



the **GOSPELPROJECT**
FOR STUDENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS
LEADER GUIDE

VOLUME 8

PRODUCTION AND MINISTRY TEAM

PUBLISHING TEAM LEAD:

Alecia Bryant

CONTRIBUTING PRODUCTION EDITOR:

Angela Reed

MANAGER, STUDENT ONGOING STUDIES:

Brett Buckland

DIRECTOR, NEXTGEN MINISTRY: Chuck Peters

SEND QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO:

Alecia Bryant, The Gospel Project for Students Leader Guide, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027

Printed in the United States of America.

The Gospel Project® for Students Leader Guide (ISSN 2163-0917; Item 005854158) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027, © 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

For ordering or inquiries including Autoship, visit Lifeway.com, call 1-800-458-2772, write Lifeway Resources Customer Service, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, or fax 615.251.5933. For address changes, email subscribe@lifeway.com. For bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address, visit Lifeway.com/Autoship, email orderentry@Lifeway.com, or write to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway’s doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

UNIT 22 JESUS THE HEALER

SESSION 1 • “Signs and Wonders” 8
SESSION 2 • “Is Not This Joseph’s Son?” 16
SESSION 3 • Not As the Scribes 24
SESSION 4 • Desolate Places..... 32

UNIT 23 JESUS THE TEACHER

SESSION 1 • “Your Sins Are Forgiven” 40
SESSION 2 • Send Them Out..... 48
SESSION 3 • “The Lord of the Sabbath” 56
SESSION 4 • “Kingdom of God” 64

UNIT 24 JESUS THE PROMISED ONE

SESSION 1 • “The One” 72
SESSION 2 • “God Has Visited His People!” 80
SESSION 3 • “The Larger Debt” 88
SESSION 4 • “Teach Us to Pray” 96
SESSION 5 • How the Lilies Grow 104

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

UNIT 22 | Jade Turner

UNIT 23 | Jonathan Holmes

UNIT 24 | Stephanie Cross



PREPARATION

- Access the leader training for each session at gospelproject.com/leader-training.
- Read through the main passage and surrounding chapters of Scripture listed on the opening page of each session.
- Study the **Before You Teach** section, focusing on which aspects of the study you will cover during group time.
- Check each session for a pack item list or description.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

These pages are designed to help leaders prepare for each session, providing content that digs deeper into the focal passages and main point emphasized throughout the session.

- **Biblical Commentary:** This content is compiled to help leaders understand how the passage connects to today's culture.
- **Theology Connection:** Each session contains a biblical doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT
John 11:1-16

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY
John 11:1-16

THEOLOGY CONNECTION
Justification by Faith

CONTEXT

THEOLOGY CONNECTION
Justification by Faith

LEADERS' PRAYER

CONTEXT

We believe Scripture should be studied within the context in which it was written. This section breaks down where the passage fits in the grand narrative of God's Word. At the beginning of each book, we highlight the author, time period, original audience, and purpose. This section also features important historical facts to help leaders and students understand the message.

KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

1 POWERFUL HOPE

2 CULTURAL CONNECTION

INTRO OPTIONS

- **Kickstarter:** This is the shortest option for groups which may not have time for longer activities. They rotate between "Did You Know?" facts, short polls, and Heart Checks, which refer to the previous lesson as a form of accountability.
- **Activity:** This activity is mostly discussion-based. It's designed to take up minimal time with few or no supplies.
- **Cultural Connection:** This feature helps connect the week's content to the students' culture. It will hit on real-life questions and difficult topics. It's designed to encourage deep discussion between students and leaders.

DISCUSSION SECTION

The **Discussion** section is designed to show how God's story connects with our own stories today. Here we will see how the biblical storyline for each session challenges the way we think, feel, and live each day. While this certainly happens on an individual level, we do want to stress to students that all Christians share this calling and mission to live differently. Leaders will also find suggested answers with sentences in bold as a guide for more reluctant groups.



This icon indicates questions that look at how the content connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture points to Him.



This icon indicates questions that directly relate to the doctrine for the week. We want to encourage discussion about these doctrines to expand students' biblical worldview.



The **Head/Heart/Hands** questions are designed to show how God's story connects with our own. We'll see how Scripture challenges the ways we think, feel, and live. While this certainly happens on an individual level, we do want to stress to students that this calling and mission to live differently is something all Christians share and pursue.



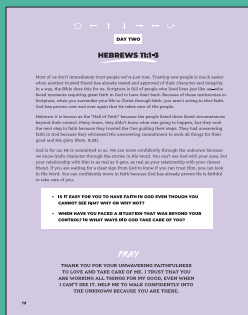
LEADER PACK

The **Leader Pack** provides additional ways to make the session interactive with One Sheets, PowerPoint templates, posters, and other resources to support both leader preparation and group time.



STUDENT DEVOTIONS

Students remember thirty percent of what they hear and seventy percent of what they say and write. To get students more involved in the biblical storyline of Scripture and in their personal discipleship, we have included five days of devotions following each session in the **Daily Discipleship Guide**. As a leader, emphasize weekly how important it is for students to read these devotions and develop the spiritual discipline of being in the Word of God. These devotions will provide simple techniques for studying the Bible as illustrated by the **Seven Arrows**. The pages are perforated so that students can tear them out and take them home.



SEVEN ARROWS



What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?

VOLUME 8 | ESV

THE SON HAS AUTHORITY



22.3

22.4

24.3

23.1

23.3

22.1

24.5

22.1 "SIGNS AND WONDERS"

23.4 "KINGDOM OF GOD"

22.2 "IS NOT THIS JOSEPH'S SON?"

24.1 "THE ONE"

22.3 NOT AS THE SCRIBES

24.2 "GOD HAS VISITED HIS PEOPLE!"

22.4 DESOLATE PLACES

24.3 "THE LARGER DEBT"

23.1 "YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN"

24.4 "TEACH US TO PRAY"

23.2 SEND THEM OUT

24.5 HOW THE LILIES GROW

23.3 "THE LORD OF THE SABBATH"





PUBLISHING TEAM LEAD

ALECIA BRYANT

Welcome to Volume 8! We're going to spend time walking through some beautiful and powerful moments in Jesus's ministry. We'll follow along as people wrestled with the realization that the Messiah was among them. We'll see that many couldn't grasp who Jesus was or why He came; sometimes, we struggle to grasp the gospel too, right? We have an incredible advantage over those who lived during the time in which Jesus lived: We can look back. We can see the rest of Jesus's ministry unfold. We can pore over the pages of the Gospels and see His miracles for what they are: proof of His identity. We can see His authority, not only to heal sickness and disease, to restore sight, and to raise the dead, but also to forgive sin. Our sin. We can reflect on how perfectly true Jesus's words are because we now live in the freedom He offered. We now have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, guiding us in all truth and righteousness. What a gift—and one we often take for granted. What a privilege to look back and know God keeps His promises because we are walking in the fulfillment of so many of them here and now.

Jesus's ministry to His people and to the Gentiles in the region teaches us about God's kingdom. He came for the lowly, the sick, the needy, the rejected, the sinner. He bent low, willing to reach out and touch those deemed unclean by the law. He came for the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the scribes, the arrogant religious elite. He came—for us.

May we follow Jesus's lead. May we see people, not only their actions. May we see their hearts and their desperate need for salvation. And may we love Jesus enough to love others like He loves them. When we do, we continue God's kingdom work here on earth.

Alecia Bryant



**“THEREFORE I TELL YOU,
HER SINS, WHICH ARE MANY,
ARE FORGIVEN—FOR SHE
LOVED MUCH. BUT HE WHO
IS FORGIVEN LITTLE, LOVES
LITTLE.” AND HE SAID TO HER,
“YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.”**

LUKE 7:47-48

"SIGNS AND WONDERS"

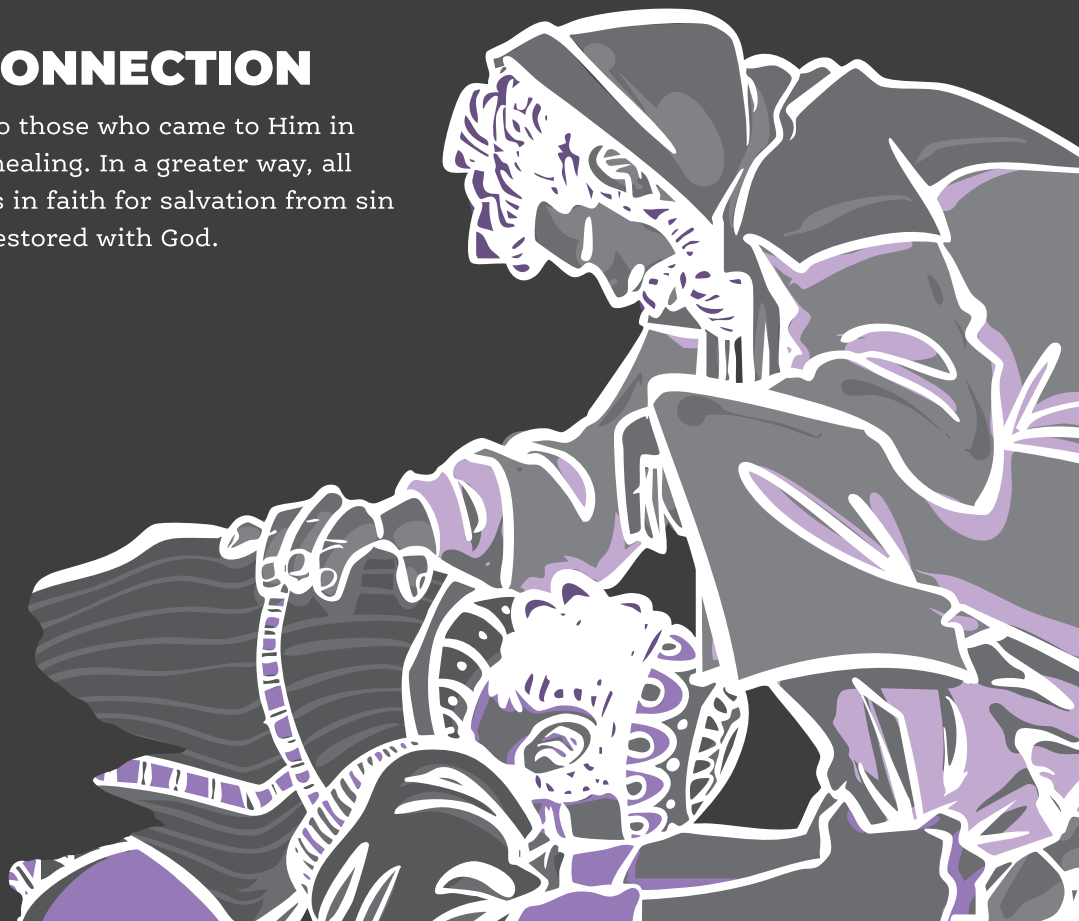
MAIN POINT.

Faith is believing Jesus's words before seeing His works.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus responded to those who came to Him in faith for physical healing. In a greater way, all who come to Jesus in faith for salvation from sin are forgiven and restored with God.



BELIEVING BEFORE SEEING

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

DESPERATION LEADS US TO JESUS

JOHN 4:46-48

46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

BELIEF LEADS TO HEALING

JOHN 4:49-54

49 The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. 51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 52 So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53 The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. 54 This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Faith is believing Jesus's words before seeing His works.

Leaders: Spend time reflecting on how Jesus's works have strengthened your belief. Our faith is steady and sure, rooted in hope and in proof of what we haven't yet seen (Heb. 11:1).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

DESPERATION LEADS US TO JESUS

JOHN 4:46

"This official could be either a Jew or a Gentile, and if he was a Gentile, then the divine grace revealed in this story is even more remarkable. But John does not indicate that the official is a Gentile, so we cannot be certain. In any case, for many Jews a servant at Herod's court would be little better than a Gentile, so the scandalous nature of God's grace is evident here even if the official is a Jew."¹

BELIEF LEADS TO HEALING

JOHN 4:49-50

"The word 'go' is imperative, so the man has been commanded by the Savior of the world with a promise of life for his son. But if he left, according to his way of thinking, he would leave behind his one chance for help. Jesus demanded that his faith be desperate enough to trust his word, not just his visible works. Wonders may produce awe, but words produce faith."²

JOHN 4:49-53

"The man obeyed the word of Jesus without seeing the sign. In the ancient world miracles and acts of power were linked to the presence of the miracle worker, but here the healer refused to be present. The story therefore is an important illustration of the purpose for which John wrote the Gospel. Here believing the word is linked with not immediately seeing the sign."³

CONTEXT

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus performed two significant miracles in the town of Cana. The first miracle took place at the wedding where Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). After Jesus traveled through Judea and Samaria, He returned to Cana, where He performed a second miracle—the healing of the royal official’s son. Many biblical scholars believe this royal official was one of Herod’s officers who had heard of Jesus’s first miracle in Cana and then desperately pursued Jesus to help his sick son.⁴ The fact that the official asked Jesus to “come down” (4:47) and heal his son is consistent with the geography of the region: Cana is at a higher elevation in the hills, where Capernaum is down on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Coming from Capernaum, the official would have traveled between 18 to 22 miles to reach Jesus in Cana. Verses 51-52 indicate that the official likely walked this long distance to Cana and back, given that he returned to his servants the day after he encountered Jesus.⁵ The official would have had many hours to think as he walked the dusty roads, desperately hoping that Jesus really would heal his son.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Justification by Faith

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, YOU ARE OUR GREAT AND POWERFUL HEALER. MAY WE HAVE CONFIDENT FAITH IN YOU, EVEN WHEN OUR PERSPECTIVES ARE LIMITED. GIVE US THE STRENGTH AND COURAGE TO WALK BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT. PLEASE CONTINUE TO GROW OUR STUDENTS' FAITH AS THEY PURSUE YOU.





KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that the longest road in the world is nearly 19,000 miles long? The Pan-American Highway is made up of a series of roads that starts in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, and stretches south to the tip of Argentina, the lower reaches of South America.⁶

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

POWERFUL HOPE

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHO IS THE MOST POWERFUL PERSON YOU KNOW?**
- **DISCUSS A TIME YOU REALLY NEEDED SOMEONE'S HELP.**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU HOPED FOR SOMETHING WITHOUT KNOWING IF IT WOULD HAPPEN?**

When Jesus began His public ministry and demonstrated His ability to perform miracles, people responded in a variety of ways. Some people suspected and doubted Him, while others believed in Him. We can trust in Jesus's ability to work powerfully in our lives. He is our Redeemer, who has the power and desire to save all who come to Him in faith.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever wrestled with why God heals some people and not others? Christians aren't immune to the effects of living in a fallen, broken world. Jesus often healed people's sicknesses and diseases, and Scripture encourages us to pray for healing when we are sick (James 5:14,16). Sometimes God heals, but sometimes He chooses not to heal on this side of eternity. If you've walked through a situation where God didn't answer a prayer for healing, you aren't alone in feeling disappointed, hurt, or confused. We don't have to hide our hurt or disappointment from Him. Instead, we go to Him; we hold on to the truth that He is our good, loving Father, who uses everything—even what's painful—to draw us close and make us more like Jesus (Rom. 8:28). We can invite Jesus into our suffering, knowing He sympathizes with our weaknesses and struggles because He also suffered here (Heb. 4:15). God always heals those who seek Him for spiritual healing. All who confess Jesus as Lord are saved (Rom. 10:9), and we have hope that no matter what happens on earth, we will spend eternity in heaven with no more pain, sickness, or disease.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Faith is believing Jesus's words before seeing His works.

DESPERATION LEADS US TO JESUS

READ JOHN 4:46-48

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEEDING SOMETHING AND BEING DESPERATE FOR SOMETHING? WHEN HAVE YOU FELT DESPERATE?

Leaders: Share context about distance from Capernaum to Cana. Desperation implies having an extreme and urgent need and may lead to risky or reckless behavior in an attempt to find answers. Maybe you've felt desperate for relief from pain or for a loved one's healing. The royal official was clearly desperate to find healing for his sick son and traveled a long distance to seek Jesus's help. Situations like these often lead us to Jesus when we realize we have nowhere else to turn. **But the truth is that we can go to Jesus with every need because He cares about them all—both big and small.**



HOW ARE WE ALL IN THE SAME DESPERATE SITUATION BEFORE GOD? WHY CAN'T WE FIX IT?

We all have the same fundamental problem as human beings: We are spiritually dead because our sin separates us from God (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). We can't earn salvation or forgiveness with our good works or by following God's law. Because God is good, holy, and just, He can't overlook sin or sweep it under the rug. This leaves us in a desperate situation because we are all guilty before God and deserving of death (John 3:18). **Thankfully, God provided a way for us to be fully justified before Him through Jesus's sacrificial death on our behalf.** Jesus met us in our desperation and fixed what we couldn't fix on our own.



WHEN WE'RE *DESPERATE*, WHY DO WE OFTEN RUN TO OTHER THINGS OR PEOPLE INSTEAD OF JESUS? HOW DOES EVERYTHING ELSE FAIL US?

Sometimes our earthly needs feel like the most significant issues we face. For example: We may feel desperate for belonging. And instead of seeking godly friends to walk with us, we settle for toxic friendships that distract us from following Jesus. To avoid loneliness, we settle for belonging in the wrong places. In our desperation, we often turn to other people or the things of this world instead of looking to God to rescue us or help us. However, no temporary solution can truly save us. No matter how great our earthly needs are, our spiritual need is greater. Jesus proved that He cares about our needs by coming to our broken world to save us from our sin. **If we can trust Jesus with our greatest need—forgiveness of our sin—then we can trust Him to meet our other needs as well. Trusting Him with our eternal life means that we can also trust Him with our earthly life.**

BELIEF LEADS TO HEALING

READ JOHN 4:49-54



HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE GENUINE BELIEF IN JESUS?

Genuine belief in Jesus involves both our head and our heart—our mind and our will. We must believe that He is the Son of God, sent to the world to save us from our sin. But only mentally acknowledging that Jesus is real is not enough to save us. The demons believe Jesus is real but do not follow Him (James 2:19). We must confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). **Saving belief means that we believe in Jesus and obey what He says. Faith requires action.** If we love Jesus, we must keep His commands (John 14:15). Just like the royal official believed and acted on what Jesus told him, we must do the same. True followers of Jesus must follow His commands to turn from our sinful ways and honor Him with our lives.



WHY DO YOU THINK WE SOMETIMES STRUGGLE TO TAKE JESUS AT HIS WORD OR TO TRUST HIS PROMISES?

Trusting people can be difficult if they've let you down or disappointed you. We more easily trust people when we see their good character. Thankfully, Jesus is perfectly trustworthy. **Jesus wants us to take Him at His word, and He is kind enough to show us that we have good reasons to trust Him.** Jesus backs up His words with action. He proved His power and authority by performing signs and miracles, like healing the royal official's son. Jesus proved that He loves us by dying on the cross for our sins. He demonstrated His power as the Messiah through His death and resurrection, which He predicted beforehand. Jesus knows that our limited human perspective can make it difficult for us to trust Him, so we can look to His power and fulfilled promises to strengthen our faith.

WHAT DOES JESUS'S ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO HEAL PEOPLE LIKE THE ROYAL OFFICIAL'S SON REVEAL ABOUT HIM?

Some scholars believe that the royal official wasn't Jewish but a Roman Gentile. **Jesus's ability to heal shows that He is the Messiah, and His willingness to heal a Gentile shows that He loves and cares for all people.** Not only did Jesus's healings fulfill Old Testament prophecies about what the Messiah would do (Matt. 8:17), but they also showed us His heart. Jesus had compassion for those who were sick or struggling with sin and those who wanted to be near to Him. Jesus is gentle and lowly at heart (Matt. 11:29) and offers grace and mercy to those who come to Him. He is our kind and loving Savior, who laid down His life for us so that we could have fellowship with Him forever.

WRAP-UP



IN WHAT SITUATION IS JESUS ASKING YOU TO TRUST HIM BEFORE SEEING THE RESULTS? WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO HAVE FAITH BEFORE SEEING THE OUTCOME?

When Jesus told the royal official that his son would live, the man believed Jesus would be true to His word. He made the long journey back to Capernaum, trusting Jesus had healed his son before seeing the proof. We are called to have this same confidence in Jesus's words, but this can be challenging when we are in a season of waiting. Maybe you are waiting to find a solid group of friends. Maybe you're waiting for a college admissions letter or a scholarship opportunity. Maybe you're waiting to hear back from a doctor about test results. **In the "in between" times, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7)—to believe before we see.** Knowing that we serve a powerful and merciful Savior is comforting. Jesus has already met our greatest need by providing the way for us to be restored to God. He promises to be with us and give us the strength we need to follow Him every day (Phil. 4:13). Remembering Jesus's power and His love for us will help us trust Him while we wait to see the outcome.

"IS NOT THIS JOSEPH'S SON?"

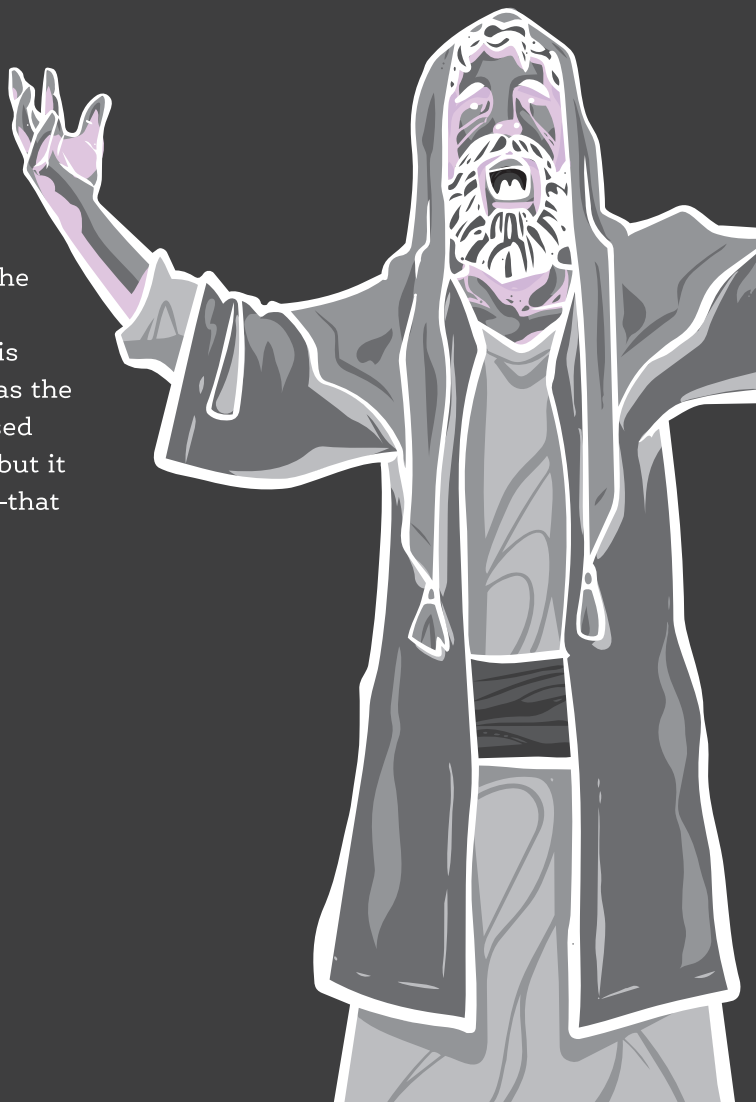
MAIN POINT.

We can expect rejection for following Jesus.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote of God's plan to send someone to bring good news and redeem His captive people. Jesus proclaimed that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy—the promised Messiah. Jesus was rejected by the people, but it was through that very rejection—the cross—that He provided redemption from sin.



REJECTING THE SAVIOR

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

JESUS FULFILLED PROPHECY

LUKE 4:16-23

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" 23 And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."

JESUS WAS REJECTED

LUKE 4:24-30

24 And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We can expect rejection for following Jesus.

Leaders: This week, pray for your students who are struggling with rejection from their friends and peers. Look for ways to encourage them to press on, regardless of what others think.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS FULFILLED PROPHECY

LUKE 4:17

“Luke indicated that Jesus deliberately chose the following passage to read and thus emphasized Jesus’s messianic consciousness as he began his ministry.”⁷

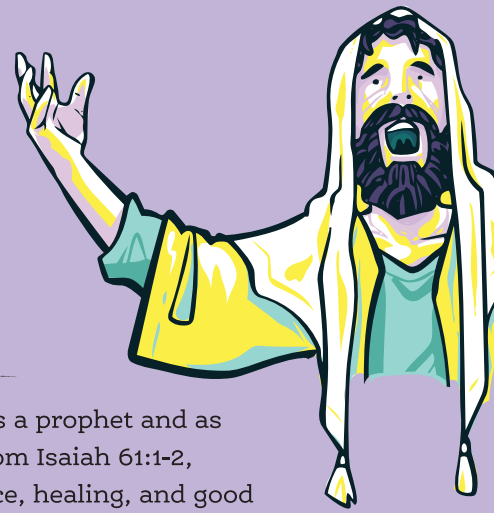
LUKE 4:18

“Jesus did, in fact, go to these very kinds of people and proclaim, preach, and teach the kingdom of God. The primary means of setting people free in whatever their social or political circumstance is the proclamation of the gospel. But that means the gospel has to be so real a gospel that it addresses people in their social and political position. The gospel cannot be abstracted from the real conditions of the people it addresses. Israel was under Roman occupation. Israel was oppressed. Israel was crushed beneath the heel of the Caesars. And Christ came to them preaching the gospel of the kingdom—not the kingdom of Caesar but of another world. He gave hope to a people broken by the rule of men.”⁸

JESUS WAS REJECTED

LUKE 4:24-27

“Sidon and Syria were Gentile lands and people. Jesus is saying God’s salvation passed over Israel and went to the ‘unclean’ Gentiles. Israel rejected their prophets, but the Gentiles received them and were saved. Now we remember the last words of Isaiah 61: ‘For as the earth produces its growth, and as a garden enables what is sown to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations’ (v. 11). God always intended to save people from every nation and ethnic group and language group, not just from Israel. As Paul explains in Romans, the Gentiles have been grafted into God’s salvation because the Israelites have been broken off (Rom. 11:17). That is what Jesus preaches here: Israel will be cut off and the Gentiles brought in.”⁹



CONTEXT

This passage in Luke displays how Jesus identified Himself both as a prophet and as the Messiah described in Old Testament prophecies. Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2, which describes an anointed figure sent by God to bring deliverance, healing, and good news. Jesus identified Himself as this figure when He proclaimed that this Scripture had been fulfilled. Just like many prophets were rejected by their own people, Jesus was also rejected in His hometown of Nazareth. He referenced the stories of Elijah and Elisha to point to what His own ministry would look like. These two Old Testament prophets didn't show favoritism toward the Israelites but willingly ministered to non-Israelites. Elijah miraculously provided food for a widow and her family in Sidon (1 Kings 17:8-16). Elisha did not cleanse any Israelites of leprosy, but he told Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, how to be healed (2 Kings 5:1-14). Jesus would also minister to many Gentiles (non-Jews) throughout His ministry, while His own Jewish people frequently rejected Him. Jesus's audience understood the implications of His teachings: Jewish people would not be the only ones to receive deliverance and healing from God, and they were being accused of rejecting God's prophets. The angry mob tried to kill Jesus, but He evaded them, perhaps through some supernatural means.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

The World Opposed to God

Sometimes in Scripture the term "world" refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan's control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by faith in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

LEADERS' PRAYER

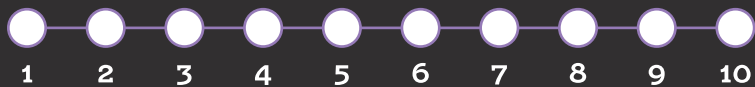
LORD, HELP US TO FOLLOW YOU FAITHFULLY, EVEN WHEN IT REQUIRES SACRIFICE. THANK YOU FOR COMING TO OUR BROKEN WORLD AND EXPERIENCING REJECTION SO THAT WE CAN BE SAVED. PLEASE HELP OUR STUDENTS SEE THAT YOU ARE WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP, EVEN IF WE FACE REJECTION FOR IT.



