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# GOSPEL PROJECT<sup>®</sup> CHRONOLOGICAL

## THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE / SPRING 2017  
VOLUME 5, NUMBER 3

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Printed in the United States of America

*The Gospel Project for Students* (ISSN 1939-0742; Item 005508013) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,  
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2016 LifeWay Christian Resources.

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## UNIT 1



**MICHAEL CARD** (sessions 1-6) has recorded over 37 albums, authored over 25 books, hosted a radio program, and written for a wide range of magazines. He has penned such favorites as “El Shaddai,” “Love Crucified Arose,” and “Emmanuel.” He has sold more than 4 million albums and written over 19 #1 hits, but the popularity of his work seems a stark contrast to his goal in life—to simply and quietly teach the Bible.

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## UNIT 2

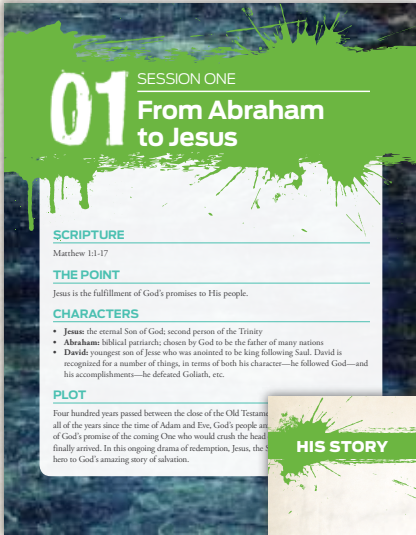


**D.A. HORTON** (session 7-12) currently serves as a pastor at Reach Fellowship, a church plant in Los Angeles, California, and as the Chief Evangelist for UYWI. He is also working toward his PhD in Applied Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Elicia, have three children, Izabelle, Lola, and Damon Jr. (aka Duce).



**RICHARD R. MELICK JR.** (special session) serves as a Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Affiliated Faculty, at Gateway Seminary. He is a consulting editor for *The New American Commentary*, for which he also contributed the volume *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. He and his wife, Shera, coauthored *Teaching That Transforms*. They have three children and eight grandchildren.

# HOW TO USE



## INTRO

The first page of each session contains a brief overview of what to expect in the His Story section. This will include the Scripture passage(s), the main point, key figures, as well as a basic plot that sets the scene for the Bible study.



## HIS STORY

Intended for group and personal use, the His Story section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. These pages also feature questions to engage with, Essential Doctrines to learn, and a visually helpful timeline to follow throughout the study. In addition, there is a Christ Connection section at the end, helping you to connect the dots between Jesus and the biblical storyline for each session.

# THIS STUDY

**Matthew 1:12-17**  
*"And after the deportation to Babylon, Achishai was the father of Shobai, and Shobai the father of Zerubbabel," and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azbuk, and Azbuk the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud," and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Mattan, and Mattan the father of Jaasiel the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*

**CHRIST CONNECTION**  
 In the years to come those of us who follow Jesus will inevitably experience separation, exclusion, and maybe even exile. This is what many of our brothers and sisters all over the world already experience. The promises made to Matthew's first readers two thousand years ago are just as alive and relevant to us today as they were to the frightened followers of Jesus during the first centuries of the church. Despite societal pressure and persecution, they went on to change the world. They stood up against the greatest earthly power the world had ever known—the Roman empire. Their eventual victory was motivated by one simple fact: They believed in and trusted the promises made to them, promises that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

**JESUS BAPTISM**  
 The meaning of baptism is a miracle of the cross.

**JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION**  
 When evil men tempted Jesus, Christ overcame.

12 Session 1

**YOUR STORY**

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.

- ▶ **God kept His promises to Abraham and David to one day send a Savior. What does God's faithfulness in keeping these promises say about God's character?**
- ▶ **The reality of Jesus' coming changed the lives of Matthew's readers. How does that reality change the course of your own life?**
- ▶ **Like the Jews during their time in captivity, have you ever felt like you were in a spiritual exile? How does the gospel of Christ deliver you from that?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you in your own understanding of Jesus' birth?**

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

## YOUR STORY

Intended for group and/or personal use, the Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to the present. As you discuss and answer these questions, you'll begin to realize that what God was doing in the lives of these biblical characters easily connects with life today.

## YOUR MISSION

Also intended for group and/or personal use, 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 this day forward. It is intended to show that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God in this world.

**YOUR MISSION**

**HEAD**  
 Contained in this first genealogical block are the names of four women. Surprisingly, Sarah (Abraham's wife), Rebekah (Isaac's wife), and Rachel (Jacob's wife) did not make the list. The first to make the list, Ruth, was a foreigner. Those that follow, Tamar and "Uriah's wife" (Bathsheba), were both victims. Even Rahab, who might have been written off because she was a prostitute, gave shelter to the spies and saved their lives. What these women have in common is that they were non-Jewish women married to Jewish men. Their presence in the genealogy shines a spotlight on the promise that all nations would be blessed through Jesus.

- What does the inclusion of these four women tell you about God's desire to bless the whole world?
- In what ways does God bless the world through Christians—those who have trusted in Jesus and are now part of this family tree?

**HEART**  
 All throughout the Bible, we see a loving Father who consistently keeps His promises to His children. In fact, God keeps His promises even when His people live in disobedience to Him or doubt that He will do what He says. God's constant faithfulness should encourage believers. His consistency in remaining faithful not only means that God will always keep His word, but also that He will always work for our good and joy even when we don't deserve it.

- How should the reality of Jesus' arrival increase your confidence in God's faithfulness?
- What are some areas of life where you have experienced doubt that God would come through for you? How does the Bible's testimony of God's constant faithfulness challenge those doubts?

**HANDS**  
 Jesus' arrival wasn't just for the people in the first century. And Jesus' arrival wasn't just for us—His arrival is for all people of all times. Instead of keeping the gospel of Jesus to ourselves, God calls us to proclaim Jesus as the central figure of history and the only One in whom salvation is found. We want others to know Him, and the fact that so many have never heard of Him should motivate us to go and tell others the good news of His arrival.

- Who in your life was faithful enough to share the gospel with you for the first time?
- What is God's will for your life when it comes to sharing the gospel with others? What are some ways you are currently being faithful to that call?

14 Session 1

# FROM THE EDITOR



**Andy McLean**

Editor

*The Gospel Project  
for Students*

We have reached the halfway mark in our chronological journey through the Bible. The first half of that journey allowed us to spend 18 months in the Old Testament, unpacking the depths and riches there by looking at many of the main characters and events. A big part of that journey involved looking at God's continual promise to send someone who would undo what was lost when our first parents sinned in the garden. We traced the promise mentioned to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 to the covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and their descendants. We saw a continual expectation for God to carry out His promises of making all things right and all things new. Along the way, we were able to catch glimpses and signs of the one to come—Jesus.

We now begin to fully see the fulfillment of these promises and expectations with our arrival in the New Testament. What was partial before is now perfectly clear. The God who has always desired to dwell among His people has done so in the most remarkable way possible—by becoming human. In the incarnation, we have the ultimate grounds for believing that God desires to rescue His people, that Immanuel (“God with us”) wants to make all things new—starting with our hearts.

As we journey through this first volume in the New Testament, pay close attention to Jesus' words and character. The One we have been on the lookout for in the Old Testament is right before our eyes in the New. Listen to what He has to say. Observe His life. And be amazed at the transformation that takes place in the hearts of people who encounter Him. It is the same internal transformation that takes place today for those who encounter Him through His Word and believe!

# UNIT 1

---

## **God the Son**

MATTHEW, LUKE

## MEMORY VERSE

<sup>16</sup>And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup>and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

**MATTHEW 3:16-17**



# 01

## SESSION ONE

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# From Abraham to Jesus

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 1:1-17

### THE POINT

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Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to His people.

### CHARACTERS

---

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Abraham:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to be the father of many nations
- **David:** youngest son of Jesse who was anointed to be king following Saul. David is recognized for a number of things, in terms of both his character—he followed God—and his accomplishments—he defeated Goliath, etc.

### PLOT

---

Four hundred years passed between the close of the Old Testament and Jesus' birth. As with all of the years since the time of Adam and Eve, God's people anxiously awaited the fulfillment of God's promise of the coming One who would crush the head of the serpent. That time had finally arrived. In this ongoing drama of redemption, Jesus, the Son of God, entered as the hero to God's amazing story of salvation.

# HIS STORY

## Matthew 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup> The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, <sup>3</sup> and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, <sup>4</sup> and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5</sup> and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse...

## JESUS DESCENDED FROM THE LINE OF ABRAHAM

Unlike Luke, who tucked his genealogy of Jesus away in chapter 3, Matthew opened his Gospel with a genealogy. He was making a point about the significance of Jesus' lineage and identity. From the beginning of the genealogy, Matthew organized Jesus' ancestors into three groups of 14 generations each.

Through this genealogical identity of Jesus and all of His famous ancestors, Matthew made another point: Jesus is the fulfillment of God's unique promises. Not only that, but Matthew wanted his readers to understand that even as Jesus had ancestors, so He will also have descendants, citizens of His kingdom. That is the new and yet ancient identity that belonged to the first Jewish followers of Jesus and that can belong to those who follow Him today.



### FROM ABRAHAM TO JESUS

*The arrival of the Promised One.*



### MARY PRAISES GOD

*God works in the heart and life of Mary.*

## JESUS DESCENDED FROM THE LINE OF DAVID

The second block began with David, who was unique in his relationship with the Lord. No one ever rose so high or fell so far (2 Sam. 11; Ps. 89). In the chronicles of the kings, David was the standard against whom all other kings were measured. Throughout the Old Testament, the title “Your father David” was not a phrase addressed only to Solomon, but also to many of the later kings.

In spite of the broken promises of so many kings, God would remain faithful to His promise concerning the eternal throne of David. In the end, the promise made to David was not about him. Matthew wanted readers to know it would be Jesus, David’s direct descendant, who would perfectly keep the promise to walk in the Lord’s ways. He would bless all nations, according to the promise made to Abraham. He would establish an eternal Kingdom, taking His seat on David’s throne. Jesus would be the focus and fulfillment of every promise, every dream and every hope.

