

GOD IS WITH US

MAIN POINT.

Our Savior lowered Himself to save us, which should move us to worship.



CHRIST CONNECTION

The birth of Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament promises concerning the coming Messiah. Jesus was born in humble circumstances to be the sacrificial Lamb and would lay down His life to be our mighty Savior. One day, Jesus will return as our eternal King.





This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Matthew 1; Luke 1-2

THE MESSIAH WAS BORN INTO LOWLY CONDITIONS

LUKE 2:1-7

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

THE MESSIAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

LUKE 2:8-20

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

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our Savior lowered Himself to save us, which should move us to worship.

Leaders: Spend time dwelling on the wonder of this moment in the biblical narrative: God came down. Worship Him with gratitude for bending low to save us from our sin.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

THE MESSIAH WAS BORN INTO LOWLY CONDITIONS

LUKE 2:1-7

“For Luke Christianity was not a new religion. It was not even a revised form of Judaism resulting in a new Israel. On the contrary the Christian church is the present-day expression of the religion of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. It is the religion of the patriarchs and prophets now fulfilled. . . . In essence the early Christian proclamation was that ‘the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets have been fulfilled.’ It was not, Do you want to join a new religion? Thus in Luke we do not find a dichotomy of law, i.e., Judaism and the OT, versus grace, i.e. Christianity and the NT. Rather we see a complementary scheme of promise and fulfillment, a looking forward and an already realized, an expectation and the dawning of the new age.”¹

LUKE 2:7

“Tolbert sees this as theologically appropriate: ‘All the poor, insignificant, forgotten people of the world can gather around the manger and dare to believe that the Babe who lies there really belongs to them.’ This would fit in nicely with Luke’s presentation of a Savior for all people everywhere.”²

THE MESSIAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

LUKE 2:8-11

“Shepherds had bad reputations. The nature of their work meant they could not observe Israel’s ceremonial laws. They were considered unreliable and could not give testimony in the law courts. They were a despised class of people. . . . To these lowly men, the angel gives the highest theology (vv. 10-12). These despised shepherds are the first to receive the announcement of the gospel. This is the only time in the Gospels this phrase is used. It’s the only time we see all the titles of Jesus brought together—Savior, Messiah, Lord. He will save his people from their sins. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised to Israel. And most staggeringly of all, he is Lord. He is God. He is Maker of all. He is Ruler of all. The angels not only give the gospel to the Shepherds; they give the true identity of Christ.”³

CONTEXT

Background: Each Gospel writer had specific purposes and audiences in mind when writing about Jesus's life. Luke, a physician and historian, wrote his Gospel for Gentile believers. Luke wasn't an apostle, but he traveled with Paul and received eye-witness accounts about Jesus's life and ministry (Col. 4:14). In fact, Luke wrote the book of Acts as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. One of Luke's main purposes for compiling these organized accounts was for Theophilus to know the certainty of the knowledge he had received. In other words, Luke wanted to assure him—and all readers—that what he had been taught about Jesus was true (Luke 1:3-4). Luke's consistent theme is that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, suffered, died, and rose again to offer sinners new life—both Jews and Gentiles. Luke also emphasized that the kingdom of God had arrived on earth with Jesus's birth—at least partially. God Himself had “visited and redeemed his people” (1:68). Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to earth, and one day, He will return to bring it fully.

Bethlehem: David's birthplace, also called the “city of David”; prophesied as the Messiah's birthplace (Mic. 5:2); means “house of bread”; breeding place for sacrificial lambs

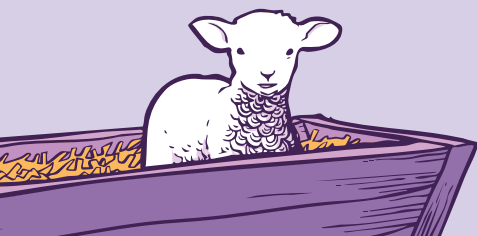
THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God the Son

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humans yet without sin.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, MAY WE NEVER FORGET OR TAKE LIGHTLY THAT YOU CAME DOWN TO SAVE US. YOUR SON DESCENDED FROM A HEAVENLY THRONE TO WALK WITH US AND TO LIVE AMONG US. WE ARE IN AWE OF THE LENGTHS YOU WENT TO FOR OUR SALVATION. THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF YOUR SON, JESUS.





KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Temple lambs used for sacrifices at Passover were born in **Bethlehem**. Shepherds often wrapped them in tight cloths to keep them safe because they wouldn't be eligible for temple use if they had injuries or defects. Piece this together: Jesus, our perfect Lamb, was born in this same town and wrapped in the same cloths, marking Him for death.⁴ How do these details deepen the way you see Jesus's purpose?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

TOO GOOD

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN SOMEONE ACTS LIKE THEY'RE TOO GOOD FOR SOMETHING OR SOMEONE?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER REFUSED TO DO SOMETHING BECAUSE YOU FELT IT WAS BENEATH YOU? WHAT WAS IT?**
- **WHAT'S THE DANGER IN THINKING WE'RE TOO GOOD FOR SOMETHING OR FOR SOMEONE ELSE?**

Many of us consider certain jobs or situations as being beneath us. In other words, these things aren't good enough for us. We can even fall into a trap of treating people as if they're beneath us too. Today, we'll see that Jesus was born into lowly conditions, identifying with all people.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was born as a baby? Why couldn't God just send Jesus here to wipe out sin and death without Him having to be like us—except for remaining sinless, of course? Well, God's plan for our salvation wasn't some superhero movie plot; it was so much better. Our salvation was always God's plan. Sin is like a credit card, constantly racking up debt and requiring payment. For Jesus to act as our faithful high priest and to pay for our sins, He had to be like us in every way (Heb. 2:17). Because Jesus suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help us when we are tempted (Heb. 2:18). The best part? Jesus chose to do this for us. He chose submission to the Father's will to come here—to leave a throne in heaven, to feel hunger and thirst, to feel grief, to experience temptation, to die a painful death. Why? So that He could pay our debt. So that we can be freed from sin. Jesus lived a sinless human life, and He alone was able to become our sacrifice, our substitute. Because He was born like us, Jesus was able to stand in our place.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our Savior lowered Himself to save us, which should move us to worship.

THE MESSIAH WAS BORN INTO LOWLY CONDITIONS

READ LUKE 2:1-7

WHAT COMMON DETAILS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY AREN'T IN THE TEXT? WHY HAVE WE ADDED TO THE STORY?

Many of us gather details of Jesus's birth from movies and plays. Mary often rides a donkey while in labor, and the couple races to find a room at an inn, which is, of course, run by a rude innkeeper. But the text doesn't show Mary in labor as they arrived or anyone refusing to house the family. We don't see an audience of barn animals either. **We do see God use a census to position the family in Bethlehem, fulfilling prophecy (Mic. 5:2).** Jesus was likely born in a cave or small room attached to a home, which housed animals at night. **We don't need to add to Jesus's birth; though simple, His arrival was extraordinary.**



WHAT SURPRISES YOU ABOUT JESUS'S BIRTH? WHY DO YOU THINK GOD CHOSE TO SEND HIS SON IN THIS WAY?

Think about it: The Son of God came to earth. **Instead of making a grand entrance and dazzling the entire world, He came in the silence, in a small town, humbly and lowly.** We might expect Jesus, our King, to come another way—in a palace with all eyes watching—but God the Father chose the specific time and place for Jesus's birth. God's promises pointed to this moment. Jesus could be our substitute and save us from our sin because He was like us in every way; He was human. **Jesus's birth reminds us that He knows us deeply and saves us completely.**



READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9. HOW DO YOU SEE THIS REFLECTED IN JESUS'S BIRTH? WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS MADE HIMSELF POOR FOR US TO BE RICH?

We easily become desensitized to Jesus's birth. We hear the story every year, celebrating it mostly at Christmastime and putting it in the back of our minds for the rest of the year. **Let's not miss this: Jesus lowered Himself for us. He willingly descended from heaven. He willingly stooped down. He willingly became poor, identifying with us in our poverty and in our human struggle against sin and pain. Jesus's birth reminds us that He was like us.** Though Jesus is the King of kings, He was born humbly. All things were created through Jesus (John 1:3), but God the Son entered into creation and wrapped Himself in flesh to dwell with us. Why? To save us from our sin. Even His name means "Yahweh saves!" Jesus was born lowly and humbly, and in exchange, we get to become rich—not in a worldly sense, but in a much better way. Because Jesus lowered Himself and conquered sin and death, we conquer sin and death too when we confess Him as Lord and call on Him for salvation. We are coheirs with Jesus, richer than we can imagine!

THE MESSIAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

READ LUKE 2:8-20



HOW DOES THE ANGEL DESCRIBE JESUS (V. 11)? WHAT DO WE SEE ABOUT HIS PURPOSE?

Savior. Messiah. Lord. The angel's words to the shepherds made Jesus's purpose very clear: Jesus came to save us from our sin. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah—the One from David's line who would rule over God's people forever, fulfilling God's promises (2 Sam. 7:16). **Even at birth, Jesus was Lord over all creation and worthy of worship. The multitude of angels erupted in praise at Jesus's arrival on earth because He already was—and always had been—the King of kings.**

WHAT DOES GOD FIRST ANNOUNCING JESUS'S BIRTH TO SHEPHERDS INSTEAD OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS SHOW ABOUT HIS KINGDOM?

Leaders: Share commentary about shepherds. If people in this time made an ordered list of who should hear first of the Messiah's arrival, the shepherds would've been toward the bottom of the list. Shepherds were generally part of the lower class in society, and because of their work, they weren't a part of important religious groups. **When God chose these shepherds to be the first to hear of the Savior's birth, He revealed something important about His kingdom and about His Son's purpose: God's kingdom is for all people—even the outcast, the poor, the sinner, those the world dismisses.** Jesus, the Messiah, was born to bring salvation for all people.



WHY DO WE EASILY LOSE THE AWE AND WONDER OF JESUS'S BIRTH? HOW CAN WE CELEBRATE IT MORE THAN JUST AT CHRISTMAS?

The more we experience something, the less effect it may have on us, right? We easily lose awe and wonder; the extraordinary becomes ordinary. For example, maybe you were amazed when you saw mountains or the ocean for the first time. But after a while, the scene became ordinary. The excitement faded. We confine celebrating Jesus's birth to Christmastime, and we often focus on presents and parties more than the real reason: **God came down to us to save us.** We let this miracle become ordinary! Now, we aren't designed to live on emotional highs; much of our walk with God is based in discipline, not emotion. But we should continuously express joy and gratitude for Jesus's birth by worshiping Him daily. **The more we seek God and know God through His Word, the more in awe we'll be that Jesus came to us to save us.**

WRAP-UP



THE SHEPHERDS RAN TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS. WHO IN YOUR LIFE NEEDS TO HEAR THE GOSPEL? WHY DO WE OFTEN HESITATE TO SHARE IT?

The shepherds didn't hesitate to act on what the angel told them to do: Go and see Jesus. They didn't wait until morning or for a more convenient time. They left immediately to find Jesus in the manger; then, they ran to tell others what they had seen. We can follow their example. As believers, we're called to share the gospel, to tell others about Jesus. But if we're honest, we make all sorts of excuses for not doing so: We're too busy; we're waiting for a better time; we're not "good" at talking to people; we're scared. We even say things like, "God hasn't called me to do that," but really, we just don't *want* to. And here's the deal: These are all valid feelings.

Sometimes, sharing the gospel is scary. Sometimes, we won't feel like we have the right words. Sometimes, sharing about Jesus won't be convenient. But God can and will work through our weakness. He will guide us in wisdom and use our obedience, even if we only plant a seed for someone else to come along and water (1 Cor. 3:6-9).

MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus is the One we've waited for to restore us and save us.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Simeon praised God when he saw Jesus, recognizing Him as the promise for which Israel had longed. Simeon also prophesied that many would oppose Jesus. Jesus came to His people, but they did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God (John 1:11-12).



EXPECTING WHILE WAITING

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Luke 2:1-40

WAIT EXPECTANTLY FOR JESUS

LUKE 2:25-35

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

WAIT FAITHFULLY SERVING JESUS

LUKE 2:36-40

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus is the One we've waited for to restore us and save us.

Leaders: As you wait for the Lord, position yourself to hear His voice, and expect Him to move.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WAIT EXPECTANTLY FOR JESUS

LUKE 2:25

"This refers to the consolation that would be brought about by the inauguration of the messianic age. Compare Luke 2:26, where this consolation is described as 'seeing the Lord's Christ.' For Luke this referred not to the fulfillment of Jewish political hopes involving deliverance from their enemies and restoration of David's throne but rather to the salvation Jesus brought."⁵

LUKE 2:28-35

"Two chapters into Luke, we know what to expect from Jesus. He is son of his parents and Son of his Father. He is good news, gospel, joy, Savior, Messiah, Lord God, cause of amazement and wonder, one who fulfills every clause of the Law, full-fledged member of the covenant people Israel. He is the source of comfort and consolation for which Israel waited, the promised bringer of salvation, the light giving revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Israel, the fulfillment of God's promised redemption. More ominously, he is the source of falling and rising, the target of sneers and rejection, the revelation of the true thoughts and belief of Israel, the cause of a heart-piercing pain for his mother."⁶

LUKE 2:34-35

"Simeon sees the salvation from the Lord in his arms, and he glimpses Calvary as well. In time, the poor will be lifted up and the wealthy, powerful religious leaders will fall. In time, this child will grow and an entire nation—an entire world!—will have to decide to either follow him or oppose him. Hearts will be revealed. God will see. Condemnation and salvation will come in one Savior sacrificed on a cross."⁷

WAIT FAITHFULLY SERVING JESUS

LUKE 2:37

"[Anna] was a person who plainly knew and loved God. She had developed her spiritual life over many years and was faithful in her devotional life, communing regularly with God in both public and private worship. She was sensitive to the direction of God and lived in expectation of the promised messianic deliverance. Like Simeon, she knew how to praise God and was able to share her faith openly with others, speaking in the Temple to 'all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.'"⁸

CONTEXT

Leviticus 12 helps us understand Mary and Joseph's actions after Jesus's birth. The Mosaic law required all males to be dedicated to the Lord on the eighth day through circumcision, an outward expression of being set apart as God's chosen people. For thirty-three days after the birth of a male, the mother also took part in purification requirements. At the end of the allotted time, the baby would then be presented at the temple, accompanied by the sacrifice of a lamb. In Jesus's case, the sacrifice wasn't a lamb but two turtledoves or two pigeons, indicating that Mary and Joseph weren't wealthy.

Qâvâh: Hebrew word meaning to wait; "to bind together (by twisting), to expect:—gather (together), look, patiently, tarry, wait (for, on, upon)."⁹ The word implies waiting with tension, like a cord pulled tight, stretched in anticipation. This waiting is active, not passive, and is referenced in Isaiah 40:31—a waiting that renews strength rather than draining it.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired people to write the Scriptures and enables people to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts people of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls people to the Savior and gives them new life. At the moment of salvation, He baptizes every believer into the body of Christ.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, HELP US TO WAIT EXPECTANTLY FOR YOU TO MOVE IN OUR LIVES AND IN THE LIVES OF OUR STUDENTS. HELP US TO POSITION OURSELVES TO HEAR YOUR VOICE AND TO FOLLOW YOU IN OBEDIENCE. WE LOOK FORWARD BECAUSE WE HAVE CERTAIN HOPE IN JESUS.

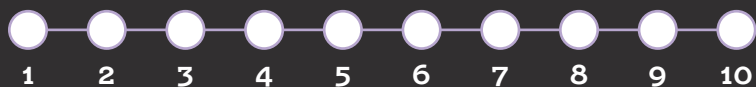




KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How patient are you when waiting for something you really want (1=Hurry this up; 10=I have all day)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

OPEN EYES

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING YOU MISSED BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T PAYING ATTENTION?**
- **WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU WITNESSED THAT OTHERS MISSED BECAUSE YOU HAPPENED TO BE LOOKING AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME?**
- **WHAT ARE SOME THINGS WE MISS OUT ON IF WE AREN'T EXPECTING THEM?**

Sometimes, we miss out on really amazing experiences because we weren't ready; we weren't alert or watchful or paying attention. While this can be disappointing, we can learn something valuable to apply to our walk with God: We will see more of God when we look for Him, when we seek Him, when we expect Him.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

What is hope? We use the word fairly often, even casually. We hope school gets canceled on a snow day. We hope to pass our math test. We hope someone asks us to a school dance. We hope our future turns out okay. When we express our hopes, we leave some wiggle room for disappointment. We hope for what we want, but many of us don't fully allow ourselves to believe it will happen. But hope is a confident expectation, and for believers, hope is certain. We don't have to wonder if we'll be okay; we don't have to wonder if we'll spend eternity with God. Because we have hope that is certain in Jesus. We don't have to leave wiggle room for the possibility of hope failing us. We don't have to protect ourselves from disappointment. Jesus is our living Hope (1 Pet. 1:3). He lived, died, and rose again exactly as He said He would. We can trust His promise that He has gone to the Father to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). We can trust God's promise to be with us until we arrive there and to work all things for our good—knowing Him more deeply (Rom. 8:28). Our minds and hearts can rest because our hope is secure.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus is the One we've waited for to restore us and save us.

WAIT EXPECTANTLY FOR JESUS

READ LUKE 2:25-35



HOW DOES IT FEEL TO RECEIVE OR SEE SOMETHING YOU'VE WAITED FOR?

Maybe you waited for a visit from a friend who moved away. Maybe you waited for the day you could get your driver's license or for a championship game. When the time finally came, you were overcome with joy, gratitude, and excitement. When we wait for something—when we long for it—we feel more excitement when it happens.

Expectancy makes us more aware. We look for the thing that's coming. In our walk with God, we can wait and look for Him with expectancy too. We can expect Him to show up, to move, to speak. And we'll be filled with joy, gratitude, and excitement when He does.



HOW DID SIMEON RECOGNIZE JESUS SO EASILY? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN OUR LIVES?

The Holy Spirit had not yet come because Jesus had not ascended to heaven, but the Spirit did come to certain people for specific times and purposes (Ex. David). The Holy Spirit was on Simeon (v. 25). He sought God and positioned himself to hear God's voice, and he believed what God said: He wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah. The Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple to see Jesus, and he obeyed because he believed! **Without the leading of the Spirit, Simeon wouldn't have encountered Jesus, and neither will we. He leads us now—drawing us to Jesus, convicting us of sin, showing us truth, and guiding us in wisdom.**



HOW CAN WE BE MORE *EXPECTANT* FOR JESUS IN OUR DAILY LIVES? WHY DON'T WE LONG TO "SEE" HIM THE WAY SIMEON DID?

Simeon expected to see the Messiah because he believed God. **He believed God because he knew God.** Imagine if Simeon didn't know God. He may have disregarded God's promise. He may have forgotten it because he was too busy or distracted by the world. He may have doubted if he heard God's voice correctly. Imagine if he simply didn't believe. **Maybe we don't long for or expect to see Jesus because we don't believe God; we don't believe God because we haven't invested time to know Him.** Because if we know Him—really know Him—we'll believe Him. **When we spend time with God by daily reading our Bibles, praying, and worshiping, we live more expectantly. Why? We position ourselves to know God more intimately.** He speaks to us through His Word and His Spirit dwelling within us, which are always in agreement, never contradicting one another. He leads us and prompts us. We begin to expect Him, to be more aware of His presence. We get to know God. Knowing Him helps us to believe His promises, remembering every one because we aren't too busy or distracted by other voices. We're able to dispel doubt because we recognize God's voice with certainty. Imagine simply believing God because you know Him. Imagine all you'd see.

WAIT FAITHFULLY SERVING JESUS

READ LUKE 2:36-40

WHAT ARE WAYS WE WASTE TIME INSTEAD OF USING IT WISELY? WHY DO WE DO THIS?

Let's all be honest: Wasting time is a temptation because it's so easy to do. God commanded us to make the most of our time (Eph. 5:16), but many of us waste time because it takes less effort. We numb out by scrolling social media, playing video games, watching television, and so on. **Rather than looking for ways to serve God and others, we serve ourselves. We give in to the desire to be lazy and call it de-stressing. We justify wasting time in the name of self-care. Before we know it, we miss opportunities to grow closer to Jesus and to help others grow closer to Him.** Sure, we must listen to our bodies and know when to rest because God designed us with the need to pause. But we must do so without using it as an excuse. We can honor God's command to rest while also paying attention to how we live and spending our time wisely (Eph. 5:15).



WHY DO YOU THINK ANNA SPENT SO MUCH OF HER LIFE AT THE TEMPLE?

