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UNIT 1



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HOW TO USE

01 SESSION ONE
Anointed for Burial

SCRIPTURE
Matthew 26:6-16

THE POINT
Our heart's condition is revealed either by our giving or our greed.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus**, the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Mary**, sister of Lazarus; follower of Christ
- **Judas**, one of the original twelve disciples; betrayed Christ to the chief priests

PLOT

This quarter opens up with a scene that teaches us about giving while it closes with one of greed and deception. Our main characters are Jesus, the disciples, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from the dead). Although this story teaches us important virtues and sins, it is the beginning of the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion.

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

MARY ANOINTED JESUS' HEAD WITH OIL

At first glance, it is difficult to appreciate what was happening in this scene. For starters, who among us would be at all honored by someone sneaking up behind us and pouring an entire bottle of olive oil or strong perfume on our heads? We would probably be humiliated, if not extremely confused.

However, anointing oil was used for a number of purposes in Scripture. People are most familiar with it in its function as symbolic of an Israelite officer or authority. For example, priests were to be anointed with oil (Ex. 29:7), as were kings (1 Sam. 10), and even prophets (1 King 19:6). Additionally, certain objects were anointed, as was the case with the tabernacle (Ex. 40:9). What all of these examples have in common is the consistent theme of setting apart a person or thing for devotion to God.

- The perfume Mary used was expensive. What does this tell you about Mary's sacrifice and her love for Jesus?
- What does Mary's gift teach us about giving to others?

Matthew 26:6-7
"While Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman approached him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She poured it on his head as he was reclining at the table."

Matthew 26:6-13
"When the disciples saw it, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked. 'This might have been sold for a great deal and given to the poor.'" "Aware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Who are you bothering this woman? She has done a noble thing for me. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. By pouring this perfume on my body, she has prepared me for burial.' Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

JESUS PRAISED MARY'S GIFT OF DEVOTION

For the disciples there was no compelling reason to enjoy an entire bottle of valuable oil on Jesus' head. However, they missed the significance of the act of devotion and expressed their belief that her gift is wasted. But by denouncing this woman and the value of this act, the disciples unknowingly denounced Jesus Himself and His coming death and resurrection.

Not only did Jesus praise her action, but He also declared that it would be forever etched in the story of the gospel as an example of devotion and love. Throughout Scripture, the people of God are marked by their giving.

JUDAS PLANNED JESUS' BETRAYAL

Matthew immediately moved from the anointing to the betrayal, and what was implied in his account was made explicit in John. According to John 12, it was Judas who led the chorus of condemnation of the woman's anointing, and it was not from love of man, but of money. Thus, when he went to the chief priests and asked for payment, his motivations had already been exposed: Judas was not driven primarily by religious or theological conviction, but by greed.

The contrast between Judas and Mary could not be more striking. Mary was willing to forfeit wealth for Jesus; Judas was willing to forfeit Jesus for wealth.

Matthew 26:14-16
"Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests¹⁴ and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?' So they weighed out thirty pieces of silver for him."¹⁵ And from that time he started looking for a good opportunity to betray him."

ANNOINTED FOR BURIAL
Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM
Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

THE LAST SUPPER
The Last Supper with Jesus and the Disciples.

JESUS IS ARRESTED
Jesus is arrested and taken to the high priest's courtyard.

The Gospel Project for Students

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

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES
Christ as Sacrifice

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

CHRIST CONNECTION
If our motivation for giving is to receive praise from others, or to gain something in return, that is nothing more than greed. If our outright greed moves us to withhold generosity, then we have revealed that God's call on our lives is secondary to our comfort. It also shows that we treasure things other than God, and long for our glory over Christ's. The Bible is clear, the people of God are marked by their joyful giving (2 Cor. 9:7). Even when our complex hearts reveal the deadly mix of generosity and greed, the power of the Spirit allows us to repent and honor God. As God has given to us His Son, out of the overflow of His heart, so He calls and compels His people to express their devotion through visible acts of worship. We should follow Mary's example, demonstrating love and devotion in our generosity.

THE CRUCIFIXION
Jesus at the cross, taking our sacrifice.

HIS BIRTH
The incarnation of the Son of God.

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.

► In what areas of your life do you feel as though you are generous?

► What compels your generosity?

► In what areas of your life do you feel as though you are greedy?

► What do you think causes us to become greedy and unwilling to be generous with the things God has given us?

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

Imagine you have \$50,000 in a savings account. How certain would you have to be that an investment is a worthy pursuit before you invested your money? Mary's act demonstrated her generosity and her faith and confidence in Jesus. She had witnessed firsthand His provision and power (including in the raising of her own brother, Lazarus, from the dead) and so she freely gave. She understood the value of her gift as being a mere symbol of the infinite value of the One to whom it was given.

- Why should our generosity be motivated by who God is and what He has done for us?
- What does your generosity say about the level of your own gratefulness to God?

HEART

According to James 4:1-4, arguments and conflicts arise from our desires and cravings. Jesus craved money. The chief priests craved power and privilege. We are all creatures driven by desire; our cravings and longings are reflections of our loves and lusts. Not everything we desire is necessarily wrong or sinful. However, even good desires become distractions and idols when they become demands in our hearts.

- Based upon the heart set that James provided, what do your day-to-day pursuits and actions reveal about your heart's desires?
- What does your current level of generosity to others reveal about what your heart truly values?

HANDS

Mary, who poured expensive oil on Jesus, provides an example of giving that is not a waste, but an act of worship. It did not make sense by the world's standards. However, Jesus affirmed Mary and showed that He is more valuable than anything in this world. In turn, we see that giving as an expression of worship is the only true and pure form of generosity. This session has made it abundantly clear, God calls us to treasure Christ above all wealth and to express our devotion through visible acts of worship.

- What are a few practical steps you can take to begin practicing generosity as an overflow of devotion and worship?
- How might you begin to cultivate a greater love for Christ that compels you toward generosity and sacrifice?

14 Session 1

FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

The current volume of *Jesus Saves* takes us to the central event in all of human history—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we see repeated over and over throughout the Bible, the events surrounding the cross of Christ are the reason Jesus came. The disciples may have been thrown off by these events, but Jesus wasn't. He knew the cross was His mission to bear, and He knew exactly would it would cost Him. It was the means God chose to reconcile sinners to Himself, making "him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The promise God gave to Adam and Eve long ago would finally be fulfilled. Jesus, the Promised Seed, would crush the serpent's head, and death itself would be defeated in the death of Christ. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham to provide a lamb by sending the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. And, as Isaiah prophesied, the Suffering Servant was wounded for our transgressions and pierced for our iniquities. All of the foreshadowing in the Old Testament not only pointed forward to Jesus, but also pointed to the mission He would complete.

The cross and resurrection of Christ are central to God's Story in human history. Jesus is the Hero who came to rescue a captive people by taking the punishment they deserved. The cross is also central to our faith as believers. It is because of the cross that we can rightly see ourselves, like Barabbas, as being guilty and set free. It is because of the cross that, like Mary, we can live as if Jesus is better than anything this world can offer. It is because of the cross that, like Peter and the other disciples, we can move past our own personal failures and disappointments and be reconciled to God. And God empowers us for the life mission He has called us to.

UNIT 1

Jesus the Savior

MATTHEW, JOHN

MEMORY VERSE

¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

JOHN 13:13-15

01

SESSION ONE

Anointed for Burial

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:6-16

THE POINT

Our heart's condition is revealed either by our giving or our greed.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Mary:** sister of Lazarus; follower of Christ
- **Judas:** one of the original twelve disciples; betrayed Christ to the chief priests

PLOT

This quarter opens up with a scene that teaches us about generosity and devotion, while it closes with one of greed and deception. Our main characters include Jesus and His disciples, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from the dead). Even though this story teaches us important virtues and sins, it primarily offers us a look at the beginning of the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion.

HIS STORY

MARY ANOINTED JESUS' HEAD WITH OIL

At first glance, it is difficult to appreciate what was happening in this scene. For starters, who among us would be at all honored by someone sneaking up behind us and pouring an entire bottle of olive oil or strong perfume on our heads? We would probably be humiliated, if not extremely confused.

However, anointing oil was used for a number of purposes in Scripture. People are most familiar with it in its function as symbolic of an Israelite office or authority. For example, priests were to be anointed with oil (Ex. 29:7), as were kings (1 Sam. 10), and even prophets (1 Kings 19:16). Additionally, certain objects were anointed, as was the case with the tabernacle (Ex. 40:9). What all of these examples have in common is the consistent theme of setting apart a person or thing for devotion to God.

Matthew 26:6-7

⁶ Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table.

- The perfume Mary used was expensive. What does this tell you about Mary's sacrifice and her love for Jesus?
- What does Mary's gift teach us about giving to others?



ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.

Matthew 26:8-13

⁸ And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? ⁹ For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

JESUS PRAISED MARY’S GIFT OF DEVOTION

For the disciples there was no compelling reason to empty an entire bottle of valuable oil on Jesus’ head. However, they missed the significance of the act of devotion and expressed their belief that her gift is wasted. But by demeaning this woman and the value of this act, the disciples unknowingly demeaned Jesus Himself and His coming death and resurrection.

Not only did Jesus praise her action, but He also declared that it would be forever etched in the story of the gospel as an example of devotion and love. Throughout Scripture, the people of God are marked by their giving.

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¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.



THE LAST SUPPER

The fulfilling of the New Covenant.



JESUS IS ARRESTED

Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Sacrifice

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

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THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.



HE IS RISEN

The resurrection of the Son of God.

