no match for his strength.

Second, they were afraid because of his self-mutilating behavior. He was an outcast. He didn't fit in. And, since they couldn't control him, they banished him. He was completely ostracized from culture and society.

Unlike those who bound the man and cast him out to live among the dead, Jesus met this man on the shore and engaged him. Jesus didn't turn His back on this needy sinner. In fact, it was for people like this that Jesus came in the first place. Jesus cared about this demoniac because he saw a sick man, not just the demonic spirit that ravaged him. No amount of medicine could help this man. No self-help book could revive him. Jesus knew what we know now—that He alone had the power and authority to change this man's life forever.

- **What do you think causes us to be afraid of things we don't understand? Why do you think we fear evil despite God's command not to? (p. 72, PSG)**

## JESUS CONFRONTED THE EVIL SPIRITS AND HAD COMPASSION ON THE DEMONIAK

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Jesus didn't just show compassion to the man in distress. He demonstrated His power over evil. Watch how He confronted the evil spirits:

**<sup>9</sup> And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many."<sup>10</sup> And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country.<sup>11</sup> Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside,<sup>12</sup> and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them."<sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.<sup>14</sup> The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened.<sup>15</sup> And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.<sup>16</sup> And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs.<sup>17</sup> And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. (Mark 5:9-17)**

One of the main truths we learn from this story is that all demonic forces, including the Devil, are subject to the power of Christ. No demonic spirit has the final word. The Devil and his demonic forces are subject to One who is much greater and more powerful. Note that the text says the demons begged Jesus and that Jesus gave them permission to enter the pigs. The Bible says that demons believe "and they shudder" (Jas. 2:19) Thus, we know that evil spirits believe in the power of God and know that they are under His authority and are only permitted to do what He allows.

While we don't often see today the same kind of demonic possession witnessed in the New Testament, we still believe that Satan opposes our mission in every way He can—including demon possession. Because evil stems from the heart (Mark 7:23), we should take care not to give too much credit to demonic work. But neither should we rule out demonic influence in all circumstances.

The man in Mark 5 wasn't merely a maniac but a demoniac. He was possessed by the Devil. With a powerful word, Jesus delivered this man from all the torment and destructive behavior that once characterized his life. Therefore, we learn this powerful truth: The power of Jesus Christ changes lives.

There are a few things to notice about this change. First, it was radical. The text says that the man was dressed, sitting there, and behaving normally (v. 14). His life had completely changed when he met Jesus. He did a 180 degree turn. That doesn't mean that past struggles or even consequences of past sins go away. But a new heart changes the way a person thinks and behaves. Not only that, but we also see that the internal change was externally visible to others, and something that couldn't be hidden.

## GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The demons identifying themselves as “Legion” indicated the strength of the demons. A Roman military legion consisted of about 6,000 soldiers (the number of pigs in Mark 5:13). The name *Legion* thus serves to indicate a large number (because we are many), explains the supernatural strength of the man, and magnifies the fact that Jesus was the more powerful One (Mark 1:7; 3:27). Furthermore, pigs were unclean to Jews, and herding them was forbidden (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8). The large herd reminds us that this event took place in a Gentile area (Mark 5:11). The unclean spirits begged Jesus not to send them out of the region (Mark 5:10), and then, they begged to be sent into unclean animals (Mark 5:12).

## JESUS CALLED THE MAN TO TESTIFY TO GOD'S GOODNESS IN HIS LIFE

When Jesus delivered this man, He had a much bigger plan for the man's life than for him to just live out the rest of his days in peace. This man was charged to testify to the goodness of God that he had experienced firsthand. Here we learn that the gospel that saves is the gospel that sends. When God redeems you, He gives you a mandate and a mission.

**18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him.**

**19 And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (Mark 5:18-20)**

All followers of Christ have a mandate—to tell those who don't know God about what He has done for them. Jesus told him to go home to his own people and tell them what happened to him. This is the power of a personal testimony. While God does sometimes use seminary-trained preachers who proclaim the Word of God to lead people to faith in Christ, the Great Commission is not reserved for preachers alone. Rather, the Great Commission is for ordinary Christians to take the good news of Jesus to new people and places.

Our mission is local, but at the same time it is also global. Jesus wanted this man share what the Savior had done for him at home. However, Jesus also told him to share throughout the cities of the Decapolis, which was a grouping of cities that was largely under Greek influence.