Scholars believe Anna was either eighty-four years old or well over a hundred years old. Either way, Anna lived for many years as a widow after only seven years of marriage. Think about how she could've lived her days—bitterly, grief-ridden, angrily accusing God of ruining her plans. Anna took a different path; she devoted her life to God's work. As a prophetess, Anna remained closely connected to God to hear His voice. **Her public and private lives were centered on the Lord; her service was an overflow of seeking God privately.** Like us, Anna had a choice: What would she spend her life on? She chose to spend every minute wisely. Why? **Anna's hope was in a coming redemption, not in earthly comforts. She believed, and her belief dictated her days.**

HOW DOES ANNA'S REACTION TO SEEING JESUS COMPARE TO OUR REACTION TO GETTING TO KNOW JESUS?

Anna arrived as Simeon encountered Jesus, and she instantly knew He was the promised Messiah. In response, she told everyone who had also been looking forward to His coming. The Jews had been waiting, longing, and hoping for freedom from Roman rule. But Jesus would bring a much greater freedom—freedom from sin and death! **As believers, we've experienced this freedom; we get to know Jesus! Like Anna, we should joyfully and boldly share the gospel with others.**

WRAP-UP



WHAT DID BOTH SIMEON AND ANNA DO WITH THEIR WAITING? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW YOU ABOUT HOW TO WAIT FOR THE LORD?

We don't know when the Holy Spirit revealed the promise to Simeon, so we don't know how long he waited to see it fulfilled. But we *do* know that Simeon spent his days knowing God. Simeon was devout, committed, righteous, and "looking forward" to the promise. He was watchful. Anna worshiped and served while she waited. She committed all of her days to the Lord instead of wasting them on bitterness and self-pity. And for both Simeon and Anna, the waiting was worth it. Their waiting wasn't wasted, and it wasn't passive. They waited actively. Maybe you're waiting on one of God's promises. Sometimes, God's good promises feel far away, and we allow discouragement or apathy to settle into our hearts and minds. **But if we will wait with purpose—if we will seek to know, worship, and serve God and to look forward—then we won't miss Him when He moves and speaks and leads us.** He promises that we'll find Him when we seek Him with all our heart (Jer. 29:13). **Waiting isn't wasted time; it is precious time to grow in our faith.**

WE SAW HIS STAK

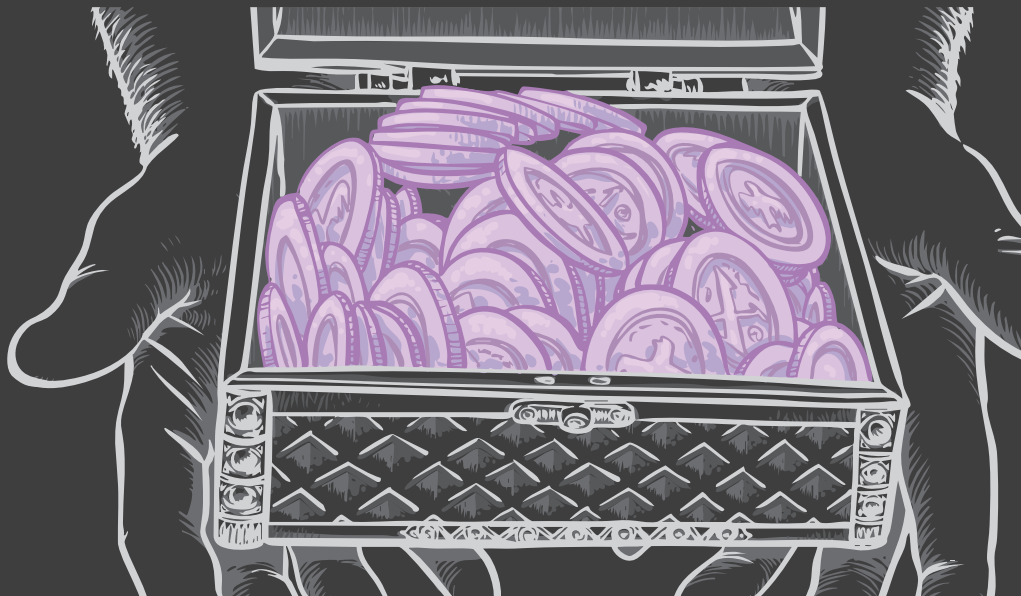
MAIN POINT.

Knowing Jesus as King compels us to surrender all to Him.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus was born to be our great Shepherd. When the wise men came before Jesus, they worshiped Him and offered Him gifts fit for a king. Jesus, even as a baby, was the King of kings and the Lord of all creation. One day, He will return to rule His eternal kingdom.



RESPONDING WITH WORSHIP

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Matthew 2

WE'RE CALLED TO RESPOND TO THE SAVIOR

MATTHEW 2:1-8

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

WE'RE CALLED TO BRING OUR GIFTS TO THE SAVIOR

MATTHEW 2:9-12

9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Knowing Jesus as King compels us to surrender all to Him.

Leaders: Consider how to bring your best before King Jesus as you prepare to teach this week.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WE'RE CALLED TO RESPOND TO THE SAVIOR

MATTHEW 2:1-2

"The Magi's question to Herod emphasizes the word 'born.' The grammatical construction makes it clear that they ask about who the child is who has legitimate claim to Israel's throne by virtue of his birth. Herod is thus viewed as a usurper to the throne. A new star in the sky was often believed to herald the birth of a significant person in the land over which the star shone. So the Magi's question is a natural inference from their observation."¹⁰

MATTHEW 2:4-6

"Chief priests: Representing Jewish worship. Despite God's purposes in appointing priests, these religious leaders had essentially become a group of corrupt, religiously oriented politicians at the time of Jesus birth.

Scribes: Representing Jewish law. The scribes were basically lawyers who knew, taught, and interpreted the Jewish law (both Old Testament law and the traditions that had developed around this law), which is frightening given the way we see them opposed to Jesus throughout His ministry. . . .

When Herod inquired of these Jewish religious leaders as to where the Messiah was to be born, they quoted from the Old Testament, revealing that He would be born in Bethlehem. What is startling is that these men who knew of the Messiah's birthplace did absolutely nothing about it. Again, it is a dangerous thing to know the Word and fail to respond. These religious leaders were indifferent to Jesus, and this indifference and apathy soon developed into outright opposition."¹¹

WE'RE CALLED TO BRING OUR GIFTS TO THE SAVIOR

MATTHEW 2:12

"In the Ancient Near Eastern world, dreams had great significance. In some cases, they provided information about the future and were used to show the dreamer the right decision to make. The dreams of common people were important to them, but the dreams of kings and holy men or women were important on a national or international scale. As Matthew's narrative shows, God used dreams as a vehicle of revelation in the birth and early days of Jesus."¹²

CONTEXT

Background: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are Synoptic Gospels, meaning all three accounts follow a shared chronology and can be seen together. In general, the three Gospels offer a similar point of view of Jesus's life and ministry. These Gospels also contain Jesus's parables, while John's Gospel does not. Though Matthew is technically anonymous, early church tradition credited the apostle Matthew. The author wrote mostly to Jewish Christians in an effort to show how Jesus perfectly fulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Opening with a detailed genealogy, Matthew traced Jesus's lineage to David and Abraham, a requirement for the Messiah. He focused on revealing Jesus as the better Moses—the promised One who lived according to God's law and showed us how to as well. This Gospel was Matthew's way of saying, "Jesus is the One, the King, we've waited for!"

Shekinah: Hebrew term, not used in the Bible, meaning "that which dwells."¹³ It is used to describe God's glory, or visible "side of God which humans recognize and to which humans respond in confession, worship, and praise."¹⁴ Shekinah glory is often associated with God's manifestation through natural elements, like light, fire, or clouds.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Stewardship

God's intention is for us to serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matt. 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have and that our true treasure is found in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Prov. 3:9), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), sacrificially (Matt. 12:41-44), humbly (Matt. 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7), praying that God is glorified in our giving of His provisions.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, HELP US TO CONSIDER HOW WE RESPOND TO YOUR SON IN THE WAY WE LIVE EACH DAY. HELP US TO WORSHIP HIM JOYFULLY INSTEAD OF FALLING INTO APATHY. WE WANT TO BRING OUR BEST BEFORE OUR KING.





KICK STARTER

♥ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about being expectant in our relationship with Jesus. How did you look for Him and take steps to be more aware of His presence? Where did you see God working?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

DIFFERENT EYES

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S SOMETHING THAT REALLY EXCITES YOU BUT NOT OTHERS?**
- **WHEN HAS YOUR RESPONSE TO A SITUATION (A GAME'S OUTCOME, A TREND, AN EVENT) BEEN THE OPPOSITE OF SOMEONE ELSE'S RESPONSE?**
- **HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE TO VIEW ONE SITUATION SO DIFFERENTLY?**

Part of what makes us unique is how we see the world. What excites you may not excite someone else. It's sometimes wild to see how people can feel so differently about one situation—or in this week's lesson, one person. Jesus's birth was the best news, but everyone didn't see it that way.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Some of us grew up with a warped view of God. Maybe we didn't go to church or misunderstood Scripture. We may have believed God is harsh, stern, angry, and eager to punish us. And believing this way leads to a distorted view of God. Let's get honest: If this is our view of God, then we'll see Him as a threat—a threat to our fun, to our passions, to our lives. In response, we'll run; we'll hold back because we fear surrendering to Him. We'll fear what He'll take or how He'll change us. We need to reorient our understanding and look to Jesus to show us God's character—because He is God. God loves us. He sent His Son to save us. He gives us good gifts. He is compassionate and slow to anger. We don't have to fear surrender or that God will take away everything we love. God will use our surrender and transform our hearts to love what is good and holy. When we fully surrender and loosen our grip, God exchanges our offerings for peace and joy. He gives us meaningful, abundant life (John 10:10)! We have nothing to fear.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Knowing Jesus as King compels us to surrender all to Him.

WE'RE CALLED TO RESPOND TO THE SAVIOR

READ MATTHEW 2:1-8

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU'VE TRAVELED A LONG WAY TO SEE OR DO?

Some of us went a long way to see our favorite band or our favorite team play. We traveled many hours to see a shoreline or a historical site or to ride an attraction. **We make an effort for the things and people we care about.** The wise men did too. God used a star to announce Jesus's arrival and to illuminate His location. The wise men (we aren't sure how many) traveled a long way to see the King, whose birth altered the starry sky. They saw; they responded. **We're called to respond to Jesus as well, and this often requires great effort. God may lead you to go and do something small or spectacular, but you can know that seeing Jesus is worth every effort.**



WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE SHOW US ABOUT WHY JESUS CAME AND WHAT HE'D BE LIKE? READ PSALM 23. WHAT CONNECTIONS DO YOU SEE?

Jesus was born the King of kings. This passage shows us what kind of king He is: Like His ancestor David, also a shepherd, Jesus would shepherd God's people (v. 6). **Shepherds care for their sheep, not from a distance, but by living among them. They keep watch at night to ensure their safety; they guide them to water and rest.** David's psalm captures the way Jesus rules His people, prophesied long before Jesus was born (Mic. 5:2-4). Jesus still rules in this way; His Spirit leads us on the right paths, giving us all we need. He is our Good Shepherd (John 10:11).



BREAK DOWN HOW HEROD, THE CHIEF PRIESTS, AND THE WISE MEN EACH RESPONDED TO JESUS'S BIRTH. HOW DO OUR LIVES REFLECT OUR *RESPONSE* TO JESUS?

Threatened, hardened, determined: three responses to one situation. The promised Savior was born! Why wouldn't everyone celebrate this moment? Herod held the title, "king of the Jews," and he put to death others who threatened his position—including some of his own children! He wasn't born into this position; Rome bestowed it. So, hearing foreigners refer to a child "born king of the Jews" sent Herod into self-preservation. The chief priests knew where the Messiah would be born (Mic. 5:2), but instead of rushing to see the promise fulfilled, they shrugged their shoulders in apathy. They had knowledge without devotion. The wise men were awake; their eyes were open, and they rushed to see Jesus. The long and dangerous journey to Jerusalem, likely from Persia, required their time, but finding the new King was priority. What is our response? **Are we threatened by Jesus's presence because elevating Him as King over our lives strips us of control? Are we hardened to truth, numb because we're busy and distracted, mistaking knowledge for devotion? Or are we awake—watching, seeking, rushing to be near Jesus?**

WE'RE CALLED TO BRING OUR GIFTS TO THE SAVIOR

READ MATTHEW 2:9-12

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT THE STAR WAS MORE THAN A NATURAL PHENOMENON? HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN IT?

This star wasn't just a natural occurrence but a supernatural one (Num. 24:17). The star appeared and led the wise men "until it came to rest" above Jesus's home (v. 9). This isn't coincidence; scientific theories can't explain it away. It moved and hovered over a precise home. Was this a literal star or some version of God's shekinah glory (see Context)? We can't know for sure. **But we can know with certainty that God is Lord of all creation, and He used it to guide the wise men to His Son.**



WHAT DID THE WISE MEN DO WHEN THEY SAW JESUS? HOW CAN WE FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE NOW?

The wise men followed the star in the sky for one purpose: to worship Jesus. They made great efforts to find the One for whom the star appeared. And when they came into Jesus's presence, they fell to their knees in worship, laying their very best gifts at His feet—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In ancient culture, gold was connected with royalty; frankincense was used in royal processions and in offerings to God; and myrrh was used to prepare bodies for burial. Whether or not the wise men knew all of this, we don't know, but they did bring the very best their land had to offer. We can imitate these men. **Our posture before Jesus should always be one of worship; we bow our hearts—our lives—before Him because He is worthy of our entire selves. He is worthy of all our worship, of all we can offer—our love, our devotion, our praise, our adoration.**



WHY DO WE SOMETIMES WITHHOLD OUR BEST (OUR GIFTS, TALENTS, TIME) FROM GOD? HOW CAN WE OFFER THEM IN WORSHIP INSTEAD?

Many of us are selfish with our talents, passions, and priorities. **We use them for our own benefit or enjoyment and give God what's left.** For example, you may spend the bulk of your time studying or practicing a sport and leave very little time for prayer or reading your Bible. Maybe you play an instrument but use your talent only for personal gain. Offering it in worship might look like playing in a worship service or teaching someone else to play. **God didn't give us good gifts for us to hoard. Instead of clinging tightly to our talents, passions, and time, we can offer them in worship to Him.**

WRAP-UP



IN WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE ARE YOU NOT GIVING GOD YOUR BEST? HOW CAN YOU?

Giving God our best is an ongoing struggle for believers. We surrender our lives to the Lord; we confess and repent of our sin. But then, we still have to live in this world. We still struggle against our sinful desires, like selfishness, vanity, pride, and worldly approval. At times, our desires for these things cause us to reserve some of our heart, mind, time, affection, and so on for ourselves. We attempt to give the Lord our entire self while clinging tightly to certain parts. But Jesus is worthy of it all. Maybe the area you struggle most with is your time: You choose sleep over prayer and reading the Word; you choose to scroll social media or play video games for hours but neglect building godly community in your local church or group; you dedicate all of your attention to your physical looks but neglect your heart. **When we encounter Jesus, we have a choice to respond either in surrender or in defiance. When we surrender all to Him—even what we love most—the result is joy (v. 10). Why? Because salvation in Him—knowing Him—is better.**

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

MAIN POINT.

We grow in our faith by following Jesus's example.



CHRIST CONNECTION

As Jesus grew, He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with people. Each step of His life prepared Him for the eternal mission His Father had given Him: to live a life of complete obedience, to die on the cross for our sins, and to rise again in victory.



BREAD AND PRESENCE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Luke 2:39-52

PRIORITIZE GOD'S WORD

LUKE 2:39-47

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

SPEND TIME IN GOD'S PRESENCE

LUKE 2:48-52

48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We grow in our faith by following Jesus's example.

Leaders: Consider listening to the song, "The Air I Breathe." Spend time assessing if the Word is your daily bread (Deut. 8:3) and if His holy presence is the air you breathe, guiding you in all things (John 14:26).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

PRIORITIZE GOD'S WORD

LUKE 2:41-47

"Pious parents attended the Passover each year in Jerusalem, again fulfilling God's expectations (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:23-24; Deut. 16:16). Each year the growing Jesus learned more about the history and worship of God and God's people (Ex. 12-13). The twelfth appearance proved special. Next year he would officially enter the community of Jewish men. At the temple he showed he was more than ready. His earthly growth was preparing him for heavenly mission."¹⁵

SPEND TIME IN GOD'S PRESENCE

LUKE 2:48-49

"My Father's house? The learned doctors knew the Old Testament inside out. In all the long biblical record, not even Moses who had built the tabernacle, not David who had longed to build the temple, nor Solomon who had actually built it, no prophet, no king or commoner, not the most exalted of them, had ever referred to the tabernacle or temple as 'my Father's house.' The child was conscious of a relationship with God that none had conceived of, let alone expressed, before. And with that relationship, a compelling devotion: 'I had to be in my Father's house.'"¹⁶

LUKE 2:48-51

"Long before Jesus began his public ministry, Luke revealed that he was aware of his unique relationship to God. Already at the age of twelve he knew that he was God's Son and that he possessed a unique calling. He demonstrated a higher allegiance to his divine sonship than to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:49), although because he kept the law he would be obedient to them (2:51)."¹⁷

LUKE 2:51

"Mary does what Luke wants his readers to do as well. It is good to pause and contemplate who Jesus is and the mission he performs. Even two thousand years of history does not do away with the need for such reflection."¹⁸

CONTEXT

This passage is the only recorded account of Jesus's childhood in Scripture. Some scholars argue that a cumulative outside source existed (called Q, or Quelle, meaning "source"), which documented Jesus's life and ministry.¹⁹ If Q did exist, then the Gospels' writers made choices about which accounts to pull into their specific Gospels, especially as they considered their audience and purpose. Regardless of whether Q existed or not, after much research (Luke 1:1-4), Luke chose to include this account of Jesus staying behind in Jerusalem. Why? We must remember Luke's purpose: He wanted to provide an orderly account of the gospel so believers could know with certainty that it was truth—that Jesus was the Messiah, who came to offer salvation to all people. This account of twelve-year-old Jesus further proved His identity as the Son of God. Even as a child, Jesus was aware of His relationship to the Father and was committed to His mission: saving the lost.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Jesus's Humanity

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, HELP US TO BE MORE INTENTIONAL IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU. HELP US TO SPEND QUALITY TIME IN YOUR WORD. GUIDE US WITH YOUR SPIRIT SO THAT WE CAN GROW IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR WORD—IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF WHO YOU ARE.





KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The longest time on record for someone **surviving at sea** is 438 days! A fisherman, Salvador Alvarenga, set sail from Mexico and encountered a five-day storm that damaged his engine and equipment. He drifted over 6,700 miles, eventually jumping from his boat when he spotted land!²⁰

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

WHEN I GET OLDER

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO BE OR DO WHEN YOU GET OLDER?**
- **HAS IT CHANGED OVER THE YEARS? IF SO, HOW?**
- **WOULD YOU RATHER HAVE SOMEONE MAKE THIS CHOICE FOR YOU OR CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF? EXPLAIN.**

Most of us dream of what we want to be when we get older. As kids, we may want to be police officers, teachers, or singers. Sometimes, our dreams change drastically as we mature. Even as a young boy, Jesus knew His purpose, and He dedicated Himself to growing and preparing for it, as we'll see in today's lesson.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

How would you answer this question: "What can you not live without?" You may say you can't live without your family, your friends, your phone, your favorite food, your car. But how many of us would say that we can't live without God's Word? Ouch. The Bible actually teaches that we need it to live (Deut. 8:3), so how are so many of us living without it each day? Well, the quick answer is that if we try to live a meaningful, abundant life without taking in God's Word each day, we'll starve spiritually. Trying to live for the Lord without ingesting His Word as spiritual food leads to performing, striving, and checking off boxes to feel "good enough." But Jesus showed us a better way. We can't thrive spiritually without spiritual food—God's Word and His presence. Thinking we can get by with what we get from church or youth group is a lie; we need more, daily. The truth is that the enemy, Satan, would love to see us starve. God offers us a feast—His Word and His presence.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We grow in our faith by following Jesus's example.

PRIORITIZE GOD'S WORD

READ LUKE 2:39-47

WHAT PASSION OR HOBBY COULD YOU TALK ABOUT FOR HOURS? WHY DO YOU THINK JESUS WAS DRAWN TO THE TEMPLE AND TO TALKING ABOUT GOD?

Our passions and hobbies excite us; we're drawn to others who share them. **Our passions usually shape our priorities and our relationships.** Jesus was twelve when His parents unknowingly left Him in Jerusalem. Traveling in a huge group was common, so they assumed Jesus was with another family or friends. They found Him at the temple discussing God! The temple wasn't just a building but His Father's house. **Jesus, even as a young boy, was passionate about seeking the Father and longed to be in His house, surrounded by others who loved His Word.**



WHY DO YOU THINK THE TEACHERS WERE SHOCKED (V. 47)? WHERE DID JESUS'S ANSWERS COME FROM?