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How do you feel about taking a risk that might result in rejection (1= Super confident; 10= Utterly terrified)?



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

REJECTED

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN AFRAID OF BEING REJECTED? WHY DO YOU THINK WE WORRY SO MUCH ABOUT BEING REJECTED?**
- **HOW DOES BEING REJECTED IMPACT HOW WE FEEL ABOUT OURSELVES OR OTHERS?**
- **DESCRIBE A CIRCUMSTANCE WHEN BEING REJECTED MAY BE A GOOD THING.**

Most of us don't like the idea of rejection, and we typically try to avoid the risk of being rejected. Jesus knows exactly how being rejected by people feels—even the very people He came to save. Yet this was a part of God's plan to redeem us. Jesus's rejection led to His death, but His death and resurrection paved the way for us to be restored to God.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

We are surrounded by voices that tell us how we should act, dress, speak, and think if we want people to accept us. We may feel pressure from our family, friends, classmates, or social media to conform to what's popular to fit in. We want to be well-liked, so much that we compromise our beliefs to avoid rejection. Maybe you go along with the majority opinion, even if it means agreeing with something sinful. Maybe you participate in behavior you know is wrong because you're more concerned with fitting in than obeying God. We worry that taking a godly stance will cause others to tease us, accuse us of ruining the fun, or label us intolerant or hateful. However, avoiding rejection robs us of living obediently to God's Word. As Christians, we certainly shouldn't go out of our way to offend people or cause chaos. We can disagree with others and still show love and respect (Rom. 12:18), even if the world opposes our biblical values. Though we may face rejection, we must be open to talking with people about our Christian convictions in the hope that they will come to know the Lord.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We can expect rejection for following Jesus.

JESUS FULFILLED PROPHECY

READ LUKE 4:16-23

HOW DID THE PEOPLE IN JESUS'S HOMETOWN LOOK AT HIM? WHY DID THEY ASK IF HE WAS JOSEPH'S SON?

Jesus preached in His childhood synagogue in Nazareth, a small and insignificant town, where the people likely knew Jesus and His family. Hearing one of their own people claim to be God's Anointed One astonished them. The Jews had hoped and prayed for the Messiah to come for generations. The prophecy about the Messiah's birth indicated that He would come from Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), not Nazareth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem! But His family moved to Nazareth after a short time. **Jesus coming from an ordinary town and from an unimportant family made His claims difficult for people to believe.**



JESUS CLAIMED TO FULFILL ISAIAH'S PROPHECY FOR THE MESSIAH. HOW DID JESUS DISPLAY THIS IN HIS MINISTRY?

Jesus demonstrated that He had the power to meet people's physical and spiritual needs. He proclaimed the good news of the gospel: God sent Him to offer forgiveness of sin and eternal life to everyone through His death and resurrection. He ministered to social outcasts who were labeled sinful or unclean. He healed the sick and disabled, gave sight to the blind, and set people free from demonic oppression. **Jesus did all these things by the power and authority God the Father gave to Him, and He welcomed anyone who came to Him in faith.**



MANY PEOPLE HAD DOUBTS ABOUT JESUS. WHEN ARE YOU MOST TEMPTED TO DOUBT WHO JESUS SAYS HE IS?

We may struggle to trust that Jesus really is the Messiah for several reasons. Our world rejects Jesus and tries to make us doubt our beliefs. We see people walk away from their faith after professing to be Christians for years. Christian leaders fail us; believers in the church hurt us. Sometimes, our circumstances are not what we expect, and we wonder if God has forgotten us or if He is real at all. In these difficult situations, we must remind ourselves of the truth of God's Word. Broken people are likely to fail us, but Jesus never will. We must place our faith in our holy, perfect Savior and not in sinful, fallen people. Our hearts deceive us and lead us astray (Jer. 17:9), so we must consistently fill our minds with truth. Experiencing doubt or having questions isn't shameful. Like the man who begged Jesus to help his unbelief (Mark 9:24), we can come to Jesus with our doubts and questions. The best way to combat doubt? Invest in knowing Jesus. When you do, you'll see His words are true and His character is steady. **Jesus loves you; He isn't waiting to punish you for wrestling with doubt. He will show you compassion and patience as you surrender your doubt to Him.**

JESUS WAS REJECTED

READ LUKE 4:24-30

WHAT WAS JESUS'S MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF NAZARETH? WHY WERE THEY OFFENDED?

The people enjoyed Jesus's message until it contradicted their expectations for the Messiah. While He would perform signs and miracles like Scripture foretold, Jesus would not minister exclusively to the Jewish people. He cared for Samaritans, Roman citizens and officials, and other Gentiles. Jesus explained that His ministry would be like that of Elijah and Elisha, who did not show favoritism toward their own Hebrew people. **The Jews of Jesus's day expected their Messiah to deliver them from Roman oppression, but Jesus was more concerned with providing spiritual deliverance to those in bondage to sin.** He made salvation possible for everyone and offered it to everyone—both Jews and Gentiles, which greatly offended those listening to His message, expecting to be exclusive.



WHY DO PEOPLE YOU KNOW CONTINUE TO REJECT JESUS'S MESSAGE TODAY?

Our world is opposed to Jesus and the things of God. The world is temporarily under Satan's authority, the ruler of this world (John 14:30). As Christians, we are called to proclaim the good news of the gospel so that unbelievers' eyes may be opened to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4). **People accept that God loves us but often reject the gospel because it requires a response that goes against a sinful lifestyle.** The gospel calls us to confess our sin, turn from it, and place our lives under Jesus's lordship. This command goes against our natural, sinful desires: We want to live on our terms and be in control of our lives. **Our spiritual blindness prevents us from seeing that our sin leads to death, convincing us to cling to sin rather than to surrender it.**



HOW DID GOD USE JESUS'S REJECTION TO BRING SALVATION TO THE WORLD? WHAT CAN THIS SHOW US ABOUT OUR OWN REJECTION?

Rejection can have purpose. Jesus's rejection at home resulted in the crowd trying to hurl Him off a cliff, pointing to His impending death. God used the people's unbelief and rejection to accomplish our salvation through Jesus's crucifixion. Jesus said no one would take His life; He would lay it down willingly (John 10:18)—for us. **Jesus was rejected so that we could be accepted by God.** When we're rejected because of Jesus, we can lean on the truth that God can use it for His glory.

WRAP-UP



WHERE IS THE FEAR OF REJECTION KEEPING YOU FROM OBEYING GOD? HOW DOES KNOWING JESUS FACED REJECTION GIVE YOU STRENGTH?

Here's the truth we don't *want* to be true: Following Jesus guarantees you won't always fit in. Your lifestyle won't make sense. People may stop inviting you to hang out. Your obedience will likely cause tension because walking according to God's Word will contradict what the world says is normal. Jesus knows what it's like to live here; He knows how rejection feels because He faced it at the highest level. He wept over His own people, longing to give them peace (Luke 19:41). Even members of His family didn't believe Him (John 7:5). Ultimately, the very people Jesus came to save killed Him. Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him; if we are to keep running in faith, we must fix our eyes on Him (Heb. 12:1-2). Jesus persevered through rejection out of His great love for us—so that we could have a relationship with Him. Remembering the hatred and rejection Jesus faced for us can help us stand strong when we face the same. **We will never regret remaining faithful to Jesus; we will regret being unfaithful to avoid rejection.**

NOT AS THE SCRIBES

MAIN POINT.

We can trust the One who has all authority.



CHRIST CONNECTION

When Jesus approached the man who was possessed by demons, even the demons recognized His authority. Jesus would later demonstrate His authority over sin and evil in a greater way through His crucifixion and resurrection. Sin no longer has power over those who trust in Jesus.



LIGHT AND AUTHORITY

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.

Mark 1

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER EVIL

MARK 1:21-28

21 And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. 22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. 23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24 "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28 And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS

MARK 1:29-34

29 And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. 31 And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32 That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door. 34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We can trust the One who has all authority.

Leaders: We can't deny the darkness in our world, but Jesus maintains control—the Light that darkness will never overcome (John 1:5).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER EVIL

MARK 1:21-28

“At first glance, the statement that he taught with authority might be taken as a description of his style. It could be a way of saying that Jesus was a dynamic and compelling speaker. As the story unfolds, though, it is not the way he spoke that is important; it is what happens when he taught. In this instance his presence provoked a confrontation with the demonic. Jesus cast the evil spirit out, and with an appalling convulsion the evil spirit obeyed him. After the exorcism Mark repeats the reference to Jesus’s amazing authority. Jesus’s teaching was much more than a collection of novel or encouraging ideas. It was an exercise of power. The powers of darkness perceived in his teaching a challenge to their dominion. The authority of Jesus was displayed as those powers were first silenced and then banished.”¹⁰

MARK 1:22

“The word usually translated ‘scribes’ is found twenty-one times in Mark and is regularly translated ‘teachers of the law’ by the NIV. They were not copyists but scholars and therefore experts in the interpretation of the law. Their interpretations, which in the time of Jesus existed only in oral form and are therefore called the oral tradition (7:5-13), constituted a second law that came to be as important as the written, or Mosaic, law.”¹¹

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS

MARK 1:31

“Verse 31 suggests the quickness and completeness of the cure. The mother-in-law is presented simply as a model of discipleship, which requires lowly service from all, male and female. By including accounts of the healing of women as well as men, Mark implied that Jesus was concerned about all people, including those who had a lowly place in society.”¹²



CONTEXT

Some of the most intriguing and mysterious topics in Christian theology relate to the spiritual realm and spiritual warfare. Unfortunately, movies and books influence our views on the supernatural instead of the Bible. Demons have no authority to kill or possess Christians, but they can wage war against us. The enemy harasses believers with accusatory thoughts and lies to discourage, scare, or intimidate us (John 8:44; Rev. 12:10). We must be defensive against these schemes. Scripture promises that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). We must firmly reject the lies of the enemy and replace them with the truth of God's Word. Scripture warns that we must not give the enemy a foothold through ongoing sin in our lives (Eph. 4:27). Scripture forbids Christians from engaging with any kind of divination, witchcraft, or attempts to communicate with the dead (Deut. 18:10-11; Acts 16:16). We don't have to live in fear of the enemy because Jesus has authority over these powers, and He delegates this authority to us as believers. Jesus displayed His power to cast out demons and heal the sick. Jesus's ability to set people free from demonization baffled Jewish leadership, who accused Him of being possessed by the devil (Mark 3:22)! Jesus's miracles are a glimpse of what is to come in the end: He will cast Satan and his demons into the lake of fire forever.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION



Demons

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, WE PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR POWER AND STRENGTH. ALL POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER HEAVEN AND EARTH BELONG TO YOU. HELP US NOT TO FEAR THE ENEMY. GIVE US STRENGTH TO WALK IN VICTORY, KNOWING THAT YOU HAVE WON THE BATTLE OVER DEATH AND DARKNESS.



KICK STARTER

♥ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we discussed that Christ followers can expect to face rejection in our world because the world is opposed to God. Have you experienced or seen any instances of rejection in the past week? Did you avoid rejection by giving in to popular opinion? Did you stand? How did you feel after?

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

GOOD AUTHORITY

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **IN YOUR DAILY LIFE, WHICH PEOPLE HAVE THE GREATEST AUTHORITY OVER YOU?**
- **IF YOU COULD BE IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY, WHAT ROLE WOULD YOU CHOOSE?**
- **WHAT MAKES SOMEONE A GOOD AUTHORITY FIGURE VERSUS A BAD ONE?**

When we think of what makes someone a good authority figure, we likely picture someone who is strong and caring, someone who has integrity and is committed to doing what is right. Thankfully, Jesus is all of this and more. In the Gospels, Jesus demonstrated His divine authority over heaven and earth. He displayed His authority over sickness and the powers of evil by healing the sick and freeing those in demonic bondage, as we'll see in today's passage.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Culture is fascinated by the spiritual realm, often manifesting as a dangerous interest in darkness and evil. Movies, shows, and books with demonic themes top the charts. You may wonder if taking part in darkness is a big deal for believers. What if it's just for fun? Where is the line? First, we can't let the world define this line. We must confront the idea of believers turning to content with demonic forces for entertainment—media that profits off real powers of evil, whose goal is to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Even more dangerous, consuming dark content can open doors to demonic attack in the life of a Christian. Scripture forbids us from engaging with Ouija boards, tarot cards, psychics or mediums, or participating in attempts to contact the dead (Deut. 18:10-11; Acts 16:16)—even in the name of “fun” or “pretending.” We shouldn't open any doors to darkness. Why would we even want to associate with the powers of evil, who are completely at odds with God's work and who seek to destroy His work in us?

