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HOW TO USE

01 SESSION ONE
The Four Soils

SCRIPTURE
Mark 4:1-8, 14-20

THE POINT
People respond in different ways to the message of the gospel.

CHARACTERS
• Jesus: the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity

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

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

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

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

• What are some things that can get in the way of a heart understanding the good news of the gospel?

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

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

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

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

THE SOWER AND THE SOILS
Jesus teaches of how people respond when hearing the Word.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT
Jesus teaches of forgiveness.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN
Jesus teaches of how to love one's neighbor.

TWO LOST SOONS
Jesus teaches of how parents should pray for their children.

The Gospel Project for Students 11

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

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

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

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

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

THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR
 Jesus teaches on the subject of self-righteousness.

THE WICKED TENANTS
 Jesus teaches on God's judgment and the need to repent.

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.

- ▶ What are some characteristics of a heart receptive to the good news of the gospel?
- ▶ Why should we freely share the gospel with people regardless of our perception of them?
- ▶ What are some worries and desires of this world that can "choke the Word" and make it unfruitful?
- ▶ What takeaways do you have from Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils and its explanation?

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

- What are some practical ways you can use the lessons in the parable in your own life?
- How might you encourage others around you to be cultivating the conditions of their hearts, while also guarding against the development of harmful conditions in your own heart?

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

- What are some things that can get in the way of a heart understanding the good news of the gospel?
- What are some ways you can guard your heart against things that interfere with your spiritual growth?

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

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

14 Session 1

FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

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

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

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

UNIT 1

Jesus the Storyteller

MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE

MEMORY VERSE

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’ ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

LUKE 15:22-24

01

SESSION ONE

The Four Soils

SCRIPTURE

Mark 4:1-8,14-20

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Mark 4:1-4,14-15

¹ Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ... ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them."

THE HARDENED SOIL

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

- What are some things that can get in the way of a heart understanding the good news of the gospel?



THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

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



THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Jesus teaches on forgiveness.

Mark 4:5-6,16-17

⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ... ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

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

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Mark 4:7,18-19

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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.

Mark 4:8,20

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²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

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THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.



THE WICKED TENANTS

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

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- ▶ **What takeaways do you have from Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils and its explanation?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

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HEART



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HANDS



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

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

02

SESSION TWO

The Unmerciful Servant

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:21-35

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

JESUS TALKED ABOUT FORGIVENESS

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

- **How would you define forgiveness? How does your definition align with what Jesus said in these verses?**
-
-

Matthew 18:21-22

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

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



THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Jesus teaches on forgiveness.



THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus teaches on how to love one's neighbor.

THE SERVANT'S DEBT WAS CANCELED

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

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

Matthew 18:23-27

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt."

CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO FORGIVE AS THEY HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

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

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



TWO LOST SONS

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



THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.

Matthew 18:28-35

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God is Merciful

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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

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



THE WICKED TENANTS

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



WATER INTO WINE

Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.

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 makes it difficult to sometimes forgive others?**
- ▶ **What potential objections would someone have to forgiving another person again and again ("seventy times seven")?**
- ▶ **How are you challenged by Jesus' addition of the phrase "from your heart" to His command to forgive?**
- ▶ **What practical steps do you need to take in light of Jesus' teaching in the parable of the unmerciful servant?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION

HEAD



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

- Why is it important to realize we can never repay our personal debts to God? How does our inability to repay increase our amazement of God's mercy and forgiveness?
- Why is it important for us to always remember our own forgiveness when confronted with needing to forgive someone who has wronged us?

HEART



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

- Why must forgiveness begin with the heart?
- What would such a level of grace and forgiveness within the church communicate to unbelievers?

HANDS



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

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

03

SESSION THREE

The Good Samaritan

SCRIPTURE

Luke 10:25-37

THE POINT

Jesus' compassion leads Christians to be compassionate toward others.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

JESUS SUMMED UP THE LAW AND PROPHETS

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

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

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

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

Luke 10:25-28

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” 27 And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”



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.

Luke 10:29-35

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

JESUS SHOWED WHAT COMPASSION LOOKS LIKE

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

JESUS COMMANDS US TO BE COMPASSIONATE TO OTHERS

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

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

- What is the difference between doing acts of compassion and being a compassionate person?
-
-



THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.



THE WICKED TENANTS

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Social Concern

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

Luke 10:36-37

36 "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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



WATER INTO WINE
Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.



BREAD FROM HEAVEN
Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.