- **What are some ways we can carry out our mission of sharing what Jesus has done for us both locally and globally?** (p. 74, PSG)

## TIMELINE

*\*Beginning Fall 2017*

### **ANOINTED FOR BURIAL**

*Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.*

### **JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM**

*Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.*

### **THE LAST SUPPER**

*The fulfilling of the New Covenant.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Demons (p. 74, PSG)

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

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Deliverance from sin always—eventually—leads to a deployment into mission. Jesus calls us to leave the wrappings of sin to pursue worshiping Him among people that don't know God at all. Through our own salvation, we come to realize that forgiveness leads to freedom. And freedom leads disciples of Jesus to go to the ends of the earth so that all people may know and fear Him. The reason we can fearlessly move forward in the mission is because He has sovereign power and authority over all things, including evil spirits. His sovereignty doesn't void our going—it empowers it.



# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some radical changes you've seen in the lives of people who trust in Jesus?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What changes would you point to in your own life since you became a follower of Jesus?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How encouraging is it to know Jesus has power and authority over the evil forces at work in the world today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How has this session challenged you on a personal level?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Christians often wonder: “If demon possession still takes place today, am I susceptible to demon possession?” Those who find their identity in Christ have been adopted into the family of God and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:3-14). And, as John wrote, “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Demonic spirits have no hope of ever possessing a person who is already possessed by an even Greater Spirit—the Spirit of Christ.

- **In your spiritual journey of following Jesus, what have you found helpful to resist the schemes of the Devil?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How comforting is it to know that the Spirit of God within believers protects those who trust in Jesus?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Jesus was moved to the core when He saw the effects of sin (Matt. 9:36). If that was His heart toward those trapped in the bondage of sin then, what should we feel toward those who are in the same condition today? Since we have the Spirit of Jesus, shouldn't our hearts break over the sin that plagues our those we know? Shouldn't we feel a deep pain over the sin that captivates countries and the world at large? When what breaks Jesus' heart doesn't break our hearts, there's a problem. An area of our hearts that does not break over sin is an area of our hearts that isn't conformed to Christ.

- **When was the last time your heart broke over the consequences of sin? How did you respond?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What should be our response if we ever find ourselves unmoved by and unbroken over personal sins?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Wherever you live, in whatever city or area God has placed you, there are people like this demoniac—men and women who are created to be in a relationship with God, but who suffer under the power and reign of sin. They are in desperate need of the healing power found only in the gospel. The demoniac serves as the embodiment of the damaging effects sin can cause, and causes us to ask: How can we who have experienced the gospel share it with those on the fringes of society?

- **What are some reasons we tend to shy away from serving people who may be labeled difficult cases?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How do Jesus' actions challenge that tendency?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #10, which contains a FAQ sheet on angels and demons.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 12

## SESSION TWELVE

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# Power Over Sickness and Death

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we continue our study through Jesus' miracles. As Jesus healed a sick woman and raised Jairus' daughter, we see the power of God displayed—a power that overcomes sickness, shame, and even death. As Christians, we minister to those who suffer from sickness and shame, with faith that God is mighty to save and to heal.

### SCRIPTURE

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Mark 5:21-43

# THE POINT

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**Jesus' power overcomes the shame of impurity and curse of death.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

The Bible describes God as omnipotent. Derived from two Latin words, *omnipotent* means *all powerful*. Nothing can compare with His overwhelming and matchless power.

Jeremiah, otherwise known as the weeping prophet, wrote about God's power as he gazed into the heavens: "Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:17).

Through His Word, from Genesis to Revelation, we see the omnipotence of God—in creating the world, parting the Red Sea, sending manna from heaven, raising the dead, and even walking on water.

Tragically, many of us have become so familiar with God that we've lost the sense of "wow" when we encounter Jesus in the Gospels. We read the stories of Jesus performing miracle after miracle, and yet we often remain unmoved, unimpressed. We are too accustomed to the power of God in these stories.

What we need is an awakening to the overwhelming sense of the power of God. We need to experience awe and wonder when we encounter the reality of who God is. We need renewed understanding that no problem is too big for Him.