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We can trust the One who has all authority.

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER EVIL

READ MARK 1:21-28

HOW DID THE PEOPLE REACT WHEN JESUS CAST OUT THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT? WHY DID THEY RESPOND THIS WAY?

The people were astonished by what they saw, amazed by Jesus's authority to command unclean spirits to do as He said. Jesus did not have to perform a complicated ritual or beg the demon to leave. He did not have to recruit a special rabbi for the task. Jesus simply told the spirit to be silent and come out of the man, and it did. **Jesus had complete control of the situation and amazed those who were watching with His remarkable power—the Word (John 1:1), healing and restoring by the power of His spoken word.**



WHAT DOES THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT KNOW ABOUT JESUS? WHAT DOES THIS SHOW US ABOUT KNOWING VERSUS FOLLOWING?

The unclean spirit recognized Jesus and called Him the “Holy One of God” (v. 24). Unclean spirits, or demons, are ancient spiritual beings who rebelled against God and actively work against Him. They strive to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). God is far more powerful than Satan and his demons; they are limited by God's control and are subject to His will. **The demons know Jesus is who He says He is, and they know His aim is to destroy them.** In the end, every force of evil will be destroyed and under God's judgment forever.



WHAT KIND OF SPIRITUAL BATTLES OR SPIRITUAL DARKNESS DO WE FACE? HOW CAN KNOWING THAT JESUS HAS ALL *AUTHORITY* OVER THE POWERS OF DARKNESS HELP US FIGHT?

As believers, we don't always recognize the spiritual battle raging around us. We are actively fighting against darkness here and now. **The enemy attacks us when we're vulnerable—when we stop dwelling on the truth of God's Word, on what is good and pure (Phil. 4:8).** We battle sinful thoughts and emotions, old habits, and temptation. But as Christians, we are on the side of victory; Jesus has won the war against all evil powers! Jesus has disarmed the forces of darkness, and He made a public display of them by triumphing over them on the cross (Col. 2:14-15). Satan and his demons are literally losers—they have lost the war that Jesus has won. When we are in Christ, Jesus gives us His authority over all the powers of darkness. **We don't have to live in fear of what Jesus has defeated.** Why? Because the One who lives within us—the Holy Spirit—is so much greater than the enemy who temporarily rules the world (1 John 4:4). On our own, we can never have victory, but because of Jesus, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, and no force of evil can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:37-39).

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS

READ MARK 1:29-34



WHAT STANDS OUT TO YOU ABOUT THE WAY JESUS HEALED SIMON'S MOTHER-IN-LAW?

When Jesus entered the house, the disciples told Him that Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a fever. A fever indicates an illness or infection, and in the days before modern antibiotics, this woman's situation could have been deadly. Jesus tenderly took her by the hand and raised her up, and the fever left her immediately. His touch alone brought healing to her body, displaying Jesus's amazing power to heal and His gentle compassion toward the sick. **Sometimes, we see Jesus's power and fail to remember that He is also incredibly gentle and kind. We can have hope that Jesus will also minister to our hearts and bodies with care.**



WHY DO YOU THINK JESUS TOLD THE DEMONS TO KEEP SILENT ABOUT HIM?

We are quick to shout our achievements on social media, but Jesus wasn't concerned with attention. Jesus performed many signs and miracles to show that He was the Messiah and to demonstrate His compassion for all people. However, Jesus was on a specific mission from God—a mission with a timeline and a purpose. Any information or news about Jesus coming from a demonic source would not be trustworthy, since demons are liars who try to keep people away from God. **Jesus followed God's plan for when and where He would reveal His identity, and evil forces had no authority to challenge God's timing.**

HOW DID JESUS'S ABILITY TO HEAL THE SICK AND CAST OUT DEMONS FORESHADOW WHAT HE WOULD ACCOMPLISH ON THE CROSS?

Healing the sick and driving out demons are both pretty amazing, but they pale in comparison to what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection. Jesus displayed that He has power not only over sickness but over death itself. The result of sin is death, but Jesus defeated death by His resurrection. He promised that all who believe in Him will have eternal life (John 11:25). Jesus's death also destroyed the one holding the power of death, the devil (Heb. 2:14-15), sealing Satan's fate with finality. **Sin and evil are defeated, and Jesus shares His victory with us both now and forever!**

WRAP-UP



WHAT DID SIMON'S MOTHER-IN-LAW DO IMMEDIATELY AFTER JESUS HEALED HER? WHY DON'T WE ALWAYS RESPOND IN THIS WAY?

After Simon's mother-in-law was healed, she immediately began to serve Jesus. We should also respond to Jesus's healing and forgiveness in our lives with obedient service. Unfortunately, we don't always respond this way. **We are quick to forget what God healed us from: sin, spiritual death, and eternal separation from Him. We often revert to our old habits of serving ourselves instead of serving the One who has saved us.** Reminding ourselves of what Jesus has done for us motivates us to live in service to Him. We serve Jesus as a response to who He is and what He has done for us—we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). He has freely saved us by His grace and has created us in Christ to do good works (Eph. 2:8-10). We should consistently remind ourselves that serving the One who freely gave His life for us is the greatest honor of our lives.

DESOLATE PLACES

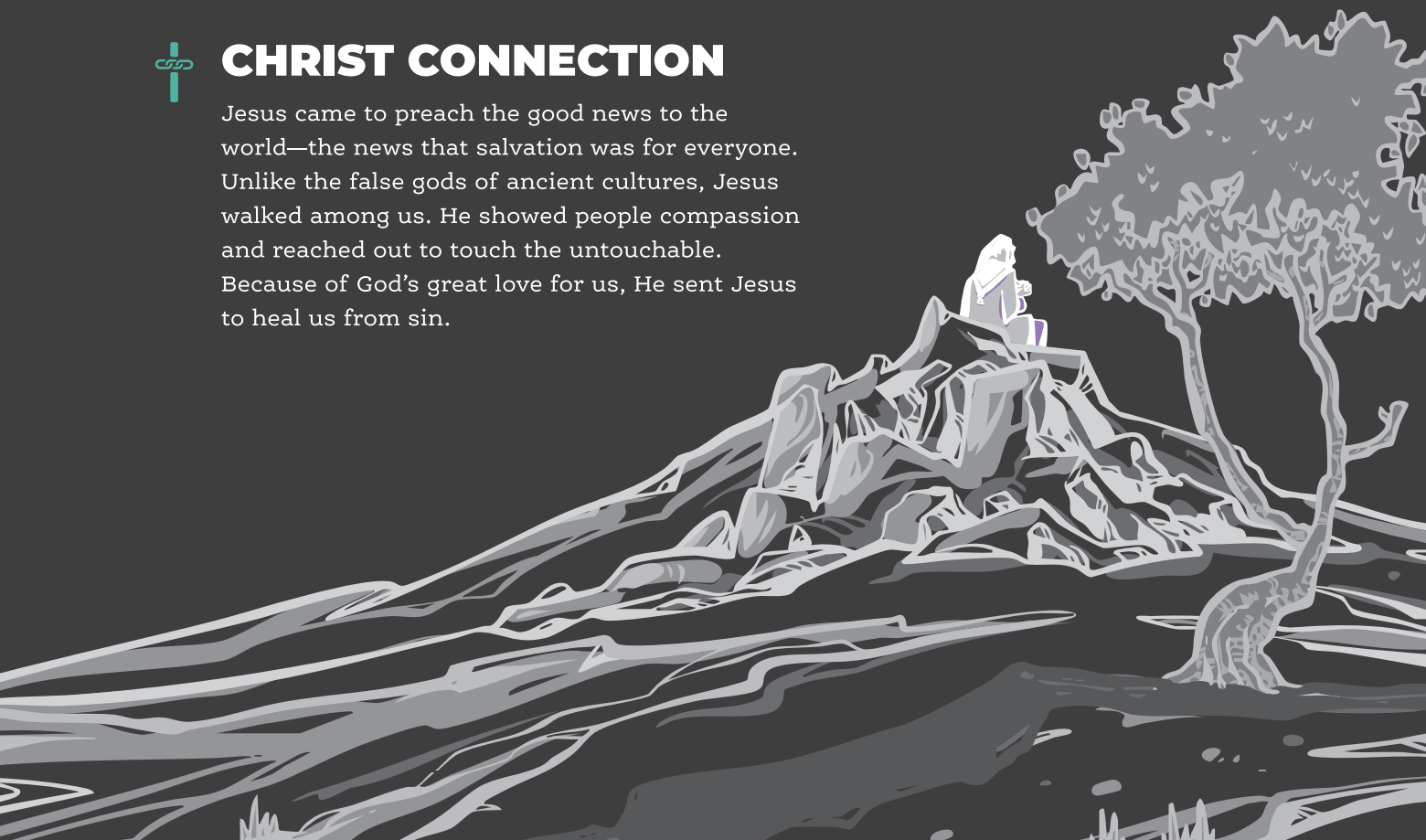
MAIN POINT.

Jesus meets us with compassion and willingly restores us.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus came to preach the good news to the world—the news that salvation was for everyone. Unlike the false gods of ancient cultures, Jesus walked among us. He showed people compassion and reached out to touch the untouchable. Because of God’s great love for us, He sent Jesus to heal us from sin.



RADICAL COMPASSION

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.

Mark 1; Luke 4-5

JESUS CAME TO BRING GOOD NEWS

MARK 1:35-38

35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, 37 and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." 38 And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

JESUS IS WILLING TO COME CLOSE TO US

MARK 1:39-45

39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. 40 And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." 45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus meets us with compassion and willingly restores us.

Leaders: Consider that some of your students may desperately need the reminder that Jesus says He is willing (Mark 1:41).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS CAME TO BRING GOOD NEWS

MARK 1:35

“Jesus found time for prayer. Mark’s portrait of Jesus is of a man busy and unable by day to escape the long and tiring demands of people in need. Victorious over Satan and his minions, healing every kind of disease, Jesus was nevertheless a man in need of prayer.”¹³

JESUS IS WILLING TO COME CLOSE TO US

MARK 1:39-42

“Leprosy was considered to be highly contagious and usually incurable. Lepers had to live away from clean people, and a natural home for them was the garbage dumps of the ancient world, where they could eke out a meager living. By the first century they were required to wear bells around the necks. If someone approached them on the road, they were required to call out, Unclean! Unclean! at the top of their voices so that no one would make contact with them accidentally (Lev. 13:45). This leper broke the law to approach Jesus. Leprosy cut its victims off from members of their own family. It also cut them off from the community of faith. Unclean people could not enter the temple or synagogue to worship or offer sacrifices (2 Chron. 26:21). These harsh measures nevertheless had some justification in that they protected the health of the larger community. And yet it is the epitome of alienation in a religious community for people to find themselves in a position where they must break the law of God to get help.”¹⁴

MARK 1:41

“The Bible never speaks of healing leprosy, always of cleansing it. Part of the reason may be the loathsome nature of the disease, but a more likely explanation is that leprosy is a symbol of sin that must be cleansed. The episode implies that Jesus can forgive sin and therefore prepares for 2:1-12.”¹⁵

MARK 1:45

“Ironically, Jesus and the leper have traded places. The leper is now on the inside with family and friends. Jesus is on the outside in a lonely and desolate place. This picture of substitution is the heart of the gospel. It is why Jesus came. He will take on Himself our sin, our sorrow, and our shame. In return He gives us His forgiveness, His holiness, and His righteousness—praise the Lord! What an exchange!”¹⁶



CONTEXT

Jesus continued preaching and displaying His authority over sickness and evil as He traveled throughout Galilee. Today's passage features a man with leprosy humbly coming to Jesus for healing. Leprosy, an infectious bacterial disease (called Hansen's Disease today), eats away at a person's skin and body, often causing deformity. A Jewish person with leprosy was in a dire, hopeless situation. According to Mosaic law, lepers were considered unclean. They could not live with other Jews or offer sacrifices at the temple because of their unclean status and the risk of infecting others. In fact, they were required to yell out "Unclean!" in public. Other Jews could not touch them without being made ritually unclean themselves (Num. 5:2; Lev. 13:45-46). Lepers were social outcasts, alone while deteriorating from this terrible disease. Leviticus 14:1-32 outlines the numerous steps lepers must complete to be ceremonially cleansed. By healing this man of his leprosy, Jesus also restored him to his Jewish community and worship. This miracle is a small glimpse of what Jesus offers all of us through His death on the cross: He heals our sin and restores our relationship with God.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God Is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful: There is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD, THANK YOU FOR HAVING COMPASSION ON SINNERS AND FOR NOT LEAVING US ON OUR OWN. PLEASE OPEN OUR STUDENTS' EYES TO THE TRUTH OF YOUR AMAZING LOVE FOR US, AND HELP THEM TO RESPOND TO THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The liver is the only internal organ in your body that can regenerate itself. It can even regrow to nearly its normal size after half of it has been removed!¹⁷

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 HAS BOTH GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS TO SHARE WITH YOU, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU RATHER HEAR FIRST? WHY?**
- **HOW DO YOUR REACTIONS DIFFER BETWEEN HEARING GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS?**
- **WHEN YOU HEAR ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE STRUGGLING OR IN NEED OF HELP, HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY REACT?**

Most of us likely prefer to receive good news rather than bad news, right? Thankfully, the gospel means “good news.” Today we will discuss how Jesus came to show us compassion by preaching the good news of the gospel and by healing those who were in desperate need of help.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever felt like an outsider? Maybe you've felt this way at school, with your family, or even at church. Feeling like you don't belong is a painful experience when you desire to fit somewhere. Sometimes, we allow our shame to isolate us. When we mess up, we fear what others will think of us, so we keep them from getting too close. We fear being rejected if we show someone our brokenness. If you long to be seen, loved, and accepted—if you want someone to see past your mess and see the hurting person underneath—know this: Jesus sees you right where you are and loves you deeply. No one is too dirty or too far gone for His grace. He longs to show you compassion, just like He did for so many sick and struggling people in the Gospels. Maybe you need to hear this: You don't have to clean yourself up to come to Jesus; you can bring Him your brokenness and know that He has done all the necessary work to save you. He desires to make you clean and whole—all you have to do is surrender to Him.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus meets us with compassion and willingly restores us.