- **What does this parade of evil kings in Jesus’ genealogy tell us about God’s faithfulness to His covenant?**

### 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

#### Jesus’ Humanity

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

#### Matthew 1:6-11

*<sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon the wife of Uriah,<sup>7</sup> and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,<sup>8</sup> and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,<sup>9</sup> and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,<sup>10</sup> and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah,<sup>11</sup> and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.*



#### GOD WITH US

*The good news of Jesus’ Incarnation.*



#### JESUS’ EARLY YEARS

*Jesus grows in favor with God and men.*

## Matthew 1:12-17

*<sup>12</sup>And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, <sup>13</sup>and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, <sup>14</sup>and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, <sup>15</sup>and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, <sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. <sup>17</sup>So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*

## JESUS IS THE MESSIAH WHO DELIVERS US FROM EXILE

Matthew closed the final 14 generational block of his genealogy not with a person like Abraham or David, but with an event. This exception is supposed to catch our attention and force us to ask why. Whenever a biblical author does not give us what we are expecting, it is an occasion to focus in and really listen. This exceptional event is the return of God's people following the Babylonian exile.

Jesus is the perfect and trustworthy One who will lead us home, rescuing us from the exile that resulted from our stubborn disbelief and sin. As the direct descendant promised through Abraham and David, Jesus would perfectly and completely accomplish what God intended from the beginning: He would be with us (Lev. 26:12).

## CHRIST CONNECTION

In the years to come those of us who follow Jesus will inevitably experience separation, exclusion, and maybe even exile. This is what many of our brothers and sisters all over the world already experience. The promises made to Matthew's first readers two thousand years ago are just as alive and relevant to us today as they were to the frightened followers of Jesus during the first centuries of the church. Despite societal pressure and persecution, they went on to change the world. They stood up against the greatest earthly power the world had ever known—the Roman empire. Their eventual victory was motivated by one simple fact: They believed in and trusted the promises made to them, promises that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.



**JESUS' BAPTISM**  
*The meaning of baptism in the life of the believer.*



**JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION**  
*Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.*

# YOUR STORY

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.

- ▶ **God kept His promises to Abraham and David to one day send a Savior. What does God's faithfulness in keeping these promises say about God's character?**
- ▶ **The reality of Jesus' coming changed the lives of Matthew's readers. How does that reality change the course of your own life?**
- ▶ **Like the Jews during their time in captivity, have you ever felt like you were in a spiritual exile? How does the gospel of Christ deliver you from that?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you in your own understanding of Jesus' birth?**

## HIS STORY

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

## YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

---

Contained in this first genealogical block are the names of four women. Surprisingly, Sarah (Abraham's wife), Rebekah (Isaac's wife), and Rachel (Jacob's wife) did not make the list! The first to make the list, Ruth, was a foreigner. Those that follow, Tamar and "Uriah's wife" (Bathseba), were both victims. Even Rahab, who might have been written off because she was a prostitute, gave shelter to the spies and saved their lives. What these women have in common is that they were non-Jewish women married to Jewish men. Their presence in the genealogy shines a spotlight on the promise that all nations would be blessed through Jesus.

- What does the inclusion of these four women tell you about God's desire to bless the whole world?
- In what ways does God bless the world through Christians—those who have trusted in Jesus and are now part of this family tree?



## HEART

---

All throughout the Bible, we see a loving Father who consistently keeps His promises to His children. In fact, God keeps His promises even when His people live in disobedience to Him or doubt that He will do what He says. God's constant faithfulness should encourage believers. His consistency in remaining faithful not only means that God will always keep His word, but also that He will always work for our good and joy even when we don't deserve it.

- How should the reality of Jesus' arrival increase your confidence in God's faithfulness?
- What are some areas of life where you have experienced doubt that God would come through for you? How does the Bible's testimony of God's constant faithfulness challenge those doubts?



## HANDS

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Jesus' arrival wasn't just for the people in the first century. And Jesus' arrival wasn't just for us—His arrival is for all people of all times. Instead of keeping the gospel of Jesus to ourselves, God calls us to proclaim Jesus as the central figure of history and the only One in whom salvation is found. We want others to know Him, and the fact that so many have never heard of Him should motivate us to go and tell others the good news of His arrival.

- Who in your life was faithful enough to share the gospel with you for the first time?
- What is God's will for your life when it comes to sharing the gospel with others? What are some ways you are currently being faithful to that call?

# 02

## SESSION TWO

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# The Angel Visited Mary

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 1:26-38,46-55

### THE POINT

---

Mary responded in faith to God's call on her life.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Mary:** Jesus' earthly mother
- **Gabriel:** one of only two angels who are named in the Bible. Mentioned in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

### PLOT

---

After looking at Jesus' genealogy and His connection with Abraham and David, we will zero in on Mary's life and her encounter with the angel Gabriel. How did this young, poor Jewish girl respond to the news that she would miraculously conceive a child, and that this child wouldn't be like every other child? This child would be God Himself, coming to dwell among His people and rescue them from their sins. How did she react to this call on her life? Our journey today answers those very questions.

# HIS STORY

## MARY SUBMITTED TO GOD'S DIFFICULT PLAN

Gabriel responded, as angels often do, with poetry. The passage began with two Greek words—their most literal translation being “no fear”—often heard from the lips of angels.

The angel’s poem addressed Mary’s fears. He told her that God would show her favor by giving her a Son, who would be called “Yeshua” (Jesus). He would be the fulfillment of the promise God made to David and his descendants, of whom Joseph was one. He would reign over the house of Jacob forever in the kingdom that would never end. From the poverty-stricken Nazareth, an obscure town, would come the King to sit on David’s eternal throne.

- **Gabriel’s greeting troubled Mary. What should she have “rejoiced” over? What did the angel mean when he said she was “favored?”**

### Luke 1:26-38

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And the angel came to her and said, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup> But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

<sup>31</sup> Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. <sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?” <sup>35</sup> The angel replied to her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> “I am the Lord’s slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.



**MARY PRAISES GOD**  
God works in the heart and life of Mary.



**GOD WITH US**  
The good news of Jesus’ Incarnation.



### Luke 1:46-50

*46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."*

## MARY MAGNIFIED GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS

The birth of Jesus was about more than just a baby being born—it was the birth of a new hope. The only appropriate response (whether you're a poor girl in an impoverished city or a glorious angel sent from heaven) is to sing. Let's take a look at how Mary's song magnified God for His goodness and mercy.

- **Make a list of things Mary praised God for in verses 46-50. What are the common themes?**

### Luke 1:51-55

*51 "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

## MARY TRUSTED GOD TO KEEP HIS PROMISES

Mary's song concluded with a chorus that celebrates the truth that the world would be turned upside down. This is Luke's favorite theme of radical reversal, presented in poetic form.

Mary's language revealed a heart and mind that must have been saturated with the Psalms. For the moment, she became a psalmist herself. And, like David, she understood that the new hope being born into the world was based on an ancient hope.



### JESUS' EARLY YEARS

*Jesus grows in favor with God and men.*



### JESUS' BAPTISM

*The meaning of baptism in the life of the believer.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Angels

*Besides the creation of humanity and animals, the Bible also speaks of other beings that God created—angels, who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God,” “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word “angel” carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. Angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.*

The God of the Gospels is a God who is always in the process of turning the world upside down. The new hope that was born—the hope that is the subject of so many songs in the Scriptures—was granted to the outsiders, to the poor in spirit. In order to be rich, we learn to let go of our riches. In order to become wise, we embrace the foolishness of the cross. In order to become mature, we become like little children. In order to become truly free, we become slaves. Jesus wins everything by losing everything.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

It would be difficult to overstate Mary’s obscurity. She was a young woman living in a culture that marginalized women. Yet, it was Mary of Nazareth who received God’s impossible call to bear His Son. Her immediate and intuitive response to the angel Gabriel exposed the shape of her heart for God. She seemed to instinctively understand that He was her master, and she was His humble servant.

The Gospels don’t provide any scenes of her struggling inwardly to come to grips with the demands of becoming the mother of the Messiah, but it is not hard to imagine that she had a definite impact on Jesus’ life as He grew to manhood. Did her life of humility and obedience shape His heart and life as well? Was her instinct toward obedience imprinted on Him from an early age? Could His mother’s example of complete submission to God’s plan for her life have inspired Him as He came to grips with the fact that He had also come as a servant (Phil. 2:6-11)? Such are the beautiful mysteries of the incarnation, God taking on human flesh and entering the world through the womb of a woman!



### JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION

*Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.*



*\*Special session*

### WHO IS HE?

*The disciples learn Jesus’ identity and the purpose behind why He came.*

# YOUR STORY

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 was Zechariah's question a sign of his weak faith but Mary's question a sign of her strength? What can we learn from the way Mary responded to the angel's message?**
- ▶ **How does Mary's response—calling herself the Lord's servant and willingly submitting to His will—reveal the posture every faithful Christian should have? What does submitting to God's plan look like in our culture today?**
- ▶ **Name two or three of your favorite songs that magnify the Lord for His goodness and mercy. Why do these songs resonate with you? What aspects of God's character do they celebrate?**
- ▶ **What are some ways that your church can display the "upside-down" nature of Christ's kingdom? How does your life challenge the values of the world with the values of the Kingdom?**

## **HIS STORY**

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

## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story  
meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

Mercy, by definition, is something we need the most when we deserve it the least. When God, in His mercy, sent His own Son, the natural human response to His over-the-top gift of hope was poetic and lyrical. Though we have no right to expect anything from Him, He gives us everything, including His one and only Son. That is the nature of His lovingkindness. We need mercy the most when we deserve it the least. That's exactly what Jesus' birth would perfectly provide for the world.

- Why does mercy fail to be mercy when it is something that is deserved?
- Why is it important to always keep in mind that God gives mercy to undeserved sinners like ourselves?



## HEART

The image of the great angel Gabriel appearing to a marginalized teenager in an insignificant and impoverished village like Nazareth establishes a contrast that Luke maintained throughout his Gospel. Earlier in the story, Gabriel was forced to explain his identity to the unbelieving priest in the holy place (Luke 1:19). Zechariah questioned the truth of Gabriel's words, despite Gabriel's declaration that he stood in the presence of God (Luke 1:18). But Gabriel found a more faithful person in Mary. She also asked how Gabriel's message could be, but hers was more a question of process than disbelief. Luke intended for us to appreciate the contrast between the disbelieving priest in the magnificent temple and the trusting girl in impoverished Nazareth.

- How does Mary's faith as a young teenager encourage you in your own obedience to God?
- If you were to compose your own song of thankfulness to God for His mercy in your life, what themes would you touch on and why?



## HANDS

The stories of church history reveal that following Jesus cost His disciples everything. With the exception of John, death was the ultimate price of faithfulness for Jesus' closest followers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German martyr, famously wrote: "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."<sup>1</sup> New life in Christ is not intended to be easy. Jesus never promised earthly security—He calls us to be willing to give up everything to follow Him (Matt. 16:24).