In Jewish culture, the learning process centered on dialogue. Most children began studying the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) at five years old. Teachers asked thought-provoking questions, and if a student understood the concept, he asked a question in return. Deep learning happened through questioning. **At twelve years old, Jesus had incredible knowledge of Scripture. But don't mistake this: Jesus wasn't knowledgeable simply because He was the Son of God but because He had grown in wisdom by studying and asking questions.** Because He loved the Father, Jesus dedicated Himself to the Word.

WHAT EXCUSES DO WE GIVE FOR NOT PRIORITIZING TIME IN GOD'S WORD? WHY DO WE NEED TO READ IT CONSISTENTLY?

Let this sink in: Jesus—the Word of God (John 1:1), the living gospel message—studied Scripture. In a way we struggle to comprehend, Jesus was both fully God and fully man. He learned and grew in His knowledge of the Word. **Yet, we accept a lie that we'll be okay not reading God's Word consistently. We're satisfied with a very basic understanding of Scripture instead of longing to know more. We're apathetic instead of devoted.** Why? If our passions shape our priorities, then our passion may not be to know the Lord more deeply. Instead, we're passionate about our self-image, popularity, sports, music, trends, video games. These aren't sinful—unless they dictate our priorities and become “gods,” demanding our attention and devotion. Our ability to study, question, and focus is like a muscle that needs worked. But for many of us, this muscle has atrophied due to non-use. We have answers at our fingertips; a quick search online gives us what we're looking for. We need God's Word—more than anything else we prioritize. The effort we make to engage with it matters. **The Word shows us God's character, how to live, how to love others. The Word is our daily bread, and as believers, we'll starve spiritually without it.**

SPEND TIME IN GOD'S PRESENCE

READ LUKE 2:48-52



WHAT DO YOU THINK OF JESUS'S REACTION TO MARY'S QUESTION (VV. 48-49)? WHAT DID JESUS KNOW?

Mary and Joseph anxiously searched for Jesus, and like most parents would do, they reprimanded Him. Some people read Jesus's response as disrespectful, but let's reframe it. Consider that an angel visited Mary and Joseph, telling them who their Son would be: the Messiah, the One to save people from sin (Matt. 1:20-21; Luke 1:28-33). Then after His birth, two people made similar declarations in the temple (Luke 2:25-38). Still, they were surprised to find Jesus in the temple. **Essentially, Jesus asked, "Don't you remember who I am? Whose I am?"** At Jesus's age, boys had chosen their future profession or business. Jesus explained that it was necessary for Him to be in God's house, or in some translations, "about my Father's business." **Jesus understood that God was His Father; He understood that He was on mission as God's Son.**



READ PSALM 84:1-2,10. COMPARE THE WRITER'S DESIRE TO JESUS'S DESIRE TO BE IN THE TEMPLE. HOW DOES LOVING GOD FIRST AFFECT OUR DESIRES?

You enjoy being around and are drawn to the people you love. The speaker in Psalm 84 desperately longed to be in God's presence; his heart and body cried out to the Lord. Being in God's presence even for one day was better than being elsewhere. Jesus shared this longing to be near the Father. We long to be so many other places, though. We battle a desire to be near to the world. And truthfully, we forget that God's presence is with us at all times—a gift we take for granted. If we love the Lord, we'll desire to be near Him. **If you don't know where to start, dedicate real time to sitting in God's presence—in worship, in prayer, in stillness—and you'll long for more (Ps. 34:8). His presence is your good (Ps. 73:28).**



WHAT DID JESUS DO TO GROW IN WISDOM AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND OTHERS? HOW CAN YOU APPLY THIS?

You need godly wisdom to make godly choices each day, and you'll never stop needing it. Jesus was like us in every way. He grew in wisdom as He devoted Himself to the Word and prepared for ministry. **Jesus is God's perfect, sinless Son, yet He is our model for how to gain wisdom and remain faithful.** If we want to grow in our walk with the Lord, we can follow Jesus's example of prioritizing the Word and being in God's presence. He will speak to us and lead us down the right paths.

WRAP-UP



WHERE ARE YOU SPIRITUALLY? ARE YOU GROWING IN WISDOM? WHY OR WHY NOT?

We go through all types of assessments. Teachers assess whether or not we're learning specific skills in our classes. Coaches assess if we're ready to play a certain position. Parents assess if we're ready for certain privileges. We expect these types of assessments, but assessing where we are spiritually should be part of our routine. If we look back at our decisions, our priorities, our understanding of the Word and don't see growth, then we need to examine why. **Jesus showed us the way to a closer relationship with the Father.** We can look at our time in the Word and in God's presence—not just for the sake of checking a box. Are you spending *quality* time reading the Word—studying, asking questions, looking for answers, slowing down to absorb it? Are you spending *quality* time in prayer—praising God, confessing sin, expressing gratitude, sharing your needs and requests? **Consistency is key. If you study the Word and spend time in God's presence consistently, you'll grow spiritually—in wisdom and in favor with God and others.**

ONE WHO IS MORE POWERFUL

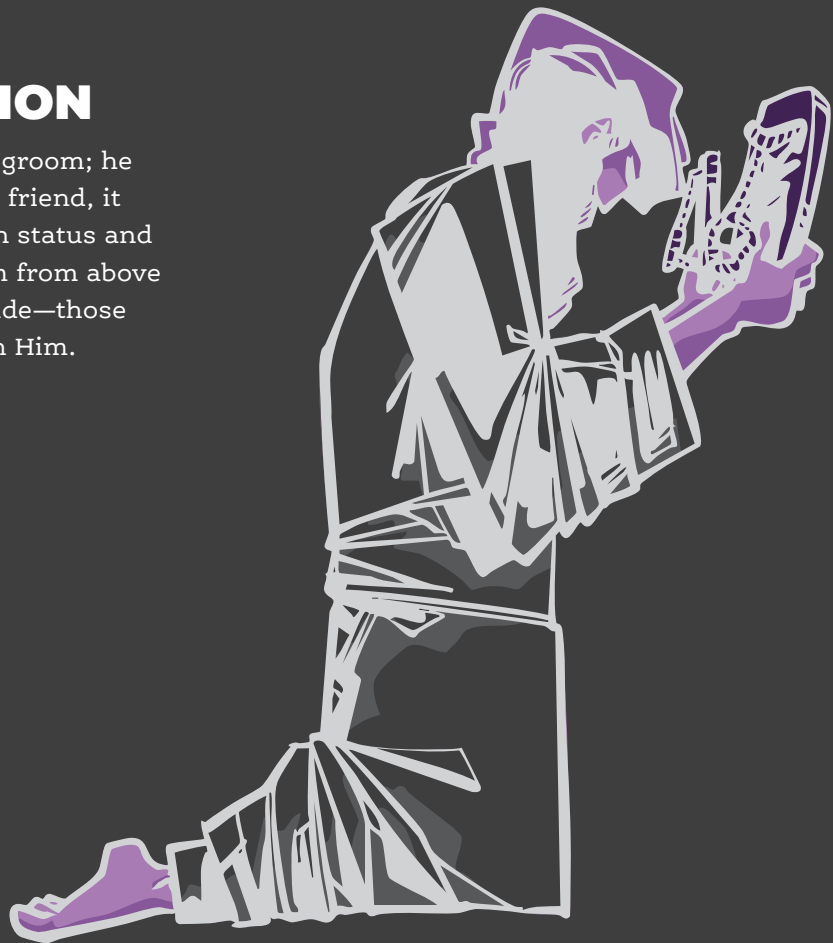
MAIN POINT.

Our lives must elevate Jesus instead of ourselves.



CHRIST CONNECTION

John the Baptist said he wasn't the groom; he was the friend of the groom. As the friend, it was his responsibility to decrease in status and to elevate Jesus. Jesus is the Groom from above who came to give His life for His bride—those who receive His Word and believe in Him.





This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Matthew 3:1-12

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE REPENT

MATTHEW 3:1-6

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

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE'RE AUTHENTIC

MATTHEW 3:7-12

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our lives must elevate Jesus instead of ourselves.

Leaders: May we live in a way that reveals “fruit consistent with repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE REPENT

MATTHEW 3:1-4

“John’s lifestyle declares that he lived fully for the will of God, not valuing possessions, comfort or status. Blinded by our society’s values, we too often preach a Christianity that merely ‘meets our needs’ rather than one that calls us to sacrifice our highest desires for the kingdom. Too many Western Christians live a religion that costs nothing, treats the kingdom cheaply and therefore does not demand saving faith. Saving faith includes believing God’s grace so sincerely that we live as if his message is true and stake our lives on it. May we have the courage to trust God as John did, to stake everything on the kingdom (13:46) and to relinquish our own popularity, when necessary, by summoning others to stake everything on the kingdom as well.”¹

MATTHEW 3:3

“In Isaiah, God is pictured as coming to his people, exiled in Babylon, to deliver them and to lead them home. Matthew applies the passage to John and Jesus—John being the voice of one crying in the wilderness whose mission is to prepare the way of the Lord, Jesus being the Lord who is coming to save his people. In biblical perspective, initiative is with God in creation, revelation, and redemption. God creates; God reveals himself; and God comes to man to save him. In many religious systems, man is seen as discovering God and establishing himself before God, whether through ritual, works, goodness, asceticism, knowledge, or otherwise.”²

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE’RE AUTHENTIC

MATTHEW 3:7-9

“John again reminds his listeners that they dare not trust in their ancestral credentials or believe that they alone are legitimate candidates for inclusion in the people of God. Matthew’s two-pronged emphasis, introduced in chaps. 1–2, thus continues: the messianic age brings new people into God’s kingdom and excludes others who thought themselves secure. The Messiah is the true Son of Abraham (1:1-2); apart from him there is no salvation.”³

MATTHEW 3:11

“John was indeed a great man (11:11-14), but he derived his greatness from the even greater One whom he served. To illustrate the contrast between himself and the Messiah, John thought of the lowest of all tasks (removal of another person’s sandals), and then said he was even below that. He was voicing the impossibility of comparison between his humanity and the Messiah-King’s deity.”⁴



CONTEXT

John the Baptist fulfilled prophecy: He cried out in the wilderness and prepared the way for the Messiah (Isa. 40:3). John was like a king's herald, who went ahead of the king to smooth the road for easier travel and to announce his upcoming arrival to a town or city. After roughly four hundred years of prophetic silence, John called the people back to God, much like Elijah did in 1 Kings 18. During this period, the Pharisees and Sadducees were like religious political groups; most of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, belonged to one of these groups. The Pharisees, the larger and better-liked of the two, obsessively followed the law in an effort to earn righteousness, developing "the oral law as a 'fence around the Torah,' which included detailed interpretations, applications, and amplifications of the written Scriptures to enable people to obey them properly."⁵ They were known for a legalistic approach in their relationship with God. The Sadducees, typically aristocratic landowners, adhered only to the first five books of Scripture. While the two religious groups disagreed on many issues, both believed Jewish heritage ensured their status before God, a false security both John and Jesus exposed.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



Repentance

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). This is the human response to God's salvation, in other words, how we turn to Him and accept what He's done for us.

LEADERS' PRAYER

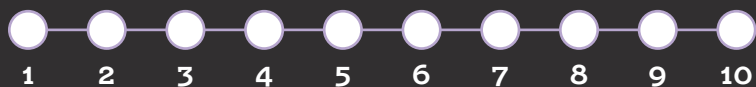
GOD, THANK YOU FOR OFFERING SALVATION THROUGH YOUR SON, NOT THROUGH OUR EFFORTS OR LINEAGE. WE CAN'T BOAST IN OUR SALVATION BECAUSE WE DID NOTHING TO DESERVE IT. HELP US TO ELEVATE JESUS IN THE WAY WE LIVE OUR LIVES—TO DISPLAY FRUIT OF REPENTANT HEARTS.



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How easily can you tell when something is fake (1=I can't tell; 10=It's always obvious)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **IF SOMEONE GAVE YOU THE OPTION TO HEAR GOOD NEWS OR BAD NEWS FIRST, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE? WHY?**
- **WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED ABOUT NEWS ON TELEVISION? DOES IT LEAN MORE TOWARD BAD NEWS OR GOOD NEWS?**
- **WHY IS IT HELPFUL TO SURROUND OURSELVES WITH PEOPLE WHO TELL US WHAT WE NEED TO HEAR INSTEAD OF PEOPLE WHO TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR?**

If you watch the news on television, you probably notice more bad news than good news. Culture leans toward bad news and thrives on emotional reaction. But when it comes to truth in our personal lives, we lean away from the bad parts. We want to hear only what's good. Today, our lesson shows that sometimes the hard truth is what we need to hear most.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do any of us strive to be fake? Do any of us want people to look at us and see a hypocrite, an impostor? Probably not. We want people to see who we really are—to be known. At the same time, we fear being known because people will see the worst parts of us—qualities and insecurities we so desperately try to hide. Want a little hope? Actually, a lot of hope? God knows you (Ps. 139:1). He knows every single part. He has always known you—your failures, your sin, your fears, your questions, your worries, your insecurities, your shame. He doesn't want you to pretend or to hide any of it from Him. God calls you to bring what He already knows and lay it all down in exchange for abundant, authentic life. How? Confess and repent of your sin, throw off all the things that hinder you (Heb. 12:1), be transparent with the Lord, and walk in the joy of being known by Him.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our lives must elevate Jesus instead of ourselves.

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE REPENT

READ MATTHEW 3:1-6



WHAT WAS JOHN'S FIRST WORD TO THE CROWDS? WOULD HIS MESSAGE ATTRACT CROWDS TODAY? WHAT MESSAGES ATTRACT PEOPLE NOW?

John's first word was "repent." Basically, John told God's people, the Jews, that they weren't living like God's people and that they needed to confess their sins and live in a way that pleased Him. John called them out! Today, this message isn't attractive; calling people up to God's standard is often offensive, even in our churches, so we refrain from pointing out sin and the need for repentance. **We center our messages on love, acceptance, and forgiveness (all good and true), but if we leave out repentance, then we leave out humanity's need for a Savior: Jesus.**



DESCRIBE JOHN'S LIFESTYLE. WHY DID HE LIVE THIS WAY? SHOULD WE?

John was radically devoted to God and to the message God had given him to share—even if it was offensive. John lived sacrificially, unconcerned with worldly comfort; none of it mattered. He staked his life on the reality that God's kingdom was supreme—and it was coming. Does God expect all of us to live in the wilderness and survive on bugs and honey? Not likely. **But He does call us to live sacrificially, wholly devoted to Him. He calls us to share the gospel boldly, even when it's offensive to our culture. He calls us to live with eternity in mind instead of striving to make this world our home.**



WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN? WHERE IS IT? HOW IS IT "AT HAND" (V. 2)?

We hear "kingdom of heaven," or "kingdom of God," and think the phrase refers to heaven only, where God dwells on His throne and where believers spend eternity. But the kingdom of heaven exists in a few ways. First, as the King of kings, Jesus ushered His kingdom to earth; His presence here meant God's kingdom had come in a new way. Jesus was Immanuel, "God with us," who came near to offer us a place in His kingdom. Next, because Christ now dwells in every believer through the Holy Spirit, God's kingdom is here, now—the rule and reign of God within us. We are living stones and spiritual houses in God's kingdom (1 Pet. 2:5). And still in another sense, though the kingdom of heaven has already come through Jesus's birth and through His Spirit, it is also yet to come—when Jesus will bring His kingdom fully. This kingdom will remain forever, free of sin and pain and death. Jesus will restore all of creation, making all things new, and believers will worship Him forever (Rev. 21:1-5). **Because of Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father, we get to live as citizens of God's kingdom here and now! We don't wait for eternity! Because Jesus came near and offered His life, we are God's sons and daughters, called to live for His kingdom rather than our worldly kingdoms.**

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE'RE AUTHENTIC

READ MATTHEW 3:7-12

WHAT IS JOHN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS? DOES IT SURPRISE YOU? EXPLAIN.

Leaders: Share context about the Pharisees and Sadducees. John didn't use confusing language or soften his message. He called the religious leaders a "brood of vipers"! John knew they hadn't come to repent and be baptized; they came to assess and critique him and then report back to the religious court. **John called out the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, for claiming to belong to God but living for themselves—for their reputations, their pride, and their personal gain—and for leading others to do the same.**

WHAT DOES JOHN MEAN IN VERSE 8? HOW CAN OUR LIVES CONTRADICT THAT WE FOLLOW JESUS? WHY HAS THIS BECOME "NORMAL" FOR BELIEVERS?

John's message was simple: If you belong to God, then live like it. How often do we need to hear the same message? How often do our lives contradict the worship songs we sing with our lips? Our words are profane and full of gossip; our actions are selfish, prideful, and unloving; our priorities are worldly. We don't reflect our King. If we've repented—confessed sin and turned from it and toward God—then our lives should display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). **Instead, we've normalized lukewarm faith over authentic faith and labeled holiness and godliness as "radical."** Why? Because we strive to fit into a worldly kingdom—a kingdom in which we're no longer citizens. **The truth is that God wants every part of your life. Is this radical? Sure. Will you be different from the world? Absolutely. You'll be like your King, reflecting His kingdom.**



WHAT DOES JOHN SAY WON'T MAKE PEOPLE RIGHT WITH GOD (V. 9)? WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DO PEOPLE POINT TO TODAY TO SAY THEY'RE RIGHT WITH GOD?

Many Jews relied on their ancestry, basing their security in God's kingdom on being Abraham's descendants. Today, people point to their families too, claiming security in someone else's faith. People claim church attendance or biblical knowledge as proof. They point to good morals as evidence of being right with God. **The only way we are saved from sin and secure in God's kingdom is through surrendering our hearts and enthroning Jesus there, by confessing Christ as Lord and repenting of sin.** Jesus is our way to the Father (John 14:6).

WRAP-UP



IN WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE HAVE YOU LET IT BECOME NORMAL TO LIVE LIKE THE WORLD? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT YOU LIVE AS A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN?

God wants us to be real and desires for us to follow Him authentically. He isn't fooled by our efforts at *pretending* to follow Him. But we live in a culture that specializes in faking it. Think about it: How easily can we fake a perfect life on social media, when in reality, life is falling apart? So, is it really that surprising when this spills over into our walk with God? **We've gotten good at faking intimacy with the Lord. We've normalized living like the world in certain areas of our lives.** Maybe you use the same language as unbelievers in your classes. Maybe your priorities look like the world's priorities, and your time doesn't reflect that you value God's Word, prayer, or godly community. Maybe you date like the world dates and justify being in a relationship with someone who brings you down spiritually. Maybe you sometimes lie or sometimes cheat. The world tells us that all of this is *normal*. **But God's Word calls us up—to a standard of holiness, even if it requires sacrifice, even when it's not easy. The good news is that Jesus showed us the way.**

MY BELOVED SON

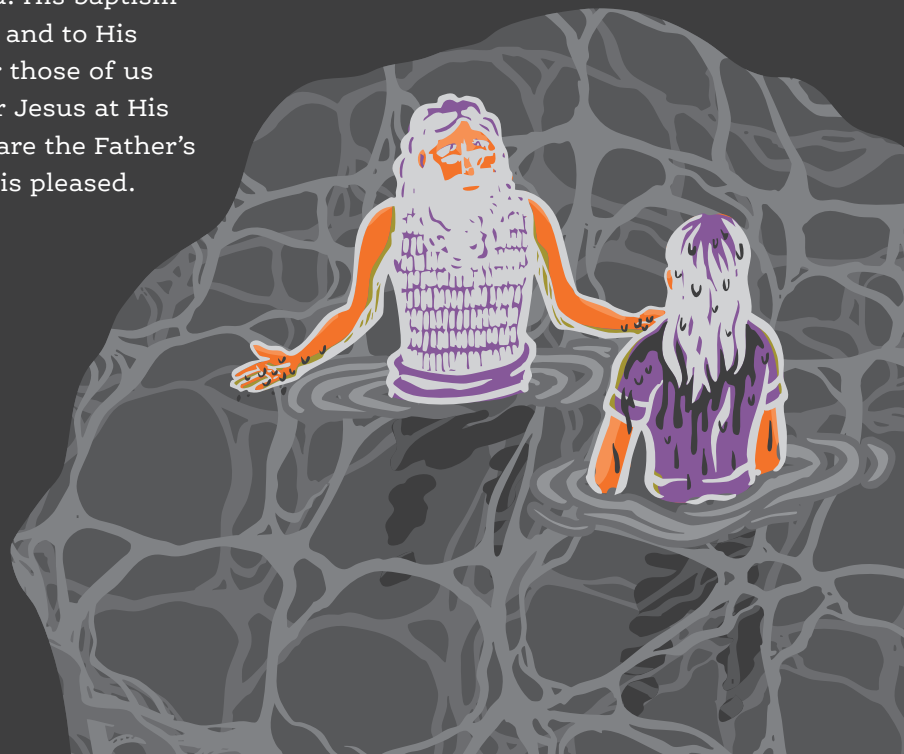
MAIN POINT.