YOUR STORY

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▶ **What do you think causes us to become greedy and unwilling to be generous with the things God has given us?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

Imagine you have \$50,000 in a savings account. How certain would you have to be that an investment is a worthy pursuit before you invested your money? Mary's act demonstrated her generosity and her faith and confidence in Jesus. She had witnessed firsthand His provision and power (including in the raising of her own brother, Lazarus, from the dead) and so she freely gave. She understood the value of her gift as being a mere symbol of the infinite value of the One to whom it was given.

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HEART

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HANDS

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- What are a few practical steps you can take to begin practicing generosity as an overflow of devotion and worship?
- How might you begin to cultivate a greater love for Christ that compels you toward generosity and sacrifice?

02

SESSION TWO

Jesus Entered Jerusalem

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:1-17

THE POINT

Jesus is the Savior who came to restore true worship.

CHARACTERS

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

PLOT

The last week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion is known as Passion Week. There are several notable events surrounding the days leading to the crucifixion, with Jesus entering Jerusalem and cleansing the temple being among them. An incredible amount of Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in these texts—all in the days leading up to the Passover.

HIS STORY

JESUS ENTERED THE CITY ON A DONKEY

Rolling out the red carpet is a sign of respect and hospitality for the head of state or a celebrity making a grand entrance. Jesus, the anointed King, was entering the city. The long awaited Messiah had finally come. Ages of sorrow, hope, and longing were being fulfilled before their very eyes. In recognition of the gravity of the occasion, the crowds placed their robes and palm branches before the feet of the King who was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Matthew 21:1-11

¹Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."



JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.



THE LAST SUPPER

The fulfilling of the New Covenant.

JESUS CLEANSED THE TEMPLE

The Jesus of our culture is a caricature; He is often pictured kneeling beside a group of children, carrying a sheep, or hugging a stranger. He is always happy and smiling. The idea of Jesus getting mad or sad is completely foreign to the version of the happy hippy Jesus our culture often portrays.

Unlike these cultural caricatures, Scripture presents a Jesus of passion and humanity. However, unlike our frustration with school or responsibilities, Christ's frustration came from a place of holy discontentment. Jesus was not offering a critique of fair trade or making a statement on economic policy, but was instead declaring that this was neither the time nor the place to be selling. He turned the temple upside down as a sign of cleansing, much like a person might take all the clothes out of a drawer in order to rearrange a dresser.

- Does Jesus' reaction surprise you? Why or why not?
- How would you have responded if you were with Jesus or in the temple when this occurred?

Matthew 21:12-13

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit indwells the church, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 12:13). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live lives differently than before, bearing the virtuous fruit that comes only by the indwelling work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This indwelling work of the Spirit also equips individual members of the church with gifts for the work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12:11).



JESUS IS ARRESTED

Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.



THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.

Matthew 21:14-17

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant,¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?"¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

JESUS HEALED THE LAME AND THE BLIND

Once the tradesmen and animals were driven out of the temple, many of the hurt, lost, and broken filtered in. The blind, lame, and children came to see, hear, and touch Jesus—He healed them all. The temple was in an uproar as the children cried out, calling Him Hosanna.

Meanwhile, other eyes were watching and ears were listening. These eyes and ears observed with disdain all that happened as their glory and authority crumbled around the feet of Jesus.

- How did the priests and scribes accuse Jesus?
- How did Jesus respond to them?

CHRIST CONNECTION

By entering Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. Through His actions in the temple, Jesus conveyed His judgment toward those who would misuse God's house for their greedy purposes. And for the sins of His people, Jesus offered His own body as a temple to be destroyed, and to eventually be raised again.



HE IS RISEN
The resurrection of the Son of God.



HEARTS ON FIRE
All Scripture points to Jesus.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **Why do you think the prophecy predicted that the Messiah, the King, would enter the city on a donkey? What does this say about Jesus' humility?**

- ▶ **What is the difference between regular anger and a holy anger?**

- ▶ **What do you think motivated Jesus in this mission of cleansing the temple? What is the takeaway for us today?**

- ▶ **What is something new and important you have learned from this session?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

The fact that Jesus entered the city riding a donkey is significant. According to 1 Kings 1:32-35, we see that it wasn't the first time a Jewish king had ridden into Jerusalem on a mule. Solomon, the last great king of the united kingdom of Israel, entered the city riding a donkey. The son of David rode into the city on a donkey to be anointed as king. But later, the greater Son of David rode into the city, the One whose reign would be eternal.

- Why do you think it is important that Jesus fulfilled these Old Testament prophecies?
- What type of confidence in your faith does it give you to know that Jesus fulfilled all of these Old Testament prophecies?



HEART

The good news of Hosanna is that Christ has come to save us from our inadequate worship. Just like the blind, lame, and children who came to see, hear, and touch Jesus, we too can be healed. Jesus embodies faithfulness. He is the king who came to restore true worship, even in our unfaithful hearts. He is able to replace a cold or even lukewarm heart with one that overflows with genuine praise for Him.

- When have you experienced gratitude and hope in Christ to such a degree that it overflowed into praise?
- What does a life of praise and worship look like?



HANDS

It's solely on the basis of what Jesus has done for us that we can boldly and confidently share with others news of the salvation that only He can give. Whether we share with someone who has never heard the gospel or with a believer who is struggling with lukewarm worship, it is easy to point others to Jesus—the only One capable of transforming our lives from the inside out.

- When have you been driven by a desire for the glory of God?
- How do our actions and attitudes change for the better when we are driven by the glory of God?

03

SESSION THREE

The Last Supper

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:26-30; John 13:1-15

THE POINT

The Lord's Supper points to Jesus' sacrifice for sins.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT

Our story progresses to an event that is well known even among those unfamiliar with the Bible—the last supper. In celebration of Passover—the miraculous event that took place in Egypt during the time of Moses—Jesus and the disciples gathered together to share a meal, the elements of which would point to what He would eventually accomplish on the cross.

HIS STORY

JESUS WASHED THE DISCIPLES' FEET

Jesus' entire life was marked by service. He served the crowds and His disciples constantly, escaping only for a few short breaks to rest in prayer and contemplation. One might think this last meal would surely be the moment of His big reveal. Like the undercover boss, maybe we imagine that—having taken the form of a servant until the end of the episode—the King removes His blue-collar uniform and sits enthroned in royal robes to the amazement of His followers. That is what we might expect. Instead, the King removes His robe and kneels in yet another act of service to the amazement of His followers.

What would motivate such service? What kind of posture of heart would cause someone to lay aside privilege and preference for the sake of others? In a word—*humility*. Christ's service was not begrudging or selfish, but selfless and sacrificial. He sees the needs of His people and He responds.

John 13:1-15

¹Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹²When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.



THE LAST SUPPER
The fulfilling of the New Covenant.



JESUS IS ARRESTED
Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.

- Is your life marked more by serving or being served?

Matthew 26:26-28

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

JESUS EXPLAINED THE PURPOSE OF THE SUPPER

When Jesus broke the bread and lifted the cup, He was painting a picture of a new reality. He crafted a visual depiction of the events that would soon occur—His body would hang between earth and air, and His blood would flow from His pierced side. His broken body: the breaking of bread. His blood poured out: the drinking of the cup. Even now, as we participate in the Lord's Supper together, we do so to remember what He sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 11:17-26).

JESUS POINTED FORWARD TO A FUTURE SUPPER WITH ALL BELIEVERS

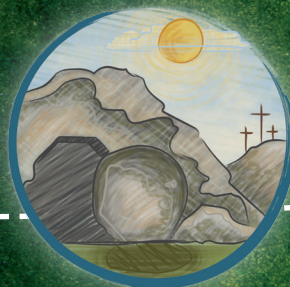
There in that tiny upper room, what must have seemed like an offhand remark is actually a beautiful promise. Jesus would not drink of the vine again soon, but He would drink it again. Not only would He drink it again, but He would do so in the kingdom of His Father, with the disciples.

The message of the coming kingdom is a message of hope, joy, and fulfillment and is the longing of the Christian heart. So, we pray for God's kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10). We hunger and thirst for the kingdom, because we hunger and thirst for the King.



THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.



HE IS RISEN

The resurrection of the Son of God.

Matthew 26:29-30

29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

- When have you felt the deep desire, or need, for God’s kingdom? For Jesus?

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer, and anticipate His second coming (1 Cor. 11:26).

CHRIST CONNECTION

One of the great commands we find throughout Scripture is to remember. Remembering resets our identity on where we have come from and on what we have come through. Remembering not only solidifies our identity by looking into the past, but it also fortifies our mission as we look to the future. In the Passover meal, the Israelites remembered their God who served, delivered, and guided them. As Christians partake in the Lord’s Supper, we remember Christ, whose entire life was marked by service in the mission of God and service for the good of His people.



HEARTS ON FIRE

All Scripture points to Jesus.



JESUS SENDS

The disciples witness the risen Christ and receive the peace He brings.

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 Lord's Supper provide a picture of salvation in Christ?**
- ▶ **The Lord's Supper can become a church ritual rather than a meaningful remembrance. What are some ways that you can cultivate a more intentional experience the next time you take communion with your church?**
- ▶ **What is the last thing you can remember waiting for in anticipation?**
- ▶ **Do you honestly look forward to the full arrival of God's future kingdom? Why or why not?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

Earthly kings are not typically known for their service. However, our God has established a different kingdom—one marked by humility and selflessness. Every time we partake in the Lord's Supper now, we are constantly reminded of the servant nature of our God because the Lord's Supper points to the sacrificial nature of Christ's death for our sins.

- Read Mark 10:45 and Acts 17:24-25. What do these passages say about how God relates to us?
- Why do you think people often believe they must first serve God in order for Him to respond with love and grace?