- What is your response to Jesus' command when He says, "Follow Me?"
- What are some hindrances in your own life that you need to abandon in order to live faithfully for Jesus?

# 03

## SESSION THREE

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# Jesus' Birth

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:1-20

### THE POINT

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Jesus' birth story teaches that His kingdom is for all people.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Magi:** intellectual and influential individuals who came from the east bearing gifts for Christ; also called wise men
- **Herod:** Roman appointed king over Jerusalem during the birth of Christ; became paranoid over hearing the King of the Jews had been born

### PLOT

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Our next stop in this chronological journey lands us in one of the most well known accounts in the entire Bible—the birth of Jesus. Even if we may be somewhat forgetful of many of the other figures and events in the Bible, thanks to our celebration of the Christmas season we have a yearly reminder of the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. In fact, it may be because we seem so familiar with this story that we need to hear it again, opening our minds to the possibility that there are still important things we need to know or hear once more.

# HIS STORY

## JESUS' BIRTH DEMONSTRATED HIS HUMILITY

The humble birth of Jesus prepares us for one of the major themes we see throughout Luke's Gospel. Throughout his portrayal of the life and ministry of Jesus, Luke revealed that those who should understand Jesus' ministry rarely did. The wealthy, the educated, and the most religious missed what was happening. At the same time, those you'd never expect to understand what God was doing (the women, the poor, and the marginalized) intuitively grasped what Jesus' arrival meant.

This passage shows the reality of God becoming human and being born in a stable—it was the best that Joseph and Mary could provide. This “outsider” appearance would follow Jesus for the rest of His life. The One through whom God made all that was made was born for us into poverty, without a proper place to lay His head.

- Based upon these passages, how does the biblical description of Jesus' birth differ from our modern day understanding?
- 
- 
- 

### Luke 2:1-7

<sup>1</sup> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



**GOD WITH US**  
The good news of  
Jesus' Incarnation.



**JESUS' EARLY YEARS**  
Jesus grows in favor  
with God and men.

## Luke 2:8-20

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" <sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

## JESUS' BIRTH IS FOR THE POOR

At the time of Jesus' birth, the first announcement of the Messiah's arrival was carried to some of the poor and marginalized people in society: the shepherds.

The angel gave the shepherds two signs to help them find baby Jesus. First, the baby would be wrapped in strips of cloth. Second, He would be lying in a manger. The nature of a sign is that it represents something out of the ordinary. Everyone swaddled their babies, but this sign indicates it was unusual to find a baby wrapped in rags. Likewise, no one expected to see a newborn sleeping in a feeding trough. So, the One who came for the marginalized was described as an outsider who was unimaginably poor.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Virgin Birth

The Bible affirms that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). The virgin birth affirms the historicity of the incarnation, where the eternal Son of God took on human flesh. The virgin birth is significant in that it serves as a reminder of Old Testament prophecies (Isa. 7) while also affirming both the deity and humanity of Christ.



**JESUS' BAPTISM**  
The meaning of baptism in the life of the believer.



**JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION**  
Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.

## JESUS' BIRTH IS FOR THE NATIONS

By the time the magi arrived, Joseph and Mary lived in a house. The word used to describe Jesus indicates that He was a young boy, approximately two years old. The wise men fell to their knees in worship. Of all their vast knowledge and authority, there was something they still lacked, something that drove them to travel all the way from Persia on a journey that might have taken two years. They found all they longed for in that simple house. They offered Jesus their gifts (these gifts would provide for Jesus' family's escape to Egypt). Then, the magi were warned in a dream, so they returned home a different way.

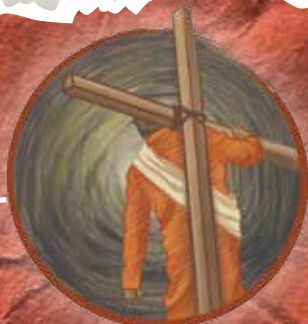
### Matthew 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

God made three covenant promises to Abraham—an heir, a place, and a blessing for the nations. Jesus would perfectly fulfill all three. He is the true son of Abraham. He came to establish His Kingdom. And, as Simeon sang in the Gospel of Luke, He would be a light to the Gentiles. Through Him, God would bless all people.

The shepherds had worshiped Jesus first. As much as two years later, from far off Persia, the wise men came to worship the King, as well. They were the first representatives of the "nations" that would be blessed by the coming of the One promised to Abraham.



*\*Special session*

### WHO IS HE?

*The disciples learn Jesus' identity and the purpose behind why He came.*



### THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

*Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.*



# YOUR STORY

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 can we learn about God's character by looking at the conditions surrounding Jesus' birth?**
- ▶ **Why do you think our culture tends to value the character quality of pride over that of humility? How is this understanding challenged in the story of Jesus' birth?**
- ▶ **What is the significance of God revealing the news of Jesus' birth to shepherds first? How does this scene challenge the way we think of worth and importance?**
- ▶ **What are some ways that the church may unintentionally communicate that the gospel is only for certain kinds of people? How can we demonstrate the beauty of God's love for those who are pushed to the side in our society?**

## **HIS STORY**

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

## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story  
meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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When we picture the magi, we often imagine only three men. This is based on the three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It is more likely that they traveled with a large entourage, including Persian cavalry. There could have been a hundred of them. Their intent was clear—to find and worship the new King. Their worship of Him would represent an endorsement of a new monarch.

- What are some other misconceptions people often have about Jesus' birth story?
- How might this information regarding the magi increase our confidence in Jesus' identity?



## HEART

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The magi were the elite, the educated. They held enormous power at the Persian court. Yet, with all their power and knowledge something was obviously lacking. They hungered for something more, and when they saw the sign of the star they seemed to understand that the star would lead them to the answer they sought. When they bowed before the new King of the Jews, it is as if their far-away kingdoms were bowing, foreshadowing the day every knee and every nation will bow to King Jesus.

- How does knowing that the magi were well educated affect your own faith?
- In what ways has Christ satisfied the personal hunger for something more in your own life?



## HANDS

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The shepherds left the manger scene eager to tell others what they had experienced. This is how people responded when they met Jesus and understood who He was. The same response must be true for those of us who meet Christ, as well. Like the shepherds, we will naturally tell of God's goodness to others once we have embraced the good news of what God has done in our own lives. We do not share begrudgingly or out of a sense of duty, but from a heartfelt delight as a result of knowing that our sins have been forgiven.

- In what ways has your relationship with Jesus changed your own life?
- How can our willingness to share Christ with others serve as a sort of spiritual thermometer in our relationship with Him?

# 04

## SESSION FOUR

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# Jesus Visited the Temple

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 2:40-52

### THE POINT

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Jesus modeled for us love for God's Word and obedience to God's will.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Mary and Joseph:** Jesus' mother and earthly father

### PLOT

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Today's session is really the only account we have from Jesus' childhood. The Gospels focus their attention on Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection, and rightly so. However, God intended this portion of Jesus' childhood to be included in the Gospel of Luke for a specific reason. It highlights Jesus' humanity and divinity, and gives us an example of what we should prioritize in our own lives.

# HIS STORY

## JESUS LEARNED GOD'S WORD

In this passage, Jesus was twelve years old and growing in wisdom and knowledge. As a child, Jesus would have learned to read in the synagogue. It was a place where children were taught to read, using the alphabetical Psalms to learn their letters.

If you look closely at the text, you will notice that Jesus was not simply teaching the elders—Luke said Jesus was listening and asking questions. He was of the age where He was expected to interact with adults in matters of the Old Testament. However, those who heard Jesus in the temple were surprised by the understanding Jesus displayed in His answers.

### Luke 2:40-47

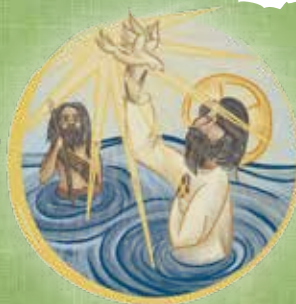
*40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. 41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

- **Even though He is the Son of God, Jesus listened to and asked questions of the teachers in the temple. What can we learn from His example?**



### JESUS' EARLY YEARS

*Jesus grows in favor with God and men.*



### JESUS' BAPTISM

*The meaning of baptism in the life of the believer.*

### Luke 2:48-50

*48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.*

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Sinlessness of Jesus

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

## JESUS WAS INVOLVED IN GOD'S WORK

When Jesus' parents found Him, He was surprised by their reaction to His "disappearance." Why did His parents have to search for Him? He seemed puzzled that they did not know to go straight to the temple. After all, He had to be there, right? Where else would He be? Look at how the story progressed.

Jesus' family misunderstood His task, but Jesus did not. In fact, in the temple, Jesus displayed a startling clarity. He knew precisely where He was supposed to be and what He was supposed to be doing—He was supposed to do His Father's work. He engaged with the text of Scripture, together with a community of men who had come together around God's Word. He did not appear to be dominating the scene; rather He asked questions right along with everyone else. The ability to formulate a meaningful question was and still is highly regarded among the rabbis. Often there is more learning in the question than in the answer.



### JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION

*Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.*



### WHO IS HE?

*The disciples learn Jesus' identity and the purpose behind why He came.*

*\*Special session*

**Luke 2:51-52**

*51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.*

*52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

## JESUS GREW IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND OTHERS

Jesus' kindness and compassion, as well as the moving words He spoke, drew men and women to Him throughout the brief years of His time on Earth. This is what He had in mind when He encouraged His followers to shine like lights in a darkened world. We are not to hide our lights, just as Jesus did not. Whatever the cost, we must risk gaining favor as Jesus gained favor, by engaging with the Word and the world around us.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus experienced the confusion all young people feel as they begin to learn that God has a calling on their lives. The Gospels readily portrayed the difficulty Jesus experienced. Jesus was not some sort of superman; He experienced conflict with His family even as a young boy.

As a grown man, Jesus faced conflict with the teachers of the law and with His own disciples. He was frequently misunderstood, yet never lost sight of God's call and purpose for His life. Even when Satan challenged Jesus' identity in the wilderness, Jesus remained faithful and obedient to His Father.

Like Jesus, as we attempt to follow God, we will be misunderstood. Our new identities in Christ will be challenged by those around us, even members of our own families. Still, if we follow Jesus' example, empowered by His grace, we too can remain obedient to the call on our lives.



**THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES**

*Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.*



**BORN AGAIN**

*Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.*

# YOUR STORY

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 ways your church cultivates a love of learning when it comes to God's Word?**
- ▶ **At this stage of Jesus' life, what do you think it meant for Jesus to say He was involved in His Father's work? How does our involvement in our Father's work grow as we mature physically and spiritually?**
- ▶ **What was the connection between Jesus' love for God's Word and His involvement in God's work? In what ways do God's Word and God's work intersect in your own life?**
- ▶ **Like Jesus, what character qualities should we try to cultivate in our own lives in order to grow in favor with those around us?**

## **HIS STORY**

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

## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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Knowing Jesus was involved in biblical discussions as a young person teaches us that young people should be involved in biblical discussions today, as well. Not only that, but we should also realize that the questions students bring and the answers they offer are beneficial to the discussion. In other words, people shouldn't assume that a young person's contribution will be overly simplistic. The church is a community of believers that is centered on the Word, and all age groups should be a part of the discussion.

- When was the last time you had a meaningful conversation about the Bible with someone in a different age group within your church?
- Why is it important for churches to learn from the Scriptures together?



## HEART

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All young people arrive at a time in life when they must choose whether or not they want to make their parents' faith their own. Even though this account is unique to Jesus, the divine Son of God, we can nevertheless draw application from it for our own lives. Even if we have Christian parents and siblings or go to church on a regular basis, we have to reach a point in our lives where we take personal ownership of our faith.

- Why is it important to emphasize that borrowed faith isn't real faith? What's the difference between the two?
- Have you grown up in a home with other Christians? If so, in what ways has that influence encouraged you to take ownership of your own faith?



## HANDS

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Being both fully human and fully divine, Jesus knew well what it was like to be a part of an earthly family. He was fully obedient in honoring His father and mother, and thus able to fulfill this law for us in our place. The fact He was obedient even when misunderstood reminds us that the authority God places over us is not dependent on our own feelings. In obedience to God's Word, we must honor those God has placed in authority over our lives.

- How is our honor for those in authority a demonstration of our honor toward God?
- When is it difficult for you to show honor to those in authority? How can Jesus' example encourage you during those times of difficulty?



# 05

## SESSION FIVE

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# Jesus' Baptism

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 3:1-17

### THE POINT

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Jesus' baptism foreshadowed His death and resurrection.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **John the Baptist:** the forerunner to the Messiah; prepared the way for Jesus' earthly ministry

### PLOT

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Today's session introduces us one the ordinances of the church, baptism. An *ordinance* is *something that we are commanded to do by Jesus as we go about the task of making disciples*. Jesus chose to be baptized, even though He was sinless, in order to identify with His sinful people and provide an example of righteousness. Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and identifies us as God's people.

# HIS STORY

## JOHN THE BAPTIST LED THE WAY

The prophet Isaiah spoke about John the Baptist as the one crying out, telling people to prepare the way for the Lord (Isa. 40:3). How did John prepare people to receive Jesus, the Messiah? John, as the forerunner, made them aware of their need for the forgiveness that only Jesus can provide. He challenged them to repent.

### Matthew 3:1-6

<sup>1</sup> In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>3</sup> For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" <sup>4</sup> Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Baptism

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



**JESUS' BAPTISM**  
*The meaning of baptism in the life of the believer.*



**JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION**  
*Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.*

## JOHN THE BAPTIST PREACHED REPENTANCE

John's baptism embraced all these images and more, but the fact that John baptized Jews was a sign that more was going on than initiation here. John was concerned about the heart of the person. A baptism of repentance was a unique innovation of John the Baptist.

### Matthew 3:7-12

<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

<sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

- Why wasn't it enough for the Pharisees to rely upon the faith of their fathers when it came to their own lives?

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#### WHO IS HE?

*The disciples learn Jesus' identity and the purpose behind why He came.*

*\*Special session*



#### THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

*Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.*

### Matthew 3:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

<sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." <sup>16</sup> Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

## JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH HIS PEOPLE IN BAPTISM

Jesus had come from Galilee to the place where John baptized. In the Gospels, Jesus often surprises us—saying what we don't expect and doing what we wouldn't imagine. This moment is no exception. Jesus asked John to baptize Him.

In submitting to John's baptism, Jesus was not repenting. He took His place alongside those of us who do need to repent. He radically identified with His sinful people. In essence, He said, "I will take my place alongside sinners, I will identify with them even to the point of dying on the cross so that they might eventually be set free from their sins."

## CHRIST CONNECTION

The process of identifying with Christ doesn't begin and end with baptism. Being baptized is only the first step. Baptism ushers us into a radical commitment and identification with Christ's body, the Church.

Jesus' radical identification with sinners through His baptism and crucifixion is a model for His followers. We are called to follow His example. We are to stand with the poor. We are to be lights to the world, even as He was the Light of the world. We are to take up our crosses, as Jesus took up His. As Jesus identified with us, so we identify with Him. In doing so, we gain a greater sense of unity with Jesus' body, the church. Though we had no right to expect anything from Him, Jesus gave us everything. Though the world has no right to expect anything from us, for His sake we are to offer everything, including our very lives.



### BORN AGAIN

*Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.*



### THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

*John the Baptist points others to Jesus.*

# YOUR STORY

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 would you explain to someone the significance of baptism based upon this session?**
- ▶ **Why do you think John the Baptist emphasized the need for personal repentance? Why should Christians stress the importance of personal repentance today?**
- ▶ **What does it mean to you to know that Jesus identifies with sinners?**
- ▶ **How has this session strengthened your own understanding of baptism?**

## **HIS STORY**

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

## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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John's message of repentance hit a nerve. He was the first prophetic voice to speak to God's people in generations. Even Peter, whose brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, was affected by John's message. His heart softened at John's exhortation to repent, shown in the way Peter fell to his knees and confessed to Jesus that he was a sinful man.

- How does repentance make us ready to hear from God's Word?
- Why is it important to recognize our need to repent continually in our walk with Christ?



## HEART

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Maybe it seems that John was harsh with the Pharisees, but he was also incredibly humble. He claimed that he was not worthy to loosen the Messiah's sandals. John not only preached a message of repentance, but he also demonstrated the humility that must accompany such repentance. His example teaches us that until we are humble, we will never see our need for repentance.

- Why is it important for our actions to match our words?
- How might cultivating a humble heart prevent us from being like the Pharisees?



## HANDS

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In our own time, the "way" is still being prepared. This time, the prophet John isn't the one preparing the way. Instead, the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts us of sin and softens our hearts as He leads us to repentance. The way prepared for sinners is a path to repentance, demonstrated through baptism. And baptism is the call for all who repent and turn to Jesus.

- How does baptism provide a picture of salvation through Christ?
- In what areas of your life has the Holy Spirit been convicting you lately? How will you respond to His conviction?

# 06

## SESSION SIX

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# Jesus' Temptation

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 4:1-11

### THE POINT

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Jesus overcame temptation through the power of God's Word.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Satan:** the Devil, the Accuser, the father of lies who's only desire is to kill, steal, and destroy

### PLOT

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Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted. One of the things we see in this account is that, unlike Adam and Eve in the Garden and unlike the children of Israel in the wilderness, Jesus refused to gratify His desires apart from God's will or to test God and His promises. Instead of taking the path of earthly exaltation, Jesus fixed His eyes on the cross and triumphed over the temptations of the Evil One. As Christians, we can resist temptation by trusting in the Savior who overcame temptation in our place.

# HIS STORY

## Matthew 4:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

<sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

## JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO SATISFY HIS DESIRES APART FROM GOD'S WILL

Satan's intent was revealed in the opening words of his first assault: He questioned Jesus' identity as the Son of God. In order to understand the strategy Satan used against Jesus, we must understand how his opening move was intended to lead Jesus to doubt His identity and to indulge an earthly appetite.

Jesus fasted for forty days, so Satan attacked Him at His weakest moment. Behind the temptation to turn the stones into bread was the assumption that physical food is the most important nourishment we need, but Jesus' response said otherwise. In each of the three temptations, Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy. His reference here, to Deuteronomy 8:3, noted the Word of God as the most needed nourishment.

- In what way did the Word of God sustain Jesus when the Devil tempted Him? How did this relate to Jesus' identity?



### JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION

Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.



\*Special session

### WHO IS HE?

The disciples learn Jesus' identity and the purpose behind why He came.



### Matthew 4:5-7

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple  
<sup>6</sup> and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

## JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO TEST GOD AND DOUBT HIS PROMISES

Satan took Jesus to the top of this magnificent building, and he altered his attack by adopting Jesus’ method of warfare. Here, Satan also quoted the Bible—Psalm 91:11-12—which refers to God’s tender provision of protection to the ones He loves.

Satan intended for Jesus to understand these two verses in isolation, apart from the larger context of the Psalm. But Psalm 91 speaks of a person who rests in faith and trusts in the Almighty. The psalmist wrote about why he was not afraid and why he had made the Lord his refuge. In short, the song is from someone who placed his total trust in God.

## JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO EXALT HIMSELF APART FROM THE CROSS

With the final temptation, Satan offered a shortcut for Jesus to arrive at exaltation—through bowing down and worshiping him instead of choosing to fulfill His calling as the Messiah.

However, Jesus knew who He was. He knew that His kingdom would be centered on a cross. He knew that His kingdom would be based on His self-sacrifice, not His self-exaltation. He knew that His glory would flow from His identity as the Son of God. And so, once again, He quoted Deuteronomy, saying that only God was deserving of His worship and service.

### Matthew 4:8-11

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.



#### THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.



#### BORN AGAIN

Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus' triumph over the temptation to turn stones into bread brings to mind two other biblical scenes. First, Adam and Eve were placed in a Garden filled with all the food they would ever need. Yet, even in that paradise, the serpent drew them to the one tree that was forbidden. In seeing that the tree's fruit was good to eat, they disobeyed God and were exiled from the garden into the wilderness.

Second, the children of Israel wandered in a literal wilderness. Even there, God's provision was everywhere. They were given manna from heaven and quail to eat. They had water to drink, miraculously provided from a rock in the desert. When their enemies threatened, God intervened to protect His people. Even with all this provision and protection, the Israelites grumbled against God and were forced to remain in the desert instead of entering the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

Like Adam and Eve and the children of Israel, we must also recognize our tendency to be faithless in spite of all God has given us. The temptation of Jesus shows us the One who remained steadfast and committed to trusting in the provision of God. We benefit from His victory and walk in His steps.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Temptation and Sin

*Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet He never sinned but faithfully resisted temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).*



#### **THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY**

*John the Baptist points others to Jesus.*



#### **THE WOMAN AT THE WELL**

*Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.*

# YOUR STORY

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 knowing who you are in Christ so important in the fight against sin?**
- ▶ **What are some ways Christians attempt to battle temptation and sin and fail? What was Jesus' approach?**
- ▶ **Satan tried to manipulate the true meaning of God's Word in his attack on Jesus. What does this teach us about our need to properly understand God's Word?**
- ▶ **Do you hunger for God's Word just as much as you hunger for food? Why or why not? What are some ways you can begin to increase your appetite for God's Word in your life?**

## HIS STORY

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

## YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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The wilderness is the place God uses to establish our identity as His sons and daughters. In the Old Testament, God called His people to the wilderness so they could learn His worth and learn to truly worship Him. Pharaoh was told to let the people go to the wilderness to worship God. In the wilderness, Israel learned the words of God. The same can be said of the wilderness temptation of Jesus. Jesus' sonship was declared by the Father at the Jordan River, and His relationship with the Father was strengthened by His obedience in the wilderness. There Jesus demonstrated what it truly means to be a child of God.