When we're devoted to following Jesus, we will live in obedience to God's Word.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus completely obeyed God and identified with sinful humans by being baptized. His baptism points to His death on the cross and to His resurrection from the grave. For those of us in Christ, the words spoken over Jesus at His baptism are also true of us: We are the Father's beloved children with whom He is pleased.



OBEDIENCE **AND IDENTITY**

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:29-34

JESUS'S OBEDIENCE REVEALED HIS IDENTITY

MATTHEW 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

OUR OBEDIENCE REVEALS OUR IDENTITY

JOHN 1:29-34

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

When we're devoted to following Jesus, we will live in obedience to God's Word.

Leaders: Your life reveals who or what you're devoted to; may the sum of it point to Jesus only.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS'S OBEDIENCE REVEALED HIS IDENTITY

MATTHEW 3:14-15

"Jesus's baptism was unique. It was not a 'baptism of repentance' (as John's was) nor was it a 'Christian baptism' (as ours is today). But it was an identifying step of obedience at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. Jesus would not have been fully obedient if he had bypassed this step that seemed to John to be unnecessary for the Holy One (3:14)."⁶

MATTHEW 3:13-17

"Jesus's baptism is an identification with sinners. Jesus came, according to Isaiah 53:12, to be 'counted among the rebels,' and ultimately this has to do with their sin, though Jesus Himself had no sin (Heb. 4:15). We identify with Jesus when we are baptized, being united to Him in His life, death, and resurrection, so it makes sense that baptism is in a very real sense His identification with us. He who had no sin took His place among those who had no righteousness. This is the essence of what Jesus came to do (2 Cor. 5:21). . . . Jesus also sets an example for us. His baptism is an example for saints. Jesus models obedience for His followers by being baptized, which is an obedience that He will eventually command His followers to submit to (Matt. 28:20). . . . It is also a picture of salvation. Baptism pictures death and resurrection to new life, such that here at the beginning of Jesus's ministry, we get a picture of the climax of this ministry. That is, His immersion portrays His future death and resurrection. And now, every person who trusts in Christ for salvation is baptized, immersed in water, as a picture of our dying to sin and to ourselves and rising to new life in Christ."⁷

OUR OBEDIENCE REVEALS OUR IDENTITY

JOHN 1:29

"In Revelation 5 we briefly glimpse the worship of Jesus in heaven, and we hear that the 'Lion from the tribe of Judah . . . has conquered' (v. 5). But then our eyes look up and we see not a Lion but a Lamb, standing yet looking as if he had been slaughtered. Bowing all around him are people singing, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered' (v. 12). Jesus conquered sin, death, and hell by sacrificing himself as our substitute. He was a Lamb offered by God for our sin."⁸



CONTEXT

Baptism existed before the New Testament. Jewish people had taken part in ceremonial water cleansing for a long time to honor God's commands concerning purity. Sometime during the second century BC (Second Temple period), Jews developed a stepped bath, called a "mikveh." Archaeologists discovered mikvehs in private homes and in public spaces, like the pools of Siloam and Bethesda, to accommodate large crowds. These pools often attracted the sick, the "unclean" or "blemished," providing a backdrop for some of Jesus's healings. Before entering the temple, praying, or other sacred acts, Jews washed themselves in mikvehs, symbolically representing repentance and purification. When John the Baptist called everyone to repent and be baptized, he did so within this context. But Jesus's baptism sent a different message: The Son of God would cleanse us of sin once and for all and baptize us in a new way, through the Holy Spirit. His sacrifice altered water cleansing forever; rather than continually taking part in it to be ritually clean, we are baptized once, as a symbol of Jesus's blood continually purifying us, making us clean for good, and as a declaration of obedience to the Father.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



Baptism

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, THANK YOU FOR SENDING YOUR SON, WHO OBEDIENTLY IDENTIFIED WITH US IN EVERY WAY TO REDEEM US FROM SIN. WE CHOOSE TO LIVE IN OBEDIENCE TO YOUR WORD, AS AN OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF OUR COMMITMENT AND DEVOTION TO YOU.



KICK STARTER

♡ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we learned that worldly living shouldn't be "normal" for believers, who are called to live as citizens of heaven. How have you made efforts to look at things with this perspective? What area of your life is a struggle when it comes to this mindset?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

PLAYING BY THE RULES

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN HAVE YOU FELT LIKE A CERTAIN RULE DIDN'T APPLY TO YOU?**
- **HOW DO YOU RESPOND IN THOSE TIMES? DO YOU OBEY OR REBEL?**
- **CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOUR WHOLE CLASS, GROUP, OR TEAM WAS PUNISHED BECAUSE OF ONLY ONE PERSON'S ACTIONS? WAS THAT FAIR? EXPLAIN.**

Sometimes we get in a situation where a rule may not apply to us, but we're expected to follow it anyway. Though Jesus is fully God, He was fully man. He lived in perfect obedience, and today, we'll learn that He was baptized, not because He had sinned and needed to repent but because He was our model for obeying the Father and identified Himself with us to save us.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

What's the big deal with baptism? Can we skip that step? First, baptism doesn't save us from sin or make us clean. When we confess Jesus as Lord (confessing and turning from sin) and believe He was raised from death, we are saved (Rom. 10:9). But Jesus commanded us to follow His example in baptism (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus, who had not sinned, was baptized to show us the way of obedience. Baptism is a declaration of our salvation: Our old self is buried and we're new creations, able to walk in a totally new way because of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:3-5). Many times, people resist baptism because they're fearful of being in front of others or because they don't feel it's necessary. But Jesus commanded it, so we're called to obey. We must ask ourselves how we can inwardly commit our heart yet outwardly refuse to obey Him in this matter—in any matter. Jesus didn't command us to do anything that He didn't do too. He showed us how. We can obediently follow Him and trust His example.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

When we're devoted to following Jesus, we will live in obedience to God's Word.

JESUS'S OBEDIENCE REVEALED HIS IDENTITY

READ MATTHEW 3:13-17

HOW IMPORTANT IS FAIRNESS TO YOU? HOW HAVE YOU SEEN LIFE BE UNFAIR?

Most of us value fairness. Even small children recognize unfair situations. But some of us see unfairness only when it applies to ourselves. We cry out for justice only when we're treated unjustly. The difficult truth is that what's actually "fair" for all of us is punishment. Why? Because the punishment for sin is death, and we've all sinned. What's fair is for all of us to pay the debt we owe. But Jesus stepped in our place to suffer and die—unfairly. So, is life fair? Not at all, and praise God! **Because of Jesus, we don't get what's fair or what we deserve; we get forgiveness and life.**



JESUS WAS SINLESS, SO WHY DID HE INSIST ON BEING BAPTIZED?

Leaders: Share context on mikveh to help students understand John's confusion and the context of these baptisms. John was understandably confused about Jesus asking for baptism. The purpose of mikveh was repentance and symbolic cleansing, but Jesus was sinless. **By taking part in baptism, Jesus transformed its meaning! Baptism was His outward declaration of obedience to the Father—of already being clean and already belonging to God.** To redeem us, Jesus identified with us. He began His ministry with this act of obedience—an act He later commanded for all believers, displaying the same outward declaration of being clean and belonging to God.



WHEN HAVE YOU NEEDED SOMEONE TO BACK YOU UP OR SUPPORT YOU? WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT THAT GOD CONFIRMED JESUS'S IDENTITY AT HIS BAPTISM?

Confirmation provides proof and assurance. For example, if you want people to believe you're telling the truth, having others confirm your story makes it more believable. Jesus's baptism was monumental for several reasons. Jesus, a seemingly unimportant man from the small town of Galilee, was beginning His public ministry. But we know now what many people didn't know then: Jesus was so much more than a good teacher from Galilee. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. At the start of Jesus's ministry, God opened the heavens and verbally affirmed Jesus's obedience, expressing pride for His Son and echoing prophecy (Isa. 42:1). Every Person of the Trinity was present: God the Father observed God the Son's obedience, while God the Holy Spirit rested on the Son like a dove! **We get a beautiful glimpse of the Father's loving relationship with His Son as He applauded Jesus's obedience—and not just obedience in this moment but for Jesus's entire life leading up to this moment. At Jesus's baptism, God confirmed His Son's identity as if saying, "This is my Son, the chosen One; He is who He claims to be! And He makes me proud."**

OUR OBEDIENCE REVEALS OUR IDENTITY

READ JOHN 1:29-34

WHAT CAUSES US TO ACT PRIDEFULLY OR ARROGANTLY? HOW DO YOU KEEP THIS IN CHECK?

John was Jesus's cousin. People were drawn to him out of curiosity about his bold message and his lifestyle. John could've hoarded the praise and attention and leaned into arrogance. The reality is that sometimes we do really great things. We have really great ideas, talents, and achievements. Keeping our pride in check isn't easy. We need the Holy Spirit to convict us of pride and remind us of who we are without Jesus. Without His help, we drift into glorifying ourselves and believing we're self-sufficient, but anything good in us comes from the Lord (James 1:17). **If God gives you a platform or any type of success, point all praise and curiosity and attention back to Jesus. He is the greater One, worthy of all praise.**



HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT JOHN BELIEVED ABOUT JESUS? HOW WILL PEOPLE KNOW WHAT WE BELIEVE?

John boldly stated who he knew Jesus to be—the Son of God, not simply a good teacher or role model. He didn't soften his words or speak vaguely so that everyone would agree with him. John knew Jesus was the Lamb, who would do what thousands on thousands of sacrificial lambs never did: heal our sin and offer permanent forgiveness. John's words testified about Jesus, but his actions confirmed his beliefs. He pointed to Jesus as the greater One. **Our words and actions reveal if we belong to Jesus. If we claim to follow Him, then we can't be neutral concerning His identity; we can't speak vaguely; we can't believe from a safe distance.**



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DEVOTED? WHAT ARE THINGS PEOPLE CAN TELL YOU'RE DEVOTED TO RIGHT NOW?

We're all devoted to something or to someone, and people can tell what it is. How? The object of our devotion becomes clear in the way we talk, how we act, the places we go or don't go, and how we spend our time. Can people tell that your heart is devoted to Jesus above all else? Would people say that you're more devoted to school, sports, music, money, clothes, popularity, friends, a boyfriend or girlfriend? Here's the truth: So many of these things aren't bad or sinful, but they become idols if we're devoted to them instead of God. **When we're wholly devoted to God, He uses the things we love and our talents as instruments to reach others! Our devotion to God opens the door for everything else to have greater purpose.**

WRAP-UP



HOW COULD YOUR LIFESTYLE CONFUSE PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR BELIEF IN JESUS? WHY DOES YOUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD MATTER?

If our lifestyle causes confusion about Jesus, then we must examine why.

People won't believe our message if our lifestyle contradicts it; they won't believe Jesus can change them if we don't live changed. Like John,

we must clearly vocalize who Jesus is but without being unloving or rude; we don't reflect Jesus when we berate people while sharing our beliefs. But God calls us to bold faith, and this includes speaking out when He leads us to do so. We can make our belief in Jesus clear by loving people, in how we talk to and about others, by making godly choices instead of sinful ones.

Jesus walked in perfect obedience and showed us how to live. While we won't be perfect, we can follow Jesus's lead and obey God's Word, even when others disagree. Our lifestyle must point people to Jesus, not away from Him. If the way we live confuses people, then we must determine where we're disobeying God's Word. **Our obedience displays the power of the gospel to a lost world and gives people hope that God can save and change them too.**

IT IS WRITTEN

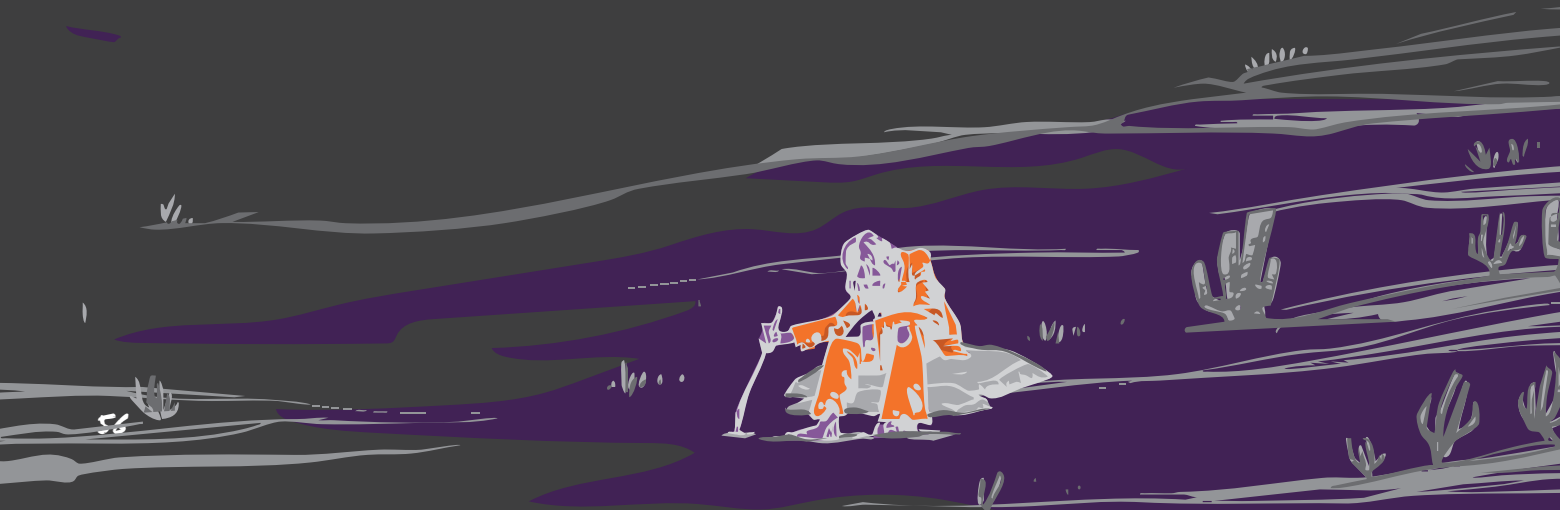
MAIN POINT.

God's Word is our powerful weapon against Satan's lies and against temptation.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus stepped into our world and overcame the temptation Adam did not overcome. Jesus showed He is fully obedient to the Father. He is the only One worthy of undoing the consequences of Adam's sin and bringing blessing to all people (Gen. 12:3). Jesus's life of obedience led Him to the cross, where He conquered sin and death as our Savior.



WORD AND SPIRIT

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Luke 4:1-14; Matthew 4:1-11

GOD'S WORD IS OUR WEAPON

LUKE 4:1-4

1 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

SATAN FLEES WHEN WE CLING TO TRUTH

LUKE 4:5-14

5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" 9 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. 14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

God's Word is our powerful weapon against Satan's lies and against temptation.

Leaders: Pick up the sword (Eph. 6:17), and show students that they aren't weaponless in their fight against temptation.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

GOD'S WORD IS OUR WEAPON

LUKE 4:1

"Jesus's victory over the devil thus resulted not simply because of his knowledge and use of the Scriptures (as in Matthew) but also because he was 'full of the Spirit.' Thus unlike Israel, which failed in its wilderness experience, God's Son was victorious. The Spirit's importance in this is evident, and Jesus's experience became a model of how Theophilus was to live out his life. Even as Jesus, 'full of the Spirit,' was victorious over the devil, so in Acts, Peter (4:8), Stephen (6:5,8; 7:55), Barnabas (11:24), and Paul (13:9) were also filled with the Spirit and followed in their Lord's footsteps. Luke's readers are exhorted by their example to be filled with the Spirit as well."⁹

LUKE 4:3

"The circumstances could not be worse for Jesus to deal with the offer of food in verse 3. Jesus's circumstances could provide him a ready rationalization for giving in. The contrast of this temptation to that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden could not be greater. Adam and Eve had everything they needed to eat, but Jesus meets Satan in the midst of hunger and deprivation."¹⁰

SATAN FLEES WHEN WE CLING TO TRUTH

LUKE 4:13

"Jesus's numerous quotes from Deuteronomy in response to these wilderness temptations recall another time and place where temptation and God's chosen met in the wilderness. During the exodus, the Israelite nation failed this test. Jesus succeeds where Israel failed. What is more, the genealogy immediately preceding this account has named Jesus as Son of Adam and Son of God. The echo of Genesis 3 cannot be missed. What Adam failed to do as representative of all humanity, Jesus succeeds in doing."¹¹

LUKE 4:5-14

"The ultimate issue here is whether Jesus is the Son of God. That's why Satan keeps coming at him this way. Satan's real aim is to destroy Jesus's sonship so that he might destroy our salvation, for if Jesus were to fall in any of these temptations, he could not be the sinless sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world. So Satan unleashes the most relentless demonic assault in the history of creation, and Jesus remains faithful to his Father through it all."¹²



CONTEXT

The Greek word “devil” comes from the Hebrew word *sātan*. *Sātan* is a term for an accuser, slanderer, or adversary, rather than a proper name. We see many references to *sātans* in the Old Testament. But over time, the term became synonymous with Satan, described in the New Testament as “an enemy (Matt. 13:39); the evil one (Matt. 13:38); a tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5); an adversary (1 Pet. 5:8); the father of lies (John 8:44); a murderer (John 8:44); a liar (John 8:44); a deceiver (Rev. 10:9); an accuser (Rev. 10:10); and one disguised as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).”¹³ We know that Satan is limited; we can resist him and are urged to do so because he flees when we do (James 4:7). We often inflate the devil’s powers. God has given him limited power in the world—for now. His influence has earned him titles like, “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “ruler of this world” (John 12:31). But never do we see that the devil can control or read believers’ minds, enter our bodies, or be everywhere at once. In no way is he like our Lord, Jesus Christ, who has dominion over all of heaven and earth, now and forever!

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Temptation and Sin

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

JESUS, THANK YOU FOR ENDURING TEMPTATION, NOT ONLY TO SHOW US HOW TO FIGHT AGAINST IT, BUT ALSO TO PROVE THAT YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD—THE PERFECT, SINLESS SACRIFICE. YOU DID WHAT NONE OF US COULD DO AND STOOD AGAINST SATAN’S LIES. HELP US TO RUN TO YOU FOR HELP WHEN WE FACE TEMPTATION AND TO BELIEVE IN THE TRUTH OF YOUR WORD.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The longest amount of time someone survived without solid food is 382 days. Hospitalized under medical care, Angus Barbieri survived on tea, coffee, water, soda water and vitamins as part of his weight loss regiment. His first meal after 382 days was a boiled egg and buttered toast!¹⁴

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

THAT'S TEMPTING

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **IS TEMPTATION A SIN? EXPLAIN.**
- **WHAT DOES TEMPTATION FEEL LIKE?**
- **HOW CAN TEMPTATION LEAD TO GROWTH?**

We're all tempted by sinful desires, but temptation isn't a sin. Our response to temptation can lead to sin. In the moment, we may feel like we have no choice but to give in, but if we'll remember God's Word, temptation can be an opportunity to grow stronger in our walk with God.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

The world teaches us that sin isn't a big deal; it's normal to experiment; we're only young once. Culture lowers the bar for sin, or eliminates it completely, and teaches that we all have our own truth. We try our best to keep these ideas from permeating our hearts and minds, but they creep in—especially if we stop paying attention, if we crack open the door to a sinful desire instead of closing it and walking away. We think we can handle just a little bit of sin and stop anytime. Sin doesn't work on those terms; sin is slavery that leads to death (Rom. 6:16). And when you give it room, sin seeks to invade every part of you. You may sometimes feel like you have to sin because you don't have a choice, but this is another lie from the enemy of your soul. You have the power of the Holy Spirit living within you, directing you to the way out. God won't allow you to be tempted more than you can handle (1 Cor. 10:13), but you have to use the tools God has given you to stand: His Word and the help of His Spirit.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

God's Word is our powerful weapon against Satan's lies and against temptation.

GOD'S WORD IS OUR WEAPON

READ LUKE 4:1-4



HOW DID JESUS WIND UP IN THE WILDERNESS? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW YOU ABOUT OUR LIVES?

After Jesus's baptism, the Spirit, not Satan, led Him to the wilderness to be tempted. God led; Jesus obeyed. God allowed Satan to tempt Jesus to confirm His Sonship and to model how to overcome temptation. God allows us to be tempted, but He never does the tempting. Giving in to our sinful desires is what causes us to sin (James 1:13-15). God sometimes brings us to our own wilderness to face testing and trials to strengthen our faith (James 1:2-3). Jesus was no stranger to suffering, and we won't be either, but **we can trust that wherever the Spirit leads is for our good—to help us become more like Jesus, who endured temptation to give us grace and mercy in ours (Heb. 4:15).**



WHY DO YOU THINK SATAN TEMPTED JESUS WITH BREAD FIRST? WHY WOULD MANY PEOPLE JUSTIFY HIM GIVING IN?