HEART

The Lord's Supper has a way of increasing our expectation of the day Jesus will return. It points our attention to and increases our anticipation of the day when we will no longer need symbolic representations of Christ's sacrifice since Christ Himself will be with His people. Jesus mentioned the anticipation of His return, as did Paul (Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 11:26). We should never allow the Lord's Supper to become dull or ritualistic; instead, we should allow it to guide our imaginations into what that day will be like when the people of God are gathered together for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:1-9).

- How can the Lord's Supper encourage believers in their faith?
- How does this session give you a renewed understanding of the Lord's Supper?



HANDS

Just as the Lord's Supper points toward the fact that Jesus' service is not selfish, but selfless and sacrificial, we should remember our servant identity in the kingdom of God. In partaking of the Lord's Supper, we agree with God's mission of sharing the gospel with others. Because of Jesus' humble service to us and because of His new covenant sacrifice, we can live lives of service as we excitedly wait for His return.

- In what areas of your life are you serving others?
- What are some practical ways you can practice service toward those in your home, church, school, and community this week?

04

SESSION FOUR

Betrayed and Arrested

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:36-49,56,59-66

THE POINT

Jesus was sent by the Father to face judgment for our sins.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others
- **Chief priests and elders:** the religious leaders of Jerusalem during Jesus' earthly ministry

PLOT

Following the last supper, the disciples were still in the dark about what would soon take place. They knew Judas was certainly involved in some suspicious activity, but they did not know the extent. They also had not fully realized that what they celebrated during the Passover pointed to Jesus—the Lamb of God who would atone for the sins of those who believe.

HIS STORY

Matthew 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

JESUS AGREED TO HIS MISSION

The account of the night in the garden of Gethsemane is filled with struggles. The disciples struggled to stay awake. Jesus struggled with the disciples over their inability to remain alert. Later, Peter struggled with the guards, and all the disciples would struggle to understand. But in the garden, the greatest struggle seemed to be within Jesus Himself. As Jacob wrestled with the Lord through the night, Jesus wrestled with the weight of His identity and mission.

Taking leave of His friends, Jesus headed off alone into the night for solitude, as was His custom (Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 5:16). But this was no customary prayer time. Jesus, the Son of God, was overwhelmed with sorrow as He faced what was before Him.



JESUS IS ARRESTED

Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.



THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.

Matthew 26:47-49, 56

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ... ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Propitiation

Because of God's righteousness and holiness, humanity's sins must be atoned for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ's death is the appeasement or satisfaction of God's wrath against sin. Christ's propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God's great love toward sinners (1 John 4:10), as well as the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (Rom. 3:26).

JESUS' MISSION WAS FORETOLD IN SCRIPTURE

No one could take Jesus' life from Him. He had made that clear before (John 10:18). If He wanted to retreat, He could pass through the midst of a crowd (Luke 4:30). If He wanted to fight, He could call down 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). Anyone who can calm a storm, walk on water, and cast out demons can control a little crowd. But rather than demonstrate control through lightning or fire, Jesus exercised the self-control of restraint.

In this moment of crisis, there would be no retreat, no revolt, no rescue. Jesus was resolute in accepting what Scripture had foretold. Everything that occurred on that night was foretold, but this was no comfort for the disciples in the dark. Jesus had steadied Himself in His Father's provision and plan, but the disciples were shaken and afraid. The Old Testament message illuminated the events of this night, but the disciples failed to see it. The narrative would not end without even more fulfillment to come, but the sheep were scattered and the Shepherd was led willingly across the dark valley into the city of Jerusalem.



HE IS RISEN
The resurrection of the Son of God.



HEARTS ON FIRE
All Scripture points to Jesus.

JESUS AFFIRMED THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS IDENTITY AS THE MESSIAH

When Jesus finally spoke, it was in response to a call for an oath to the living God, and He went all in. Though His response appears cryptic to us (v. 64), it most likely represents an idiom that would have been a strong confirmation of the charge.

By equating Himself with the Son of Man from Daniel 7:13-14 and referring to His descent from heaven, Jesus doubled down on the charge of blasphemy in the eyes of the Sanhedrin. At this point there was no mistake to be made. He was either blasphemous or blessed. He was the Christ or guilty of the charge of idolatry. To the leaders, the conclusion was obvious.

- **What does this passage tell you about Jesus' commitment to follow through with His Father's plan?**

Matthew 26:59-66

⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"

⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"

⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."

CHRIST CONNECTION

In the garden of Eden, Adam failed to resist the serpent and chose to follow his way over God's. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, the second Adam, submitted fully to His Father's purpose and plan. He willingly submitted to death upon the cross. Jesus demonstrated His identity as the Son of God through His words and actions as He was betrayed, arrested, and put on trial.



JESUS SENDS

The disciples witness the risen Christ and receive the peace He brings.



OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas' doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.

YOUR STORY

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

- ▶ **Why do you think the disciples were unable to make the connection between the events of this night and Jesus' prophecies of His impending betrayal and death?**

- ▶ **Why is it significant that the Old Testament prophesied many of the events surrounding the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?**

- ▶ **What are some occasions in our own lives in which we can follow in Jesus' example and show restraint even when we are persecuted or treated unfairly for our faith?**

- ▶ **What are some accusations the world makes against the church? Which of these should we reject or embrace? Why?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



The “cup” was a familiar symbol of judgment and wrath in the Old Testament (Ps. 11:6; Isa. 51:17; Ezek. 23:33). Death itself would have been enough to upset even the bravest of men. The threat of torture and crucifixion was an even more imposing imminent reality. But Jesus faced something even worse. Before Him was a cup full of wrath and judgment from the holy God. By drinking it fully, Jesus would know abandonment, sin, desolation, and death.

- What do we learn about Jesus from this biblical narrative?
- How does Jesus’ willingness and resolve to drink “this cup” on our behalf affect you?


HEART



The fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture is of particular relevance to Matthew as he crafted his Gospel through a Hebrew lens for a Jewish audience. Matthew demonstrated the various ways in which Jesus fulfilled Old Testament expectations and hopes. From birth to these events in the garden of Gethsemane, Matthew saw fulfillment (Matt.1:22-23; 3:15; 21:4-5). In this account, fulfillment may have occurred for a combination of Scripture passages (Ps. 55:12-14; Zech. 13:7).

- How can the fulfillment of these prophecies inspire hope and confidence in one’s faith?
- How can you use this knowledge of fulfilled prophecies when talking with a skeptic?

HANDS



Discussing the wrath of God isn’t a popular topic in many American churches. It is a tough truth to accept. This is especially true when we consider that God’s wrath against sin will be justly poured out on people who haven’t found shelter under the gospel of Jesus Christ. By drinking this cup fully, Jesus experienced abandonment, sin, desolation, and death—and Jesus did that for you and me, so that we would not have to know the eternal torment of these realities.

- Why is it important to talk about God’s wrath to others even though it may be an unpopular topic of conversation?
- How might it dishonor Jesus and His sacrifice if we neglect to talk about God’s wrath?

05

SESSION FIVE

The King was Crucified

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 27:15-51

THE POINT

Jesus is the King who willingly took upon Himself the punishment for sin.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Pontius Pilate:** Roman governor of Judaea during Jesus' earthly ministry
- **Barabbas:** murderer and rebel who was set free from prison in exchange for Jesus' crucifixion

PLOT

After being arrested under the darkness of night, Jesus was then ushered off before an agitated judge and jury all seeking one thing—His immediate execution. However, as we have seen time and time again throughout Scripture, what man intends for evil God intends for good.

HIS STORY

JESUS TOOK BARABBAS' PLACE

Pilate was looking for a way out. He knew the priests and elders all too well and was not blind to the situation before him. He knew Jesus was undeserving of death, but he also knew that the chief priests would stop at nothing to silence any and all perceived threats to their position and privilege.

In Barabbas' release, we see a picture of our own promised release. Like Barabbas, we are guilty of rebellion, but not against the Roman Empire. We have each conspired to commit cosmic treason against the Lord and rightly deserve death. If not for Jesus, we too would stand before the Judge's seat to be convicted. But as Jesus took Barabbas' place before Pilate, so He takes the place of those who love and trust Him before His Father.

JESUS WAS MOCKED, TORTURED, AND CRUCIFIED

As Jesus was tortured and prepared for the cross, He was treated with contempt and mocked as the Messiah. He was given royal robes and a crown (of thorns)—the entire display a mockery of justice.

This passage of Scripture screams humiliation—torture, mockery, abuse, insults, and taunts. Jesus was a spectacle to be laughed at and disregarded by the soldiers and the spectators.

Matthew 27:20-26

²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.



THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.



HE IS RISEN

The resurrection of the Son of God.

Matthew 27:27-44

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. ³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

This passage also screams humility—patience, love, grace, and mercy. Jesus on the cross was a spectacular drama showing just how far the Son of God was willing to go in perfect obedience to His Father, and we are encouraged to share in that same humility (Phil. 2:5-11).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Substitute

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



HEARTS ON FIRE

All Scripture points to Jesus.



JESUS SENDS

The disciples witness the risen Christ and receive the peace He brings.

Matthew 27:45-51

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

JESUS SERVED AS THE SUBSTITUTE LAMB

Jesus' cry should have resonated in the minds of the onlookers, but they missed His reference. These are the opening words of Psalm 22, a psalm dripping with messianic meaning (especially verses 1-2, 6-8, and 12-18). Jesus was not calling upon Elijah, as the crowd supposed. He was identifying Himself as the One to whom the Psalm pointed and demonstrating the horror of feeling forsaken by His Father.