- **What happens to our relationship with God when we are no longer in awe of Him or His power? Why is awe and wonder important for our relationship with God?**

### Option 2

The purest diamonds are known by their clarity. The clearer the stone and the bigger the size (measured in carats), the more expensive the diamond. Still, the reality is that most diamonds form with imperfections. These imperfections in diamonds are called *inclusions*. Diamonds are ranked based on these inclusions. A diamond with no flaws visible when magnified is considered flawless, while a diamond with inclusions that can be seen easily without magnification are much lower on the scale and described as having obvious inclusions. Nicks and dings on the surface of the diamond can be polished away, and won't affect the diamond's value as much as a crack just under the top part of the stone.<sup>1</sup>

- **Name one other interesting fact about diamonds. What new information did you learn about diamonds today?**

Just as diamonds have imperfections, so do we. Some of our flaws are more visible than others. Some are only seen with a closer look at our hearts. Either way, Jesus didn't just come to "polish" our flaws, He came to forgive us for them and free us from them. His power overcomes the shame of our mistakes. His purity washes out any impurities in us and fills us with His righteousness.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus' power overcomes the shame of impurity and curse of death.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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As we continue our study of Jesus' miracles, we now turn to two miracles that happened around the same time. The way Jesus healed these two people teaches us some specifics about Jesus the miracle-worker—that He has power that overcomes sickness, shame, and even death.

## JESUS ENCOUNTERED A SICK WOMAN ON THE WAY TO JAIRUS' HOUSE

Today's passage contains a story within a story. It begins with Jesus on His way to help a man whose daughter was at the point of death, but then someone else showed up. Take a look:

**21 And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. 22 Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet 23 and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." 24 And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. 25 And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, 26 and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. 28 For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." 29 And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. (Mark 5:21-29)**

- **Take a moment to list several signs in the story that the characters are desperate. What other actions do you associate with desperation?** (p. 78, PSG)

Let's start with the first person in need—the man who is desperate for Jesus to heal his daughter. Perhaps you've felt that sense of desperation, or know someone who has, after receiving news from the doctor that turned your world upside down. Maybe you heard the words "she only has a few days left, a week at the most," or "you'll deal with this issue for the rest of your life." Your situation seemed desperate, and you felt like your whole world was crashing down.

Jairus was desperate because he knew that, without the power of God, he would lose his daughter. The woman who touched Jesus was desperate as well. For twelve years, she had suffered from an illness that afflicted her in more ways than one. She'd suffered physically from the illness, financially (after seeing countless doctors), and socially (because of the shameful nature of her disease). Like Jairus, she knew that her situation was hopeless without Jesus.

### TIMELINE

#### POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

*Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.*

#### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.*

*\*Beginning Fall 2017*

#### ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

*Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.*

Jairus and the woman knew where to turn. They fixed their hope on Jesus. Perhaps that should be the first truth we recognize when we feel desperate: We should fix our eyes on Jesus. Neither of these characters believed that their hope was in themselves. They would not have embraced the teaching that healing only comes to those who have enough faith. They didn't have faith in their faith, but faith in the Savior. Both individuals focused their faith in the right place.

## JESUS HEALED THE SICK WOMAN

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The woman in this story had more than just illness to deal with. There were the constant societal pressures. She was considered “unclean” because of her situation. So not only was she hoping to have her sickness healed, but also the negative label that it brought. Watch what took place when Jesus realized she touched Him:

**<sup>30</sup> And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?” <sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” <sup>32</sup> And he looked around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 5:30-34)**

Because of her disease, this woman was subject to ridicule and shame. Her rights as a citizen were affected. Now, picture the scene. This woman, rendered unclean by her condition, was trying to get to the Messiah—the only spotless, innocent, pure Man to ever live. According to the law, her uncleanness should have kept her from approaching Jesus. But there was something about this Man she had heard about: He had power to heal. And that's just what He did.

This woman's story provides a picture of our spiritual state. Because of our sin, we are all impure and estranged from God. Because of our sin, we usually shrink back from approaching Him.

Not so for Christians. You and I can have confidence before God because of Jesus. Shame no longer controls us. Shame no longer has the last word. Shame no longer drives us to the darkness, but is blinded by the light.

Jesus hung the cross to die a death He did not deserve so that we might become His righteousness, and be holy and blameless before Him (2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 1:22). His purity overcame our impurity. Through our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, our shame is removed, our guilt is absolved, and we are declared holy before God.