Jesus had fasted for forty days. Satan knew Jesus's body demanded food. Physical hunger created an opportunity for Jesus to act apart from the Father instead of trusting His provision. We might wonder, "What was so wrong with Jesus providing food for Himself? Hadn't He earned it?" The problem was that Satan began his temptation with "If you are the Son of God . . ." **Jesus had no reason to prove Himself to Satan; Satan knew Him well.** God had also confirmed Jesus's identity at His baptism. **Unlike the Israelites who failed to trust God's provision in the wilderness, Jesus passed the test.**

WHAT TEMPTATIONS DO TEENAGERS FACE TODAY? READ DEUTERONOMY 8:3. HOW DOES SEEING JESUS APPLY THIS VERSE SHOW YOU THE WAY TO FIGHT TEMPTATION?

Many of us struggle with comparison, focusing our attention on what others have. Temptation strikes at our identity, leading us to question how God made us. Temptation pressures us to lower the bar for sexual purity; we're lured to harmful websites and into toxic relationships. We are tempted to escape real life through substance abuse. We wrestle with finding our worth in worldly approval and popularity. Deuteronomy 8:3 says that God's Word is more critical than physical food. In other words, we can't survive spiritually without it. Here's the reality: **Jesus didn't pull His "Son of God" card or use supernatural powers to defeat temptation; He battled Satan's lies and temptations with the exact weapons we have: the Word and the Spirit!** Jesus is the Son of God. But He wasn't sinless because He tapped into some power we don't have available to us. Jesus was human in every way, yet He defeated temptation because He chose to obey the Father's Word. He showed us how to stand—by knowing and living according to God's Word and by following the Holy Spirit's voice. **Though standing strong against temptation may seem way more difficult than this, it's this simple: God's Word sustains us. We can't live without it.**

SATAN FLEES WHEN WE CLING TO TRUTH

READ LUKE 4:5-14



READ PSALM 119:11. HOW DID JESUS APPLY THIS VERSE? CAN WE REALLY DO THE SAME?

Satan could never make Jesus sin; He could only suggest it. Didn't the serpent convince Eve to sin by suggesting that she misunderstood God's words: "Did God actually say . . ." (Gen. 3:1)? Isn't this what Satan does with us too? **He can't make us sin; he can only suggest it.** When we are tempted by our sinful desires and have a weak understanding of God's Word, we allow the enemy's suggestions to cause doubt and for doubt to become justification: "Well, maybe this isn't really a sin? The Bible is outdated; culture has changed. Things have different meanings now. Surely, God didn't really mean . . ." Adam and Eve allowed doubt to win, but Jesus showed us how to stand—on a firm foundation of the Word. **He refuted every lie and every suggestion with truth; every word from Jesus's mouth was the Word. God's truth is like a light that exposes the enemy's lies and shuts them down!**



IS SIN EVER UNAVOIDABLE? LOOK AT 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13. WHAT DOES THIS VERSE SHOW YOU?

Satan tempted Jesus with "every temptation" (v. 13), and we can see three types in today's text: needs, power, comfort. We often struggle in these same areas. We worry God won't meet our needs, so we look some place else; we desire power and status, so we strive for popularity over holiness; we seek comfort over suffering and avoid the more difficult road of faith. We often put ourselves in situations where sin feels unavoidable, but we always have a choice to surrender our sinful desires and take the way out God promised to give us. **We sin because we want to sin—because it's enticing. But as we walk with Jesus, He changes our hearts to desire Him instead!**

LOOK AT VERSE 10. WHAT DID SATAN USE AGAINST JESUS? READ 2 TIMOTHY 4:2-4. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T KNOW AND RIGHTLY UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURE?

The situation is comical. Satan tried to use God's Word against THE Word (John 1:1)! Jesus knew the Word and was full of the Spirit. Satan had no chance of bending truth. **If we are going to stand against Satan's strategy of bending truth to confuse us, then we can't simply know the Word; we must have a right understanding of it—its context and how it applies.** If not, Satan will weaponize truth by blending it with lies, convincing us to trust teachings that sound good but lead us astray.

WRAP-UP



BASED ON THE PASSAGE, HOW MUCH POWER DOES SATAN HAVE IN TEMPTING YOU? HOW CAN YOU DEFEAT TEMPTATION THAT KEEPS DEFEATING YOU?

We often credit Satan for our sin. We say things like, "The devil made me do it." Let's get rid of that mentality because Satan has no power over God's children. He can't read your mind; he can't be everywhere at once; he can't force you to act on sinful desires. But he knows human nature because he has watched human history. The truth is that we have the power to walk away when we're tempted. **We can walk different paths and avoid the way of sinners (Ps. 1:1), but instead, we so often strive to walk alongside them—to get as close to sin as possible without touching it.** Then we wonder why we keep falling into sinful patterns we've desperately tried to break on our own. We must look at where we're walking and where we're planted (Ps. 1:3). **If we want to defeat temptation—if we're tired of giving in and doing what we don't want to do—then we must use the powerful weapons God gave us: His Word and His Spirit.** We must actively engage with the Word—deeply and daily—and walk by His Spirit (Gal. 5:16-17).

FOLLOW ME

MAIN POINT.

Following Jesus changes us and gives us new purpose.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus came into the world to call sinners to repentance and to lay down His life on their behalf. Likewise, as His followers, we are to tell others about Jesus and call on them to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus.



FINDING AND TELLING

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 1

WHEN WE FIND JESUS, WE TELL OTHERS

JOHN 1:35-46

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). 43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

JESUS SEES US AND KNOWS US

JOHN 1:47-51

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Following Jesus changes us and gives us new purpose.

Leaders: Reflect on who you were before Jesus; consider sharing how meeting Him changed you.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WHEN WE FIND JESUS, WE TELL OTHERS

JOHN 1:35-37

“Having directed a general witness to his people Israel, John now offered that same witness specifically to his disciples. It is one thing to state a sweeping conviction to the masses, quite another to deliberately give up one’s own devotees; but John did not flinch from dismantling the rapidly growing movement that had brought him fame and followers (3:22-30). It was a mark of his effectiveness as a witness that although two disciples heard John speak, they followed Jesus. Soon they would be attributing to him the very titles of ultimate honor which John had renounced for himself (vv. 20,41).”¹⁵

JOHN 1:43

“The call of Philip as recorded here has been reduced to its most essential element: Follow me. This phrase also lies at the core of the call to commitment in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21). It defines discipleship in relational rather than in intellectual, emotional, or actional terms. Philip was not offered an idea to ponder, a mood to experience, or a task to accomplish, but a person to obey. In place of law in the sacred Scriptures or ritual at the holy Temple, Jesus dared to identify himself as the source of guidance to God. Furthermore, his summons was future-facing. Following implies an open-ended, dynamic pilgrimage, not a closed, static position. Christianity is not a place to stand but a road to walk in choice companionship with the ‘leader’ of life (Acts 3:15; Heb. 12:2).”¹⁶

JESUS SEES US AND KNOWS US

JOHN 1:51

“What will they see? In Genesis 28 Jacob falls asleep and has a dream. In this dream he sees a ladder that extends from heaven to earth. Angels are using this ladder to move between the two. Above the ladder stood the Lord God. Jesus is the ladder to God. He is the only way into God’s presence. He promises Nathanael he will recognize that Jesus alone can bring a person into God’s presence.”¹⁷



CONTEXT

In only seventeen verses, John revealed seven names for Jesus, making sure his readers understood Jesus's identity: (1) "Lamb of God," who atoned for sin; (2) "Rabbi," meaning "teacher"; (3) "Messiah" and "Christ," both meaning "Anointed One"; (4) "son of Joseph," fully human and of David's lineage; (5) "Son of God" and (6) "King of Israel," both fulfilling prophecies; (7) "Son of Man," the One Daniel envisioned (Dan. 7:13). These names encompass Jesus's identity and His purpose: He is the One all of Scripture pointed to as the coming Savior King. Jesus is the perfect sacrificial Lamb; the One who teaches us how to know the Father and how to follow His commands; the Anointed One and one of us; God's only Son and promised King from David's line; the eternal Son of Man, who is worthy of approaching the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13) and receiving a "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Dan. 7:14). Amen!

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Evangelism

Every Christian and every church has the duty and privilege to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of a person's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary efforts rest on a spiritual necessity for all people to be renewed and is clearly and repeatedly commanded in Jesus's teachings. Jesus commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. Every child of God has the duty to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness and by a Christian lifestyle.

LEADERS' PRAYER

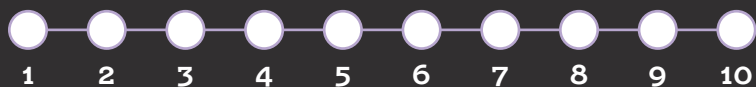
JESUS, THANK YOU FOR INVITING US TO FOLLOW YOU. WE GET TO WALK WITH YOU, LEARN FROM YOU, AND TELL OTHERS ABOUT YOU. WE CONFESS THAT WE TAKE THIS LIGHTLY, OFTEN KEEPING QUIET ABOUT THE HOPE YOU'VE MADE SECURE. HELP US TO LIVE FOR YOU, BUT ALSO HELP US TO BE VERBAL WITNESSES OF THE GOSPEL, EVEN WHEN SPEAKING UP IS UNCOMFORTABLE.



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

When you get amazing news, do you tell others (1=Staying quiet; 10=Posting on socials immediately)?



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1

CELEBRATING THE GOOD

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHEN SOMETHING GOOD OR EXCITING HAPPENS FOR YOU, WHO IS THE FIRST PERSON YOU TELL? WHY?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN SOMEONE IS GENUINELY EXCITED ABOUT THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN YOUR LIFE?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN YOU SHARE SOMETHING MEANINGFUL BUT OTHERS DON'T CARE OR SUPPORT YOU?**

Having people to celebrate our good news makes the news feel even more exciting. In the same way that we run to these people to share our excitement, we're called to run and tell others about Jesus. But instead, we often keep this news quiet. Today, we'll learn that knowing Jesus as Savior should prompt us to share the gospel.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Does the idea of sharing your faith make you nervous? Do you freeze? Do you worry how people will react if you talk about Jesus in class, on your teams, or with your friends? If you do, you aren't alone. When we encounter Jesus, He changes us. Some of those changes are drastic and immediate, while some happen more slowly, as God continues to work in us. But the people who knew us before we knew Jesus may not understand the change. Instead of being up front about who Jesus is and what He has done in our lives, we stay quiet. Why? We worry more about people's opinions of us than their salvation. We worry they'll think we're strange, radical, or judgmental. But if the gospel is really the best news—if we've been saved from sin and death—how can we keep silent? How can we not share the best news with others?

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Following Jesus changes us and gives us new purpose.

WHEN WE FIND JESUS, WE TELL OTHERS

READ JOHN 1:35-46

WHAT DO PEOPLE SEARCH FOR IN LIFE? WHAT DID JESUS ASK THE TWO MEN (V. 38)? WHAT DOES JESUS'S RESPONSE SHOW ABOUT HIM (V. 39)?

We're all searching. We look for stability, peace, and joy; we seek belonging and acceptance. These longings aren't bad. In fact, these God-given desires are designed to point us to God, who alone meets them fully. **Everything else comes up short because our souls are searching for a restored relationship with God.** Jesus asked, "What are you seeking?" implying, "What are you searching for, hoping for, longing for?" Then Jesus invited them to come and find it by following Him. **He invites us to come—to find what our souls are searching for in Him.**



SHARE YOUR NICKNAMES. WHY DID JESUS RENAME SIMON?

Leaders: Share the meaning of Cephas or Peter or ask a student to look it up. We don't have control over our legal names. They're chosen for us and can often help shape us. But nicknames usually come from something we've done or will do or from our character. Our nicknames can help shape our identity too. Jesus called Simon, Cephas or Peter—both meaning "rock." Jesus wasn't just giving Simon a nickname; He was transforming him, giving him a new identity and a new purpose. **God may not change your name, but He calls you His child (1 John 3:1), giving you a new identity and a new purpose.**



HOW DID ANDREW AND PHILIP REACT TO REALIZING THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH? WHY DON'T WE HAVE THIS SAME REACTION AND DESIRE TO TELL OTHERS?

After spending a short time with Jesus and realizing He was the Messiah, Andrew ran to tell his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus. Philip did the same; he found Nathaniel and told him that Jesus was the One Scripture promised. Both men reacted the same to this realization: They ran immediately to tell others about who they had found—and how Jesus found them. The Jewish people had waited centuries for a Savior. The prophets pointed to Him. After waves of oppression and exile, Jews lived under Rome's cruel power. They were expectant and hopeful for Israel's rescue and restoration, but the rescue would extend much further. Jesus rescued humanity from sin, restoring us to God! When Andrew and Philip realized Jesus was the Messiah, they were overcome with the news. They had to tell others. Now, we know Jesus paid in blood for our rescue; we've experienced restoration in our relationship with God. **Yet, we often forget how badly we needed to be rescued—that we couldn't do it ourselves. We lose awe and wonder for the gospel. We stop running to tell others what we've found—of who found us, Jesus. May we never get over our rescue or stop telling others how to be rescued too.**

JESUS SEES US AND KNOWS US

READ JOHN 1:47-51

HOW DID NATHANIEL FIRST REACT TO NEWS ABOUT JESUS? HOW CAN JESUS'S RESPONSE TO HIS QUESTIONS COMFORT US?

Hebrew students learned through questioning. Questions prompt answers. Nathaniel's first recorded words were questions (vv. 46,48). Let that sink in. Nathaniel heard about Jesus but had questions. Notice how Jesus described Nathaniel: a true Israelite who wasn't deceitful! Jesus wasn't bothered by Nathaniel's questions. Jesus knew his heart—his desire to distinguish the real Messiah from false ones. Jesus was okay with Nathaniel asking questions because he desired truth. **God isn't afraid of our honest questions. When we desire to learn and grow in our faith—when we seek truth with the pure intention to know God better—He'll direct us to the right answers.** He'll show us grace and patience, too, because the answers don't come all at once—some never do on this side of eternity. But we get to walk with and learn from Jesus.



HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE GOD DIDN'T UNDERSTAND YOUR LIFE OR SEE YOU? WHAT DOES VERSE 48 HELP YOU KNOW?

You may struggle with feeling seen sometimes. The world is big—huge, actually. Our lives can feel so insignificant in a sea of other people and in a world with so much trouble. You're not the only one who may wrestle with feeling like God doesn't see you, think of you, or care about the details of your life. **God sees you; He sees all of us. And He doesn't just see where we are but who we are on the inside. He sees our motives, our sin, our doubt. And He calls us anyway—from all of this—to follow Him and to let Him transform us from the inside out.**



HOW DO PEOPLE TRY TO GET TO GOD OR HEAVEN ON THEIR OWN, APART FROM JESUS? READ GENESIS 28:10-17. WHAT DID JESUS REVEAL ABOUT HIMSELF IN JOHN 1:51?

People have tried everything to reach heaven on their own, even going so far as building a huge tower (Gen. 11)! We try so hard to be good enough: We live morally; we help the poor; we go to church; we donate to charities. But our human efforts are simply towers, which will never reach high enough. Jesus referred to Jacob's (Israel's) vision of a ladder going to heaven and explained that He was the ladder. **Humanity's best efforts would never be enough, but on Jesus's very body and by His blood, we can ascend to heaven and be with the Father.**

WRAP-UP



IF PEOPLE "COME AND SEE" WHERE YOU'RE GOING IN LIFE (V. 46), WHERE WOULD YOU LEAD THEM? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT YOUR LIFE LEADS TO JESUS?

Our lives say, "Come and see," even when we aren't actively inviting people to do so. Many of us want others to see *us first*. We point people to our accomplishments, our intelligence, our talents. We desperately want them to see our physical beauty or our strength. We showcase our possessions and our wealth. Every bit of this fades. **We waste our days pointing to what doesn't last.** Instead, the way we live each day should cry out, "Come and see Jesus!" Come and see the One who lives forever and shares His inheritance with us! Come and see the Son of God and what He did for us! Come and see how He transformed my life of sin into a life of holiness! Come and see freedom instead of addiction, security in place of insecurity. Come and see God's love for you. How do we do this? **We actively walk with Jesus; we can't lead others to Him if we aren't following Him. And as we walk with Jesus—as we grow and learn and enjoy real relationship with Him—we become like Him.** We become His ambassadors, pointing to Him always.

THE FIRST OF HIS SIGNS

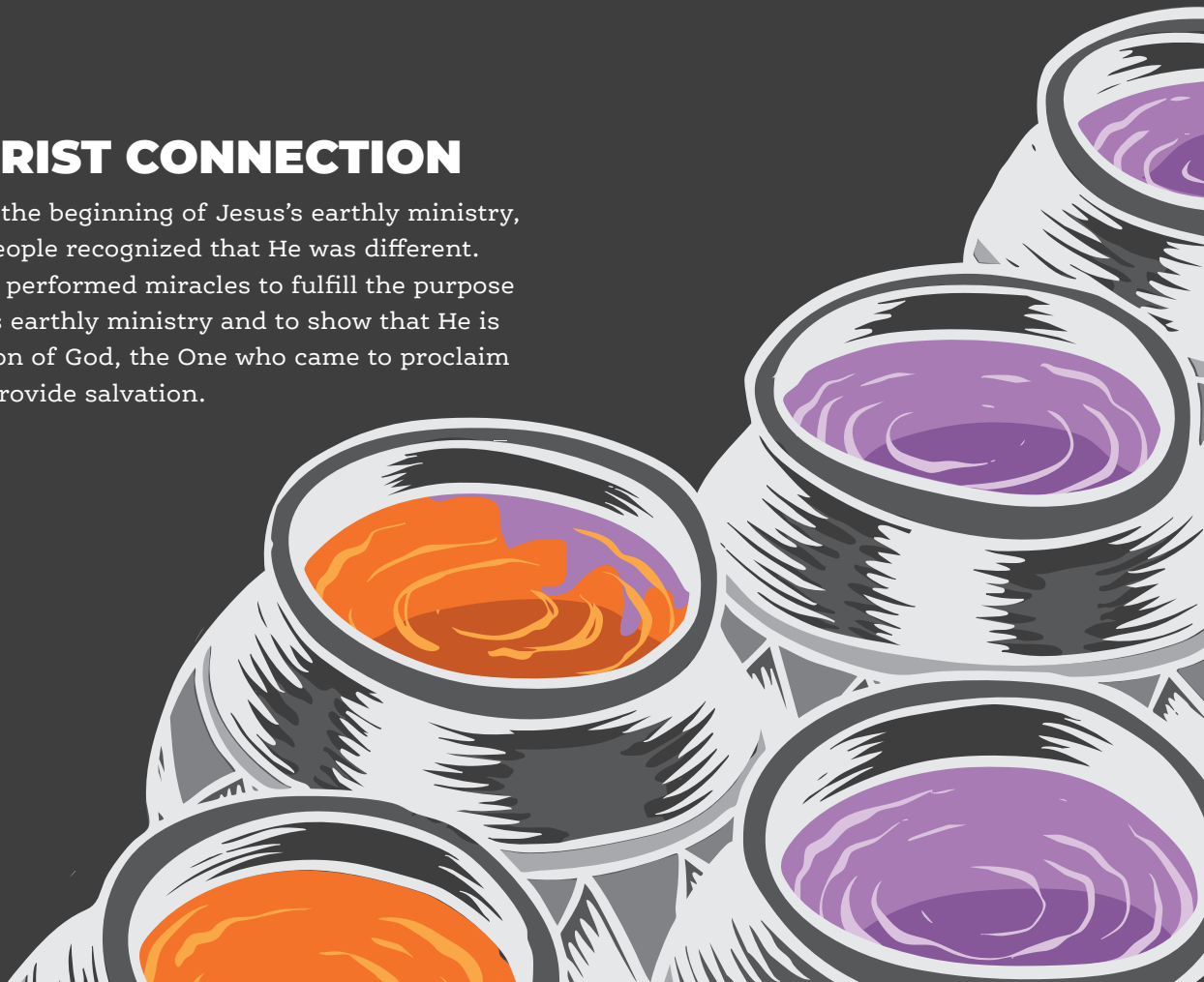
MAIN POINT.

Jesus meets our needs to help us see Him and know Him.



CHRIST CONNECTION

From the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry, the people recognized that He was different. Jesus performed miracles to fulfill the purpose of His earthly ministry and to show that He is the Son of God, the One who came to proclaim and provide salvation.



TRANSFORMING POWER

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 2

JESUS PROVIDES SOMETHING BETTER

JOHN 2:1-8

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it.

JESUS'S MIRACLES REVEAL HIS IDENTITY

JOHN 2:9-11

9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus meets our needs to help us see Him and know Him.