In the torn curtain, a message was proclaimed. A Son was rejected so that the Father would have many more sons and daughters. The Father forsook His only Son that He might extend forgiveness to a great many children. A Son's sacrifice was accepted in the holy of holies so that all who trust in Him might be accepted before the very throne of God.

- How does it affect you to know Jesus was forsaken and rejected so that you could have forgiveness for your sins?

CHRIST CONNECTION

Unjustly condemned to death, Jesus willingly took up His cross and suffered the judgment our sins deserve. At the moment He died, the curtain in the temple sanctuary was torn in two, signifying the truth that sinners have access to God through the blood of Christ. Jesus' crucifixion is the center of history, revealing God's holiness and justice, our sinfulness and unrighteousness, and Christ's humility and love.



OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas' doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.



FOLLOW ME

Jesus' forgiveness and the call of every Christian.

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 do you think Barabbas responded to this turn of events in his favor? How should we respond to Jesus taking our place?**
- ▶ **What are some ways we can be guilty of choosing something or someone over Jesus?**
- ▶ **How do the details surrounding Jesus' physical torture and crucifixion affect you?**
- ▶ **How does the fact that Jesus' friends abandoned Him in His greatest need add to Jesus' suffering?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

HEAD

Before God spoke light into existence, there was darkness. Before the Israelites' redemption from Egypt, the plague of darkness covered the nation. And at the crucifixion, darkness swallowed the whole land for three hours as a marker of this moment's cosmic significance.

- What do the events at Golgotha demonstrate about the love of the Father and the love of the Son?
- If a non-Christian asked you why Jesus died, how would you respond?

HEART

The narrative of the events leading up to and including the crucifixion certainly does not do justice to the full horror on display. Black print on a Bible's pages can never fully express the scarlet blood flowing from a wounded back and pierced brow. A few paragraphs read in a matter of seconds cannot adequately convey the dread and shock of hours of torture Jesus experienced for the guilty. As Jesus marched to Golgotha, He did so not only in Barabbas' place, but also for all who would believe. He was crucified and condemned so that we might be ransomed and redeemed. He became sin so that we might become the righteous of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

- How does knowing the extent of Jesus' sacrifice increase your love for Him?
- How does it affect you to know Jesus bore the punishment our sin's deserve?

HANDS

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the King who willingly took upon Himself the punishment for sin. In light of this, we don't need to be afraid of talking about sin and calling people to faith. Our Father does not abandon us on our mission to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, through His Holy Spirit, He strengthens our faith and fuels our worship and witness.

- How does the reality of what Jesus endured for us protect us from viewing evangelism simply as an obligation?
- Why is it important for Christians to first talk about sin when sharing the good news of what Christ has done for us?

06

SESSION SIX

Jesus was Raised

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28:1-15

THE POINT

Sin's curse was removed and death was defeated in Jesus' resurrection.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary:** two of the women who came to Jesus' grave to anoint Him with spices; the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection

PLOT

Jesus' disciples, His closest companions for the past three years of His ministry, were nowhere to be found after His arrest and crucifixion. In self-preservation mode, they all took off in fear that a similar fate awaited them. What would explain the sudden shift from living in paralyzing fear to living out courageous faith? The answer: Jesus' resurrection.

HIS STORY

THE ANGEL INVITED THE WOMEN TO COME AND SEE

The process for burying Jesus was rushed because of the coming Sabbath. Prohibited by tradition from carrying out work or coming into contact with the dead on this sacred day, those who placed Jesus in the tomb quickly carried out a partial preparation that would have to do until after the day of rest.

The two Marys in this narrative were not expecting to see anything spectacular as they approached Jesus' borrowed tomb. They were looking for a conclusion and closure, but what they found was certainly more than they bargained for. In a moment, their expectations were turned upside down and hope, which had once been buried alongside their Teacher, no longer inhabited a grave.

Matthew 28:1-6

¹Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.
²And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.
³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.
⁴And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.
⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified."
⁶He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

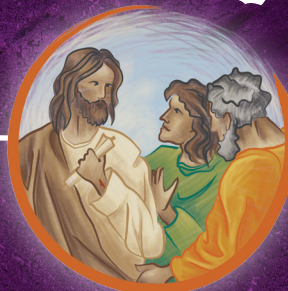
Glorification

Glorification is the final stage in the process of salvation. It refers to the future time when a Christian reaches moral and spiritual perfection at the time of death or at Christ's return (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:22). Glorification also involves the physical perfection that we will have once our bodies have been resurrected. When we are glorified, we will have a fuller knowledge and understanding of God and His Word (1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 3:20-21).



HE IS RISEN

The resurrection of the Son of God.



HEARTS ON FIRE

All Scripture points to Jesus.

Matthew 28:7-9

⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

THE WOMEN WORSHIPED THE RISEN JESUS

The message entrusted to these women was threefold. First, the angel told them to repeat what they had already been told: Jesus had been raised from the dead. That would be incredible enough, but the message of their mission continued. The angel also instructed them to proclaim that Jesus was going to Galilee, the region of the majority of His ministry. Finally, the angel tasked them with telling the disciples that they would see Him there.

- **Imagine you were with the women visiting the tomb. How would you respond to what you saw?**
-
-

- **Why do you think the women clung to Jesus when they saw Him again? How can you also cling to Jesus?**
-
-

JESUS COMMANDED THE WOMEN TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

What is your first response to receiving good news? Most of us immediately seek to share the news with those we love. Whether we post it on social media, send out a mass text, or call our mom and dad, we instinctively seek to share good news with others. When the women encountered Jesus, they could not help but share the good news.



JESUS SENDS

The disciples witness the risen Christ and receive the peace He brings.



OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas' doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.

- What are the easiest things in life for you to get excited about and want to share with others? What are some of the most difficult?
-
-
-

Matthew 28:10-15

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

¹¹ While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.

¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers

¹³ and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Jesus' words to the women were almost exactly the same as the angel's. Fueled by their joy and the message of resurrection, the women headed back to the city. They had received urgent news to share.

CHRIST CONNECTION

On Easter Sunday, God vindicated His Son's perfect sacrifice by raising Him from the dead and beginning the new creation He had long promised His people. Through faith, we are united to Christ, we are part of His new creation, and we share in the promise of being resurrected in His likeness. Sin's curse has been removed, death has been defeated, and we are assured of everlasting life with God.



FOLLOW ME
Jesus' forgiveness
and the call of
every Christian.



AS YOU GO...
Fulfilling the
Great Commission
wherever we are in life.

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 you think Jesus chose to appear first to these women rather than appearing directly to the disciples?**

- ▶ **How does the message of Jesus' resurrection help believers fight fear?**

- ▶ **How does the message of Jesus' resurrection offer hope to those who have none?**

- ▶ **What circumstances surrounded your life when you came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus? How did that change you?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

Have we become so familiar with the truth of Jesus' resurrection that we have lost our amazement over its implications? For people like you and me, death can be a paralyzing fear. For many, death represents the great unknown. Death is chilling in its finality. With all of our advances in medical technology, death is the one thing we cannot avoid. But the one thing that man cannot defeat, Jesus Christ triumphed over. And for Christians, His victory is our victory.

- How should a Christian approach the reality of one day dying?
- What are some ways Christians can offer hope to those who fear death?



HEART

Matthew didn't record the words the women must have spoken or the questions they must have asked upon seeing Jesus raised from the dead—he simply recorded that they worshiped the risen Jesus. In the presence of the sacred, there is nothing better to do. And really, before we can go and tell others, worship must be our first priority.

- How does our personal worship of Jesus fuel our mission to tell others about Him?
- How might a lack of pursuing God's mission be a spiritual warning sign that something is missing in our personal worship?



HANDS

Go and tell others the truth about Jesus. Though the call and commission of Matthew 28 was delivered specifically to Jesus' disciples, it certainly extends to all of His disciples—all the ones who love and trust Him. After all, how could we fail to share such good news with the world?

- What are some reasons people give today for not believing in the risen Savior?
- How does the women's immediate obedience in telling others about Jesus serve as an example for us?

UNIT 2

Jesus the Risen King

MATTHEW, LUKE, JOHN, ACTS

MEMORY VERSE

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

07

SESSION SEVEN

The Emmaus Road

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:13-35

THE POINT

Jesus is the central focus of Scripture and our worship.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Cleopas:** one of the two travelers on the road to Emmaus who was approached by the resurrected Jesus

PLOT

The eyewitnesses to Jesus resurrection' continued to pile on. Jesus first revealed Himself to the women at the tomb. Then, on His way to meet the disciples in Galilee, He found an opportune time to reveal Himself to two more people as they were traveling to the town of Emmaus.

HIS STORY

Luke 24:13-24

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

JESUS ENCOUNTERED TWO DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

How often has our sorrow and confusion blinded us to the presence of Jesus? That's what happened to two travelers on the day Jesus was raised from the dead.

Luke highlighted two travelers having a heated discussion about the events of the weekend—the arrest, trial, sentencing, and death of Jesus (v. 20). Jesus' crucifixion had shattered their dreams. And then, Jesus appeared.



HEARTS ON FIRE
All Scripture points
to Jesus.



JESUS SENDS
The disciples witness the
risen Christ and receive
the peace He brings.

Luke 24:25-27

25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

JESUS EXPLAINED HOW ALL SCRIPTURE POINTS TO HIM

Jesus expressed disappointment that the two disciples failed to understand what the Scriptures said. The combination of “foolish” and “slow” suggests they were slow to accept by faith what the Scriptures taught about the Messiah.