JESUS CAME TO BRING GOOD NEWS

READ MARK 1:35-38



JESUS RETREATED TO SPEND TIME ALONE IN PRAYER. WHY DO WE NEED TIME TO BE ALONE WITH THE LORD?

Many of us struggle with being quiet and alone. **We're surrounded by noise; if we don't intentionally make time for prayer, we will struggle to pray at all.** If Jesus made time to get alone in prayer, then we need to prioritize prayer as well! Time with the Lord refreshes our souls. We are to pray continually and bring all our requests to God with praise and thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6). We can confess our sins to God, knowing He will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). **Through prayer, we seek the Lord's will, and He shapes our hearts and desires to reflect His own.**



WHAT MESSAGE DID JESUS COME TO PREACH (V. 38)? WHY WASN'T IT ALWAYS ACCEPTED?

Jesus came to preach the good news of the gospel, but many found this good news offensive. He proclaimed, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus offers the gift of forgiveness and eternal life to those who place their faith in Him (Rom. 6:23), but then and now, many reject this gift. They feel the way is too narrow and look for salvation in other ways—through good works or in "being a good person." **But we can't earn salvation apart from Jesus, and the good news is that we don't have to!**



WHAT SHOULD MOTIVATE US TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS WITH PEOPLE? WHAT HOLDS US BACK?

We may be hesitant to share the gospel for many reasons. We fear rejection or awkward situations. We worry that people will ask a question that we don't know the answer to or that we won't have the right words to say. **These excuses put the emphasis on us—on our ability or our reputation—rather than caring for a lost person's soul.** If we've experienced the freedom Jesus offers, then we should want others to experience it as well. **Our love for Jesus and others should motivate us to share the gospel; if we aren't motivated at all, then we must take a look at our heart. We have to ask why we allow anything at all to keep us from sharing the way to freedom.** Jesus commissioned us to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, and He is with us as we go (Matt. 28:19-20). God empowers imperfect people like us to lead others to Him! Jesus's compassion should flow from us, desiring all people to experience the joy and freedom we have in Him.

JESUS IS WILLING TO COME CLOSE TO US

READ MARK 1:39-45

HOW DID THE MAN WITH LEPROSY APPROACH JESUS? WHAT DO JESUS'S ACTIONS SHOW US ABOUT HIS HEART?

Leaders: Share context about leprosy in biblical times. This passage is a beautiful example of Jesus's compassionate heart. The leper humbly knelt before Jesus, not expecting to be touched but hoping for healing. Before Jesus healed the man, He simply reached out and touched him. We don't know how long the man had been afflicted, but we know others weren't likely to come near him, much less touch him, because of religious and cultural practices. Jesus acknowledged this man's dignity and value by touching him without disgust. **Jesus's tender care for this man and His willingness to heal him clearly reveal why Jesus came: to bring physical and spiritual healing to the sick, the dying, and the lost.**



WHY WASN'T JESUS MADE UNCLEAN WHEN HE TOUCHED THE MAN WITH LEPROSY?

Jewish people feared leprosy because it was contagious and made a person unclean. According to the law, those who were unclean could not live in the community or participate in temple worship. However, Jesus wasn't afraid to touch this man. Instead of the leper making Jesus unclean, Jesus made him clean. God is omnipotent, which means He is all-powerful. As the Son of God and Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus shares in this power. Jesus has the power to touch and fellowship with sick and sinful people without affecting His perfect character. Jesus is able and willing to give us His righteousness. **Jesus's healing of people's physical ailments reflects what He does for us on a spiritual level: Though our sin is like a deadly disease, Jesus welcomes us, draws us in, washes us clean, and gives us new life.**

JESUS INSTRUCTED THE MAN TO FOLLOW THE LAW TO BE MADE RITUALLY CLEAN. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO JESUS AFTER HE HEALS OUR SIN?

When Jesus heals and forgives us, He calls us to follow Him in obedience. Jesus says that if we love Him, we must keep His commands (John 14:15). **We don't obey Jesus so that He will save us—we obey Him because He has already saved us.** We follow Jesus in all that we do in response to His love and grace to forgive our sin and give us eternal life. Our new identity as a Christ-follower should be evident by the good fruit in our lives—the actions that flow from a changed heart.

WRAP-UP



WHAT ARE PRACTICAL WAYS YOU CAN SHOW CHRISTLIKE COMPASSION TO THOSE AROUND YOU?

We can model Jesus's example of compassion toward others in many ways. People around you are likely experiencing some kind of pain or a difficult season of life. These people may be your family, friends, classmates, teammates, or church members. Take some time to think through ways you can be a blessing to others. Maybe you can encourage them with your words or by offering to pray with them. You might have the resources to meet a need that will lessen someone's burden. Who in your school or on your team needs a kind, godly friend? Does your church have a ministry that you could get involved with that serves your community? If not, recruit other Christians to join you in serving others! **If Jesus was generous with His time and presence, then we should follow His example. Being the hands and feet of Jesus and showing compassion to those who need hope are a blessing and an honor.** We get to show people what Jesus is like in the way we treat them. Let's not miss the opportunities before us each day!

"YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN"

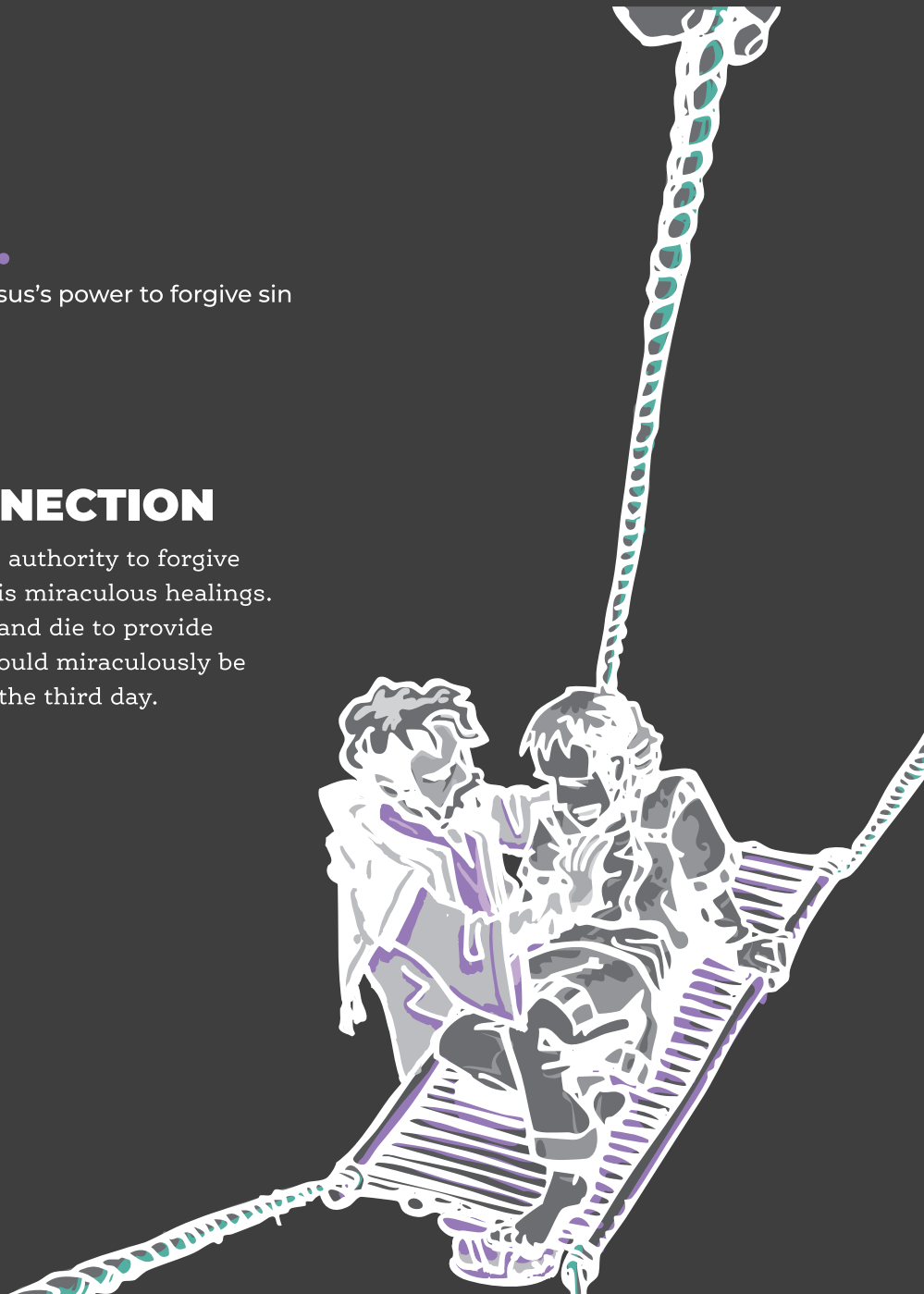
MAIN POINT.

Our obedience shows Jesus's power to forgive sin and transform hearts.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus's claim to have the authority to forgive sins was supported by His miraculous healings. Jesus would later suffer and die to provide forgiveness of sin and would miraculously be raised from the dead on the third day.



WALKING EVIDENCE

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.

Mark 2

ONLY JESUS CAN FORGIVE OUR SIN

MARK 2:1-7

1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

OBEDIENCE IS EVIDENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

MARK 2:8-12

8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— 11 "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." 12 And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Our obedience shows Jesus's power to forgive sin and transform hearts.

Leaders: This week, consider how loving Jesus precedes and prompts obedience to Jesus's commands (John 14:15).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

ONLY JESUS CAN FORGIVE OUR SIN

MARK 2:5

"It was a staggering claim, and we should understand it not only as a further exposition of Jesus's authority but also as another sign of the diminishing role of the temple. This is the second time in the Gospel when a prophetic figure opens a means of forgiveness outside the cultic center in Jerusalem. John the Baptist had called people to the desert to receive a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). And here in the village of Capernaum in rural Galilee Jesus declared that the Son of Man came to forgive sin on earth. Furthermore, Jesus's declaration follows a revelation of His power to make clean irrespective of the authority of the priests in the temple."¹

MARK 2:7

"Blasphemy is irreverent, profane, impious speech about God; and its penalty in Old Testament times was death (Lev. 24:16). Here the charge prepares the way for the same accusation at Jesus's trial (14:60-64). The scribes were certainly correct that the Scriptures everywhere teach that 'God alone,' or better 'One, even God' or 'the one God,' can forgive sins. Nor did Jesus deny this. What they failed to recognize was that the reign of God had drawn near in Jesus and that He had authority to act on God's behalf."²

OBEDIENCE IS EVIDENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

MARK 2:10-12

"At the point when the paralytic stood up, the world of tangible forms served as a sign for a spiritual truth. The man's physical disease symbolized his spiritual condition, and Jesus's power to heal his body authenticated the claim to restore his standing before God. When Jesus touched the leper, He shattered the social and religious conventions of his day. A new power had entered the world. It was the power to make people clean. It was not dependent upon the laws and rites of the temple. It operated outside the jurisdiction of the recognized religious authorities. Here that new power pressed its claim one step further. No physical condition rendered this man unfit to stand before God. The problem was sin, and Jesus did not make him clean by healing his body; Jesus made him clean by forgiving his sin."³

CONTEXT

In the Gospel of Mark, the writer (John Mark) focuses more on Jesus's miracles rather than His teachings. Jesus's teachings are sprinkled throughout the Gospel, but His miracles served as evidence: He is the Messiah for whom the people had been waiting. More precisely, John Mark wrote to a mostly Gentile audience, aiming to prove that Jesus was the true Son of God and to disprove the Roman belief that hailed Caesar as the "son of God." Jews expected the Messiah to come as a political ruler, who would re-establish Israel's rule and reign, but Jesus came in a way no one expected, not even His disciples (Mark 8:31-32). He came for more than the Jews, to serve rather than be served, and to give His life for our sin (Mark 10:45). How can we know Jesus is the Son of God, who has the authority to forgive sins? Jesus's miracles are evidence of His power, pointing us to the incredible reality that sinners find forgiveness in Him. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus's identity as the Son of God was confirmed and recognized by God the Father (1:11; 9:7); by unclean spirits and demons (3:11; 5:7); by Peter (8:27-30); and even by a Roman Centurion, who witnessed Jesus's last hour and said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39). We can rest in the truth that Jesus has authority to forgive even the worst sinner.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