Yes, we still struggle with our flesh as God continues His process of making us more like His Son. But even when we struggle, we are no longer sinners who are failing, but sons and daughters who are accepted, forgiven, and in the process of being transformed.



## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Guilt and Shame (p. 79, PSG)

*Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed, as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10).*

*Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense, and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.*

## JESUS BROUGHT JAIRUS' DAUGHTER BACK TO LIFE

Now we find ourselves back in Jairus' story. Jairus had asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter, and Jesus had agreed to come with him. Now, Jairus had been standing in the crowd, eagerly waiting for the Great Healer to come to his house. Can you imagine the anxiety in his heart? Nervously looking at Jesus with one foot toward Him and other toward his beloved daughter, Jairus waited with everything hanging in the balance. During that time, Jairus got dreadful news.

**<sup>35</sup> While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" <sup>36</sup> But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." <sup>37</sup> And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." <sup>40</sup> And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup> And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. (Mark 5:35-43)**

Have you ever been there—waiting on God, and the unthinkable happens? Can you relate with this anxious father? Perhaps it was receiving news you desperately didn't want to hear, or perhaps it's the loss of a loved one like Jairus. No matter what has happened, the One in whom we trust has defeated death, and we don't need to fear its curse. There are several reasons why we can and should trust Jesus in these situations.

## TIMELINE

### JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

*Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.*

### THE LAST SUPPER

*The fulfilling of the New Covenant.*

### JESUS IS ARRESTED

*Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.*

First, we trust Jesus because of His power. Death is no match for the power of Christ—it does not get the final word. Why else do we pray to the Lord on behalf of those who are on their deathbeds? Because that’s what we are supposed to do? No. We seek the face of God because we are sure of His sovereign ability to heal.

Second, we trust Jesus because of His presence. Jesus was with Jairus every step of the way, giving you and I an example of His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us (Josh. 1:5). No matter what you are facing today, by faith, take hold of the promise that Jesus is with you.

Third, we trust Jesus because of His compassion. Compassion never filled a man more than it filled the life of Christ. Jesus is able to sympathize with our weakness in every way (Heb. 4:15). He knew exactly what Jairus was feeling. You might ask, if Jesus was so compassionate, then why did He wait to tend to the child who was near death? Why did He stop to help this woman who had been sick for twelve years? Couldn’t she have waited? Jairus might have even thought to himself, “That woman’s disease will always be there. Jesus, can’t you come back to her after you heal my daughter?”

Yet, there was a divine purpose for why Jesus waited. He knew that Jairus had to get to a place where he was fully dependent on Him. God often allows difficulties into our lives to bring us to the end of ourselves so that He really is all we have.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Our all-powerful God has created everything we can see, taste, touch, and smell. He has also demonstrated His power through His Son Jesus, through miracles Jesus performed while He was on the earth. From these miracles, we know that God’s power spans the physical realm: The woman with the issue of blood was healed after painfully enduring her sickness for twelve years. Jesus simply spoke, and she was healed of her disease.

In addition to the physical realm, we see that God’s power also spans the spiritual realm. The bleeding woman’s impurity was covered by His purity. And, in Jairus’ family, Jesus overcame the curse of death with life. Christ has done the same for you and me. He has taken away our shame and put our guilt on Himself, freeing us to proclaim His riches to a lost and dying world.

If this is our God, then what should your response be the next time you face a challenge in life? God says that response should be trust.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does the gospel change the way we view shamefulness? How does Jesus' work on the cross remove shame?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it sometimes so difficult to wait on God? What does this reveal about our heart toward God's timing in our lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does this story encourage us when facing the tragedies of sickness and death in our own lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this story teach us about Jesus' character and His love for us?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The story of this woman reminds us of the plight of every person apart from Christ. We may not be ceremonially or ritually impure like this woman was, but we are all spiritually impure due to our sin. Sin destroys. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, they unleashed sickness and death into the world. No area of life escapes the effects of their fall into sin. One of those effects is sickness and disease. This does not mean that our personal sin is what causes our own illnesses. However, sicknesses do show that we live in a fallen world, a world tainted by sin. And sickness also provides a vivid picture of our lives apart from Christ—impure, diseased, and spiritually dead.