The reference to Moses and other prophets referred to the Hebrew Bible—what Christians today refer to as the Old Testament. In Jesus’ day, the Old Testament was read as a story in search of a conclusion. The Jewish people in Jesus’ day were waiting for the last chapter in their story to begin. Essentially, Jesus said to Cleopas and the other disciple, “I am the one who brings the story to its completion. I am the focus of all the Scriptures.”

JESUS MADE KNOWN HIS IDENTITY

Imagine the men’s surprise when they discovered that the One whose explanation of Scripture set their hearts ablaze turned out to be their risen King! The text explains that the followers’ eyes were opened, and Jesus’ identity was made known to them. But as suddenly as Jesus’ identity was revealed, He vanished from their sight. Why did Jesus disappear when the two disciples finally recognized Him? It is likely that His disappearance created the opportunity for a meeting with the Eleven and the other disciples (Luke 24:36-49). His disappearance caused the two to return to Jerusalem and report what happened (vv. 33-35), setting the stage for Jesus’ dramatic appearance to them in the next to last scene of Luke’s Gospel.

- **What do you think the men meant when they said that their hearts were burning while they walked with Jesus?**
 - **Why do you think Jesus made Himself known to them in this way? How would you respond if you were with these two men?**
-
-



OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas' doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.



FOLLOW ME
Jesus' forgiveness and the call of every Christian.

Luke 24:28-35

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Illumination of Scripture

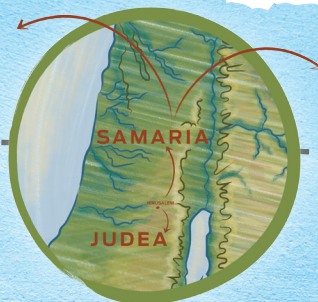
Because of the vast difference between God's wisdom and ours, and because of humanity's sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the meaning of God's Word, Christians do not ultimately rely upon human reason in the process of interpretation, and we do not rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian's ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (Matt. 13:13-15; Mark 8:18).

CHRIST CONNECTION

On the road to Emmaus, the risen Jesus explained how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed forward to His suffering and glory. Like the disciples, we read the whole Bible in light of Christ's death and resurrection, focusing our attention on the gospel that lies at the heart of God's written Word to us.



AS YOU GO...
Fulfilling the Great Commission wherever we are in life.



THE ASCENSION
Jesus promises to send His Spirit.

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 does God allow us to endure times of sorrow and confusion? How does it affect us to know that He is with us, even if He seems hidden or disguised?**

- ▶ **How has God used His Word and His people to remind you of Jesus' presence when you have faced distressing situations?**

- ▶ **Consider some of the famous stories in the Old Testament. In what ways do they point to Christ? Why is it important to see Bible stories in their relation to Christ?**

- ▶ **How does this story highlight the importance of personal devotion time in the Word?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

The mission God has given to us is not to present the Bible as a book of virtues or as a moral improvement program. Our mission is to introduce people to the risen King who came to redeem, restore, and reconcile people to God. When Jesus makes Himself known to us, He makes God known to us. As John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

- Why is it important to not primarily see the Bible as a big book of good behaviors we should live by, but instead as God’s story of saving humanity through His Son?
- If Jesus makes God known to us, and if the Bible is the best means to learn about Jesus and His teaching, then what is ultimately at stake if we neglect the Scriptures?



HEART

These disciples rightly captured what happens when we correctly understand the Bible when they said, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). For the disciples and countless Christians over the centuries, understanding the Bible and seeing how all of the stories and events point to Jesus sets our hearts on fire, creating a love and passion for the Word and a hunger for more of it.

- Share about a time when, like the disciples, the Word stirred your heart.
- What are some ways you can cultivate a passion and hunger for God’s Word in your own life?



HANDS

Note how the disciples on the road to Emmaus quickly went to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. An encounter with Jesus is not meant to be kept secret. It leads to mission. When Jesus reveals Himself to us, He expects us to spread His glory and fame through our witness to others.

- Why was it natural for these two disciples to share the news of Jesus’ resurrection?
- What can help our evangelism feel more natural?

08

SESSION EIGHT

Jesus Appeared to the Disciples

SCRIPTURE

John 20:19-23

THE POINT

Just as God the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus also sends us to be on mission.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT

The night of Jesus' arrest, His disciples abandoned Him and scattered. Terrified and overwhelmed with fear, the disciples ran because they thought that would be the only way to save themselves. Our story picks up with a frightened bunch of disciples who were hiding in fear of the Jews and all that had happened, only to be completely amazed when Jesus revealed Himself to them.

HIS STORY

John 20:19

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

JESUS OFFERS HIS PEACE

It had been a devastating weekend for Jesus' disciples. The One they expected to restore the kingdom to Israel had been crucified (Acts 1:6). But on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene announced to them that she had seen Jesus (John 20:18). We pick up with the story as the disciples huddled together in fear.

John's account of this astounding appearance focuses on three statements Jesus made to His disciples. The first was a greeting that recalled Jesus' promise to give them a peace that would overcome their troubled hearts and their fear (John 14:27; 16:33).

What an encouragement for Jesus' followers who are sent into the world on His mission. Through faith in the King who was raised so that we may be right with God, we now have peace with God (Rom. 4:25-5:1). God no longer counts our sins against us. Even in a troubled world where we face suffering and death, God's peace guards our hearts against fear and anxiety.

- **How does the peace of God guard our hearts against fear and anxiety? When have you experienced God's peace even though you were facing the troubles of the world?**
-
-



JESUS SENDS

The disciples witness the risen Christ and receive the peace He brings.



OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas' doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.

John 20:20-21

²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

JESUS SENDS OUT HIS DISCIPLES

Here we have the second statement Jesus made to His disciples. Jesus prepared His disciples for this statement in two ways. First, He showed them His hands and side. The scars on His hands and side were marks of His suffering and His victory. He had overcome death, which was exactly why His disciples were overjoyed when they saw Him.

Second, Jesus repeated His greeting of peace. With this, He offered them this a stunning commission: Just as Jesus was sent by God, Jesus would also send His disciples

out into the world. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus frequently referred to Himself as One sent by God. In alignment with that sending, He sends His followers.

Jesus' words here echo His prayer the night before His death. Jesus prayed a number of things for His disciples, but He also declared that He would send them just as He had been sent (John 17:18). Jesus invites us to participate in the same mission in which He participated. His Father sent Him, and He asks us to go on mission with Him, sending us with His peace, commanding us to love others and speak the truth with grace.

- **How does Jesus' victory over sin and death and His promise of peace encourage you as you live on mission?**



FOLLOW ME

Jesus' forgiveness and the call of every Christian.



AS YOU GO...

Fulfilling the Great Commission wherever we are in life.

John 20:22-23

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

JESUS GIVES HIS SPIRIT

The mission Jesus gave to His followers is not doable without help. The night before Jesus was crucified, He promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to guide and help them on their mission (John 14:15-17,25-26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15). With His third statement after the resurrection, Jesus made good on that promise.

At first, the timing seems confusing. It appears that Jesus gave His disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of His resurrection. Yet, about forty days after His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). This gift came on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, enabling the disciples to carry out the mission they had been given (Acts 2:1-47).

The key to understanding verse 23 is the detail that Jesus "breathed on them." This is most likely some sort of symbolic action. D. A. Carson suggests that the exhaling and command to receive the Spirit "are best understood as a kind of acted parable pointing forward to the full endowment still to come (though in the past for John's readers)."¹

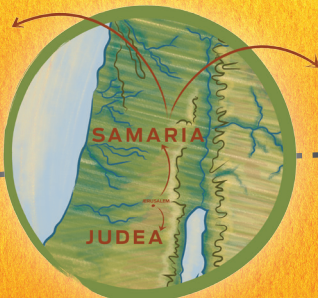
CHRIST CONNECTION

The Bible portrays God the Father sending His Son, God the Son sending His people to the world, and the Father and Son sending the Spirit to empower us for mission. As Christians, we are a sent people who are being formed in the image of our Sending God and our suffering Savior.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God in Three Persons

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



THE ASCENSION
Jesus promises to send His Spirit.



**Bonus Session*

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.

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 important for people to experience the peace that only God can bring?**
- ▶ **Why is it important to remember that, as Christ's ambassadors, we are on a mission of offering peace?**
- ▶ **What are some steps a believer can take in order to live as a disciple who is sent on God's mission by Jesus?**
- ▶ **What adjustments might your church consider making to be more focused on God's mission?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

The gift of the Spirit is linked closely with forgiveness for sins. Forgiveness is a great blessing of the gospel that the Spirit empowers us to proclaim. But what exactly is the forgiveness of sins? It is God's act of blotting out our sins and not counting our trespasses against us (Acts 3:19). The basis for this forgiveness is Jesus' shed blood and sacrifice on the cross. Jesus' death makes it possible for God to satisfy His love and the demands of His justice.

- What roles does the Spirit play in the life of a Christian?
- If the Spirit is vital to the life of a believer, what are some ways we can express more of our dependence upon Him?



HEART

The peace Jesus promised to His disciples is rooted in the Old Testament and comes from the Hebrew term *shalom*. It means much more than the absence of conflict. Instead, it refers to a condition of prosperity, welfare, completeness, and wholeness. In essence, it is a state of everything being right, just as God intended it to be. It is a peace that the world is incapable of giving—one only that can be given by God Himself.

- Share about a specific time when you felt overwhelmed with the peace of Christ.
- How does knowing God's peace strengthen your faith in Him?



HANDS

It's always worth reminding each other that we, as Christians, are a sent people who are being formed in the image of our sending God and our suffering Savior. This information should lead us to represent Jesus in His mission—as we go to the people in our schools, communities, and all other networks of relationships—to proclaim the gospel of peace.