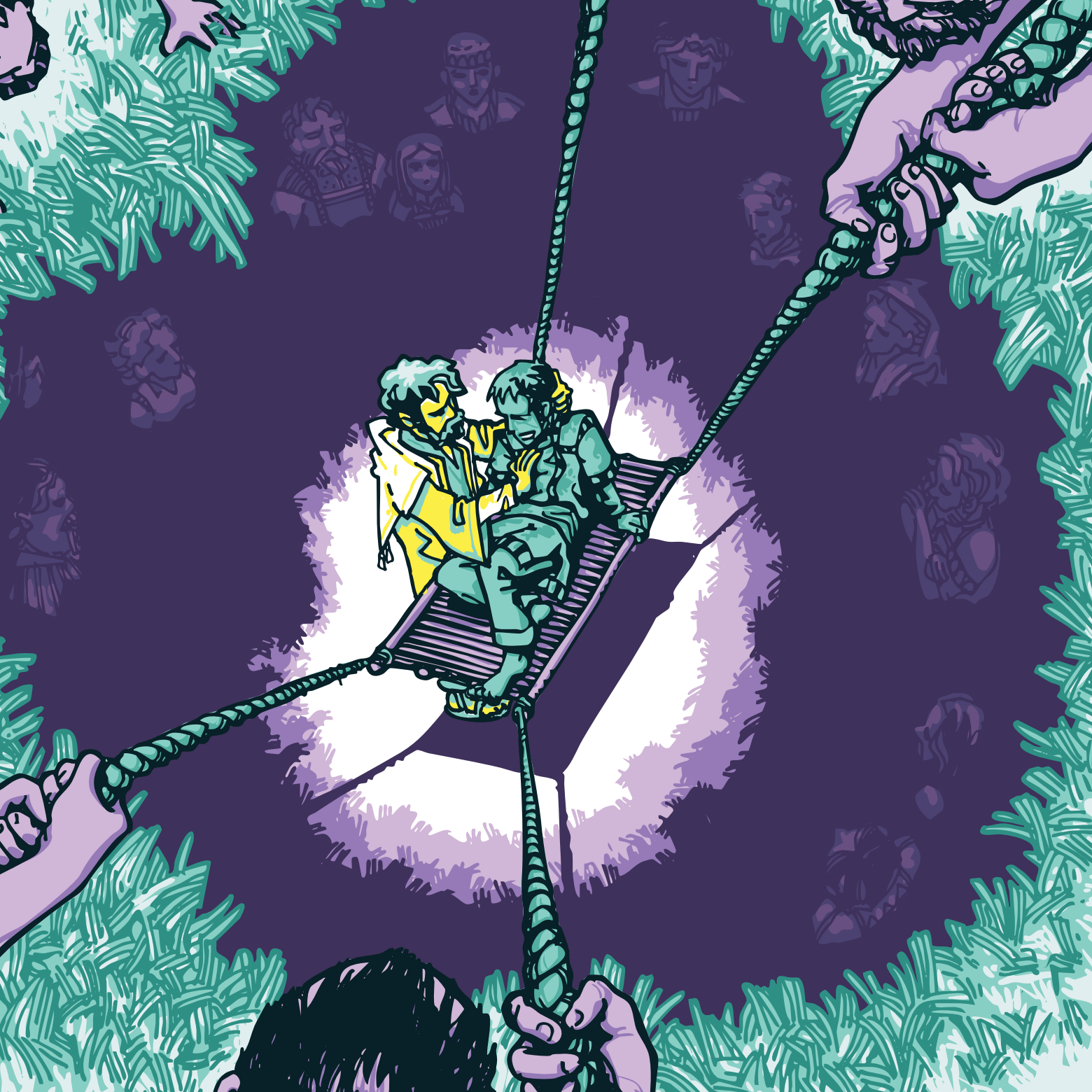
Sin's Effects in the World

Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason that creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the gospel is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

LEADERS' PRAYER

HEAVENLY FATHER, GIVE US EYES TO SEE THE DEVASTATION OF SIN IN OUR WORLD AND IN OUR LIVES. THANK YOU FOR GIVING YOUR SON SO THAT WE CAN BE FREED FROM SIN. HOLY SPIRIT, APPLY THE HEALING FORGIVENESS THAT COMES THROUGH SALVATION TO OUR HEARTS AND MINDS.

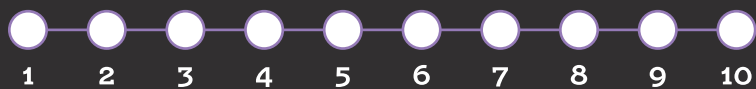




KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How important is it for a superhero to have the power to heal themselves (1=Not needed; 10=Mandatory!)?



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

POWER OF FORGIVENESS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE FORGIVENESS?**
- **WHO IS THE MOST FORGIVING PERSON YOU KNOW?**
- **WHY IS ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS OR GIVING FORGIVENESS SOMETIMES HARD?**

Forgiveness is the act of releasing someone of guilt. Because of sin, our need for forgiveness never decreases; it only increases as we continue to sin. Jesus taught about forgiveness—both our need for it and the command to give it. As we experience God's forgiveness, we must also grow in the ability to forgive others.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Is it ever okay not to forgive someone? If we're honest, we probably have an invisible line that, once others cross, we determine not to forgive them. Maybe a friend repeats the same offense over and over again, and you don't want to deal with it anymore. Or maybe someone hurts you so deeply that you can't imagine moving past the pain. Forgiveness isn't always easy, but the radical call of the gospel is to forgive others as Jesus forgave us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Even Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone—a question we wrestle with too! Jesus taught that we are to forgive others as He forgives us (Matt. 18:23-35)—endlessly. Now, forgiveness doesn't excuse harmful behavior or mean that we stay in a toxic situation; forgiveness is more about our own heart. Our ability to forgive doesn't come from our maturity or our strength but from experiencing God's grace; we forgive because we are forgiven. We loosen our grip on judgment because we are free from condemnation. If we consider the depth of our own forgiveness, then we'll more willingly forgive others.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Our obedience shows Jesus's power to forgive sin and transform hearts.

ONLY JESUS CAN FORGIVE OUR SIN

READ MARK 2:1-7



WHAT DID THE PARALYTIC'S FRIENDS BELIEVE? HOW DID THIS BELIEF MOTIVATE THEIR ACTIONS?

The home Jesus preached in couldn't fit the large crowd that had gathered, but the four men carrying their friend didn't let this stop them. They had heard what Jesus could do, and they had faith, or confident trust and hope (Heb. 11:1), that Jesus could heal their friend. They were determined to get to Jesus! Their boldness to dig through the roof was rooted in and motivated by faith—faith Jesus noticed because their actions revealed it. **Trusting the Lord will impact our actions too, and the world around us will notice our faith.**



WHY DID JESUS FORGIVE THE PARALYTIC'S SIN INSTEAD OF HEALING HIS BODY?

Imagine the disappointment. These men interrupted Jesus's teaching and lowered their friend from the roof! Jesus seemed to ignore the paralysis, forgiving sin instead of healing his body. But Jesus didn't ignore the man's pain; He exposed a much deeper pain in need of spiritual healing. **The miraculous healing would come, but Jesus was most concerned with the man's heart—with relationship.** Through the paralytic, Jesus revealed something about all of us: Our greatest need is salvation from sin. Sin's effects are far more devastating than any sickness or suffering we could ever face. Our greatest need is forgiveness, and Jesus offers it freely.



WHAT DID THE SCRIBES DOUBT ABOUT JESUS? WHO DID THEY BELIEVE COULD FORGIVE SINS?

Were the scribes wrong to question Jesus's ability to forgive sins? Actually, the scribes were correct in their understanding of who had the ability to forgive sins: God. But they were wrong in their charge of blasphemy, the accusation of speaking irreverently or slanderously about God. **They doubted Jesus's identity, seeing Him as a dangerous false prophet and not God in flesh. They knew God alone had the authority to forgive sin, but they failed to see that God was standing in their presence.** As Jesus proclaimed the power and authority to forgive sins, the scribes inwardly cried, "Blasphemy!" Blasphemy against God was a serious offense that could result in being stoned to death. In essence, they charged Jesus and murdered Him in their thoughts. In fact, this same charge would later condemn Jesus to death (Mark 14:61-64). The crowd gathered that day to hear Jesus's teaching and to witness His miracles, but Jesus is more than a good teacher and healer—He is fully God. In the presence of God, the crowd witnessed Jesus's authority to forgive sins, authority God the Father had given Him.

OBEDIENCE IS EVIDENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

READ MARK 2:8-12



HOW EASILY CAN YOU HIDE WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART? HOW DOES KNOWING GOD SEES YOUR HEART IMPACT YOU?

We easily curate a perfect image for social media, while our lives may look drastically different. The scribes and the crowd expected Jesus to heal the man physically, but when He announced the man's forgiveness instead, their hearts accused Him of lying. Jesus addressed their hearts—the thoughts they hadn't spoken out loud. We may wrestle with sin in our heart or have doubts or questions about our faith, but we don't have to hide any of it. **God already knows our hearts; He invites us to confess our sin and to bring our doubts and questions to Him.** He sees everything we try to hide from others: selfish motives, pride, jealousy. The good news is that Jesus is willing to heal us—to forgive our sin.

WHY DID JESUS TELL THE MAN TO RISE, PICK UP HIS BED, AND GO HOME?

Jesus commanded the paralytic to get up, take his mat, and go home. Immediately, the man obeyed in front of the entire crowd. **The friends' bold faith got the paralytic to Jesus; then, the paralytic's bold faith enabled his literal steps of obedience! Faith results in obedience.** The man's restored body symbolized his soul's restoration. He walked with new purpose—to point glory to God. As believers, we've been healed from sin and death. We share the paralytic's purpose: to stand, to go, to share the hope of the gospel with others in desperate need of forgiveness.

WHY WAS THE MAN'S OBEDIENCE CRITICAL IN THIS MOMENT? WHY IS OUR OBEDIENCE IMPORTANT?

Without the paralytic's obedience to rise and walk, the crowd wouldn't see a healed man. **His obedience provided evidence.** The crowd was confronted with the reality that Jesus wasn't just a good teacher and healer but God in flesh, who healed the whole person. The paralytic's steps from that day forward were a testimony of God's healing power and Jesus's authority to forgive sin. **His obedience to stand and walk proved Jesus's identity. Does yours?** As believers, we are walking demonstrations of Jesus's power to forgive sin. We're new creations and ambassadors who represent the kingdom of God. But we have to walk in this new identity! If not, then how will others see God's power to deliver and forgive? **Our obedience is proof of God's work that has taken place (and continually takes place) inwardly.**

WRAP-UP



HOW DO YOUR CHOICES CONTRADICT JESUS'S POWER TO FORGIVE SIN? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT OTHERS SEE JESUS'S WORK IN YOU?

The paralytic's friends lowering him through the roof was evidence of bold faith. Does our faith leave evidence like this? **We can easily confess Jesus with our mouths but not our actions—or our hearts. Our daily choices reflect what's beneath the surface.** When we use profanity or gossip, cheat on a quiz, or compromise standards for purity in who we date or in the content we consume, we send a confusing message to a watching world. We won't do this perfectly, but authentic faith leaves a trail of evidence (Matt. 7:15-20). Don't get the sequence wrong, though: Legalism says that first you have faith, second you obey, and then, you're saved. The gospel teaches that first you have faith in Jesus *and* are saved, and then you obey Him out of love. **Faith in Jesus leads to obedience—the fruit of your salvation that grows the longer you know Him.** Because of Jesus's costly sacrifice, we experience forgiveness and transformation and are walking evidence of His power and authority! What a joy to reflect Jesus's work!

SEND THEM OUT

MAIN POINT.

Jesus invites us to serve Him.



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.



INVITED AND WELCOMED

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.

Mark 2-3

JESUS CALLS THE LOWEST

MARK 2:13-17

13 He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. 15 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

JESUS SENDS US

MARK 3:7-19

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea 8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. 9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, 10 for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. 11 And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known. 13 And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach 15 and have authority to cast out demons. 16 He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); 18 Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus invites us to serve Him.

Leaders: Jesus called the lowest of us; may we remember where He called us from and what He called us to.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS CALLS THE LOWEST

MARK 2:13-17

“The Pharisees, who make their first appearance here, were ardent nationalists. For them as well as other Jewish patriots, Jesus’s behavior in Mark 2:13-17 was absolutely outrageous. When he called a tax collector to become one of his disciples, Jesus cast his lot with the people who symbolized everything that ardent nationalists thought was wrong with the Promised Land. Tax collectors were Jewish people who worked for Rome. They bought a franchise that gave them the exclusive right to collect taxes in a particular area. The Roman government stipulated how much money it expected in taxes and supplied soldiers to enforce the process of collection. Rome, however, did not set a limit on how much tax could be collected from a particular franchise. The tax collectors themselves assessed the total amount that would be collected in their district. The difference between what was actually collected and what was sent to Rome was what belonged to the tax collector. The home of Levi, where Jesus ate on this occasion, was surely not an incommensurable shack. For the Pharisees in particular, the people described as sinners were another symptom of the same problem. Let us be clear, though. The sinners who were present at Levi’s house were not necessarily moral monsters. Although there may have been some rough characters in the company Jesus kept, the term sinners essentially referred to people who did not keep the provisions of the covenant law. They did not frequent the synagogues or temple. They may have taken God’s name in vain. They did not wash their hands as soon as they came home from a shopping trip. They associated with non-Jewish people and did not keep the Sabbath. By and large the people called sinners were no worse than many of us. They simply did not pay much attention to covenant law. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, if there were any rabble who might reasonably be blamed for the sorry state of affairs in first-century Galilee and Judea, it was the people with whom Jesus associated.”⁴

JESUS SENDS US

MARK 3:14

“The last part of v. 14 and the first part of v. 15 indicate the two purposes of Jesus’s summons: that they might be with Jesus (one of the most important elements in being a disciple) and that they might be sent on a mission to proclaim the advent of the kingdom of God and demonstrate it by exorcising demons (6:7-12).”⁵

CONTEXT

The Gospel of Mark reveals a key concept that governed Jesus's life: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Jews never expected the Messiah to come in this way; they anticipated a powerful ruler, who would restore Israel to its former glory. But Jesus was the ultimate example of service and sacrifice. Jesus taught that His followers must be marked by self-denial (8:34-35) and service (9:35). The disciples, the twelve men Jesus called to leave everything they knew to follow Him, were ordinary men; they struggled to grasp the reality that following Jesus meant a life of sacrifice. When Jesus taught more directly about His impending sacrifice, Peter rebuked Him (8:31-33), the disciples struggled to understand Him (9:30-32), and James and John only thought about themselves (10:35-45). These ordinary men wrestled with Jesus's plan and the call to follow His example. They struggled to understand and obey the call to serve and love others. Like these men, we often struggle to orient our lives around serving and loving others. But the way of Jesus is the path of service and sacrifice. He exemplified this life, and all that follow Him must "deny himself and take up his cross and follow [Him]" (8:34).