- When have you had a “wilderness” experience in your life spiritually? Did it seem like a test? Why or why not?
- How does this account change the way you view difficult times in your life? What are some important lessons we can learn through times like these?



## HEART

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Jesus' struggle in the wilderness is our struggle, and His victory there can become ours, too. As we study the Scriptures, we come to realize that the hunger of temptation in the wilderness can only be truly satisfied by trusting in the promises of God's Word. The identity we have received from God, as His sons and daughters, must be stronger than the false identities that Satan and the world may offer us.

- When have you been tempted to “put God to the test”—to see if He would keep His promise to you?
- How does Jesus' victory over temptation give you confidence when you are in the wilderness?



## HANDS

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When talking about the armor of God in Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul mentioned only one offensive weapon—the sword of the Spirit—and identified it as the Word of God. Jesus' wilderness experience clearly illustrated Paul's point. When looking at how Jesus countered the temptations of the Devil, we see a perfectly good example of what it looks like to use Scripture in the fight of faith. Thus, instead of trying to overcome temptation or fight sin through self-strength or clever tactics, Christians are to unsheathe the Word of God by believing God's promises in the fight for faith.

- Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn the stones into bread? What does Jesus' answer teach us about the importance of God's Word?
- How might you become equipped to use the power of God's Word in your own fight against sin? How equipped are you?

## SPECIAL SESSION

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# “Who Do You Say that I Am?”

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 16:13-28

### THE POINT

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The call to follow Jesus includes a call to self-denial.

### 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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In this session, we'll take a closer look at the central confession of the Christian faith—that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. When Jesus asked His disciples about His identity, He challenged their understanding of the Messiah and pointed forward to His death and resurrection. As Christians, we confess that Jesus is the Son of God who died for us and rose again. By faith, we are united with Jesus our Messiah. Therefore, we are called to take up our cross and follow Him, no matter the cost.

# HIS STORY

## THE DISCIPLES AFFIRMED JESUS AS MESSIAH

Meeting or being acquainted with people does not mean we know them well. Many people were acquainted with Jesus. He was popular with the crowds, but they had an insufficient view of His identity.

The general population put Jesus in good religious company. Some saw Him as a “revived John the Baptist” because Jesus’ message and ministry resembled John’s. Others saw Him as a prophet like Jeremiah, who ministered during the Babylonian captivity and spoke often of Israel’s future. John the Baptist and Jeremiah were heroes to the Jews in the first century, and it was seen as a compliment to Jesus that the crowds would put Him in such company.

### Matthew 16:13-16

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

<sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

### Matthew 16:17-20

<sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.



*\*Special session*

#### WHO IS HE?

*The disciples learn Jesus' identity and the purpose behind why He came.*



#### THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

*Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.*

### Matthew 16:21-23

<sup>21</sup> From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

## JESUS CHALLENGED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSIAH

Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah was a major moment in the life and ministry of Jesus. According to Matthew, Jesus spoke about His coming death from that point on. Jesus' thoughts and actions turned toward the cross. From our perspective in history, we understand the reality and significance of Jesus' death; however, from their perspective beforehand, the disciples could hardly imagine the Messiah dying.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Union with Christ

*At the heart of our salvation is our union with Christ. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and also describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we are simultaneously dwelling in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is indissoluble; it will last for all eternity.*



### BORN AGAIN

*Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.*



### THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

*John the Baptist points others to Jesus.*

### Matthew 16:24-28

*24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

## JESUS CHALLENGED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONAL JOY

Deny yourself? Take up your cross? Lose your life? You may read this passage and wonder: Does Jesus want us only to focus on what's negative? Not quite.

Jesus' emphasis on self-denial isn't just about what we lose, but what we gain when we give up our lives to Him. Deny yourself in order to be filled. Die today in order to rise tomorrow. Instead of focusing solely on what we should deny or the command to follow, we should focus instead on the One we follow—Jesus!

- **What happens when we focus on the action of following apart from Jesus, the One we are called to follow?**

## CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus knows that our natural inclination will always be to preserve our lives. We do that instinctively, and we make choices each day under the belief that these choices will bring our lives more joy than not. However, as is often the case, Jesus challenges our thinking and even turns it upside down. He knows we want to save our lives, but He also knows we won't succeed unless we do it His way. If we want to save our lives, then we are called to lay them down for His sake and the sake of the gospel. When we do this, Jesus knows that the joy we all seek will ultimately come from doing things His way, and not through the misguided ways of the world.



### THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

*Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.*



### HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

*Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.*



# YOUR STORY

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 answers people might give to the question: "Who do you say Jesus is?" What answers are good, but insufficient?**
- ▶ **What was missing in Peter's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah? What important aspects of Jesus' identity are missing in the way most people think of Him today?**
- ▶ **In what ways do you notice people "saving their lives" instead of "losing their lives" for Jesus' sake?**
- ▶ **What does self-denial look like? How can self-denial lead to greater personal joy?**

## **HIS STORY**

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

## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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As is often the case in the Bible, an encounter with God can often result in a name change for the individual. Peter's name wasn't the first to be changed (Abram to Abraham), nor would it be the last (Saul to Paul). In this account, Jesus gave Simon a new name (Peter). In Greek, *Peter* means *stone*. His name was a play on the words found in verse 18 about building the church on the rock of confessing Jesus as Lord. Consistent with his new identity, Peter would be a spiritual rock, and his confession would become the foundation of the church.

- How has your identity changed as a result of following Christ?
- Why is it important that we understand ourselves based upon what God says regardless of what others say about us or what we believe about ourselves?



## HEART

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Jesus corrected the disciples' misunderstanding regarding what it meant to follow Him. They assumed knowing the Messiah meant they would experience earthly comforts and ease in a matter of time—just as soon as Jesus overturned the established government. However, Jesus taught them that the ultimate comfort and ease they sought wouldn't be found that way. Worldly possessions, personal status, and achievements won't satisfy in the end. Only following Jesus satisfies.

- In your own words, summarize Jesus' first question in Matthew 16:26.
- Why is Jesus more satisfying than any comfort the world has to offer?



## HANDS

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We make choices every day as disciples of Christ. The biggest choice for each of us is the daily decision to follow Jesus and live like He lived. Like Jesus, we are to avoid hanging on to the earthly things and treating them as though they are all we have. Like Jesus, we are to put others before ourselves. Like Jesus, we should be willing to even suffer for the sake of the gospel, knowing there is a greater joy that awaits those who do. All of this is part of what it means to follow Him. It is a costly thing to follow, but the cost quickly fades when we focus on the One we get to follow—Jesus.

- How can we avoid following Jesus as if it is only a task to accomplish? How can we willingly, wholeheartedly follow instead?
- How does following Christ in your own life demonstrate to others the joy of following Him?

# UNIT 2

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## **God Among Us**

MATTHEW, LUKE, JOHN

## MEMORY VERSE

<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**JOHN 3:14-17**

# 07

## SESSION SEVEN

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# Jesus Called the First Disciples

### SCRIPTURE

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Matthew 4:17-22; 9:9-13

### THE POINT

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Discipleship means faithfully following Jesus as Savior and Lord.

### 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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As we continue our journey, we see Jesus call His first disciples—a call to not only follow Jesus, but also a call to repentance. These first disciples abandoned their old way of life and received Christ's invitation to follow Him.

# HIS STORY

## Matthew 4:17

*17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

## JESUS CALLS FOR REPENTANCE

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He called for repentance as the prerequisite for discipleship. To *repent* means *to change one's mind, to turn around in a way that leads to a change of life*. Jesus did not make a suggestion, but issued a command. The person who hears the command should make a conscious decision, and then live accordingly. Repenting means leaving your former way of life to follow Jesus and is demonstrated through faithfully following Him.

The gospel message proclaims Jesus' perfect life, His death in our place, and His resurrection, and it tells us that Jesus is the only qualified Savior for sinners. We put our faith in Him, and we renounce our sin and self-righteous attempts at earning salvation. We turn away from our selfishness and sin in order to follow Jesus, the One who brings God's kingdom to earth.

- **Out of all the things Matthew could focus on, why do you think he summed up Jesus' preaching ministry with the call to repent? What does Matthew's summary say about the significance of repentance for the Christian life?**
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### THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

*Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.*



### BORN AGAIN

*Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.*

### Matthew 4:18-22

<sup>18</sup> While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

<sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

<sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

## JESUS CALLS UNLIKELY PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM

Jesus demonstrated that the prerequisite for discipleship is repentance. Jesus also called people from different walks of life to repent, to turn from their own agendas and join the mission of His kingdom. In this passage, Jesus called His first disciples. These first followers were fishermen, probably not the kind of occupation or position in society you'd expect a Messiah to choose when bringing together men who would change the world.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Discipleship

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



#### THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

*John the Baptist points others to Jesus.*



#### THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

*Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.*

### Matthew 9:9-13

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

<sup>10</sup> And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup> But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

## JESUS CALLS UNPOPULAR PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM

Jesus didn't only call fishermen to follow Him; He also called people with despised occupations. Matthew, for example, was a tax-collector.

After Matthew obeyed Jesus and followed Him, Matthew quickly saw his worlds collide. His old world of relationships with tax-collectors and sinners now mixed with his new world of Jesus and the other disciples. Put those two worlds together and, not surprisingly, the tension led to a confrontation. The Pharisees saw who was at the party and they questioned Jesus' faithfulness because of the company He was keeping.

Jesus heard their questions, and He answered them by saying the sick need a doctor. He came for the sinners. It was Jesus' heart to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus is the great physician seeking to heal those who are spiritually sick, infected by the disease of sin (Ps. 103:3).