- Why do you think Christians don't see themselves as being ambassadors for Christ in this world?
- What are some common distractions in life that may cause us to neglect our mission? How can we overcome these distractions?

1. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 655.

09

SESSION NINE

Thomas Doubted

SCRIPTURE

John 20:24-29

THE POINT

Faith is the assurance of our hope and the proof of what we cannot see.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Thomas:** one of Jesus' disciples who wasn't with the other disciples during Jesus' first appearance; needed to see Jesus for himself in order to believe in the resurrection

PLOT

Have you ever doubted your Christian beliefs? Have you ever had questions that needed answering? Have you wondered whether or not your beliefs have any evidence or reasons to support them? If so, then you're certainly not alone. Many people experience doubt, and it isn't something to feel shame over. The disciple Thomas expressed doubts and wanted to consider the evidence. Instead of a harsh rebuke, Jesus graciously responded to Thomas and addressed his doubts.

HIS STORY

John 20:24-25

*24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.
25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."*

THOMAS DOUBTED JESUS' RESURRECTION

For some undisclosed reason, Thomas was not present when the risen King appeared to His disciples on the day He was raised from the dead. When the other disciples claimed that they had seen the Lord, Thomas remained unconvinced and established a condition for belief. The condition was physical evidence. He needed to see and even touch the wounds of the risen Lord.

Like Thomas, all of us struggle with doubt in one form or another. Even believers in Jesus have moments of doubt. In fact, it has even been noted that there are different kinds of doubts, and that these different types of doubts can vary from person to person.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Faith

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



OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Thomas' doubts are satisfied when he sees and touches the risen Jesus.



FOLLOW ME

Jesus' forgiveness and the call of every Christian.

John 20:26-27

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

THOMAS WITNESSED THE RESURRECTED JESUS

Readers of the Gospel of John will experience a sense of déjà vu here. Jesus had appeared the exact same way a week earlier. The fact that eight days had passed signals that this was the following Sunday, what John would eventually refer to as "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10). Jesus came through locked doors and offered the same greeting of peace, just as He did the previous Sunday. Then, He turned to Thomas and issued a challenge—maybe even a mild rebuke.

The preliminary part of the challenge was for Thomas to handle the evidence, thus seeing for himself that his condition for belief had been met. Jesus' offer provided proof that the "Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

The core part of the challenge Jesus issued to Thomas was this: "Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer." Thomas had been a loyal disciple of Jesus up to that point, but he needed to exercise faith in the crucified and risen King. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see that faith (belief) in Jesus is necessary for receiving God's salvation and gift of eternal life.

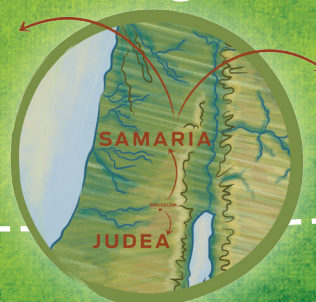
- **Why do you think Jesus singled out Thomas when He appeared to His disciples this second time?**

THOMAS CONFESSED THAT JESUS IS LORD AND GOD

Thomas' response was amazing—it was one of conviction and confession. His confession not only displayed faith in Jesus, the risen King, but also revealed who Jesus Christ is. Notice Thomas' use of the terms "Lord" and "God" so close together. It's important for us to note that in the Old Testament, "Lord" and "God" frequently stand side-by-side with reference to Yahweh. Simply put: Jesus is none other than God Himself!



AS YOU GO...
*Fulfilling the
Great Commission
wherever we are in life.*



THE ASCENSION
*Jesus promises to
send His Spirit.*

John 20:28-29

28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

But how do we understand Jesus' response in verse 29? While Jesus affirmed Thomas' faith, He also seemed to issue a slight rebuke. Or did He?

The second part of Jesus' statement is what we call a beatitude—a statement of blessing. The most famous beatitudes Jesus spoke are recorded in Matthew 5:3-12. But here, after His resurrection, Jesus offered another. Rather than rebuking Thomas, Jesus anticipated a time when He would ascend to heaven and no longer be physically present on the earth. Once that happened, all those who believe would do so without the benefit of having seen their resurrected Lord.

- **We may not physically see Jesus and believe, but we have the evidence recorded in His Word. Which do you think would be easier, to be like Thomas and be able to base your belief off of physical sight? Or to be able to believe without seeing? Explain.**

CHRIST CONNECTION

It's not difficult to see Thomas' qualities in ourselves and others. Most of us will have mild doubts or try to answer our friends' tough questions. As we have learned, our doubts can be intellectual, emotional, or volitional (of the will). Whatever form, doubts cause a level of uncertainty within us that must be addressed.

Thankfully, we serve a Savior who welcomes those who have questions and doubts—One who calls us to believe, not in spite of the evidence, but because of the evidence. Christianity has never been about having a blind faith. Rather, it has always pointed to the historic resurrection of Jesus as grounds for believing. The Christian faith is a genuine faith because the object of our hope is real—Jesus Christ, our risen Savior.



**Bonus Session*

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.



**Beginning Winter 2017-18*

PENTECOST

The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.

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 you think having doubts or asking questions can be a common experience, even for Christians?**
- ▶ **Why is it important to distinguish between different kinds of doubt? How will your response to doubters change, based on the kind of doubt they express?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus' response to Thomas both challenge and comfort those who doubt?**
- ▶ **Who can you turn to with your doubts? Why is it important to have someone you can talk with openly about faith and doubts?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

The words *believe*, *belief*, and *faith* in the New Testament come from the same word. In other words, to believe is to have faith and to have faith is to believe. But what exactly is faith/belief? It might be helpful to think about three aspects to faith. The first aspect is factual; it is agreement with the facts about Jesus and His provision of salvation. However, while faith is not less than mental agreement with the facts, it is more than that. After all, James says that while believing is great, even the demons believe (2:19).

- Why is the factual part of faith important?
- How would you explain to someone that while important, factual faith isn't enough?



HEART

The second aspect of faith is emotional; it is a confidence in Jesus, as well as a love for Him. Of course, faith is more than a feeling. At times, even the strongest feelings of confidence and trust can waver, which is why faith is more than our emotions. However, this internal love and heartfelt confidence in God is part of genuine faith—Christians should not overlook it.

- What is the danger of only paying attention to the emotional side of faith?
- Read Romans 4:18-21. How was Abraham strengthened in his faith?



HANDS

The third aspect of faith is volitional; it is an act of the will. Volitional faith is the decision to depend on Jesus each day, to exercise our belief in Him in all areas of our lives. It is the emotional and volitional aspects of faith that the demons lack. They cannot deny the truth, but they do not love it or willingly submit to it.

- How would you explain or define faith to a friend who didn't grow up in church? What analogies or illustrations would you use to help a child understand biblical faith?
- What can we learn from Jesus' response to Thomas about how to respond to doubters—both those who are already believers in Jesus and those who are not?

10

SESSION TEN

The Call to Follow Him

SCRIPTURE

John 21:1-23

THE POINT

Jesus forgives past failures and offers the opportunity to follow Him once again.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT

In past sessions we have seen Jesus reveal Himself to the disciples after His resurrection. However, we have not seen a discussion about why the disciples abandoned Jesus or denied knowing Him on the night of His arrest. One might expect a conversation about that to take place—maybe one where Jesus expressed personal hurt and feelings of betrayal because of their actions. Instead of adding to their emotional failure and fears, Jesus once again reached out with grace and mercy, recommissioning His disciples for their mission ahead.

HIS STORY

JESUS PROVIDED FOR THE DISCIPLES

In Matthew 4:18-20, Peter and several other disciples left their nets to follow Jesus. In this passage, we find that the disciples had returned to fishing. The Gospel of John did not give a reason for this decision or tell us that this decision was inappropriate. However, it does not seem to be the response we would expect from disciples Jesus had sent on a mission.

Jesus would have a conversation with Peter eventually, but His first priority was to provide breakfast to His disciples. This is a significant act. By feeding them breakfast, Jesus reassured His disciples of His presence, met their physical needs, and served them as He did before He went to the cross.

John 21:1-10

¹After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. ⁹When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."



FOLLOW ME
Jesus' forgiveness
and the call of
every Christian.



AS YOU GO...
Fulfilling the
Great Commission
wherever we are in life.

- How have you experienced the reassuring presence of Jesus in your life? What has Jesus done to remind you that He is with you and cares for your needs?

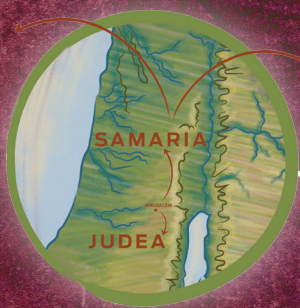
John 21:15-19

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

JESUS CALLED PETER TO FOLLOW HIM

Jesus began by restoring Peter with a "triple commission" to match Peter's "triple denial" (John 18:15-27; 21:15-17). Three times, Jesus asked if Peter loved Him.

Jesus' commission to Peter, His repentant follower, was to care for Jesus' followers as a shepherd cares for his sheep. This was a huge commission. Jesus, the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep (John 10:10-16), entrusted this responsibility to Peter. In essence, Peter would demonstrate his love for Jesus by caring for Jesus' followers.



THE ASCENSION

Jesus promises to send His Spirit.



*Bonus Session

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.