- **In what ways does the physical plight of this woman resemble the spiritual plight of sinners who are impure in thought and deed?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some other ways we resemble the two characters in this story?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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One thing we learn from both characters in this story is that their faith was persistent. In both cases, we notice their sense of determination. But not only that, we also see that their faith was urgent and exclusive. Reading her story, we do not get the sense that this woman simply laid all her options out on the table—this doctor, that method, this procedure, and, oh yeah, Jesus! Neither she nor Jairus viewed Jesus as one of many options. They were at the end of their ropes, and they saw Jesus as their only hope.

- **Why is it important for our faith to be persistent through difficult times?** *Faith and hope are closely related. We are to be persistent in faith because we are hopeful that God will work both for our good and His glory in the end. While the timing may not be our timing, that should not affect the faith we have in God's goodness and character.*
- **Why is it important for our faith to display a sense of urgency in looking to Christ for help?** *If we truly believe that Jesus is our only source of help and comfort, then we will urgently turn to Him in all matters of life.*



## HANDS

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If we truly understand our position in Christ, it should lead us to passionately share about Jesus. In fact, God calls us to announce Jesus as the Savior who takes away our shame and makes us pure and holy in His sight. We have been reconciled to God and given a right standing before Him! The reality of the lostness of this world should propel us forward to share in Jesus' mission, both locally and globally.

- **Why do Christians focus on relieving both temporal and eternal suffering?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are the dangers of only focusing on one and not the other?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

1. "Diamond Clarity," *Zales*, accessed December 12, 2016, [http://www.zales.com/jewelry101/index.jsp?page=diamonds\\_Clarify](http://www.zales.com/jewelry101/index.jsp?page=diamonds_Clarify).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUMI7Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUMI7Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**



# 13

SESSION THIRTEEN

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## Jesus Raised Lazarus

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we see how Jesus demonstrated His power over death by raising his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. This miracle story reveals the goodness and sovereignty of God, the curse of death and the power of resurrection, as well as Jesus' compassion toward those in pain. As we trust in Jesus—our powerful Friend who conquers death—we bring glory to Him in the midst of terrible circumstances.

### SCRIPTURE

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John 11:1-7,17-44

# THE POINT

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**Jesus grieved over death and overturned its power.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

From the perspective of humanity, death is final. There appears to be no way out of death, and no power that can stop it. Thoughts of death throw people into a state of denial and avoidance, and when it visits their families or friends the circumstance can become overwhelming. Due to how unpleasant and all-powerful death seems, people often avoid talking or thinking about it. The verdict is that death has the “last say.”

For Christ-followers, we know that this is not true. In God’s Word, we see that Jesus has power over everything, including death. Jesus’ raising of Lazarus was the miracle that best exemplified His power over death, and it foreshadowed the greatest miracle of all—His own resurrection.

Over the past few weeks, we’ve looked at the miracles Jesus performed. Jesus’ miracles always pointed toward a truth He wanted people to know—that He is the Almighty One who brings God’s kingdom to earth. In His miracles, we see the extraordinary power of God unleashed in the middle of everyday life.

- **Of all the miracles in the New Testament, which one is the most significant to you and why?**

### Option 2

Loss is tough, and it’s normal to experience grief over the loss of a loved one. It’s even normal to grieve over difficult life circumstances. Place students in pairs and ask them to discuss the following with their partners:

- **When have you experienced loss and felt grief over that loss?**
- **How was your relationship with God a comfort to you during that time? Or did you struggle to feel God’s presence in the midst of your pain?**

Bring the group back together and share a personal experience of loss. Then, tell the students that Jesus also experienced loss and grieved. Jesus even openly wept over the death of His friend, Lazarus, and the pain that death brought to Jesus’ other friends. He grieved. But, Jesus also provided for us a hope in our grief—all who trust in Him as Savior will spend eternity with Him, even those who have already died.

- **How does it comfort you to know that Jesus understands your grief and defeated death?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Jesus grieved over death and overturned its power.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

## PLOT

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The last miracle we look at might be, apart from Jesus' own resurrection, the most remarkable. Here we see how Jesus demonstrated His power over death by raising his friend, Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. Let's take a look at the context and see what this miracle reveals about Jesus' character and identity.