## CHRIST CONNECTION

When people respond to the call to repentance, they place their faith in what Jesus accomplished perfectly on behalf of sinners. God commands and compels His children to share the good news of the gospel with people everywhere, from all walks of life. God's compassion on sinners is witnessed when we, the body of Christ, testify about His plan of redemption found in Jesus. We must fight any tendency to profile people and assume they're not redeemable or attractive enough to be ministered to.



### HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

*Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.*



### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

*Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.*



# YOUR STORY

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.

- ▶ **Once again Jesus talked about repentance. What is the role of urgency in the call for people to repent?**
- ▶ **What strikes you the most in this account of Jesus calling the disciples?**
- ▶ **Why do you think the Pharisees felt offended by the people at the dinner? How does Jesus' response impact the way we think about ministering to those in our schools, on the athletic fields, or within our homes?**
- ▶ **What kinds of people should we minister to? Why is it sometimes difficult to minister to all people?**

## **HIS STORY**

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

## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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Throughout the story of Jesus' earthy ministry, He called, ministered to, and forgave of the sins of various people. He healed an official's son (John 4:46-54), cleansed the Leper (Matt. 8:2-4), healed the Paralytic and forgave his sins (Matt. 9:1-8), healed the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34), fed the multitudes (Matt. 15:32-38; John 6:1-14), and raised the dead (Luke 7:11-17; 8:41-56; John 11:1-44). Because Jesus calls everyone to repent, there is no specific "profile" that describes followers of Jesus. The only qualification is repentant faith.

- What does Jesus' ministry to all types of people communicate about His character?
- As followers of Jesus, how can we model His actions to those around us who are in need?



## HEART

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Today, Jesus calls people from every walk of life to leave their selfish pursuits and follow Him. That call may or may not require you to sell all your belongings or commit to living overseas as a missionary, but at the very least it will definitely require you to give up the idea that you command your own destiny. It will mean you give up any trace of selfish ambition that affects your life decisions. God's kingdom must be first, which is why we ask God to remove the remaining selfishness in our hearts and replace our desires with His heart for the world and His plan for our lives (Ps. 37:4).

- What are some things you must leave behind in order to follow Christ?
- What are the advantages of setting aside selfish pursuits to follow after Christ?



## HANDS

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The beauty of God's call to repentance is that He brings together people from various backgrounds and groups, in order to highlight His glorious work of redemption. He calls people you'd least expect. He does things you would never predict. He doesn't just call "the cream of the crop" to be His spokespeople, but unlikely people whose changed lives will demonstrate the glory of His work. And since we are commanded to imitate Christ (Eph. 5:1), we have the privilege of taking the gospel to those who might be viewed as undeserving, neglected, and overlooked in our society.

- If you were picking a team of people to help you change the world, what types of people would you want? Why?
- Why is it both comforting and empowering for believers to know and understand that God calls ordinary people to proclaim His extraordinary gospel?

# 08

## SESSION EIGHT

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# Nicodemus and the New Birth

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### SCRIPTURE

John 3:1-21

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### THE POINT

Regeneration is God's supernatural transformation of believers.

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### CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Nicodemus:** a ruler from the Pharisees; Nicodemus was known for seeking Jesus at night to ask questions about salvation.

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### PLOT

Today's session takes us to a private conversation between Jesus and a religious leader named Nicodemus. Jesus taught this religious leader about the mystery of regeneration, what He described as "being born again," and how new birth was necessary to be in a right relationship with God.

# HIS STORY

## NICODEMUS LEARNS OF THE NEW BIRTH

As their conversation began, Nicodemus affirmed Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing. He recognized that Jesus had the blessing of God on His ministry and complimented Jesus for the signs He had performed. That's as far as Nicodemus went in attributing any special role to Jesus. It's clear that he saw Jesus as a good teacher, a moral person, and perhaps even a model of how people should live.

Jesus' response was abrupt. He didn't accept the compliments Nicodemus gave. Instead, He simply said no one would see the kingdom of God without being born again. In other words, unless you are reborn and made new, you will not see God's salvation.

Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus' reply meant. So, he followed up with a question.

### John 3:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

### John 3:4-10

<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"



**BORN AGAIN**  
Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.



**THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY**  
John the Baptist points others to Jesus.

# 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

## Regeneration

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

### John 3:11-15

*<sup>11</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*

## THE NEW BIRTH COMES THROUGH FAITH

The conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus continued, but now Jesus took the lead and began to explain further the “new birth” and its significance. This new and everlasting life comes through faith in Jesus.

Until that point the religious leaders had rejected Jesus’ testimony, which raised an important question: How could the religious leaders compliment Jesus for His teaching on any matter if they rejected His testimony about Himself?

Jesus didn’t wait for an answer. Instead, He claimed to be the One who had descended to earth from heaven. Jesus is the Son of God who took on human flesh in order to reveal the character of God to the world.

- **What did Jesus mean when He said He would be “lifted up”? Why is it important that He was “lifted up”?**



### THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

*Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.*



### HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

*Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.*

### John 3:16-21

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

<sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

## THE NEW BIRTH IS THE RESULT OF GOD'S LOVE FOR HUMANITY

The focus here is on how God loved the world, and the love described here is self-sacrificing. Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son, Jesus, to seek and save the lost by dying for us—while we were still in sin, separated from Him. John 3:16 reminds us that God gave Himself, in the person of His Son, to take the place of sinners like you and me.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

In Moses' day, there was no cure apart from God's instruction. The people could have tried their homemade remedies to save themselves from the serpents' bites, but none of those remedies would have had any effect. There was only way to be healed, and it was through gazing upon the bronze snake lifted high on the pole. In a similar way, Jesus explained that He too would be lifted up. The only way for people to receive eternal life—healing from the sickness of sin and pardon from the penalty of death—would be to gaze upon Him in faith.

Earlier in the Gospel, the apostle John made it clear that God is the sole supplier of salvation. John 1:12-13 says that those who receive Christ also receive the right to be God's children. Only those who hear the gospel and look to Jesus alone as their sole means of salvation, believe in His teachings, perfect life, substitute death, and resurrection will be born again.



### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

*Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.*



*\*Beginning Summer 2017*

### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

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

# YOUR STORY

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 is the connection between a person's identity and the value of their testimony?**
- ▶ **How would you respond to someone who says they consult Jesus as a good moral guide, but they do not recognize Him as the Son of God?**
- ▶ **How would you explain the words "faith" and "believe" from a biblical perspective?**
- ▶ **What similar words would you use? How does this passage illustrate the meaning of faith?**

## HIS STORY

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

## YOUR STORY

*Where your story  
meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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Nicodemus wasn't all that different from many religious people today. Maybe he assumed that since he was a religious leader, he automatically had a right standing with God or already knew God's plan for bringing His kingdom. Maybe he assumed that his religious observance gave him a better position from which to interpret and experience God's mighty works. Like him, it's easy for people who have been raised in church, or who have some sort of faith in God, to believe that they have an inside track to God and His ways. But if this account teaches us anything, it teaches us about the necessity of coming to God on His terms, and not our own.

- What was missing in the life of Nicodemus?
- How does Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus provide a model for how we engage with those who are religious but not committed to Christ?



## HEART

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Unfortunately, as this passage shows us, humans naturally love darkness (the sinful deeds and lifestyle we're born into) rather than the light, Jesus Christ. We live in a society where people entertain the false understanding that one can have Jesus plus their sin, or have Jesus as their light even while they pursue the deeds of darkness. But this passage shows us the reality of what life looks like for those who have embraced Jesus. Those who come to Jesus want His light to expose all of their lives so that He can continue His work of renovating us from the inside out.

- In what areas of your life does it feel uncomfortable for the light of Christ to shine?
- How does God's gift of salvation impact these areas of your life?



## HANDS

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The work of regeneration is a supernatural work of God, not the natural work of man. Yet the responsibility of getting the message of the gospel out is the work God has called every believer to participate in. We should never assume that because people are familiar with church, Christianity, or even religion, that they know Jesus as their Savior. God has called every believer to trust in His power as we are transformed by the Holy Spirit.

- How encouraging is it to know that salvation is not dependent upon how persuasive you are or how much you know, but is instead the work of God in your heart?
- Even though salvation is God's work, why do you think the Bible stresses our role in sharing the gospel with others?



# 09

## SESSION NINE

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# Jesus and John the Baptist

### SCRIPTURE

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John 3:22-36

### THE POINT

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Humility is finding joy in Christ's significance, not our own.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **John the Baptist:** the forerunner to the Messiah; prepared the way for Jesus' earthly ministry

### PLOT

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An earlier session introduced the person and ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by pointing others to Him and His kingdom. But what would happen when John's ministry began to diminish in comparison to Jesus' ministry? Would he become bitter? Would he become jealous for the ministry recognition? No, it was quite the opposite. John gained joy in Jesus' exaltation, by warning others, and through witnessing about the love and power of God.

# HIS STORY

## JOHN'S MISSION WAS TO POINT TO JESUS

Some of John's followers approached him with a problem on their minds. More and more people were going to see Jesus and His disciples to be baptized. Who was this man? Why were people going to Him and not John? Did Jesus' ministry mean that John's work was no longer effective? Perhaps John's disciples felt like Jesus' rising popularity was a threat to their own work. Whatever their motivations, they went to John with questions.

John the Baptist's response was seasoned with humility. He attributed the growth of Jesus' ministry to God and nothing else. John recognized that Jesus' ministry was always designed to replace his own. That's why John reminded his followers that he was not the Messiah and that the Messiah's work would be greater than his. The remarkable thing about John's response is how content he seemed to be with those developments. He could be humble and confident because he knew his role—to point people to the Messiah!

### John 3:22-28

*22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison). 25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'"*



#### THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

*John the Baptist points others to Jesus.*



#### THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

*Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.*

## JOHN DEMONSTRATED HUMILITY IN HIS MISSION

In the continuation of John the Baptist's response to his disciples, John revealed his own character and his joy at Jesus' arrival. Don't miss the connection between John's humility (v. 30) and joy (v. 29).

### John 3:29-30

*29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."*

John the Baptist found complete joy in his subordinate role to Jesus. He recognized Jesus was the groom, the center of attention, the long-awaited Messiah. John understood that his role was to make sure that the groom would be exalted and that no distractions would hinder him.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Evangelism

*It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all thus rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle.*

- How does the idea that decreasing leads to an increase in joy apply to us today?

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- What are some areas where you could decrease to make more of Jesus in your own life? Why will this increase your joy?

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### HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

*Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.*



### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

*Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.*

### John 3:31-36

*<sup>31</sup> He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup> He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. <sup>33</sup> Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

## JOHN'S MESSAGE WAS ONE OF WARNING AND GRACE

John the Baptist saw Jesus as superior, in where He came from and in what He taught. John's witness to Christ focused first on Jesus' origin. Jesus is the Messiah who comes from heaven, while John was a witness from the earth. The point here is that John the Baptist was under Jesus' authority because Jesus came from heaven.