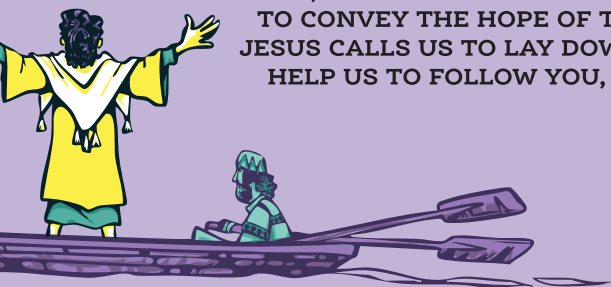
THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Calling

The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, HELP US TO CLEARLY EXPLAIN JESUS'S CALL FOR ALL BELIEVERS. HELP US TO CONVEY THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL, WHILE POINTING TO THE REALITY THAT JESUS CALLS US TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR THE SAKE OF HIS KINGDOM. JESUS, HELP US TO FOLLOW YOU, EVEN WHEN DOING SO LEADS TO GREAT SACRIFICE.





KICK STARTER

♥ HEART CHECK

Last week, we talked about how Jesus forgives all our sins. Did you struggle this past week to trust your sins are forgiven in Jesus? Was there a time last week when remembering Jesus's forgiveness motivated you to obey Him?

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

INVITED

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU GET INVITED TO SOMETHING?**
- **WHO'S SOMEONE YOU'D DROP OTHER PLANS OR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IF THAT PERSON INVITED YOU TO DO SOMETHING?**
- **WHAT IS IT ABOUT THAT PERSON THAT MAKES YOU SAY "YES" RIGHT AWAY? HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN THEM? HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST THEM?**

Saying "yes" when you get invited to a birthday party or on a special trip is easy, but saying "yes" is more difficult when the invitation is to donate money, finish your chores, or help a friend with homework. When we walk with Jesus, He invites us to join Him in both exciting and costly service. In today's passage, we'll see that Jesus invites us to follow His lead in serving others.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Comparing ourselves to others has never been easier than it is now. We measure our worth against others, but in our culture of edited photos, filters, and highlight reels, insecurity runs rampant. We may ask, "I'll never be as good as them, so why even try?" This insecurity comes from what some call "the comparison trap," and when left unchecked by the truth of the gospel, comparison leads to envy, lust, and even self-hatred. This distorted view of our value and worth infects our view of God's calling on our lives; insecurity convinces us that though we are saved, we still aren't worthy enough to participate in God's mission. But when Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He invited them to join Him in reaching others (Mark 1:17; Matt. 10:5-8). When we fall into the comparison trap, we discredit the power of God to transform us! The gospel calls us out of comparison and into security because of who Jesus is and what He has done. God values us so much that He sent His Son for our salvation. And He chooses to use us for His glory, regardless of where He found us.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus invites us to serve Him.

JESUS CALLS THE LOWEST

READ MARK 2:13-17



HOW DID RELIGIOUS LEADERS FEEL ABOUT JESUS EATING WITH TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS? HOW DID JESUS ANSWER THEM (V. 17)?

The Pharisees were appalled and voiced their concern with a question: Why does He eat with them? (v. 16). We can almost hear their condemning tone. Jesus responded by saying that only the sick need a doctor. The first step in getting well is realizing you're sick, but these leaders didn't see their own need. Jesus ironically called people "righteous" to refer to those who didn't see themselves as sick (sinners). **Jesus ate with the "sick" for a reason: to call sinners to repentance—to heal them from sin.** The Pharisees were just as "sick" with sin as the ones they condemned.

HOW DID LEVI RESPOND TO JESUS'S INVITATION? WHY DO YOU THINK HE RESPONDED THIS WAY?

Levi's own people hated him for working as a tax collector for Rome, yet Jesus called Levi to leave his lucrative career to follow Him. **Levi was rejected by his own people but called by Jesus, and when Jesus calls you to follow Him, He welcomes you as a laborer in the harvest (Luke 10:2).** Maybe Levi didn't fully understand what Jesus was calling him to, but he immediately gathered his friends to meet Him. He understood that following Jesus gave him a new message for others and a new purpose (2 Cor. 5:16-21)—one drastically different than anything he had ever known.



HOW WAS LEVI DIFFERENT FROM THE EARLIER DISCIPLES AND THEIR CALLINGS? WHAT DOES THAT TEACH US ABOUT JESUS?

Jesus had called fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, and John) to leave their nets to fish for men (Mark 1:16-20), but this time, Jesus called a tax official named Levi. Fishing was a respectable trade, even though it was a low paying job. But collecting taxes was the opposite—disgraceful, but very well paid. Tax collectors were often dishonest in their accounts, taking advantage of their own people by requiring and profiting from much higher tax payments than Rome required. **The contrast between Levi and the other disciples stands out because it teaches us that Jesus calls everyone.** The Pharisees' devotion to and worship of the Mosaic law blinded them to their need for a Savior. The Pharisees were eager to look down on sinners (Luke 18:11-14), while Jesus called out to them. Instead of sorting people into sick or healthy—sinner or righteous—Jesus calls all sinners to find healing in Him. **Why is this good for us? Because if we're honest, we're the low ones. We're the tax collectors. The sinners. The outcasts. We're the sick, but Jesus welcomes us and calls us.**

JESUS SENDS US

READ MARK 3:7-19

WHY DID SUCH A LARGE CROWD COME TO JESUS?

Mark emphasized the size of the crowd twice, describing it as those who had heard of Jesus's miracles (vv. 7-8). The crowd was filled with the sick and the demon-possessed, and they pressed around Him so much that Jesus was forced to address them from a small boat on the Sea of Galilee. **The people were eager to be healed by Jesus and to witness His miracles but didn't recognize who He was.** Did you catch who *did* fall down in recognition of Jesus? The "unclean spirits," or demons, confessed Jesus's identity, though His own disciples hadn't yet confessed Him as the "Son of God" (v. 11).



WHY DID JESUS CALL THE TWELVE DISCIPLES TO HIM? WHAT WERE THEY SENT OUT TO DO? WHAT ABOUT US?

This scene resembles the story in Exodus when God called Moses up Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:20) and then sent him out in God's authority to share His message. Jesus called the twelve disciples, "those whom he desired," to three things: to be with Him, to go out and preach, and "to cast out demons." **Notice what Jesus called them to do first—"be with him." We must first be with Jesus—we must know Him—to speak about Him. All those who are called to be with Jesus (1 Cor. 1:9), those called out of sin and into the light of the gospel (1 Pet. 2:9), are then also sent out by Jesus in the Great Commission.** Here in Mark 3, Jesus sent the twelve disciples, but in Matthew 28:18-20, He explained that all believers must go in His authority to make disciples of all nations.



HOW DO YOU THINK THE DISCIPLES FELT WHEN JESUS CALLED THEM? WHAT FEARS COULD THEY HAVE FELT? HOW DOES THIS ENCOURAGE YOU?

We may assume the twelve disciples had no fear when answering Jesus's call to be sent out, but we'll see later in Mark that these same men would fear storms (4:35-41), argue who was the better disciple (9:33-35), and leave Jesus when He was arrested (14:50)! **The disciples are encouraging to Christians today because they weren't heroes; they were real people who struggled to follow Jesus.** We may think that other people following Jesus have it all together and never struggle, but that's likely untrue. Like the disciples, we are imperfect humans. And like them, God calls us to follow Him, even as we battle fear and doubt. Praise God! He calls and empowers imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plan.

WRAP-UP



WHEN HAVE YOU FELT LIKE GOD COULDN'T USE YOU? WHY DOES GOD USE ORDINARY, SINFUL PEOPLE?

Before playing a game that requires two teams, captains usually pick players one at a time. Two kinds of people stand and wait: those who can't wait to get picked and those hoping to watch from the sideline. When it comes to being used for God's kingdom, which group are you? Many of us sit back quietly, assuming God won't call our name. We may assume that God already has a full team, so though we follow Jesus, we desire to sit on the sideline. **We believe the lie that God wants to use someone more gifted, someone a little older and wiser, or someone more "ready." But when Jesus began His ministry by calling His disciples, He picked men no one would've expected.** Jesus called four fishermen, a corrupt tax collector, and seven other regular people—many of them teenagers! They were ordinary and imperfect, but God invited each one of them to serve Him. So, why would we fall for the lie that God doesn't invite us to do the same? God can and will use us, regardless of our past, our lack of knowledge, or even our feelings of not being ready. Being a spectator isn't an option.

"THE LORD OF THE SABBATH"

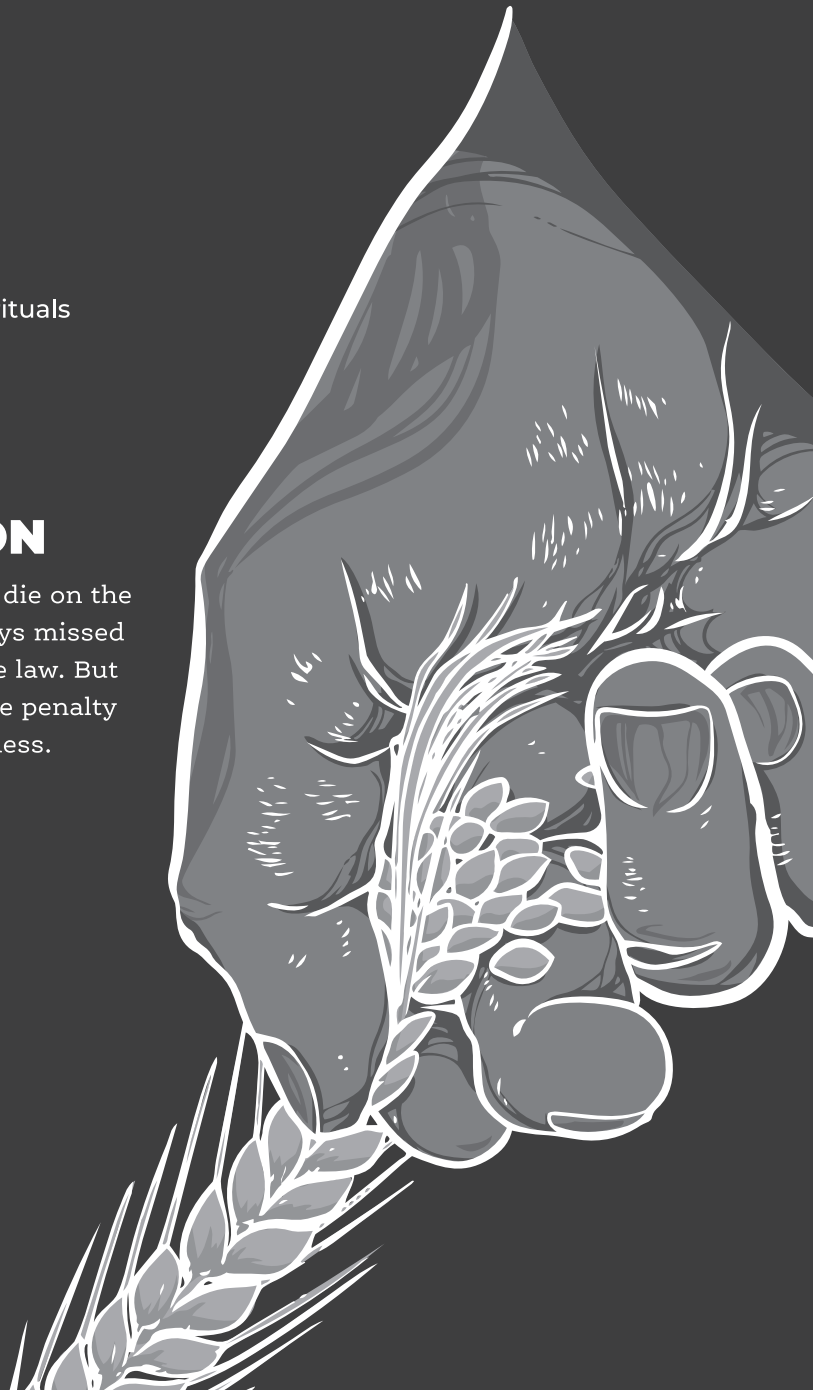
MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's mercy allowed His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for humanity's sin. We have always missed the mark of God's holy standards of the law. But through Christ, we are rescued from the penalty of death because of His love and goodness.



COMPASSIONATE AUTHORITY

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 12

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

MATTHEW 12:1-8

1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD'S LAW

MATTHEW 12:9-14

9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.