John 21:20-23

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" ²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

JESUS TAUGHT PETER TO NOT FOCUS ON OTHERS, BUT ON HIM

This call to consistent discipleship until his death as a martyr prompted Peter to ask Jesus a question. His question is one we tend to ask when we reflect on the difficulties we face for following and serving our risen King. The question is: "What about him? What about her?" The conversation between Jesus and Peter continued, but this time, Peter asked the question.

Years later, the Apostle Peter wrote about how we can follow Jesus and serve Him even during times of intense suffering. In his first New Testament letter, he challenged believers to follow Jesus' lead and entrust themselves to God, the One who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Imputation

When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed or transferred to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins, but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Through His breakfast encounter with His disciples, Jesus showed the reality of His restorative power. Because He fulfilled God's plan to rescue people from sin, Jesus was able to forgive the disciples of their sins and failures, and then recommission them in their task of following Him.



*Beginning Winter 2017-18

PENTECOST

The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.



COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.

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 has Jesus revealed Himself to you through His power and provision? Think about a situation in which you knew the answers and fulfilled needs could have only come from the Lord.**

- ▶ **What are some ways in which Jesus is a shepherd to His people?**

- ▶ **What are some ways in which we, as Jesus' followers, can "feed His sheep?"**

- ▶ **What kinds of costs must believers be prepared to pay for following Jesus in the world in general and in our specific communities?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



God calls us to demonstrate our love for Jesus by following Him—no matter where the journey leads and no matter what happens to us in comparison to other followers of Jesus. It takes grace to not play the comparison game and to have an eternal perspective when it comes to our momentary sufferings; sufferings that will one day seem incredibly small.

- When have you experienced a sense of competitiveness with your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Why do we find it so easy to question God’s reason for having different plans for different people?


HEART



When it comes to obeying the command to “follow Jesus,” it is safe to say people often focus all their attention on the verb rather than the object of that verb. In other words, we place a lot of attention on the idea of “following” and what that might entail in our lives—the potential discomfort, persecution, hostility, and so on. While those things may be real possibilities in our task of following Him, our primary focus shouldn’t be on the act of following, but on the person we follow—Jesus! We aren’t following an ethical code or philosophical way of life. No, we are following the One who is Life! And when we center our attention on Him and Him alone, we gain a correct perspective on the difficulties of following Jesus.

- How is it possible for believers to focus on following and serving Jesus when the cost is high and the pain is deep?
- Why is it more important for believers to focus on who they follow rather than the command to follow?

HANDS



Our past failures do not have to define the course of our lives. When we turn from our fearful denials of Christ and recommit ourselves to loving Him, He forgives us and recommissions us to the mission on which He has sent us.

- How does Peter’s recommission by Christ encourage you in times of personal unfaithfulness?
- How can we use Peter’s recommission story to encourage someone we know who feels overwhelmed by personal sin and failure?

11

SESSION ELEVEN

The Great Commission

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28:16-20

THE POINT

Jesus calls all of His followers to go and make disciples.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT

Before finally ascending to the Father, Jesus gave His disciples a commission to make disciples of all nations. We know this section of Scripture as the Great Commission. This call—the Great Commission—is one all Christians should take seriously because it contains specific instructions for how we should go about our daily lives as believers.

HIS STORY

Matthew 28:16-18

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

JESUS AFFIRMED THAT ALL AUTHORITY BELONGS TO HIM

The disciples went to Galilee to see the One they had been waiting for, the One they thought they had lost forever. As Jesus predicted, they worshiped when they saw Him. However, verse 17 also says that some of the disciples doubted.

It is not clear whether some of the Eleven doubted or whether a larger crowd followed the disciples to Galilee and some of that

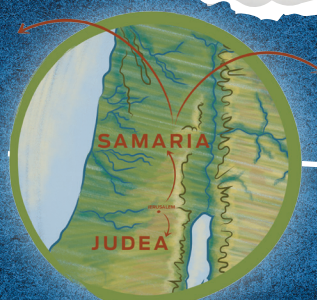
crowd doubted. We cannot be certain of the answer to that question. What is important is for us to see that doubt and hardness of heart were present in that moment.

Jesus wasn't shaken by their unbelief, and He wasn't discouraged. He was focused on the mission He would pass on to His disciples. But before He shared His commission with His disciples, He established the strength behind it—Himself. Jesus received complete authority and power from God the Father.

- **What are some other places in Scripture where we see Jesus possessing divine authority?**



AS YOU GO...
Fulfilling the
Great Commission
wherever we are in life.



THE ASCENSION
Jesus promises to
send His Spirit.

Matt. 28:19

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

JESUS COMMISSIONED HIS DISCIPLES

The disciples were instructed to go (Matt. 28:19). This was not a suggestion. Jesus wasn't telling the disciples that maybe they should go, or they could go if they could squeeze it into their schedules. Jesus used an imperative, a command, an order to be obeyed. Jesus, the risen King, commanded them to go.

For the disciples, going would mean being scattered among the peoples and nations of the world, and for many of us, it means the same. Jesus' call is for a multi-ethnic, cross-cultural focus of missionaries that may require leaving home and the known to travel into foreign lands of the unknown. But the Lord didn't tell us here exactly where to go. He didn't demand that we all leave home; He simply said to go and make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:20

20 "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

JESUS ENCOURAGED HIS DISCIPLES FOR THE MISSION AHEAD

Jesus commanded the disciples to go, to act—preaching the gospel to all nations and baptizing believers in the name of our trinitarian God. But we see in the next verse that this isn't the end of the work.

That's why the Great Commission isn't only about evangelism—it's also about discipleship. God promises to finish the good work He begins (Phil. 1:6), and He instructs us to participate in that work through learning about and obeying Him. Christians are further instructed to disciple the disciple, and as we see in these passages, no one is exempt from teaching others (Matt. 28:20). We are all called to go and disciple believers in Christ.



**Bonus Session*

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.



**Beginning Winter 2017-18*

PENTECOST

The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Mission of the Church

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under Jesus' authority, we make disciples by baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by teaching them everything Christ commanded us. As we go, we trust in the presence of Christ, who promises to be with us on mission.



COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.



COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

The church displays unity and generosity.

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 fears do you have that could keep you from obeying the mission Jesus has given to us?**

- ▶ **How does the reality of Jesus' authority over all of heaven and earth overcome those fears?**

- ▶ **How might we unintentionally downplay the importance of baptism as a part of the Great Commission?**

- ▶ **What are some practical ways you can teach others Jesus' commands and encourage obedience?**

HIS STORY

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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

The disciples were commanded to go and make other disciples. By biblical definition, a disciple is a follower of Jesus, someone who learns from Him in order to live like Him. So, these Jesus-followers were commanded to go and find other people to become Jesus-followers. In other words, even though salvation belongs to the Lord and only He can save, He allows us to play a wonderful part in salvation. We do this by sharing the gospel, through discipleship of new believers, and by equipping them with a Christian worldview.

- How have you experienced discipleship from a mature believer in your own life?
- How can we encourage one another toward making disciples?



HEART

Our temptation not to share with others is often rooted in fear: What should I say? What if they won't accept me? How will I look in their eyes? What if the response is violence? When Jesus is the focus and the message, we can rest from our fear. We don't need to fear human beings because, Jesus instructed: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

- What are some ways we can unintentionally make the message of the gospel about us instead of about Jesus?
- How does Jesus' authority help us when we feel fearful?



HANDS

Like most people, we become busy with life and our own schedules, and our busyness can lead us to forget our ultimate mission. We have a great treasure in the gospel. We have the best and only news this world needs. We also have been given the power to share it by the grace of God through His Holy Spirit, who is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to always be with us. Let's ask God for opportunities to go and make disciples of all nations and pray for our faithfulness and boldness as we share about our risen King—Jesus Christ.

- What places have you gone in order to share the gospel and make disciples?
- How can your group/church work together and support one another in this shared mission to go and make disciples of all nations?

12

SESSION TWELVE

Jesus Ascended

SCRIPTURE

Acts 1:4-14

THE POINT

God's mission can't take place apart from the help of the Holy Spirit.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **The Disciples:** the twelve men Jesus chose to follow Him, take part in His ministry, and share the gospel with others

PLOT

The disciples received instructions on what they should do with all they learned from Jesus—make disciples of all nations. Jesus' commission the disciples was a big task, but it was their new ministry and mission. How would they accomplish something like this on such a massive scale? Would Jesus go with them? Would they still be persecuted? What would they say, and why would anyone listen to them? Whatever questions may have been in their minds, Jesus' last words to them while He was here on Earth would tell them what they needed to know.

HIS STORY

Acts 1:4-5

⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

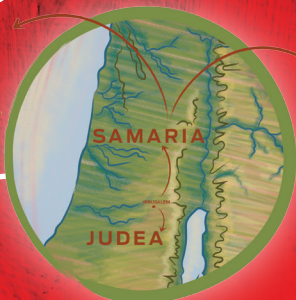
JESUS PROMISED THE DISCIPLES THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Following Jesus’ resurrection and before His ascension into heaven, as Jesus prepared the disciples for their ministry in His name, He ordered them to wait in Jerusalem for the Father’s promise to come (Acts 1:4).

Jesus described to the disciples the Father’s promise in Acts 1:5. He informed them that they would soon receive the gift of the third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit. This was the Father’s remarkable promise—the gift of the Holy Spirit—a baptism that would forever define their identity as the followers of Jesus.

- What is the most difficult part about waiting on God?

- What was so amazing about God’s promise to the disciples in this passage? How does this promise affect you today?



THE ASCENSION
Jesus promises to send His Spirit.