This passage also shows that Jesus' teaching is superior to John the Baptist's. Everything Jesus taught was and is true. Everything Jesus said about Himself being the Messiah, the promised One, was and is true. The point here is that John was a witness to Jesus, while Jesus spoke the very words of God. Not only that, but Jesus also had the power to give the Spirit to those who believed and accepted His testimony.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

John the Baptist was a firsthand witness of the ministry of Jesus. Because of his humility, he was able to take joy in the fact that Jesus was becoming known, even more well known than he was at the time. John coupled his joyful expression with a timely warning that it wasn't enough to just acknowledge Jesus, or to crowd around Him while He was ministering. Rather, what God wanted was for the people to listen to Jesus' testimony and embrace Him as their Lord and Savior.

God is calling us to do work like John the Baptist. In God's hands, our brokenness can be used to humble us so we can be lights for His glory in the darkness of this world. The goal is to then turn people's attention and affection toward Jesus as we make Him known. Nothing should bring more joy and satisfaction to our hearts than to see people know and embrace Jesus as their Savior.

We must take on the humble posture of John the Baptist and see ourselves as a friend to the groom, pointing away from ourselves and to Jesus Christ—the One and only. We shine the spotlight on Him, not ourselves.



*\*Beginning Summer 2017*

### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

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



### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*

# YOUR STORY

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.

▶ **When have you felt like another person's success was a threat to you personally or a signal that you were inadequate? How did you respond? How do you think John's disciples expected him to respond to their questions?**

▶ **In what ways does our mission today resemble that of John the Baptist? What are some differences between John's role and ours?**

▶ **When have you found great joy in helping someone who was in the spotlight or center of attention? What was that experience like?**

▶ **What are some truths about Jesus that should be part of sharing the gospel? What do these truths communicate about Jesus?**

## HIS STORY

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

## YOUR STORY

*Where your story  
meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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The words of John the Baptist remind us of the sobering reality that even though God already knows all of our sin, He is still gracious and patient, offering us the gift of eternal life and calling us away from a life of wayward living. Like a gracious Father who cares for His children, it is God's desire that all would repent and turn to Him for forgiveness.

- What role does speaking of God's judgment have in our witness to Jesus?
- What happens when we minimize or neglect this part of our message?



## HEART

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Whenever our pride leads us to seek glory for ourselves, we fall into the trap of making ourselves more attractive in order to gain more followers. Then, instead of celebrating Jesus, we begin to compete with each other. Our zeal is no longer for the gospel and God's glory, but for the building of our own kingdoms. John the Baptist's ministry challenges us to find our ultimate purpose in bringing glory to Christ.

- Why does pride and seeking glory for oneself eventually lead to a lack of joy in the end?
- How would you explain to someone that more joy comes from seeking God's glory rather than seeking it for ourselves?



## HANDS

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Like John, we are called to point people to Jesus and away from ourselves. However, fulfilling our mission of pointing others to Christ is impossible unless we intentionally leverage the gifts God has given us for His glory, not as a distraction that brings attention to ourselves. Our mission is to point people to Jesus. We should do everything we can not to get in the way.

- How have you been tempted to showcase your gifts and talents more for yourself and reputation rather than for God and His glory?
- What are some intentional ways you can use your God-given talents and gifts this week to draw attention to the Giver, instead of to the gifts themselves?

# 10

## SESSION TEN

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# Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

### SCRIPTURE

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John 4:1-42

### THE POINT

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God seeks true worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Samaritans:** a socially despised group during the first century. Jesus broke down social distinctions by reaching out to this group of society's outcasts.

### PLOT

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In previous sessions, we learned about Jesus' ministry—how He met with Nicodemus (a religious man) at night to answer his questions and the way Jesus' ministry intersected with that of John the Baptist. Throughout the Scripture in this session, John revealed more of Jesus' interactions with the people He met during His ministry. This particular interaction demonstrated Jesus' love for all people—even a woman whose ethnicity and past would have made her seem “beyond the reach” of God's grace.

# HIS STORY

## JESUS ENCOUNTERED THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

The route Jesus selected to travel from Judea to Galilee was quick, but not common. It took Him through Samaria, an area that most Jews would avoid. The Samaritans were considered “half-breeds” whose forefathers were Jewish but had intermarried with Assyrians. A result of their history, they were despised by many Jews.

Jesus rejected the culturally acceptable route that went around the Samaritans. Instead, He took the direct route, and this decision placed Him at Jacob’s well around noontime, when the social outcasts came to draw water.

### John 4:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John <sup>2</sup> (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), <sup>3</sup> he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. <sup>4</sup> And he had to pass through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

### John 4:7-15

<sup>7</sup> A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” <sup>8</sup> (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” <sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”



### THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

*Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.*



### HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

*Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.*



# JESUS EXPLAINED TO HER THE MEANING OF TRUE WORSHIP

It is interesting to note how Jesus took the conversation into a personal direction after having engaged this woman on friendly terms. The discussion about water prompted the truth about spiritual thirst that only God can quench. Then, the discussion about the woman's marital history led to a demonstration of Jesus' ability to know the hearts of people. "You are a prophet," the woman said, and she was right.

The way Jesus engaged in conversation revealed His heart. He did not just talk. He also listened. He did not condemn the woman for her past; He continued having a meaningful conversation.

## John 4:16-24

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."<sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."<sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.<sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.<sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God is Infinite

*God's infinity means that there are no boundaries on His qualities and existence (Job 11:7-9; Ps. 147:5). For instance, God is infinite when it comes to space and time, meaning He is not confined by material space nor is He restricted by time since He is timeless (Ps. 90:1-2). God's infinity also extends to His knowledge of things as well as His power to do all things according to His will.*

## THE SAMARITAN WOMAN RESPONDED TO JESUS BY TELLING OTHERS ABOUT HIM

This passage is all about mission! First, the woman made a comment about the Messiah coming to make things right; this was an attempt to put off any decision or claim that Jesus (as a prophet) might make on her. But Jesus instantly revealed to her that He was the Messiah she spoke about!



### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

*Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.*



### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

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

*\*Beginning Summer 2017*

### John 4:25-29

*25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."*

*26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." 27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"*

Then, the disciples arrived at the pivotal moment of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, after having ventured into town to find food. They wondered about His motives for breaking cultural protocol, for ignoring ethical and cultural barriers. While they were questioning in their hearts what Jesus was doing, the Samaritan woman left her water jar and ran back into town. As soon as she understood that Jesus was the Messiah, she dropped everything and told others about Him.

- **When was the last time you broke "social protocol" to minister to someone? Why is it important that Christians be seen as breaking cultural barriers instead of creating them?**
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## CHRIST CONNECTION

Through the ministry of Jesus, worshiping God is no longer bound by geographic location, gender, or ethnicity. Salvation is open and available for sinners from every imaginable background (Gal. 3:26-28). Jesus told His disciples that the harvest was great, meaning that there were many people who needed to hear about Him. For us, the same is true. There are still many people who need to hear the truth of the gospel message. We need God to open our eyes to see those people around us and open our mouths to speak His truth and lead them to Christ. And like the Samaritan woman, we say, "Come and see!"



### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*



### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

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

# YOUR STORY

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 speak to the forms of segregation our society has created? What do we learn from Jesus' model of breaking down cultural barriers in His search for the lost?**
  
- ▶ **What are some examples of "earthly" water that people drink from in order to quench their spiritual thirst? How do we know that these other sources of water do not satisfy?**
  
- ▶ **Jesus taught that worship isn't tied to a place, but is something first and foremost of the heart. Why is this important in our daily lives?**
  
- ▶ **How does the Samaritan woman's response challenge us when it comes to pointing those within our own lives to Jesus?**

## HIS STORY

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

## YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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We see in this account that God desires people to worship Him rightly, and to worship Him rightly means to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. To worship in spirit and truth means we must be born again—of the Spirit—and be satisfied with all God is in the person of His Son, Jesus. Our worship must be saturated in the Scriptures and must focus our attention on Jesus—God in flesh.

- Why does God emphasize the importance of worshiping in both spirit and truth?
- What happens when only one of these is present?



## HEART

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There's something about that incredible passion at work in the Samaritan woman. She had just met Jesus, and she was ready for everyone else to meet Him, too. Some of the greatest and most passionate evangelists are people who have recently embraced Jesus. They are filled with excitement to tell others about the good news of what God has done. Unfortunately, it's easy to lose that initial awe and wonder at God's salvation. And with that loss of passion, we share the gospel less and less. For this reason, it's vital that we see people like the Samaritan woman and ask God to rekindle our hearts and refresh us with a desire to share His love with the world.

- Why is it easy for us to lose our passion for sharing the good news of Jesus with the lost?
- What are some things we can do to counteract this loss of passion?



## HANDS

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Through the ministry of the Samaritan woman, God brought many in that city to trust in Jesus. The woman's words piqued their curiosity, but when they encountered Jesus the Messiah, they believed. This is the model for evangelism. The contents of our conversations with nonbelievers should make them curious about Jesus. Then it is our responsibility to unpack the glorious riches of the gospel to them in ways they can understand. As we walk them through the Scriptures, they encounter the God who gives us living water.

- How did the Samaritans respond to the woman's testimony?
- What can we learn from this account regarding what aspects of a personal testimony are compelling to people? How can that knowledge equip us to share with others?

# 11

## SESSION ELEVEN

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# Jesus Faced Opposition

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 4:14-30

### THE POINT

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Jesus' followers will often experience rejection and opposition.

### CHARACTERS

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

### PLOT

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In this session, Jesus spoke in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. After reading a passage of Scripture, Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy; He claimed that His mission was to free people held by various types of bondage and sin. The people in Jesus' town rejected Him as a prophet and rejected His message of salvation.

# HIS STORY

## JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE SPIRIT-FILLED MESSIAH

It was customary for the Jewish people in Jesus' day to spend time in the synagogue where leaders would read and comment on the ancient Scriptures. When Jesus went into the synagogue, as was the custom, He stood up to read a passage of Scripture. The reading for that day was part of a prophecy from Isaiah that spoke of the coming Messiah.

In a dramatic moment that likely shocked the people in the synagogue, Jesus read a passage that described the ministry of the Messiah, and then He sat down. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," He said. The moment was shocking for a couple of reasons. First, Jesus implied that He Himself was the Messiah upon whom the Spirit rested. He was saying, in effect, "I'm the guy Isaiah was talking about."