Leaders: Jesus's words and actions pointed to His identity (2:11). May our words and actions reveal His identity as the Savior—the One who redeemed us and made us new.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS PROVIDES SOMETHING BETTER

JOHN 2:3

“Running out of wine represented a social disaster much greater in the first century than it would today. Disgrace, humiliation, insult—all these and more would be brought upon the family with such carelessness as to allow this to happen. Wedding celebrations in that day sometimes lasted nearly a week, so the wine supply was a major consideration.”¹

JOHN 2:4

“If you or I called our mother ‘woman,’ it would be disrespectful, but in that culture this title was not mean, rude, or disrespectful. In fact, it’s the same way Jesus addresses Mary when he’s dying on the cross: ‘When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son”’ (John 19:26).”²

JOHN 2:6

“The inclusion of this detail shows us that the rituals associated with the old covenant are giving way to something far greater. The shadow found in the law has been replaced by the substance. Now that Jesus is here, things have changed. The water of ceremony has been replaced with something far better. External purification has given way to internal cleansing.”³

JESUS'S MIRACLES REVEAL HIS IDENTITY

JOHN 2:9-11

“The master of ceremonies’ exclamation of surprise at the quality of this ‘new wine’ compared to that served earlier (v. 10) takes us to the heart of the ‘sign’ and its meaning. The ‘new wine’ of the kingdom brought by Jesus contrasts with the old wine of Judaism. ‘Jesus changes the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity.’ . . . This miracle can happen again as the water of guilt, habitual failure and legalism, is transformed by the word of the risen Jesus into the wine of forgiveness, victory and joyful obedience.”⁴



CONTEXT

Today's passage is full of Jewish cultural implications that are sometimes difficult for modern readers to understand. Ancient Jewish weddings were significant moments in a community, and the celebration lasted up to an entire week. Families were expected to provide for guests; running out of food, drinks, and so on brought shame on the family, and in some cases, lawsuits for not honoring the traditional agreement! Mary asking Jesus to help reflected these cultural expectations. Modern readers are also alarmed at Jesus calling Mary "woman," but the term wasn't disrespectful. Jesus used this same term during the crucifixion when He asked John to care for her as his own mother (John 19:26). Many scholars believe Jesus's conversation with Mary revealed His commitment to do the Father's will first, even when what He willed was in opposition to opinions of Jesus's loved ones. Rather than immediately agreeing to perform a miracle, Jesus confirmed the time was appropriate with His Father. Though the hour for Jesus's death hadn't come, the time for His public ministry had, and His first miracle pointed to His final hour.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



Miracles

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, THANK YOU FOR REVEALING YOUR SON TO US. THANK YOU FOR THE SIGNS WHICH PROVED JESUS'S IDENTITY. THEY ARE EVIDENCE OF YOUR KINDNESS—YOUR UNDERSTANDING THAT WE ARE OFTEN PRONE TO UNBELIEF. WE TRUST IN YOUR WORD, AND WE BELIEVE IN YOUR SON.



KICK STARTER

♥ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about telling others about Jesus—about the hope we have in the gospel. Did you have opportunities to **share the gospel** last week? Did you share it? If not, why?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

SOMETHING BETTER

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **HAVE YOU EVER HELD OFF ON A GOOD OPPORTUNITY BECAUSE YOU KNEW A BETTER OFFER WAS COMING? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU TAKEN A LESSER OFFER AND BEEN DISAPPOINTED THAT YOU DIDN'T WAIT FOR SOMETHING BETTER?**
- **WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO WAIT FOR SOMETHING BETTER INSTEAD OF SETTLING FOR WHAT'S GOOD IN THE MOMENT?**

Holding out for a better offer is sometimes difficult. We're tempted to settle for something good instead of waiting for the very best. In today's lesson, Jesus will provide something good for His friends, but the miracle only pointed to something better—His sacrifice for our sin.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever promised to do better—to be a better person, friend, son, or daughter? Or maybe you wanted to be a better athlete or student, a better brother or sister. Our efforts to be better often fall short. We try for a while, but we revert back to old patterns and behaviors. The truth is that we can't be better on our own. When it comes to sin, we can't do better at all. Our efforts to be good will come up short. The more we try to be good enough apart from Jesus, the more disappointed and ashamed we'll feel. The good news is that Jesus doesn't just help us be better; Jesus makes us new (2 Cor. 5:17). He changes us into something we're not. This transformation is a beautiful exchange that none of us deserve; we receive Jesus's righteousness in exchange for Him taking our sin. So, can you be a better person, friend, daughter, son? No, Jesus makes you even better than better; He makes you new.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus meets our needs to help us see Him and know Him.

JESUS PROVIDES SOMETHING BETTER

READ JOHN 2:1-8

WOULD PEOPLE TODAY EXPECT JESUS TO BE INVITED TO A FUN EVENT? WHAT DOES JESUS BEING INVITED SHOW US?

We often have a skewed view of Jesus—maybe because of how shows and movies depict Him or because we don't have a deep understanding of Jewish culture. Jesus is often portrayed as always serious, always pointing out sin, never having fun. But Jesus was fully human, and based on passages like this and others where crowds and children flocked to Him, we get a better glimpse of who He was: **Jesus radiated love and joy.** People were drawn to Him. Jesus didn't separate Himself from people; He had friends! He celebrated their joyful occasions and spent time with them.

WHAT DID MARY'S INSTRUCTIONS REVEAL ABOUT HER VIEW OF JESUS (V. 5)? WHAT ROLE DID THE SERVERS' OBEDIENCE PLAY IN THE MIRACLE?

Jesus didn't answer Mary directly, but she trusted the outcome to Him. After bringing the problem to her son, Mary felt the freedom to walk away. **What if we trusted Jesus so much that we rested in His ability to handle every part of our lives?** The servers did what Jesus asked and simply filled the jars. Their small act of obedience opened the door for miraculous transformation and played a huge role in Jesus's first miracle. **Like Mary, we can trust Jesus; like the servers, our obedience matters more than we know.**



WHAT WAS THE JARS' PURPOSE (V. 6)? HOW DOES KNOWING THEIR PURPOSE HELP US UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE MIRACLE?

The six jars of water were in place for guests to cleanse themselves before eating, not for drinking. The jars were part of the Jews' purity rituals. Jesus changed their purpose, though. Let's zero in on the depth of this first miracle and the radical statement it conveyed. Jews ritually and physically cleansed themselves with water. But water could never cleanse them, or us, internally. Jesus's blood washes us clean from our sin. He purifies us internally, which is then reflected externally by how we live—in our actions, our words, our thoughts. **Jesus's first miracle pointed to a greater miracle: The temporary cleansing that the law and the sacrificial system provided would be fulfilled in Him! Jesus's sacrifice ushered in a way to be cleansed permanently by calling on Him for salvation.** This miracle was a sign that the new covenant was coming—the one God promised would change us from the inside out (Jer. 31:33-34) and the one that would provide "rivers of living water" deep within us through the Holy Spirit (John 7:38). The water in these jars pointed to the great salvation that was on the way!

JESUS'S MIRACLES REVEAL HIS IDENTITY

READ JOHN 2:9-11



HOW DOES THIS MIRACLE HELP YOU SEE THAT JESUS CARES ABOUT MORE THAN JUST OUR NEEDS? HOW HAVE YOU SEEN HIM WORK IN SMALL WAYS IN YOUR LIFE?

This wedding party probably seems insignificant to most of us. The party ended, and everyone went home. Was the need for more wine really that big of a deal? Well, outside of the Jews' cultural expectations that meant the family would be looked down on (and maybe even treated as outcasts or sued) for not providing for guests, no. They could've survived without it, but Jesus revealed His identity through meeting a desire. **He cares deeply about us, a care extending beyond our needs only. Jesus works in seemingly insignificant moments in our lives too.** When we have spiritual eyes to notice His work, then we gain a deeper understanding of His love and His character.



WHY DID JESUS PERFORM MIRACLES? DO WE STILL TRUST GOD TO DO MIRACLES TODAY? HAVE YOU SEEN ANY?

This miracle was the first of many Jesus performed, but every miracle served the similar purpose of revealing Jesus's identity. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus didn't just supply a little more wine to get the family through the party. He had the servers fill the jars to the brim. They overflowed with new wine—with the very best wine. Jesus transformed water into something else entirely. **The miracle pointed to something greater: Jesus gave abundantly of Himself, of His blood, for us. His sacrifice was so pure, so perfect, that it was enough to cover all sin for all time, like a fountain that never stops and is overflowing (Zech. 13:1).** Miracles still happen; God still heals and restores. As believers, we are evidence of His transforming power.



HOW DID THE MIRACLE AFFECT JESUS'S NEW FOLLOWERS?

After witnessing the miracle, Jesus's new disciples believed in Him (v. 11). The Jews knew God's promise to send another prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15). Maybe the miracle mirrored the first plague, when God, through Moses, changed the Nile River to blood as judgment on Egypt (Ex. 7:19). **Jesus, the greater Moses, changed water to wine—a symbol of joy and abundance.** Jesus provided wine at a literal wedding, but He also provided everything we need for another wedding—one to which He and Scripture both point (Rev. 19:7-8). The Bible refers to the church as the Bride and Christ as the Bridegroom. **We are clothed in white, cleansed and prepared for this great wedding instead of the judgment we deserve.**

WRAP-UP



GOD CAN CHANGE WATER INTO SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY, SO WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO TRUST HIM WITH BIG AND SMALL DETAILS OF OUR LIVES?

When we read about Jesus's miracles and the great wonders God did in the Old Testament, we often separate them from our own lives. We believe these accounts are true; we just doubt that God can or will work like this for us. When Jesus changed water to wine, He didn't just add something to the water; He transformed it entirely and made it something it wasn't before. God does the same thing with your heart, changing it from stone to flesh and helping you to follow Him (Ezek. 11:19). He gives you the Holy Spirit, empowering you to live for Him in a way you can't do on your own. This truth is a miracle. **Every single day God works a miracle in your heart by living within you!** Every breath you inhale and exhale is a miracle. We sometimes forget that the God of all creation shares His Spirit with us. God works all around you and within you. He uses the big stuff in your life, of course. But He uses the small stuff too. **God has only ever been faithful. You can trust God, who has transformed you, with every part of your life—big and small.**

I WILL RAISE IT UP

MAIN POINT.

Jesus is worthy of our best worship.



CHRIST CONNECTION

The Passover, along with the temple and perpetual sacrifices, revealed God's desire to be with His people and the way they could be made right with Him. These signs pointed to the greater way that God would restore people to Himself through Christ. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven and made right with God forever.



ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 2

GOD DEMANDS A BETTER SACRIFICE

JOHN 2:13-17

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

JESUS IS THE BETTER TEMPLE

JOHN 2:18-25

18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. 23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus is worthy of our best worship.

Leaders: Your best offering in worship teaches students that God is worthy of their best worship.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

GOD DEMANDS A BETTER SACRIFICE

JOHN 2:13-17

“They’ve set up shop in the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles. Their lust for money is interfering with the Gentiles’ coming to worship the one true God. They’ve trivialized the worship of God. When an unbeliever entered the temple and saw the commerce, he would assume the God of Israel is a prop used to extort people’s money. Jesus is angry because his Father’s house is being corrupted. Worship is being perverted. Kent Hughes wrote, ‘The way we worship reveals what we think about God.’ Jesus thought correctly about God. He perfectly understood the holiness, power, and authority of God. That is why he was so passionate about God’s house. . . . God’s people are in awe of him. God’s people worship him. Coming to God in faith requires turning from self-worship to true worship. If each Sunday is a narcissistic activity of self-worship, then you are walking in the footsteps of the temple merchants.”⁵

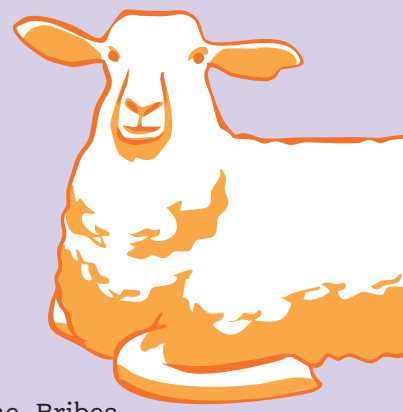
JOHN 2:13-17

“As far as the money changers (2:14) are concerned, each Israelite who was part of the annual poll was expected to provide a half-shekel tax/offering to the temple (Ex. 30:13). Moreover, those who came from a distance instead of bringing offerings of animals or birds could bring money and purchase them from the temple staff, a practice that developed out of the alternative pattern provided in Deuteronomy 14:25. The payments of these items, however, could not be made in foreign currencies like Roman denarii, which contained pagan symbols and the images of emperors. Therefore the money had to be exchanged for appropriate temple currency. The result was that the temple also became a major money exchange or bank.”⁶

JESUS IS THE BETTER TEMPLE

JOHN 2:18

“The use of the term ‘sign’ here in this context of confrontation or demand by the Jews has a slightly different focus from the sign for believers as in 2:11. The Jewish challenge was for proof of either Jesus’s right to make a particular statement (6:30) or to do a particular act (2:18). The demand for such a sign was in effect the demand for Jesus to justify himself in their eyes. In such contexts in John, Jesus refused the requests. He readily argued with the Jews, but he refused to become a magician performing signs for their benefit.”⁷



CONTEXT

The priesthood was incredibly corrupt before and during Jesus's lifetime. Bribes determined the next high priest instead of lots drawn by members of the Levite tribe. Wealthy Sadducees paid to be appointed in exchange for keeping peace with Rome and enforcing Roman law; as compensation, they benefited from temple tithes and animal sales. Understanding this corruption helps us understand Jesus's actions in the temple—His Father's house. God required spotless sacrifices. But the priesthood, the Annas family, inspected all sacrifices and frequently denied them, forcing people to purchase available animals right there in the temple, specifically in the Court of the Gentiles, at insanely inflated prices. The Annases profited off of the Jews who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, the annual festival celebrating the exodus from Egypt. Not only did they inflate prices, but they also charged temple taxes. The market-like atmosphere hindered Gentiles from worshiping. This context set the stage for Jesus's righteous indignation at what the sacrificial system of atonement had become—a system He came to replace with His own body, the Lamb of God.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God Is Holy

God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for "holy" means "separate" or "set apart." God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, WE WANT TO HONOR YOU IN OUR WORSHIP. ONLY BECAUSE OF JESUS CAN WE COME BEFORE YOU, RIGHTEOUS AND FORGIVEN. HELP US TO REMEMBER YOUR HOLINESS AND YOUR WORTHINESS EVERY TIME WE COME BEFORE YOU IN WORSHIP. WE OFFER OUR HEARTS AS A SACRIFICE, SURRENDERING THEM FULLY TO YOU.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2022, one of the deadliest outbreaks of bird flu killed **tens of millions** of egg-laying hens. How did this affect us? The cost of eggs skyrocketed 59.5%!⁸

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1

TOO MUCH

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **HAVE YOU EVER WANTED SOMETHING SO MUCH THAT YOU WOULD PAY MORE THAN IT WAS WORTH TO GET IT? (EX: CONCERT TICKETS, SHOES, COLLECTIBLES)**
- **WHY ARE WE WILLING TO PAY WAY MORE FOR CERTAIN THINGS?**
- **WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU PAID TOO MUCH FOR AND THEN REGRETTED IT?**

We make sacrifices for what matters to us. If something is valuable to us, then we're willing to go to great lengths to have it or to protect it. God deserves our best worship, but so often, we withhold it or give it away to lesser "gods" and idols. Jesus's sacrifice was enough to cover us; He paid the price for our sin so that we can enjoy relationship with God.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

What is worship? How do we worship God the right way? We use the word "worship" a lot in Christian culture, but the word even bleeds into secular, or worldly, culture. We say things like, "She worships the ground he walks on" and make people, brands, and activities our idols. Only God is worthy of worship, but we often bow before lesser "gods"—false gods that can't save us, gods that lead us away from the one true God and to destruction. Worship is giving God the glory and praise He deserves; worship involves our words, but even more, worship is bowing our hearts before the Lord and living in submission to Him. Here's how we know we're worshipping God the right way: We examine what our love and adoration point to; we examine what we're devoted to; we ask if our heart is divided between God and anything else. And if it is, we lay that thing down in surrender. Worship requires us to surrender our hearts, minds, and actions to the only One who is worthy.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus is worthy of our best worship.

GOD DEMANDS A BETTER SACRIFICE

READ JOHN 2:13-17

WHEN SOMEONE DISRESPECTS YOU OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE, HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY REACT?

A core human desire is the need to feel valued. Most of us have been disrespected at some point, causing us to feel small and invisible. Maybe someone said something harmful about our character or insulted our family. Some of us handle being disrespected better than watching family members, people we love, or people who are vulnerable be mistreated. We rise up to defend them and may feel immediate anger, a desire for revenge, or the need to fix the situation. **In the moment, we just want to restore value to ourselves and the people we care about.**



WHAT DOES JESUS'S REACTION HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT ANGER?

Many of us misunderstand anger, believing it's a sin. While anger can lead to sin, it's an emotion—one God feels perfectly and righteously. God is slow to anger (Ps. 103:8). Paul instructed believers to “be angry and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). **This means that we can be angry without sinning. How? Selfish anger and righteous anger have different motives.** Righteous anger stirs us to action and motivates us to stand against sin and injustice. Jesus displayed righteous anger. His anger wasn't rooted in revenge or pride, like ours so often is, but in respect for God's holiness, with the goal of restoring acceptable worship in the temple.



IN WHAT WAYS DO WE *CHEAPEN* WORSHIP OR TREAT GOD'S HOUSE WITH DISRESPECT?

Leaders: Share context that set the stage for this event. The sacrificial system in the Old Testament and in Jesus's time was broken. What God intended as provision for humans to experience forgiveness of sin transitioned into a money-making scheme that took advantage of people. What was supposed to be worshipful morphed into a corrupted show, distracting people from worship. God demanded a better sacrifice than what the people were bringing—even with inflated prices. If we aren't careful, we can be guilty of cheapening worship too. How? By appearing to worship God but being far from Him in our hearts. By looking the part at church but living like the world. By singing worship songs under bright lights and fog but not living the way God calls us to live in His Word. By making worship and church about us instead of God. By not offering Him our best. Here's the truth: Only pure sacrifice makes us right with God and enables us to worship Him. **God's holiness demands a better sacrifice than we could ever bring. Our better sacrifice is Jesus. He is the only acceptable sacrifice. He covered our sin fully, permanently. When we make worship about us rather than God, we cheapen His sacrifice.**

JESUS IS THE BETTER TEMPLE

READ JOHN 2:18-25

WHY DID THE JEWS ASK FOR A SIGN (V. 18)? IS THERE EVER AN OKAY REASON TO ASK GOD FOR A SIGN?

After Jesus cleared the temple courts, the Jews asked for a sign. In other words, they asked for proof of Jesus's authority to make a claim that the temple was His Father's house. Why? When Jesus said this, He claimed to be God's Son, and this was a big statement that could warrant investigation from Jewish leaders. **They didn't want a sign so that they could believe. They asked for a sign out of a desire to prove Jesus was a fraud.** Other times in the Bible, God did sometimes honor the request for a sign (Ex. Gideon, Abraham's servant). The difference was that God provided these signs to strengthen people's faith and to empower them to accomplish His plan. **We can ask God to confirm His will for us while consulting His Word first, seeking Him in prayer, and seeking wise advice from godly mentors.**



WHAT DID JESUS REALIZE ABOUT MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED IN HIM AFTER THE SIGNS? WHAT DOES THIS TYPE OF BELIEF LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Because Jesus is omniscient, or all-knowing, He saw through the people's exterior and knew their hearts. Their "belief" was dependent on signs Jesus performed and not in the truth that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. Like them, we often chase God's works over knowing Him. We believe only if God does what we ask of Him. Our belief isn't rooted in faith—in absolute assurance that Jesus is Lord. **If attached to signs, our belief unravels when life hurts, when healing doesn't come, when we feel like God doesn't answer our prayers. But belief rooted in faith, in the assurance of who Jesus is and in the hope of the gospel, is unwavering.** Signs are unnecessary because Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are enough.



WHY DOES JESUS COMPARE HIMSELF TO THE TEMPLE?

The temple was crucial to the Jews' identity. The temple provided a center for sacrifice and a way for God to dwell among His people. The temple had been destroyed and rebuilt, so Jesus's statement sounded like a radical threat. But Jesus spoke of Himself as the temple. Jesus is God, and He dwelled among His people as the center for sacrifice—as the sacrifice. **He surrendered His body, allowing it to fall, but after three days, He raised back to life! The temple was always a shadow of Jesus, the better temple.**

WRAP-UP



WHEN HAVE YOU FELT LIKE YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING GOOD TO BRING TO GOD? HOW CAN YOU REST IN JESUS'S PERFECT SACRIFICE?