## TIMELINE

### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

*Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.*

*\*Beginning Fall 2017*

### ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

*Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.*

### JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

*Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.*

## JESUS HEARD NEWS OF LAZARUS' SICKNESS

The last miracle we will look at begins in John 11, the story of Lazarus. Let's take a look:

**<sup>1</sup> Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." <sup>4</sup> But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. <sup>7</sup> Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." (John 11:1-7)**

Lazarus was sick, at the point of death. It's not difficult to understand the feelings his family might have had about him in this situation. They wanted their brother to live. What's more, they knew the person capable of making that happen: Jesus.

This family (Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) knew Jesus well. He had stayed in their home and had eaten meals with them. They were not only His followers, but also His friends. They had seen what He did for people who needed healing, so Lazarus' family knew Jesus had the power to heal.

Did Lazarus' family want Jesus to know about his sickness and do something about it right then? Absolutely. However, Jesus had a different plan. Jesus told His followers Lazarus' sickness wouldn't end in death, and then He even stayed where He was for two more days.

Even though Jesus knew how things would turn out, He also wanted His friends to find their trust in God. Trust begins with believing that God knows our situation and cares about us. Through this miracle, Jesus showed us that God wants us to trust Him no matter the situation.

*Trust is an assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of something or someone.* It could also be defined as *having faith in or being confident of, something or someone.* And trust is what Martha and Mary needed as they faced this situation.

- **How might complete trust in God have helped Mary and Martha as they faced their brother's death? How might it help you as you face losses?** (p. 84, PSG)

## JESUS INVITED MARTHA TO BELIEVE IN HIM

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By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus had been dead for four days.

**17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” (John 11:17-27)**

Martha and Mary had the same reaction you or I might have had upon seeing Jesus: “Lord, if you had just been here, Lazarus would still be alive!” Both of Lazarus’ sisters knew Jesus had the power to do whatever He wanted. Not only could He give life, but He could also renew life.

Can you hear the faith in Martha’s voice? The Greek language is explicit here: “He would never have died had you been here, Jesus!” Was she blaming Jesus? Or did this complaint include an element of faith, an assurance that had He come in time, He would have healed her brother no matter how bad his illness?

Part of trusting in God means we believe He knows what is best for His children. God knows everything. Thankfully, His knowledge is not limited to our actions and thoughts. He also knows our intentions—He understands why we act the way we do, and He cares about us anyway.

The words Jesus spoke to Martha are true for us today. Jesus is still the resurrection and the life. When you and I trust in what He accomplished on the cross to pay for our sin, we are given everlasting life. No matter how much it seems we are waiting on the Lord here and now, everlasting life already belongs to us. His resurrection life becomes ours. We often say that “Jesus gives life,” but this passage reminds us we can also say “Jesus is life.”

- **What’s so surprising about Jesus’ delay? How does Martha’s reaction demonstrate this?** (*p. 85, PSG*)

## JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

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Grief is the normal reaction to the loss of a loved one. We all have experienced or will experience this emotion at some point. Jesus was not immune to it either. Take a look:

**28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. 34 And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” (John 11:28-37)**

Jesus loved Lazarus and his family. Jesus grieved Lazarus, and He wept over His friends' grief. In Romans 12:15, the Bible encourages us to “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Here, we see Jesus living out this principle.

Jesus didn't just grieve over the sadness of the scene. The Creator of humanity feels anger and grief over the consequences of sin and death in our world. We do not experience life the way God originally intended. And as God's image-bearers, our grief over sin and death reflects His hatred of sin and death. The good news is that grief was not Jesus' last word or action in this passage.

**38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:38-44)**

## TIMELINE

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### **THE LAST SUPPER**

*The fulfilling of the New Covenant.*

### **JESUS IS ARRESTED**

*Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.*

### **THE CRUCIFIXION**

*Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.*

Imagine the scene here. Lazarus had been dead for four days. Those around the tomb probably held their noses. A four-day-old body would have certainly smelled—at least, you would expect it to. But in this case, something different happened. Jesus asked for the tomb to be opened, and it was. Jesus then called out for Lazarus to walk out of the tomb. And sure enough, Lazarus walked out—still wearing the clothes he was buried in.

Think about it. We talk often about Jesus having all power. However, here we see His power extend to the unbelievable action of resurrecting someone who was dead. He placed oxygen back into Lazarus' lungs. He restarted his heart, too. The brain that should have been damaged by death came back to life not only to function, but to have memory of the life he lost and of those he loved. Who has the power, then, to raise someone from the dead? Plain and simple: God, only God.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Life After Death (p. 86, PSG)

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*The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies he or she immediately is with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Have you ever wondered why God allows us to go through what we go through in life, or why He allows certain things and protects us from other things? In this story, for instance, why would God allow Lazarus and His sisters to go through this ordeal? It was all for His glory. Again, His perspective is different than ours. Why would He allow you to go through things? For His glory and our good.