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 do you think about the man's answer to Jesus' question?**
- ▶ **Why do you think the two religious leaders passed by the man in distress? What are some modern day examples of something similar happening?**
- ▶ **What reasons do we give when we want to "pass by on the other side" and not show compassion?**
- ▶ **What are some key takeaways for you personally after hearing the story of the good Samaritan?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
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YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

- Place yourself in this scene. If Jesus had told you that the way to inherit eternal life is by loving God and loving others, how would you have responded? What questions would you have asked?
- What do you think these different aspects of loving God (heart, soul, strength, mind) refer to, and why do they matter?


HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

- What does it say about us as Christians if we fail to be compassionate?
- How does our ministry of mercy back up what we say we believe about God’s mercy to us?

04

SESSION FOUR

The Father of Two Lost Sons

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:11-32

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

THE SIN OF THE YOUNGER SON

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

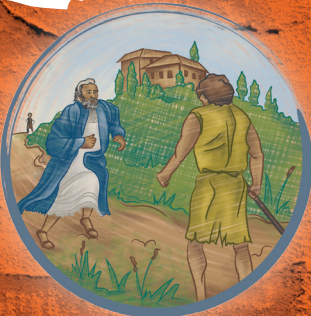
Jesus painted a picture of two types of lost people. The first is openly rebellious—the “in your face” sin of the younger son. The younger son's request illustrates the enormity and consequence of human sin. “God, we want what You can give us, but we don't want You!” The second is a more subtle type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

Luke 15:11-19

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them.

¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.”

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”



TWO LOST SONS

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



THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Jesus teaches on the dangers of self-righteousness.

THE MERCY OF THE FATHER

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

- **Make a list of several characteristics communicated by the father's actions in this parable. How are these characteristics also true of God?**

Luke 15:20-24

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

THE SIN OF THE OLDER BROTHER

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

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



THE WICKED TENANTS

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



WATER INTO WINE

Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.

Luke 15:25-32

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

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Repentance

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.



WALKING ON WATER

Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.

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.

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

HIS STORY


*God's Story of
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YOUR STORY

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YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

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


HEART



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

- What are some ways a heart closed-off to God will lead to a heart closed-off to sinners who find forgiveness?
- How does the gospel challenge and transform the closed-off heart?

HANDS



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

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

05

SESSION FIVE

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:9-14

THE POINT

God exalts the humble and humbles the exalted.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Luke 18:9

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.

JESUS' AUDIENCE WAS SELF-RIGHTEOUS

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

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

- **What are two or three signs that people are trusting in their own “righteousness”?**
-
-
-



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



THE WICKED TENANTS
Jesus teaches on God's judgment and the need to repent.

Luke 18:10-12

¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'"

JESUS TOLD THE STORY OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

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

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Justification by Faith

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



WATER INTO WINE
Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.



BREAD FROM HEAVEN
Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.

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

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

- **Notice the contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector. Take a few moments to read both descriptions and note the differences.**

Luke 18:13-14

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

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

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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



WALKING ON WATER

Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.



THE PARALYTIC

Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.

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 it easier to judge other people more harshly than we judge ourselves?**
- ▶ **What are some ways we can become more self-aware of our own need for grace and mercy?**
- ▶ **What do the differences between the Pharisee's prayer and the tax collector's prayer tell us about their attitudes?**
- ▶ **How does this story challenge you personally?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption, through
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YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

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



HEART

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

- If someone were to accuse you of self-righteousness, how do you think you would respond?
- What are some ways we can be self-righteous without knowing it?



HANDS

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

- What are the marks of people who know their need for grace?
- How do these marks differ from people who trust in themselves?

06

SESSION SIX

The Wicked Tenants

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:33-46

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Matthew 21:33-35

³³ "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.

³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another."

THE WICKED TENANTS REJECTED THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AS STEWARDS

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

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

- What are the responsibilities that come with our privilege of being God's people? What kind of fruit are we to bear as Christians?



THE WICKED TENANTS

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



WATER INTO WINE

Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.

Matthew 21:36-41

³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.

³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

THE WICKED TENANTS REJECTED GOD'S WARNINGS AND HIS SON

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

Just as the wicked tenants mistreated the servant-messengers, the religious and political leaders of Israel also mistreated the prophets. You'd expect God to respond immediately after having one of His prophets mistreated. Instead, God continued to warn His people of the consequences of their sin. He

continued to send prophet after prophet, no matter how badly they were treated.

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

THE WICKED TENANTS WERE REJECTED BY GOD

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



BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.



WALKING ON WATER

Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.

Matthew 21:42-46

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Nature of Hell

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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



THE PARALYTIC

Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.