God is holy. He can't accept half-hearted, insincere worship. Our cheap sacrifices can never be worthy enough for us to enter God's holy presence; our best sacrifices rooted in our own goodness can never be enough either. God requires complete surrender, which can feel a little intimidating, right? Here's the other part: God requires our best but gave His Son to be our best offering. He demands everything, but Jesus lowered Himself to satisfy the demand and was everything on our behalf (Phil. 2:7-8). Jesus's perfect sacrifice covers us and atones for our sin. He purchased our freedom and our rest. **So, we don't have to strive to be worthy because the blood of Jesus makes us worthy! God still deserves our best, but instead of striving to earn salvation, our best is rooted in gratitude for what Jesus has already done. His work on the cross was enough.** And now, we have the privilege of living our lives as offerings of praise.

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

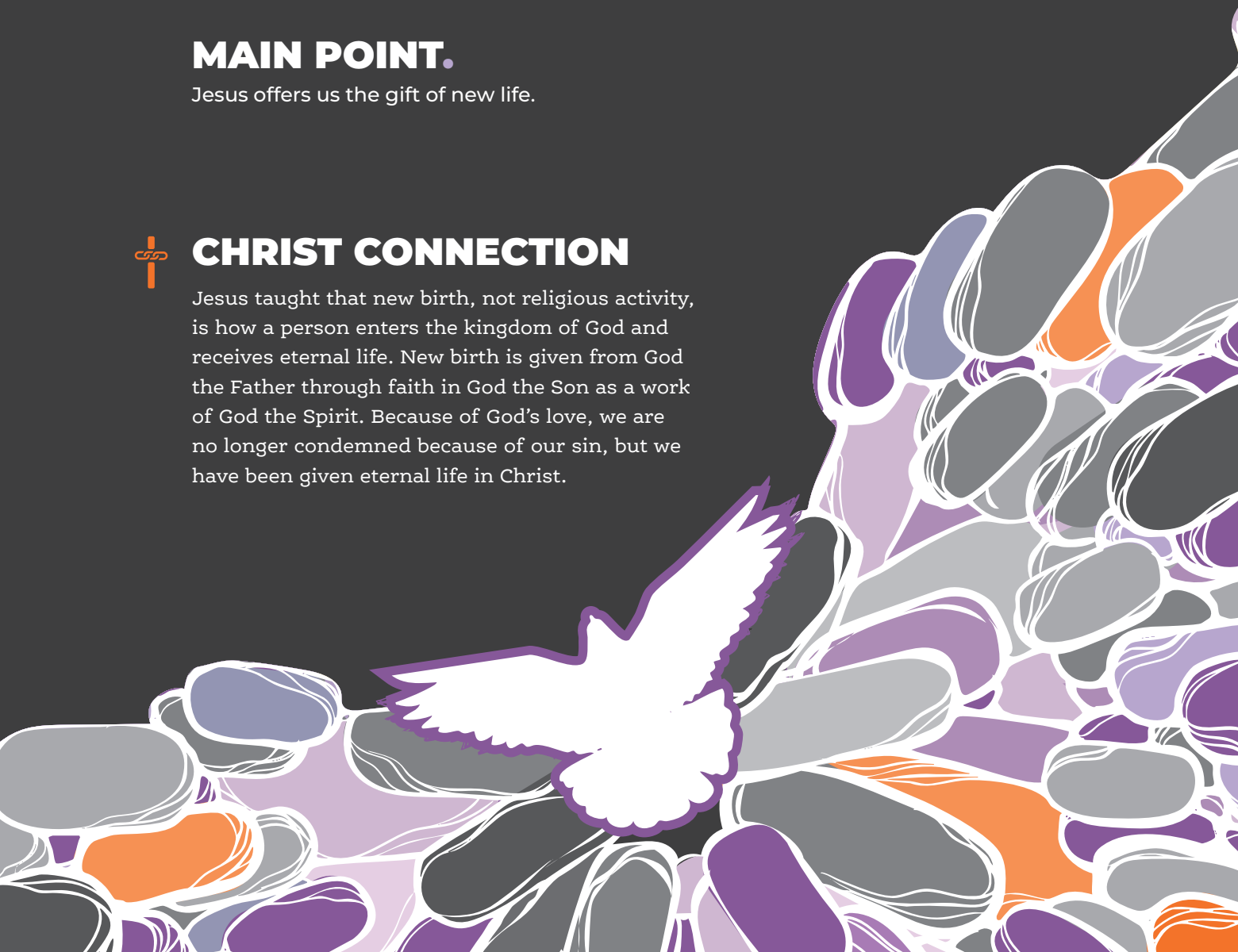
MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us the gift of new life.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus taught that new birth, not religious activity, is how a person enters the kingdom of God and receives eternal life. New birth is given from God the Father through faith in God the Son as a work of God the Spirit. Because of God's love, we are no longer condemned because of our sin, but we have been given eternal life in Christ.



WORTHLESS CREDENTIALS

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 3

JESUS OFFERS US NEW LIFE

JOHN 3:1-13

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

JESUS OFFERS US FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION

JOHN 3:14-21

14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us the gift of new life.

Leaders: This week, may you be reminded of God's deep love for you (John 3:16).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS OFFERS US NEW LIFE

JOHN 3:3-9

"Nicodemus thought entering God's kingdom had everything to do with physical birth. If a person was born a Jew, he would automatically have a spot in God's kingdom. He would only be kept out if he were blasphemous or extremely wicked. But Jesus says the opposite. No matter who a person is, he is automatically kept out of God's kingdom by his sin. He would only be let in if he were born again. If being born again isn't a physical birth, then what is it? Jesus says it's a spiritual birth. The Spirit of God makes a person alive and new from the inside. The new birth happens when God's Spirit animates the human spirit, making a person alive to the things of God. It's the total transformation of a person from the inside out."⁹

JESUS OFFERS US FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION

JOHN 3:14-15

"This illustration from the Old Testament life of Moses shows us that the cross provides a cure from the poison of sin, deliverance from the death of sin, and removal of the condemnation of sin. The words lifted up appear twice more in this Gospel (8:28; 12:32), and each time they emphasize the centrality of the cross and the message of salvation. The sin in the desert was rebellion, and Israel needed to show faith and obedience by looking to the pole (Num. 21:9)."¹⁰

JOHN 3:16

"Is there a verse anywhere in the Bible more well-known and loved than this? How poignantly it states that eternal life is not earned by begging, crying, praying, working, or joining! Salvation comes as a free gift when we believe what God has said. For almost two thousand years people have been adding to the gospel."¹¹

JOHN 3:16-21

"Jesus has come not just for the Jews or the elect, but for the world. He has come not to save some and to condemn others, but solely for salvation. Nevertheless, condemnation does take place—not through God's rejection of some, but by their rejection of him (v. 18). Judgment is a matter of what people do with the light, as Jesus emphasizes at the end of the first half of the Gospel (12:46-48). One's response to Jesus is one's judgment because Jesus is the revelation of God himself (12:49-50)."¹²



CONTEXT

Who was **Nicodemus**, the man who conversed with Jesus at night? First, Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees, a group of roughly 6,000 men deeply committed to obeying and enforcing God's law—613 commands, along with additional laws the Jews added to ensure their obedience. He likely was a member of the Sanhedrin as well—seventy men who acted as the governing body of the Jewish nation. In other words, Nicodemus had all the right credentials. He was a highly-respected, knowledgeable teacher of the law. In the Jews' eyes, Nicodemus was the epitome of one fit for God's kingdom, but the right credentials, even religious ones, can't ensure a place there. This concept would've been foreign to Nicodemus, who believed his lineage and self-righteousness made him secure. The radical idea that neither of these mattered led to more questions and, ultimately, Jesus unraveling the mystery of the gospel for Nicodemus and for us: No one can enter or see the kingdom without looking to the Son in faith. Our best credentials are polluted by sin, so God gave His Son to keep us from perishing (John 3:16).

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Regeneration

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

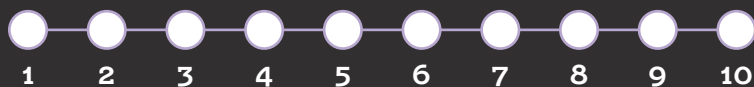
**GOD, THANK YOU FOR LOVING US AND FOR SENDING YOUR SON TO FREE US.
HELP US TO WALK IN FREEDOM INSTEAD OF BELIEVING SATAN'S MESSAGE OF
CONDEMNATION. THANK YOU FOR DRAWING US INTO THE LIGHT. WE COMMIT TO
LIVING IN THE LIGHT AND SHOWING YOUR LIGHT TO THE WORLD.**



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

Be honest: How afraid of the dark are you (1=Not at all; 10=I sleep with a light on at all times)?



These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

DARK AND LIGHT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **DO YOU LIKE TO SLEEP IN TOTAL DARKNESS OR DO YOU NEED SOME LIGHT? WHY?**
- **WHEN DO WE START BEING AFRAID OF THE DARK? WHY ARE WE?**
- **CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN YOU WERE AFRAID AND GETTING TO A SOURCE OF LIGHT MADE YOU FEEL SAFE?**

Many of us were afraid of the dark as children and many of us are still! We associate darkness with all sorts of scary things; much of our fear is based in the unknown. Light brings us comfort, protection, and sight. Today, we'll see that though our flesh is drawn to darkness and sin, light gives us sight and draws us to freedom and eternal safety.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

You've probably messed up before and wanted to just start over. Maybe you made a horrible grade and wanted to retake a test. Maybe you gossiped about a friend, and you'd love to undo your words and the damage they caused. Maybe you sinned and did something you never thought you'd do, and you'd love to go back in time to make the right choice. In some situations, we can start over, but when it comes to our sin, we can't. We can't go back to the beginning and choose never to sin. Why? When Adam and Eve fell to sin, all of humanity was infected by it. We are born into a sinful world, and we can't fix it. This may sound hopeless, but it just means that we needed someone else to fix it for us—someone never infected with sin. Jesus's sacrifice provides something better than a second chance because, if given another chance, we'd squander it. Instead, we are reborn! When we call on Jesus for salvation, He gives us His Spirit. We are renewed, continuously covered by Jesus's blood and no longer bound to our sin!

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus offers us the gift of new life.

JESUS OFFERS US NEW LIFE

READ JOHN 3:1-13

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO ASK GOD A QUESTION? WHAT WOULD YOU ASK?

Maybe you have always wondered why God created spiders, or maybe you're curious about something more serious, like why a prayer wasn't answered the way you hoped. Nicodemus had questions too, which led him to meet with Jesus at night. Maybe Nicodemus feared what other leaders would think or maybe he had some other reason for choosing night, but Nicodemus went to the source for answers. Jesus wasn't offended; He welcomed the conversation. **We naturally wonder about things we struggle to understand, but God isn't offended when we bring our questions to Him in a search for truth.**



WHAT WAS NICODEMUS'S OPINION OF JESUS? WHY WASN'T IT ENOUGH?

When Nicodemus approached Jesus at night, he called Him "Rabbi"—a term that indicated respect and meant "teacher." Nicodemus also acknowledged that God was somehow empowering Jesus to perform signs and miracles. **He recognized Jesus was from God, but he didn't understand that Jesus is God—the promised Messiah.** Nicodemus's good opinion of Jesus wasn't enough. How does this apply to us? **Many of us think highly of Jesus; we may even acknowledge that He existed. But good opinions of Him aren't enough.** We must be born again; we must confess Him as Lord and call on Him for salvation, surrendering wholly to Him.



DOES THE TRUTH THAT YOU CAN'T BE *GOOD ENOUGH* TO SEE GOD'S KINGDOM COMFORT YOU OR CONCERN YOU? WHY?

Leaders: Discuss Context about Nicodemus to ensure students understand his position in Jewish culture. Some of us find comfort in our religious or worldly credentials. We celebrate checking off the right boxes: We go to church; we read our Bibles; we sing in the choir; we make good decisions; we try to be honest; we don't lie, cheat, or steal; we don't use profanity or party; we have good morals. All of this sounds really good, doesn't it? **But if Jesus looked at a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, a man who worked to know and follow God's law his entire life, and essentially said, "Your goodness isn't enough; you don't qualify," then what does He say of our goodness?** Jesus looked at one of the best of the Jews and told him that he wasn't fit to see the Father's kingdom. But this doesn't have to be bad news! In fact, this is the good news of the gospel. **We get to see and live now as members of the kingdom because Jesus makes us worthy. He imparted His goodness to us, making us righteous with the gift of His blood!** We are reborn—new creations!

JESUS OFFERS US FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION

READ JOHN 3:14-21



WHY DO PEOPLE SOMETIMES DOUBT GOD'S LOVE FOR THEM? HOW DEEP IS GOD'S LOVE FOR US?

Human suffering is one of the biggest reasons people doubt God's love. We wrestle with why God lets us walk through pain if He loves us. Suffering and grieving dull our understanding. God deeply loves His Son, but He allowed Him to suffer. Why? Because He loves us deeply too (3:16). God doesn't desire for us to suffer; we can look at Eden and see God's original design was for us to enjoy peace, perfection, and unbroken relationship with Him. Pain and suffering exist because of sin—because humans allowed the enemy to warp truth. **But in His goodness, God doesn't waste our pain. He uses it to draw us closer to Him—to remind us that this world is broken and that His only Son was broken and bruised to redeem us.** God is near when we're hurting (Ps. 34:18). If we reframe suffering as a reminder of our brokenness, then we can stand hopefully under the weight of it, knowing God has promised that all suffering has an expiration date. Instead of allowing the enemy to use our suffering, we can lean into truth.

WHAT COULD YOU SHARE WITH PEOPLE WHO FEEL LIKE GOD JUST WANTS TO CONDEMN THEM?

We feel judged and condemned when someone points out our mistakes. Sometimes, people do have a motive to condemn us, but God's heart is our freedom. **Jesus explained that He came to redeem us, not condemn us. The truth is that our sin condemns us.** God would've been justified in leaving us here without hope, but He came down: Jesus dwelled with us, lived like us, experienced pain, grief, and suffering. Jesus, though sinless, took the condemnation we deserved in exchange for our freedom. God desires our salvation, not our condemnation.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR TEENAGERS TO LOVE AND CHOOSE DARKNESS TODAY (V. 19)?

Our flesh craves sin; without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we choose darkness. Sin masks itself as fun and freedom, when really, sin is slavery. We choose things like partying, alcohol, sexual sin. We avoid light—truth—because then we'd have to make a choice: light or dark, follow God or the world. One is our freedom; one is our bondage. **We feel safer crouching in the dark, but redemption is in the light—in allowing God to expose our sin and our need for Jesus.**

WRAP-UP



HOW CAN YOU BE AN INSTRUMENT OF LIGHT IN THE WORLD? WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE LOOK MORE LIKE DARKNESS THAN LIGHT?

We're conditioned to fear the dark. Even as small children, we associate darkness with scary monsters lurking and waiting for us. Jesus drew on this theme of darkness and light because we so easily identify with it. When it comes to our physical safety, we run to the light; when it comes to our sin, we crouch in the dark. We don't want our sin exposed in the light of day because we'd experience shame, guilt, and more—we'd have to choose either to stay in the dark or to walk into the light. Jesus said believers are light in a dark world (Matt. 5:14). We live as lights when we walk according to God's Word. This means we'll live differently from the world. We'll talk differently; we'll treat others with love and forgive enemies; we'll seek holiness instead of popularity; we'll use language that points to Jesus instead of cutting people down; we'll share the gospel instead of hiding our faith. **If we've seen the light, then we must walk in the light. When we do, we lead others to freedom and show them how to leave darkness behind: by trusting the Light of the world (John 8:12).**

THE GROOM'S FRIEND

MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus showed us how to decrease when He lowered Himself in obedience to the Father's will and came to earth as a human. He took on our sin and paid our debt so that we could have right relationship with the Father and forgiveness for our sin. Jesus pointed all glory to the Father and took on the role of a servant.



ELEVATING ONE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 3

WE MUST DECREASE

JOHN 3:22-30

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison). 25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

CHRIST MUST INCREASE

JOHN 3:31-36

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

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.

Leaders: Consider how you can point to Jesus instead of yourself. Even as leaders, we struggle with pointing to Jesus only. May we intentionally decrease and position Jesus above ourselves.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WE MUST DECREASE

JOHN 3:27-30

“The Baptizer is treated not merely as a historical person, but he is also employed as a character symbol who is to be contrasted directly with Jesus. He is witness; Jesus is the Light (1:7-8). He is voice; Jesus is the Word (1:14,23). He baptizes with water; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit (1:33). To miss this contrast is to miss the Johannine theology of ‘position’ enunciated through vivid contrasts.”¹³

JOHN 3:29

“John’s joy is in fulfilling God’s will for his life—a model of Christian discipleship. He raises the question for all who would be disciples of Jesus, Where do we find our joy? It is easy to get distracted by the pleasurable blessings of this life. We should be thankful and receive gratefully God’s blessings, but our joy’s deepest foundation is God in himself. That he is as Jesus revealed him to be is our joy, as is the fulfilling of his purposes for our own lives (15:10-11), and we see this joy here in the Baptist.”¹⁴

CHRIST MUST INCREASE

JOHN 3:36

“Notice that the word believes (v. 36) is not in contrast with does not believe but with rejects. An essential element of believing Jesus is accepting his word and obeying him. You can’t divorce obedience from belief. To believe you must obey what Jesus has commanded. What we believe and how we live are intertwined. Like strands woven together to make a rope, belief and obedience are woven together in salvation. The New Testament teaches that if you don’t turn from your sin to obey Jesus, then you haven’t put your faith in him.”¹⁵

CONTEXT

The Old Testament portrays Yahweh as Israel's faithful husband, though she was unfaithful. The prophet Hosea lived out this concept, when he obeyed God's command to marry Gomer, an unfaithful woman (Hos. 1:2). The marriage represented God's unwavering covenant relationship with Israel: Hosea, the faithful husband, represented God, and Gomer represented Israel, the adulterous wife. In today's passage, John the Baptist compared himself to the groom's friend and explained that he had no desire to distract the bride from the Groom (John 3:29). In ancient Hebrew culture, the groom's friend often safely delivered the bride to the groom and stood watch outside their door on the night of the wedding. John's job was to point the bride to the groom, Jesus. With a deep understanding of Scripture, John the Baptist built on the Old Testament theme; calling Jesus the Groom, the husband, acknowledged Him as God. Another interesting truth is that John the Baptist was both a friend of the Groom and also the bride, as are all believers!

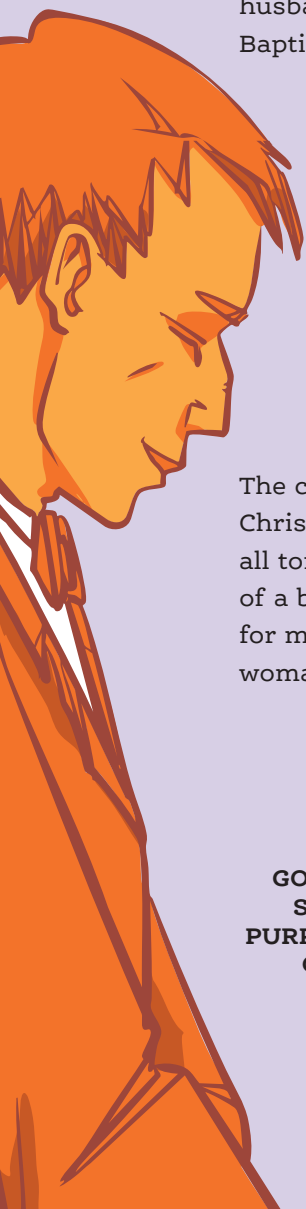
THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Bride of Christ

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, WE CONFESS THAT SOMETIMES WE DESIRE FAME AND GLORY. WHEN WE STRIVE FOR THE PRAISE OF OTHERS, CONVICT US AND REMIND US OF OUR PURPOSE. HELP OUR LIVES POINT STUDENTS TO JESUS INSTEAD OF POINTING TO OURSELVES. REMIND US THAT ANYTHING GOOD IN US COMES FROM YOU.





KICK STARTER

♡ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about being an instrument of light as believers. Did you have opportunities to choose light (truth) over darkness (sin) last week? When did you struggle to make the right choice?