### Luke 4:14-22

<sup>14</sup> And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. <sup>16</sup> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup> And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"



### HOMETOWN OPPOSITION

Jesus makes plain His identity and is rejected in His hometown.



### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.

### Luke 4:23-27

<sup>23</sup> And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."

<sup>24</sup> And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." <sup>25</sup> But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. <sup>27</sup> And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

## JESUS FACED REJECTION FROM HIS PEOPLE

After Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah, He saw the unbelief in the hearts of the people and anticipated their rejection of Him, just as God's people had often rejected the prophets.

Have you ever heard the saying, "A prophet is without honor in his hometown?" It comes from what Jesus said and is similar to a more common phrase that is used today: "Familiarity breeds contempt."

The idea behind the phrase is that the people in Jesus' hometown did not see Him as special or unique; they saw Him as ordinary. What's more, they didn't care for His message, even though they wanted to see His miracles.

- **How difficult do you think it was for Jesus, who came to rescue His people, to experience rejection?**

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Christ as Prophet

*As one of His offices, Jesus fulfills the role of prophet: He alone is the ultimate teacher and has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Jesus is also God's ultimate revelation of Himself.*



#### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

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

*'Beginning Summer 2017*



#### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*

### John 4:28-30

*28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.*

## JESUS CONTINUED HIS MINISTRY DESPITE HIS PEOPLE'S REJECTION

The people were so enraged at Jesus's words that they wanted to throw him off a cliff so that He would fall to His death. Although Jesus' mission included His substitutionary death, this was not the appointed time for Him to die. We don't know exactly how Jesus passed through the crowd and avoided death in this moment. Some commentators think Jesus' escape was miraculous. Others believe He simply managed to get away. Either way, it is clear that the situation in Nazareth was dire.

Jesus' own people rejected Him, just as Isaiah predicted 700 years before. Despite the rejection from the people in His own hometown, Jesus pressed on to fulfill the ministry God called Him to.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

What a Savior we have in Jesus! Although He faced rejection and opposition, the ministry of the Holy Spirit empowered Him to remain steady in order to complete the mission to seek and save those who were lost. It's comforting to know that God had not abandoned Israel—that hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, God gave the prophet Isaiah the message that freedom from sin would come. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem people out of the captivity to sin.

Now, we can find the hope we need to endure when we face rejection and persecution. No matter if it comes from a friend we've shared the gospel with, or even a family member who rejects us for our stance for Jesus. May we rally among other believers to encourage them and remind them of Jesus who endured opposition for our sake! May we reengage with those who have rejected us with the refreshing truths of the gospel of Jesus, who seeks to rescue them from captivity.



### 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*



# YOUR STORY

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 ways people try to discredit the uniqueness of Jesus today?**

▶ **What do you think about Jesus' decision not to perform miracles in Nazareth? Why did Jesus respond to the Nazarenes' rejection in this way?**

▶ **When have you faced rejection because of your faith?**

▶ **What encouraging words would you offer to a young believer facing rejection because of belief in Jesus?**

## HIS STORY

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

## YOUR STORY

*Where your story  
meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION



## HEAD

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The rejection of Jesus goes back to the sinfulness of the human heart. John 3:19 reminds us: “**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**” As people rejected Jesus in His day, sadly they still reject Him today. People react harshly to the truth of the gospel because it exposes the darkness of our hearts.

- When have you seen people reject Jesus because He demands they live a certain way?
- How does the truth of John 3:19 warn us when it comes to our own hesitations in trusting Jesus as Savior?



## HEART

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As God’s people endure persecution and suffering, they can rejoice to be counted among believers who faced rejection just like Jesus. In times of rejection, we remember the words of the apostle Paul: As God comforted us during times of suffering and affliction, we are then able to walk alongside and comfort other believers who are suffering through various trials (2 Cor. 1:3-7). This is the tangible expression of God the Spirit’s ministry through our lives, benefiting those inside the body of Christ.

- What do you think happens when unbelievers see Christians rejoicing in times of suffering rather than complaining?
- In what ways does our endurance in the midst of rejection or opposition strengthen our witness and mission?



## HANDS

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According to Isaiah, the ministry of the Messiah would answer both spiritual and physical needs. For this reason, the church has always focused on both kinds of needs—spiritual and material. The church proclaims the work of Jesus for the salvation of the world, while simultaneously working alongside others in bringing physical and temporal relief to suffering. Believers should take these two attributes seriously: the pursuit of holiness and the expression of love and mercy to people in need (Jas. 1:27).

- Jesus redeemed us from spiritual captivity. How does His redemption lead us to meet physical and temporal needs of people around us?
- Why is it problematic for Christians to focus only on spiritual problems and fail to meet physical needs?

# 12

## SESSION TWELVE

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# Jesus and Zacchaeus

### SCRIPTURE

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Luke 19:1-10

### THE POINT

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Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

### CHARACTERS

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- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Zacchaeus:** a tax collector known for dishonest practices. He was short in stature, so he climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus

### PLOT

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In previous sessions, we examined Jesus' interactions with different kinds of people He met and ministered to. We looked at His calling of disciples, His conversation with Nicodemus, His meeting a woman at the well, and His relationship with John the Baptist. In our passage today, Jesus traveled to the home of a tax collector named Zacchaeus.

# HIS STORY

## Luke 19:1-4

*<sup>1</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.*

## ZACCHAEUS OVERCAME OBSTACLES IN ORDER TO SEE JESUS

Did you notice the characteristics Luke used to describe Zacchaeus? He mentioned two facts: Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector, and he was rich. In Jesus' day, the Jewish people despised tax collectors. Why? Because tax collectors were Jews, too, but they collaborated with the Roman officials who oppressed God's people. What's more, it was common practice for Jewish tax collectors to extort money above the Roman tax, and then they would use the extra money to pad their pockets and live in luxury.

What's interesting about Zacchaeus is that he actually wanted to see Jesus. Unfortunately, he wasn't very tall. Perhaps the people who hated tax collectors purposefully blocked Zacchaeus so that he wouldn't be able to get through, maybe as a way of getting back at him for his extortion. Whatever the case, Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus, and so he climbed up into a tree.



### ZACCHAEUS AND THE SYCAMORE

*Jesus has come to seek and save the lost.*



*\*Beginning Summer 2017*

### THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

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

### Luke 19:5-7

<sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”  
<sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

## JESUS REACHED OUT TO ZACCHAEUS

Jesus took notice of this man, acknowledged him, and then expressed the desire to spend time in this traitor’s home.

Not surprisingly, the people that saw this interaction were appalled. To be a guest in someone’s home meant you were “in fellowship” with them. It was like having an outstretched arm of love and acceptance or giving a warm embrace. In the onlookers’ eyes, Jesus spent time with one of the “bad guys”—someone who had done terrible and selfish things as part of his career. Why would a righteous teacher, someone who claimed to be the Messiah, want to spend time in fellowship with a man known for his wickedness?

## ZACCHAEUS DEMONSTRATED REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN JESUS

Zacchaeus quickly came down from the tree to welcome Jesus, but maybe he heard the crowd, got convicted, and froze in fear. He stopped walking and just stood there. I can’t imagine what went through his mind. Perhaps it was the fact that he knew that the crowd complained correctly: He was guilty of extortion!

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God is Gracious

*God’s nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).*



#### THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

*Jesus teaches on forgiveness.*



#### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

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

### Luke 19:8-10

<sup>8</sup> And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham."<sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Immediately, without being prompted directly by anyone else, Zacchaeus told Jesus he would give half of his possessions to the poor. If he had exorted anything from anyone, he would pay back four times as much as he took. Zacchaeus was convicted of his wrongdoing—to the point he willingly confessed his extortion and demonstrated his repentance by vowing to make full restoration to those he had victimized.

- Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, and describe the qualities of biblical repentance. In the brief encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, did Zacchaeus possess some of the qualities Paul listed in the passage you just read?
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## CHRIST CONNECTION

God demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to seek and save the lost. While we were dead in our sins, Jesus came to die in our place (Rom. 5:8). His substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection fulfilled His mission. God rejoices when sinners hear the gospel and are moved to admit their guilt, confess their sinfulness, and trust in the finished work of Jesus in order to be saved. Never should we believe that people have gone so far that they cannot be reached by the grace of God.

We who have embraced Jesus know this firsthand. And because of our encounter with Jesus, we can express our gratitude to our Savior by sharing His story to those whom we come in contact with and by sharing our resources with those who are in need.



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



**PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR**  
*Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.*

# YOUR STORY

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.

- ▶ **The crowds got in the way of Zacchaeus seeing Jesus. How do people sometimes get in the way of others seeing Jesus today?**
- ▶ **What are some categories of people we may be inclined to think of as "unreachable" by God's grace? How do we biblically challenge this way of thinking?**
- ▶ **Why do you think Zacchaeus thought it was important to repay the people he extorted money from? What does this decision express about his heart?**
- ▶ **How does the gospel influence our level of generosity toward others?**

## **HIS STORY**

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


## **YOUR STORY**

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION

## HEAD

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Before we judge the crowds too quickly, we should stop ask ourselves if our judgment is hypocritical because we do similar things. What about the times we hold grudges because of other people's sinful actions against us? Or have written someone off as unreachable because they hurt us in some way? Or what about people who pursue addictions, engage in sinful exploits, express hostility or rage toward Christians—have we ever considered them beyond redemption?

- How should our own salvation help us to understand the salvation of all sinners?
- When we rightly understand God's grace to all sinners, what actions should follow?

## HEART

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We learn from this account what happens when people meet Jesus and are transformed by His grace in their lives. Zacchaeus loved riches and the lifestyle that came from being rich. However, when he met Jesus, something drastically changed. Jesus' grace and mercy toward him transformed the desires of his heart to the point that he was willing to let go of his riches and his former way of life in response to Christ. This is they type of heart change that happens inside of each person who comes to know the grace and mercy of Christ.

- How has Christ transformed your life? How have the desires of your heart changed from knowing Him?
- Why is a transformed heart and life a good indicator that someone has Jesus as Lord over his life?

## HANDS

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We must treat every person that we meet as someone who might embrace Jesus as Savior. God often calls us to pursue people we may believe are beyond His saving grace; He calls us to show them the way to salvation in Jesus. We may face opposition for building friendships with lost people, but we can learn from the model of Paul's ministry, as he shared both the gospel and himself with the people he encountered (1 Thess. 2:8).

- What is the significance of Jesus ignoring His opposition in order to spend time with Zacchaeus?
- What does this say about Jesus' heart for the lost? What implications does this have for the way believers are supposed to live?