This biblical truth should change the way we think. Jesus allowed Lazarus to die so that others could watch Him raise someone from the dead. Who can do that? Who has that kind of power? Perspective is the issue here—nothing is too big for God.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Put yourself in Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' place. How would you have interpreted Jesus' delay in coming? What would you have thought about your friendship with Him?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does it mean to trust? What are some reasons it would be difficult to trust God in this kind of circumstance?** *When emotions are high and we experience extreme grief, we are tempted to lose trust or struggle with unbelief in God's goodness toward us. However, trust in God should outweigh those emotional responses and ground us in the truth that God is for us.*
- **How does Jesus' expression of grief here communicate God's compassion for people who suffer?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some practical ways we can grieve with those who grieve?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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In this incredible story of Lazarus' resurrection, we see two main things: God's timing isn't our timing—He has a different perspective about time than we do; and God's view of life isn't our view of life—He has a different perspective about life than we do. Think about it like this: God is “around” time and not in it. He operates outside of the box of our calendar. He knows that, though people die, they can live again. A person's passing from this life is no obstacle for Him.

- **What difference does the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection make in our lives today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does trusting God in difficult circumstances bring Him glory?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Jesus is a friend who resurrects the dead. He has the power to resurrect the physically dead, and He also has the power to raise the spiritually dead. Sin has caused a separation between man and God. This separation can only be defeated through what Jesus accomplished on the cross. We are able to live because He died having paid the penalty of our sin for us. In the context of what Jesus has done for us, our only responsibility is to surrender our lives to Him so that He can become our life.

- **In what ways does “resurrection” language also apply to us spiritually when we are saved?** *When a person is born again, that person goes from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5).*
- **Why is it important to hold together the reality of spiritual resurrection and the hope of physical resurrection?** *Because Jesus strongly emphasized both. God's work in us won't be complete until the resurrection of our physical bodies.*



## HANDS

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Think about the things that make up the staple of fast-paced lives: microwave ovens, drive-through for fast food, online shopping, and so on. We want what we want when we want it. Unfortunately, we apply the “get it quick” and “I want it now” mentality to God. But God moves according to His own timetable. God gives us what we need when we need it. He provides and accomplishes His will when He sees fit. God knows not only *what* is best, but *when* is best.

- **How will this truth affect the way you handle the current difficulties in your life today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some important lessons you can learn while you wait on God to act in His perfect timing?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #11, which contains an artistic quote poster related to the session.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories](http://lifeway.com/TGPSUM17Stories))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**

# STUDY PLAN

## YEAR 1

### Fall 2015

God the Creator (Genesis 1-11)  
God the Covenant-Maker  
(Genesis 12-50)

### Winter 2016

God the Redeemer  
(Exodus)  
God the Lawgiver  
(Exodus, Leviticus,  
Deuteronomy)

### Spring 2016

God the Savior  
(Numbers, Joshua)  
God the Judge (Judges,  
Ruth, 1 Samuel)

### Summer 2016

God the King (1-2 Samuel)  
God All Wise (1 Kings, Job,  
Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs)

## YEAR 2

### Fall 2016

God the Revealer  
(1-2 Kings, Isaiah)  
God the Pursuer (Major  
and Minor Prophets,  
1-2 Chronicles)

### Winter 2017

God the Sustainer  
(Daniel, Ezra)  
God the Provider (Esther,  
Nehemiah, Malachi)

### Spring 2017

God the Son (Gospels)  
God Among Us (Gospels)

### Summer 2017

Jesus the Storyteller  
(Synoptic Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker  
(Gospels)

## YEAR 3

### Fall 2017

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King  
(Gospels, Acts)

### Winter 2018

The Spirit Who  
Empowers (Acts)  
The God Who Sends (Acts)

### Spring 2018

The God Who Directs His  
People (Epistles)  
The God Who Changes  
Us (Epistles)

### Summer 2018

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)  
The God Who Makes All  
Things New (Epistles,  
Revelation)