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1

FAMOUS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **IF YOU COULD BE FAMOUS FOR ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHY?**
- **WHY DO YOU THINK OUR CULTURE IS SO INTERESTED IN FAME?**
- **HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA PLAY A FACTOR IN MAKING FAME FEEL ACHIEVABLE?**

Social media has contributed to many of us thinking fame is desirable and attainable. We're sort of infatuated with the idea of influence. But fame and influence come with a price, often tempting us to seek glory for ourselves. Following Jesus means directing all glory to Him.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Why do jealousy and competition exist between believers and in the church? Real answer: People are sinful; people make up the church. Jealousy creeps in, even between friends who follow Jesus. Maybe a friend is making an impact on others, and you feel jealous because you know his faults. Jealousy urges you to point them out instead of celebrating how God is changing your friend for the better and using him to help others. Maybe you desire attention and applause. You see people receiving attention for their good decisions, and you struggle with bitterness. Feeling jealous or competitive reveals our motive: We want the spotlight. Jealousy and competition harm the church, causing division and bitterness and shifting our focus off of Jesus and onto ourselves. We all struggle with these feelings, but we must recognize them immediately instead of allowing the feelings to simmer. We can confess how we feel to God and to the other person and ask God to help us shift our focus onto Him. We can clap for others and celebrate their wins. The truth is that following Jesus isn't about attention or applause. Following Jesus means pointing to Him and away from ourselves because He is the One worthy of glory.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our lifestyle should point to Jesus and bring Him glory.

WE MUST DECREASE

READ JOHN 3:22-30

HOW DOES FAME CHANGE PEOPLE? WHAT PRESSURES COME WITH IT?

We've watched people become famous overnight for a viral video or for a talent. Fame comes with the pressure of others watching everything you do and listening to everything you say. They see your wins, but they see your mistakes too. Sometimes, fame goes to our head, causing us to be arrogant. Fame can lead to the desire for more fame and more attention, even at the expense of our faith and our values. **Worldly fame fades, too, just as quickly as we achieved it. Even if fame lasts for our lifetime, it means nothing in eternity.** Striving for worldly fame distracts us from pointing to Jesus, the only One worthy of all fame.



HOW DO CHURCHES AND BELIEVERS GET CAUGHT IN THE TRAP OF INFLUENCER CULTURE, IN SEEKING WORLDLY FAME OR INFLUENCE?

Our culture is saturated with influencers. A quick scroll on social media exposes us to people being elevated because of their opinions about certain brands, songs, or political issues. We strive for influencer status. Churches and believers aren't immune either. Influencer culture has helped create a celebrity Christianity. **We measure impact by social media reactions and number of followers. If people don't like and share our posts, then we aren't influential.** Sure, we can use social media as a platform to share the gospel, but how do we keep our motives pure? How do we not get caught in a desire for worldly fame—for attention, for more followers, for applause? **The line gets blurry between pointing to the gospel and pointing to ourselves.** The truth is that Jesus didn't seek His own fame. He pointed to the Father. He lowered Himself, descended from a throne in heaven, and came here as a suffering Servant (Isa. 53). **Consistent faithfulness in the small things isn't small; serving when no one sees matters.** Are we willing to decrease—to follow Jesus's and John's example? Or do we demand for the world to see our good works? If that's our motive, then their applause is our only reward—applause we can't carry with us when we go to heaven.



HOW DO JOHN'S DISCIPLES SEEM TO FEEL IN VERSES 25-26?

John explained that his purpose was to cry out in preparation for the Messiah (John 1:23). He didn't desire glory and encouraged his followers to follow Jesus instead. But some of his disciples appeared bothered by the attention Jesus received, seeming to make it a contest. Maybe they felt betrayed by people who previously followed John. Maybe they felt jealousy over another rabbi rising in public opinion. Either way, they missed the point of John's teaching. **John was joyful that everyone was running to Jesus because that meant he was fulfilling his purpose.** John showed us how to find joy by pointing to Jesus and away from ourselves.

CHRIST MUST INCREASE

READ JOHN 3:31-36

WHAT DOES VERSE 31 SHOW US ABOUT WHO WE ARE IN RELATION TO WHO JESUS IS? HOW SHOULD THIS IMPACT THE WAY WE LIVE?

Verse 31 is clear that Jesus is above all—not just some things, some people, some of creation. Jesus has authority over all. He is God’s eternal Son, who reigns forever. Us? **We’re earthly—created, temporary, finite, imperfect—yet, we often live like we are the ones in authority. We live as if we’re the center and everything revolves around us.** The reality is that Jesus is the center, holding all things together (Col. 1:16-17). He speaks the words of the Father and shows us His character. **Knowing this truth should cause us to reorient our lives to revolve around Jesus, to live according to the Word and not our opinions, to live with gladness under God’s good authority.**



READ VERSE 36. HOW DOES THE WORLD TEACH VERY DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT GETTING TO HEAVEN OR HAVING ETERNAL LIFE?

Verse 36 presents a choice: Believe in the Son or reject Him. Believing in Jesus as Lord leads to life, but rejecting Him as Lord leads to eternal wrath. Think of marriage: Marriage is the commitment of a man and a woman to one another. You’re either married to someone or not; there is no in-between, even if the world teaches otherwise. Scripture often compares believers to a bride and Jesus to the groom. **We’re either in covenant relationship with Jesus or not.** The world often teaches that many paths lead to “god,” who can exist in different forms. People believe they can go to heaven if they’re good people, but the truth is that none of us are good; we’ve all chosen sin (Rom. 3:23). **Just as we’re either married or not married, we’re either the bride, committed to Jesus, or we’re not; vague middle ground isn’t an option.**



HOW DOES OUR FAITHFULNESS TO JESUS HELP HIM “INCREASE”? WHAT DOES OUR UNFAITHFULNESS DO?

Jesus is above all; nothing we do changes His position. But our faithfulness to Jesus increases His name, or His reputation, in the world around us. We point to His glory and act as His ambassadors. **When we’re unfaithful—when we live like the world—we harm God’s name and reputation because we spread a false idea of what it looks like to follow Him.** We get to live in a way that increases Jesus’s name! Though God doesn’t need us, He chooses us as His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20)!

WRAP-UP



HOW CAN YOU USE YOUR INFLUENCE TO LIFT UP JESUS INSTEAD OF ELEVATING YOURSELF?

This type of decrease is a choice. John chose to step out of the way and to direct all attention to Jesus. Why? **Because Jesus is the One who matters—always.** God may bless you with some amazing talents or skills. He may gift you with an ability to speak or to sing in front of large crowds. He may grant you opportunities that bring some type of fame. **But what you do with attention and applause shows what’s at the center of your life: Jesus or yourself.** If God gives you any sort of influence (and to some degree, He gives this to all of us), use it for His glory. Live faithfully, showing the world what a follower of Jesus looks like. Point others to Jesus, not just in your actions, but in your words; verbally share the gospel. God doesn’t desire for us to decrease in a harmful, demeaning, or self-deprecating way. God loves us and treasures us as His most unique creation, calling the day He created us “very good” (Gen. 1:31)! But may we never forget that our existence depends on Him. Our entire purpose is to give God glory—our influence for His name and not our own.

LIVING WATER

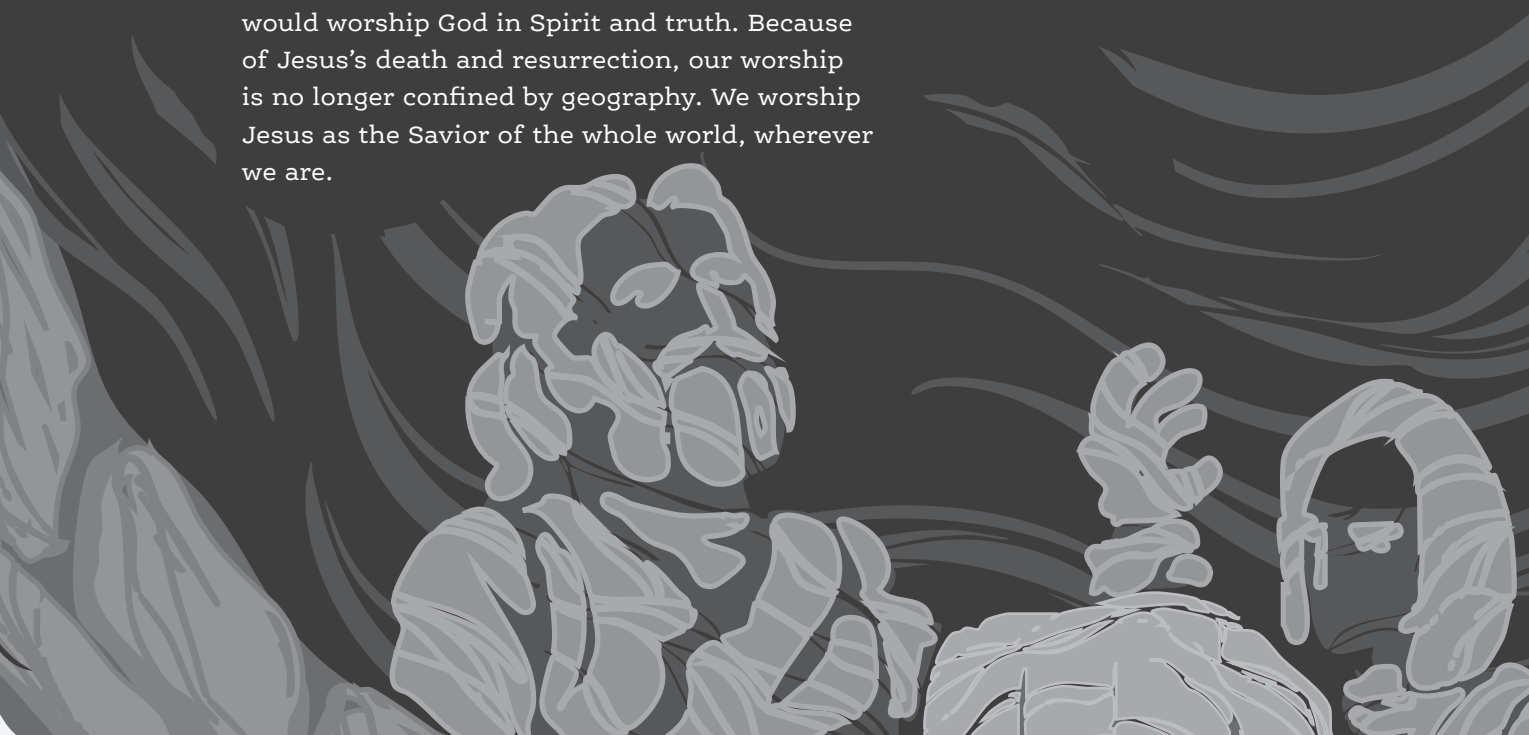
MAIN POINT.

Jesus knows us fully and still loves us deeply.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that a day was coming when worshipers would not focus on the physical location of their worship, but they would worship God in Spirit and truth. Because of Jesus's death and resurrection, our worship is no longer confined by geography. We worship Jesus as the Savior of the whole world, wherever we are.



EXPOSING SIN LEADS TO FREEDOM

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

John 4:1-42

GOD'S LOVE BREAKS BARRIERS

JOHN 4:7-14

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

GOD'S LOVE SATISFIES

JOHN 4:15-30

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." 27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus knows us fully and still loves us deeply.

Leaders: Spend time praying for students who struggle with being known fully because of their shame. The way you love them can soften their hearts to receive God's love and forgiveness.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

GOD'S LOVE BREAKS BARRIERS

JOHN 4:7-9

"The surprise on the part of the woman was not just that Jesus was talking to her—a woman, a sinner, and a Samaritan—but that he wanted to drink from a vessel a Samaritan had taken a drink from. The hatred of the Jews for the Samaritans was so strong they considered themselves unclean for even touching, much less drinking from the same cup as, a Samaritan."¹⁶

JOHN 4:13-14

"The promise of living water is written throughout the pages of the Bible, and with it we find the result of rejecting the living water—the barrenness of seeking satisfaction apart from God. We see it when the prophet Jeremiah spoke God's words to the people of Israel: 'For my people have committed a double evil: They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves—cracked cisterns that cannot hold water' (Jer. 2:13). The chosen people of God had the fountain of living water open and available to them. Their thirst could be quenched, their souls satisfied by God! Yet tragically they abandoned God. They turned from the all-satisfying source of life and strength and attempted to find satisfaction elsewhere. Instead of drinking freely from the fountain of life God offered, they took out their hammers and chisels and started carving out little bowls and digging wells. Yet every time they poured water into their handcrafted vessels, it leaked out."¹⁷

GOD'S LOVE SATISFIES

JOHN 4:15-26

"We often act as if the gospel can best be shared through big programs and events. We think it can be a large-scale, automated, impersonal process. God always works personally, and he sends us to individual people to tell them about Jesus. Jesus went to an everyday place—a well—and found a woman who needed him, and he told her the good news."¹⁸

CONTEXT

Samaria was the region north of Jerusalem. When Assyrians attacked and destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, they exiled the Jews living there and brought in other conquered people groups to repopulate the area. Once the exile ended, Jews returned to the region, and though they weren't supposed to marry foreigners, many married the people living in the area. This resulted in a group of people who weren't purely Jewish—people the Jews despised and excluded. The Samaritans eventually built their own temple and acknowledged only the five books of Moses. Tension continued between Jews and Samaritans, and we see evidence of the strain in a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Jews weren't supposed to interact with Samaritans, but Jewish men were discouraged from publicly interacting with any woman. Jesus chose to travel through Samaria, a region Jews avoided at all cost, to sit at a well with a Samaritan woman. When Jesus spoke with her and drank from her cup, He broke major barriers and pointed to the hope of the gospel: Salvation had come for all people.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



Christ as Reconciliation

Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in creating opposition between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's death, God provides the means for that broken relationship to be restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, WE'VE SEARCHED FOR MEANING AND HAPPINESS APART FROM YOU. WE'VE FACED DISAPPOINTMENT EVERY TIME WE'VE TRIED TO FORCE WORLDLY COMFORTS INTO A SPACE ONLY YOU CAN FILL. WE'RE LEFT WITH A VOID. THANK YOU FOR OFFERING US SALVATION AND FOR GIVING US YOUR SPIRIT SO THAT WE NEVER THIRST AGAIN. HELP US TO LONG FOR YOU.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Water is everywhere, but roughly 97% of earth's water is salty and undrinkable. Then another 2% of earth's water is in glaciers and icecaps, leaving only about 1% available for our use!¹⁹

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1

HUNGER AND THIRST

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **WHAT'S THE LONGEST YOU'VE EVER GONE WITHOUT DRINKING WATER?**
- **HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET HUNGRY DURING THE DAY?**
- **CAN WE IGNORE HUNGER AND THIRST? AT WHAT POINT DO THEY BECOME IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE?**

Hunger and thirst both serve an important purpose: They alert us to real, physical needs. We can ignore hunger and thirst for a little while, but if we don't meet the needs, our body will begin to shut down. God designed us to hunger and thirst spiritually too. We can ignore the signals and even try to meet spiritual needs through other things, but the only way to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst is through Jesus.

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CULTURAL CONNECTION

We're a culture that chases emotional highs and runs after adrenaline. We seek what makes us feel good. But the problem is that feeling good wears off after a while. Emotions fade; adrenaline diminishes. When we begin to feel sad, bored, lonely, or empty, we look for the next fix—for anything we can find to make us feel better. In a way, we've learned to numb the voice deep within us saying, "This isn't enough. This isn't what you need. There's something better." The truth is that temporary highs will disappoint us, and chasing them will wear us out. Why? God didn't design us to chase worldly comforts. He designed us for a relationship with Him. He designed us to depend on Him for peace, joy, and contentment. Since Eden, we've searched everywhere else but in a relationship with God to fill an emptiness that only grows and deepens without Him. In Jesus, we find real satisfaction that lasts—even when life is stressful, lonely, and sad—because it's rooted in the assurance of eternal life with God.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus knows us fully and still loves us deeply.

GOD'S LOVE BREAKS BARRIERS

READ JOHN 4:7-14

HOW DOES THE WOMAN REACT TO JESUS SPEAKING TO HER?

Leaders: Share context about the Samaritans. We can almost hear the woman's surprise because against all social customs, a Jewish man spoke to her in public. Jews didn't interact with Samaritans because of their mixed heritage. They avoided traveling through Samaria, even though it added many miles to their journey. But Jesus had to go through it (4:4). **Jesus had previously met with Nicodemus, a well-known religious leader, but in Samaria, He broke all barriers to meet with an outcast—a woman shunned even by her own people, forced to go to the well at noon to avoid interaction.** He saw her. He spoke to her.



HOW DOES CULTURE VALUE SOME PEOPLE MORE THAN OTHERS? WHAT DOES JESUS'S INTERACTION WITH THIS WOMAN TEACH US ABOUT OUR WORTH?

Culture assigns value to people, ranking them by social status, cliques, material possessions, wealth, or beliefs. From an early age, many of us experience—at least once—the feeling that we don't matter as much as others matter. We don't fit into a certain group because we don't meet its standards. We quickly learn to interact with people who are like us and who understand us. Jesus went to a woman His peers would've avoided. Why? He valued her. She mattered, regardless of what His culture taught. **We all have great worth—so much that Jesus gave His life for ours.**



READ JEREMIAH 2:13. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WELL WATER AND THE WATER JESUS OFFERED? HOW DOES THE *LIVING WATER* CHANGE OUR LIVES?

Physical thirst signals us to hydrate. So, we go to a source—some type of well that can provide what we need. Ideally, we'd drink water, but many times, we grab something that only dehydrates us even more. We suffer from spiritual thirst too. Our soul longs for our Creator and Sustainer. Signals can feel like loneliness, worry, anxiety, restlessness, depression, confusion. We go to a source—some type of well that provides relief. **We lower our buckets into waters of worldly comforts, drinking from the well of relationships, sports, social media, popularity, good grades, approval.** Even when we get these things, we still struggle with emptiness. The thirst returns, so we return to the well. **Any relief we feel eventually fades because spiritual needs can't be satisfied by worldly pleasures—broken cisterns, incapable of holding water.** When we belong to Jesus, we accept His gift of living water, the Holy Spirit. Our quality of life radically changes. When we thirst, we are satisfied with peace, security, and joy. We have the promise of eternal life, and even when we thirst here, we know eternal peace waits for us. This hope reminds us to keep returning to Jesus, our only source of life—the One who meets our needs.

GOD'S LOVE SATISFIES

READ JOHN 4:15-30

READ VERSES 19-24. WHAT POINT WAS JESUS MAKING?

The Samaritans weren't welcome in the temple, so they built their own temple, a major source of the Jews' hatred and outrage. When the woman realized Jesus was a prophet, she questioned Him about the situation. Jesus responded by telling the woman that a day was coming when worship would happen everywhere, even outside of Jerusalem. Jews considered the temple to be the only acceptable place for worship, so these words were bold and pointed to the truth that salvation was for all people—even Samaritans, even her. Jesus's death changed everything. **We are living temples, dwelling places for the Holy Spirit! We worship God with our lives, through our obedience to His Word—in Spirit and in truth.**



WAS JESUS'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WOMAN CONDEMNING OR SOMETHING ELSE? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW YOU ABOUT HIS HEART?

Jesus knew the woman's past sin and the truth about her living situation at the time. Yet, He still chose to speak to her. Jesus approached her to offer life, not shame. But she needed to confront her sin before she could experience freedom. Jesus knows our sin too. He knows the shame we feel and our struggle to let go of sinful habits. **He confronts us with our sin, not to shame us, but to lead us to freedom. Before we can drink from the living water Jesus mentioned, we first have to realize our thirst—our great need for something, for someone, to satisfy our souls forever.** We have to recognize our sin before we can be reconciled, or made right, with God.



WHAT DID THE WOMAN DO AFTER JESUS EXPOSED HER SIN? WHAT DOES THIS HELP YOU REALIZE?

The Samaritan woman was face-to-face with the Messiah. He knew everything about her, even the pieces of her life she desperately tried to hide. Jesus brought her sin into the light, but instead of feeling judged by Him, she ran joyfully to tell others! She didn't hide, argue, or justify her sin because exposing it led to her freedom. When God brings our sin into the light, we often respond with anger or shame. If the Holy Spirit uses other people to hold us accountable, we get defensive and claim that they're judging us. **God opening our eyes to sin is proof of His great love for us, not judgment.** He wants us to experience freedom and to run joyfully to share His love with others.

WRAP-UP



WHO AROUND YOU NEEDS TO HEAR THAT GOD LOVES AND VALUES THEM? HOW CAN YOU INTERACT AND SHARE HOPE WITH PEOPLE CULTURE IGNORES?

We get comfortable and feel safe in our groups. But God calls us out of comfort to share the gospel. Sure, we should do this with our friends and family, but **if we stop there, then we assign value and worth only to people we're comfortable around.**

People in your classes, on the bus, at the store, in the cafeteria—people you may never interact with naturally—need the hope of the gospel. They're marching toward eternity without God. As believers, we can ask God to open our eyes and make us aware of the spiritual needs around us. We can ask Him to draw us out of our comfort and to make us bold. Notice how Jesus first approached a woman other Jews would've avoided: He asked for water. He found a common need and initiated conversation. You don't have to approach everyone with a Bible in your hand, ready to point out their sin. **You can look for small ways to connect—a common class, a common interest, offering help. Noticing and treating others like they matter goes a long way.**