THE DEMONIAC

Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.

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.

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

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- What are some ways we might use religious devotion to mask our lack of fruitfulness?
- What aspects of this parable’s warning apply to us today?



HEART

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

- Why is it tempting to think you are safe from God’s judgment because you are “religious” or “spiritual?”
- According to this parable, what does true religion look like?



HANDS

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

- How does this parable challenge us in our efforts of sharing Christ with others?
- What role does “bearing fruit” play in our mission to share and show the love of God?

UNIT 2

Jesus the Miracle Worker

MATTHEW, MARK, JOHN

MEMORY VERSE

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

JOHN 11:25-27

07

SESSION SEVEN

Water into Wine

SCRIPTURE

John 2:1-12

THE POINT

Jesus' miracles reveal His divine authority and power.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

John 2:1-5

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

MARY WENT TO JESUS WITH A NEED

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

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



WATER INTO WINE
Jesus shows compassion for everyday needs.



BREAD FROM HEAVEN
Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.

John 2:6-10

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

JESUS CHANGED THE WATER INTO WINE

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

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

John 2:11-12

¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

HIS MIRACLES HIGHLIGHT HIS DIVINE AUTHORITY AND POWER

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



WALKING ON WATER

Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.



THE PARALYTIC

Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Miracles

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

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

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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

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



THE DEMONIAC
Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.



POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH
Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.

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 do we sometimes find it difficult to bring our personal needs to God?**
- ▶ **What does this story teach us about Jesus' concern for us, even in the small areas of life?**
- ▶ **When have you seen God reveal His glory outside the walls of your church? How were the observers changed?**
- ▶ **How can God's work of salvation in your own life be used to glorify God to those around you?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- When have you witnessed something that was unmistakably God?
- How has that experience affected you?



HEART

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

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



HANDS

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

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

08

SESSION EIGHT

Bread from Heaven

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 14:13-21

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

JESUS HAD COMPASSION ON THE CROWDS

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

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

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



BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Jesus provides for both physical and spiritual needs.



WALKING ON WATER

Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.

Matthew 14:15-18

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

JESUS PROVIDES BY DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

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

JESUS PROVIDES BY MEETING NEEDS THROUGH HIS FOLLOWERS

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

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

Matthew 14:19-21

19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 Now those who ate were about 5,000 men, besides women and children.



THE PARALYTIC
Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.



THE DEMONIC
Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Jesus' Deity

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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

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



POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.

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 reasons we might refuse to show compassion to others? Are any of these justified? Why or why not?**

▶ **What are some circumstances for which people blame God?**

▶ **What does blaming God say about a person's understanding of who God is?**

▶ **How does this story help us to trust Jesus more in our daily lives?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

- What is your impossible situation today?
- What would it mean for you to take your situation fully to Jesus?



HEART

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

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



HANDS

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

- How has God used a person to reveal Himself to you?
- How has God used you to love or lead someone in His name?

09

SESSION NINE

Walking on Water

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 14:22-33

THE POINT

Jesus has control over all of life's storms.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

THE DISCIPLES FACED A STORM

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

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

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

Matthew 14:22-25

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.

- When have you had to endure a struggle in your life that God did not immediately resolve? How were you challenged to grow in your faith through that struggle?
-
-



WALKING ON WATER

Jesus demonstrates His sovereignty over creation.



THE PARALYTIC

Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.

JESUS PROVED HE WAS IN CONTROL OF THE STORM

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

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

Matthew 14:26-27

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

Matthew 14:28-31

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

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

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

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



THE DEMONIAC
Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.



POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH
Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.

Matthew 14:32-33

³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

The Goodness of Creation

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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

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



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.



**Beginning Fall 2017*

ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.

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

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

- How does prayer reflect our understanding of God’s sovereignty over our circumstances?
- Which do you find more significant: physical storms or metaphorical “storms of life”? Why?


HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

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

10

SESSION TEN

The Miracle of Forgiveness

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:1-12

THE POINT

Faith in Jesus results in forgiveness of sins.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

THE CROWDS GATHERED AROUND JESUS

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

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

Mark 2:1-4

¹ And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.

³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.

⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.



THE PARALYTIC

Jesus has the power to both heal and forgive sins.



THE DEMONIC

Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.

Mark 2:5

5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

JESUS FORGAVE THE PARALYTIC

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

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

- **Jesus healed this man physically and spiritually. While only Jesus can heal, He uses us to spread His message of reconciliation with God. What are some ways you can share His message with others?**

- **How does it affect you to know that Jesus was punished for you?**

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Priest

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



POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.