**Bonus Session*

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Moral Influence Theory of Atonement

According to this theory, Christ's sacrifice should be seen as a demonstration of God's love, a display that produces a change of attitude within humanity. This theory falls short of all Christ accomplished on the cross, since it leaves out God's wrath against sinners and His requirement of satisfaction for sin. Still, it does remind us that the cross is the greatest example of God's love, and this love must provoke gratitude and praise on our behalf.

Acts 1:6-8

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

JESUS REMINDED THEM OF THEIR MISSION

The kingdom of God is associated with Jesus Himself. So, the kingdom had been with the disciples and would continue to be with them to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Only God the Father knows the day and time of Jesus' return, when the fullness of the kingdom comes and the restoration of God's people and all of His creation will be complete.

Instead of allowing the disciples to focus on the details of the kingdom, which they couldn't know, Jesus redirected their attention to the task at hand—it was a time for mission. Jesus had laid out the details of His mission for them in Matthew 28: Jesus' disciples are to go and make disciples of all nations. Before He ascended, Jesus expounded on the mission He previously shared.



**Beginning Winter 2017-18*

PENTECOST

The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.



COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.

Acts 1:9-14

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." ¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.

¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

JESUS ASCENDED TO THE FATHER

The fact that the disciples were given the privilege to watch the ascension is one thing, but in God's kindness to them, they were reminded once again that the Father was with them, His promises are true, and Jesus would come again just as He had left. He departed in a cloud, and He will return on the clouds of heaven.

When Jesus was gone from their sight, the disciples traveled to a home, gathered with other men and women, and waited and prayed in unity. They devoted themselves to one another and to prayer over what was about to happen. They were not anxious about the mission given to them because they knew God's promises were true.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus' ascension into heaven is a fulfillment of Psalm 110 and was the sign that God has appointed Jesus as the Lord of the universe. Seated at the right hand of God, Jesus intercedes for His people, gives us access to Father, and fulfills God's original intention to have a human reign over a created world. We wait for Jesus to return to this world in the same manner that He left.



COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

The church displays unity and generosity.



THE FIRST MARTYR

Stephen reflects Jesus in his life and his death.

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 are we prone to overlook our need of God's Spirit in our lives?**
- ▶ **Like the disciples not knowing God's plan or timing regarding the kingdom, how do you handle the mysteries of life (what is God's plan, how is God working, etc.)?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus' response to the disciples in this passage encourage you regarding the unknowns in life?**
- ▶ **How does Jesus' interceding on your behalf encourage you as you face these unknowns?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



The disciples could wait confidently for the promise's fulfillment because God's words are true, pure, and sure. When God says He is going to do something, He will. His promises aren't like our promises. We might make a promise to do something or to be somewhere, but we may break that promise in order to do something else or be somewhere else. Of course, our promises aren't always broken deliberately or out of spite; there are times when our circumstances lead us to break promises previously made. But God isn't governed by circumstances. When He makes a promise, it will be fulfilled.

- How does our perspective of earthly promises impact how we view God's promises?
- What can get in the way of your belief that God will be faithful to His promises?


HEART



When Jesus departed, the disciples didn't try to come up with a plan right away. So often preparation for us looks busy, intense, and maybe even a bit frantic, but not for Jesus' disciples. They waited in anticipation of the Spirit and prayed. Their hearts were settled, and they were unified in their belief, resolve, and love. So they waited, rested, and prayed for what was to come. Jesus gave them the mission, and the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit would work powerfully through them—and us—to accomplish it.

- What are some areas of life where you are tempted to have an unsettled heart and lack of faith in God and His promises?
- How should we respond when faced with such times?

HANDS



Jesus told the disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them—when He baptized them with the Holy Spirit. This isn't just any power, it's power from the third Person of the Trinity—the power of God. This same power brought Jesus out of the tomb alive. The Holy Spirit helps Christians in many ways as they strive for holiness, obedience, and faithfulness to Jesus' mission. One way, as the disciples experienced, was His enabling power to boldly speak and proclaim the gospel.

- What are some examples of the Holy Spirit's power that you have seen in Scripture?
- How does the reality of being empowered by the Holy Spirit impact the way we carry out the Great Commission?

SPECIAL SESSION

A Song of Thanksgiving

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 2:1-6

THE POINT

Christians thank the Lord, sing His praises, and proclaim His greatness in all the earth.

CHARACTERS

- **Isaiah:** prophet of God who wrote the book of Isaiah; prophesied about a future Messiah as a Suffering Servant

PLOT

This session takes a look into the Book of Isaiah, specifically at a recorded song of thanksgiving. This song was inspired by God, and one day, God's people would sing this song to His honor and glory.

HIS STORY

Isaiah 12:1-2

¹You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. ²"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

THANK THE LORD FOR HIS MERCY AND COMFORT

Isaiah's song refers to a "day" that for him was yet to come, but it was not a reference without context. In the first 11 chapters of Isaiah, "day" was used multiple times with positive and negative implications, depending on where you would stand on that day. Imagine you're a child again and your dad is coming home from work. Depending upon your behavior toward your mom that day—respectful obedience or disrespectful rebellion—you know whether your dad's arrival is something to be happily anticipated or dreaded. In a similar way, for the proud enemies of God, the "day" is a day of judgment and humiliation (Isa. 2:5-17). At the same time, for the remnant of the Lord's people, it is a day of preservation and salvation, even a full restoration from exile (Isa. 11:10-16). The Old Testament prophets often called this "the Day of the Lord."

- **How does your view of this song of thanksgiving change, knowing that we have all been under God's wrath?**



**Bonus Session*

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Being grateful for God's salvation leads to public proclamation.



**Beginning Winter 2017-18*

PENTECOST

The Holy Spirit empowers the spread of the gospel.

Isaiah 12:3

³ *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

TAKE JOY TOGETHER IN THE LORD'S PROMISE OF SALVATION

The Lord is the God of mercy and comfort, turning His anger away from sinners and taking them into His arms as beloved children.

We give thanks to the Lord because He does this for individuals—for you and for me—so we will sing of His salvation. But if our singing stops there, if we only confess, “God has become my

salvation,” to ourselves in the mirror, then we are missing out on an inevitable result of God’s salvation—the joyful community of the redeemed.

God, in His justice and loving discipline, promised to remove all of His people’s water sources because of their rebellion and sin (Isa. 3:1). God did this to drive the people to repentance and to find their joy in Him alone rather than in the idols they had created. The rain would return when the people returned to the Lord, not just with sacrifices but with a whole heart set upon obedience to Him. No wonder water was an appropriate metaphor for salvation from the Lord.

PROCLAIM THE GLORY AND GREATNESS OF GOD ALL OVER THE EARTH

The individual gave thanks to God for His salvation in verse 1, but here the saved individuals who have gathered together also encouraged one another to give thanks to God and publicly honor His name. The picture of praise in this chapter flows like this: *I thank the Lord that He has saved me! Hey, you are here with me, so you have been saved too. Thank the Lord that He saved you!* But the praise of God can’t stop there. This salvation from God is so great, gracious, and kind that everyone needs to hear about it, so let’s go tell more people—even those who haven’t heard about our God and His salvation!

- **How does thanking and praising God with other believers encourage us to go to those who do not know God and His salvation?**
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COURAGE OF THE DISCIPLES

John and Peter perform miracles and preach the gospel with boldness.



COMMUNITY OF GENEROSITY

The church displays unity and generosity.

Isaiah 12:4-6

⁴ And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted." ⁵ "Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. ⁶ Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Body of Christ

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representatives here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12:12).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Isaiah looked forward to a day when the blessing of God would once again be experienced by His people and God's glory would be proclaimed in all the earth. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we thank the Lord for His mercy, enjoy His gift of salvation, and commit to spreading the songs of His praise throughout the earth.



THE FIRST MARTYR

Stephen reflects Jesus in both his life and in his death.



THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.

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.

- ▶ **Isaiah used water as a metaphor describing God's salvation. What are some metaphors from our culture that we could use to describe salvation from the Lord?**

- ▶ **How can we make the community of faith a priority in our lives and in the church?**

- ▶ **What should we do when we find that our joy in salvation is decreasing?**

- ▶ **What works of God in your life can you make known among the people of the earth?**

HIS STORY


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

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION


HEAD



“The Day of the Lord” was a day of God’s decisive action in the world. In Isaiah’s immediate context, the “day” addressed the destruction that would come upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Assyria, as well as their attempt to destroy Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Isa. 7:17-25). Truth be told, there have been many “Days of the Lord” in Scripture, but there is also one “Day of the Lord” to end all “Days of the Lord.” The apostle Peter described this ultimate day: the second coming of Christ (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Christians long for that day.

- What are some reasons people may not eagerly look forward to the “Day of the Lord”?
- What do you think are some reasons Christians long for that day?


HEART



The God who pays on our behalf what we rightfully owe is One worthy of our full trust. We never need to be afraid of Him because He Himself takes care of our punishment; all that is left is loving, purposeful comfort and discipline that shape us into His image. We also should not be afraid in our life circumstances because our salvation is found in the God who created and governs all things. He infuses us with His strength and power to do what is right, and He works in our hearts to become the delight of our hearts, that His praise would forever be the song we sing.

- How would you explain the relationship between thanksgiving and praise in your own words?
- What is your favorite song of praise and thanksgiving to sing to the God of your salvation? Why?

HANDS



If we are saved in Christ, it is because others who experienced His salvation decided to go and share about His glorious works. If we want to worship Jesus rightly, then we must go to all the world and share about His glorious works in our own lives (Matt. 28:18-20). According to the pattern of thanksgiving and praise for salvation in Isaiah 12, worship must lead to evangelism.

- How would you explain the connection between worship and evangelism in your own words?
- How can we encourage one another to share the gospel with the nations?