Mark 2:6-12

⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”

¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

JESUS HEALED THE PARALYTIC

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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

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



*Beginning Fall 2017

ANOINTED FOR BURIAL
Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM
Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.

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 Jesus' compassion toward the multitudes challenge the way you show compassion to those nearest to you?**
- ▶ **Why is spiritual healing more beneficial than physical healing in the long run?**
- ▶ **What does this story teach us about seeking physical healing for others?**
- ▶ **How as this story challenged you personally?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

- What are we to believe about Jesus because of His claims and His miracle in this narrative?
- What are some ways we can help others understand the priority of having our sin sickness healed, even over our desire for physical healing?


HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

- What are some excuses and objections we can come up with for not engaging with the lost in order to share the gospel with them?
- How does the compassion of Jesus Christ coming to us in the gospel overcome our excuses and objections?

11

SESSION ELEVEN

The Demoniac

SCRIPTURE

Mark 5:1-20

THE POINT

Jesus has power and authority over evil spirits.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

Mark 5:1-8

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

JESUS ENCOUNTERED THE DEMONIC

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

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

- **What do you think causes us to be afraid of things we don't understand? Why do you think we fear evil despite God's command not to?**



THE DEMONIC
Jesus shows His power over spiritual forces.



POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH
Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.

Mark 5:9-17

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

JESUS CONFRONTED THE EVIL SPIRITS AND HAD COMPASSION ON THE DEMONIAK

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

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

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



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.



ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.

** Beginning Fall 2017*

Mark 5:18-20

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

¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

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

- **What are some ways we can carry out our mission of sharing what Jesus has done for us both locally and globally?**
-
-

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Demons

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



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.



THE LAST SUPPER

The fulfilling of the New Covenant.

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 radical changes you've seen in the lives of people who trust in Jesus?**

▶ **What changes would you point to in your own life since you became a follower of Jesus?**

▶ **How encouraging is it to know Jesus has power and authority over the evil forces at work in the world today?**

▶ **How has this session challenged you on a personal level?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

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


HEART



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

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

HANDS



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

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

12

SESSION TWELVE

Power over Sickness and Death

SCRIPTURE

Mark 5:21-43

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

JESUS ENCOUNTERED A SICK WOMAN ON THE WAY TO JARIUS' HOUSE

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

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

Mark 5:21-29

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

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



POWER OVER SICKNESS AND DEATH

Jesus shows His power over sickness and the grave.



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.

Mark 5:30-34

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

JESUS HEALED THE SICK WOMAN

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Guilt and Shame

Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed, as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10). Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense, and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.

JESUS BROUGHT JARIUS' DAUGHTER BACK TO LIFE

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

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



ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.

* Beginning Fall 2017



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.

Mark 5:35-43

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

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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



THE LAST SUPPER

The fulfilling of the New Covenant.



JESUS IS ARRESTED

Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.

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

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



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

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


HEART



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

- Why is it important for our faith to be persistent through difficult times?
- Why is it important for our faith to display a sense of urgency in looking to Christ for help?

HANDS



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

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

13

SESSION THIRTEEN

Jesus Raised Lazarus

SCRIPTURE

John 11:1-7,17-44

THE POINT

Jesus grieved over death and overturned its power.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

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

HIS STORY

JESUS HEARD NEWS OF LAZARUS' SICKNESS

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

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

- How might complete trust in God have helped Mary and Martha as they faced their brother's death? How might it help you as you face losses?

JESUS INVITED MARTHA TO BELIEVE IN HIM

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

John 11:1-7

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



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS
Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave.



* Beginning Fall 2017

ANointed FOR BURIAL
Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.

John 11:17-27

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

- What’s so surprising about Jesus’ delay? How does Martha’s reaction demonstrate this?

JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

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

John 11:17-27

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



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.



THE LAST SUPPER

The fulfilling of the New Covenant.

John 11:38-44

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Life After Death

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

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

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



JESUS IS ARRESTED

Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.



THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.

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.

- ▶ **Put yourself in Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' place. How would you have interpreted Jesus' delay in coming? What would you have thought about your friendship with Him?**
- ▶ **What does it mean to trust? What are some reasons it would be difficult to trust God in this kind of circumstance?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus' expression of grief here communicate God's compassion for people who suffer?**
- ▶ **What are some practical ways we can grieve with those who grieve?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

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

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



HEART

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

- In what ways does “resurrection” language also apply to us spiritually when we are saved?
- Why is it important to hold together the reality of spiritual resurrection and the hope of physical resurrection?



HANDS

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

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