Leaders: God values your love and devotion above your works. Let that truth give you rest.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

MATTHEW 12:3-6

“Jesus regularly highlighted a pharisaical neglect of Scripture as opposed to their conformity to tradition. In defense of his disciples’ behavior, Jesus cited the example of David in 1 Samuel 21:1-9, when he fled from Saul to the city of Nob, where the tabernacle was kept at the time. There David and his men ate the consecrated bread that was set apart for the priests to eat after it had been brought to the Lord as an offering (Lev. 24:8-9). Jesus was not citing a specific Old Testament quote in 12:5, but he was making a general observation. Throughout the Old Testament law, the Lord prescribed work for the priests on the Sabbath to facilitate the worship of others (Num. 28:9-10), and yet the priests were never declared guilty for such practices. Jesus argued that—based on those two examples and based on the fact that he himself, the architect of the temple and the one for whose worship the temple existed—he was ‘greater than the temple’ (12:6).”⁶

MATTHEW 12:7

“Here Jesus used the quote to correct their misconception regarding the priority of mercy (the true spirit of the Sabbath law) over the letter of the law. God’s command to observe the Sabbath is an expression of mercy, recognizing the limits of the human makeup, and requiring us to care for the bodies and minds he has entrusted to us. The Pharisees had actually demeaned the Sabbath by robbing it of its ‘rest’ and weighting it with overwhelming religious requirements. This is what Jesus meant in Mark 2:27 when he said, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’ So mercy is wrapped up in the heart of the Sabbath law.”⁷

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD’S LAW

MATTHEW 12:9-14

“The fury of the Pharisees as they plotted to ‘destroy him’ was their own unintentional acknowledgment of Jesus’s complete moral victory over them. He contended for the value of a man and for the lawfulness of doing ‘good’ (*kalos* means what is proper) at any time, while they contended for the observance of a day. In effect, Jesus placed the love commandment above the Sabbath. Unable to meet him even on their own ground, they resorted to external force, the persecutor’s unwitting confession of defeat.”⁸

An illustration in the top right corner shows a pair of hands, rendered in a teal color, holding a golden wheat stalk. The hands are positioned as if they are about to break the wheat. The background is a light purple color.

CONTEXT

As Jesus taught and performed miracles, He repeatedly encountered conflict with the Jewish religious leaders of the day—scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The Pharisees had burdened Israel with traditions and rules, but Jesus intended to bring rest (Matt. 11:28-30). Matthew 12 begins with accusations against Jesus and His disciples for violating the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, God gave the law to Israel to reveal sin and highlight the need for a Savior. The law was never intended to save Israel but rather pointed to the time when the “offspring” (Gen. 3:15) would come (Gal. 2:16; 3:19-26). The fourth commandment is to keep the Sabbath day holy, or set apart, meaning that Israel would work six days and rest one (Ex. 20:8-11). God gave the Sabbath so that Israel might rest and remember the creation account and the origin story of Israel—so that the people could reflect on God’s faithfulness. Over the years, the Pharisees added very detailed rules for how to keep the Sabbath, most of which went much further than what God commanded. This distortion of the Sabbath meant that Jesus had to help Israel understand that the true intention of the Sabbath was to bring rest, not burden, just as He invited the crowd to find in Him (Matt. 11:28-30).

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

God Is Merciful

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

HEAVENLY FATHER, MAY OUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE DEPTH OF YOUR MERCY THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF YOUR SON. HOLY SPIRIT, OPEN OUR STUDENTS' EYES AND EARS AS THEY ENCOUNTER YOUR MERCY IN YOUR WORD. HELP US WALK IN OBEDIENCE IN LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

The Pharisees created bizarre Sabbath rules, such as forbidding spitting on the ground (it could disturb soil, considered “plowing”), banning women from looking into a mirror (they might pull out a gray hair, considered “work”), and prohibiting wearing shoes with nails (an unnecessary burden).⁹

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

TO FOLLOW OR NOT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **ARE YOU NATURALLY A RULE-FOLLOWER? WHY OR WHY NOT?**
- **WHEN A LINE OR BOUNDARY IS DEFINED, HOW QUICKLY DO YOU GO TO THE EDGE WITHOUT TECHNICALLY BREAKING IT? WHY?**
- **WHICH OF YOUR PARENTS' OR GUARDIANS' RULES DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THE REASON BEHIND THEM?**

Some environments have more rules than others, like school or airport security. Rules can feel like a burden or an inconvenience. We often choose which ones we're willing to follow and which ones to ignore. When it comes to following Jesus, His commands aren't a burden. They lead to meaningful life!

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Does our culture celebrate getting revenge or showing mercy? The world is slow to praise mercy and quick to reward harsh online comments, stories of revenge, and people getting what they deserve. This mentality can shape how we respond to offense, but this is not the way of the gospel. We've all made mistakes; we've all sinned and fallen short of God's standard (Rom. 3:23). But in the face of all our failures, God shows us mercy—forgiveness instead of the punishment we deserve. The core of the gospel message is that sinners are not given what they deserve (death) but are given what they could never earn (salvation; Eph. 2:4-5). When you believe in this gospel, you're no longer conformed to culture but transformed in your mind (Rom. 12:2). The more we dwell on the mercy that has been given to us through Jesus Christ, the more we grow in our ability to show mercy to others. Mercy transforms our minds and hearts so that we carry mercy to others in an effort to reveal Jesus to the world.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

READ MATTHEW 12:1-8

HOW DO YOU REST? WHAT MATTERED MOST ABOUT SABBATH TO PHARISEES?

Some of us rest by sleeping in, taking time off work, or going for a walk. **Resting the way God commands is intentional—obediently pausing to depend on God and to reflect on His faithfulness.** The Pharisees accused the disciples of working on the Sabbath for picking grain to eat! Their interpretation of God's law clouded their vision; rules and traditions mattered more than human needs. The Pharisees strictly enforced rules, burdening the people with standards they could never keep. **They believed keeping these rules proved their righteousness, but Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath was a gift of rest, not a burdensome test.**

WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY CLAIMING HE IS "LORD OF THE SABBATH"? SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBSERVE THE SABBATH TODAY?

When Jesus corrected the Pharisees, He didn't challenge the Sabbath itself but how the people had interpreted it. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the "Lord of the Sabbath," which means He has the authority to define the Sabbath. **As the Son of Man, Jesus established that He was God's Son—that He is God! He has authority over all things, including the Sabbath. Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath was a gift of mercy, not a burden.** If we come to the Bible as the Pharisees did and try to find life and rest in the words, we are crushed by rules and burdens (John 5:39), but if we come to Jesus, the Word of God (John 1:1), we find eternal life and permanent rest in Him (Matt. 11:28-30). He kept the law when we couldn't. The Sabbath was a good gift for God's people because it pointed them to their Creator. But Jesus reminded the Pharisees, and us today, that the Sabbath was made for people and not the other way around (Mark 2:27-28). **God's command to rest applies to us because He designed us with the need to rest (Mark 6:31), and as we do, we should remember who God is—our Creator who gives us life and rest in Jesus.**



READ HOSEA 6:6. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS THAT GOD DESIRES "STEADFAST LOVE" (OR MERCY), NOT SACRIFICE?

The Pharisees believed sacrifices and rule-following made them righteous, or made their hearts right with God. But they had it backwards; they failed to see that religious practice without mercy misses God's heart. What God desires most is justice, love, and humility (Mic. 6:6-8); He wants not sacrifice, but obedience (1 Sam. 15:22) and service (Deut. 10:12-13). Jesus perfectly revealed God's heart and rightly interpreted the law. **Good works must flow from a surrendered heart. We can't keep the law; religious duty can't save us and means nothing unless we have a relationship with Jesus.**

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD'S LAW

READ MATTHEW 12:9-14



WHAT POINT DID JESUS MAKE IN THE EXAMPLE OF A SHEEP FALLING INTO A PIT ON THE SABBATH?

Jesus cut through the Pharisees' ongoing debate concerning how much one could help others before breaking the Sabbath and pointed to what He desires most: showing mercy by doing what is good. **Jesus reframed the Sabbath as a day for doing good instead of a day for avoiding work.** Imagine walking down a road and hearing a dog yelping for help. Would you help? The Pharisees' answer to this question wasn't so easy because of their misunderstanding of the Sabbath. **Jesus elevated the meaning of the Sabbath by showing that God's heart is always to help those in need.** Jesus made the same point in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). When we do good to others, we fulfill the law (Matt. 12:12). Jesus wasn't breaking the law because God said mercy is better than sacrifice or empty rule-following (Hos. 6:6).

WHY DID THE PHARISEES PLOT JESUS'S DEATH?

The Pharisees cared more about rules than helping those in need. Jesus responded to the man with a paralyzed hand by reaching out and healing him, resulting in the Pharisees plotting His death! The Pharisees loved to debate interpretations of the law and legal cases, but they wouldn't kill someone over a difference of opinion only. **They clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah by referring to Himself as the "Son of Man," a Messianic term. He claimed the authority to forgive sins!** During Roman occupation, the Jews were unable to condemn someone to death (John 18:31), so they had to carefully plot out Jesus's destruction.



WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO LOVE OTHERS THE WAY JESUS DID? HOW ARE WE SOMETIMES MORE LIKE PHARISEES?

Jesus met combative, argumentative people, but instead of retaliating, He repaid evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21). Jesus loved the man with a withered hand by healing him, and He loved the Pharisees by speaking truth. **We often struggle to love others. Like the Pharisees, we're blind to those who need help, more eager to win arguments or to point out sin.** Jesus loves by showing compassion to those in need. He calls us to love others by sacrificially serving them (John 15:12-13). Our natural desire can be to lash out in anger at enemies, block them, or gossip about them; God says we must love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). The law reminds us of God's mercy, which fuels our desire to love others.

WRAP-UP



HOW CAN YOU SHOW MERCY TO SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE WHO DOESN'T DESERVE IT?

Is anyone too evil, too sinful, or too difficult to receive God's mercy and love? We don't see evidence for this in the Gospels. In Jesus's many rebukes to the scribes and Pharisees, He taught them the way of God's kingdom—that God is willing to save anyone. Jesus knew one of the twelve disciples, Judas, would eventually betray Him, but He still showed Judas mercy and washed his feet (John 13). Jesus revealed the grace and mercy of God perfectly (Heb. 1:3), and He invites us to follow His steps—to love one another. Is there someone you actively avoid? Anyone you're paying back with evil for the evil they did to you? Anyone you feel is too sinful to hear the gospel? **Because of sin, getting revenge feels natural, but when we follow Jesus, we are new creations. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be like Jesus and choose to show mercy in the face of evil.** God doesn't give us what we deserve (Rom. 6:23), so may we be quick to show mercy to others in the same way God has shown us mercy.

"KINGDOM OF GOD"

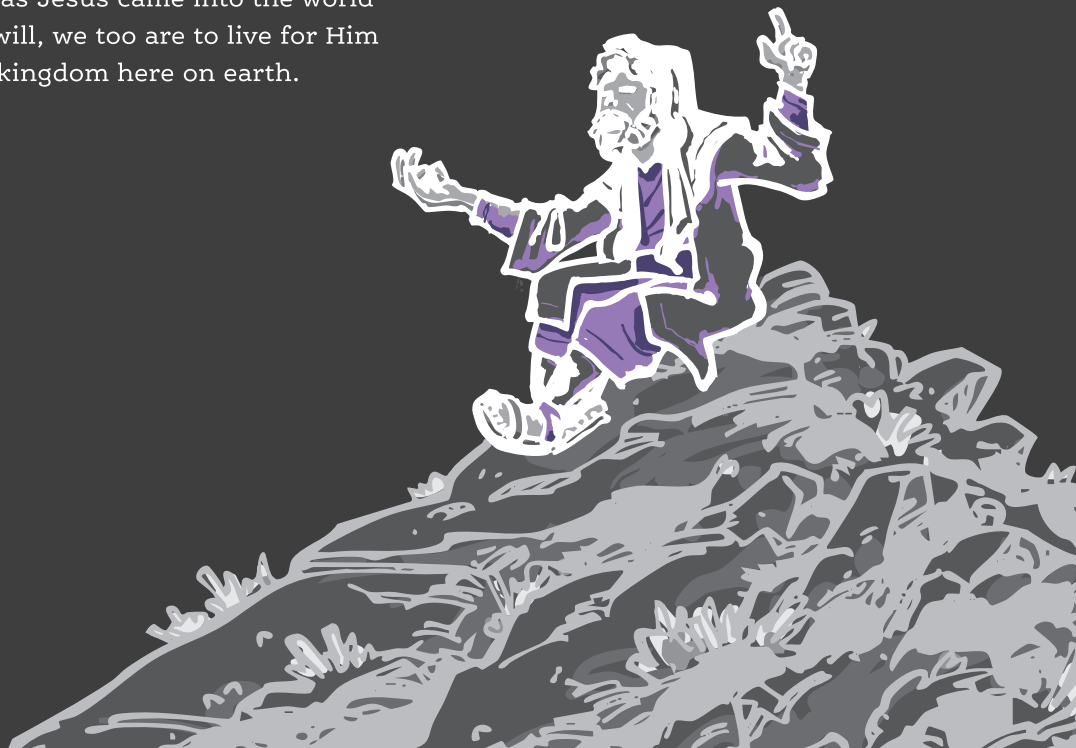
MAIN POINT.

The way of Jesus calls us to live counterculturally.



CHRIST CONNECTION

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His followers what it looked like to live as citizens of His kingdom. Just as Jesus came into the world to do the Father's will, we too are to live for Him and represent His kingdom here on earth.



KINGDOM LIVING

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 6

OUR REWARD IS IN HEAVEN

LUKE 6:20-26

20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. 24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

OUR WAY IS COUNTERCULTURAL

LUKE 6:27-36

27 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. 32 "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

The way of Jesus calls us to live counterculturally.

Leaders: When you live as a citizen of heaven rather than a citizen of this world (Phil. 3:20), you show students what God's kingdom looks like.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

OUR REWARD IS IN HEAVEN

LUKE 6:20

"Some translations use the term 'happy' to express the Greek *makarioi*, but happiness tends to be associated more with feelings, and what is being referred to here is not the feelings of believers but their status and situation. . . . Perhaps 'favored' is a better thought-for-thought translation. The poor of this beatitude possess the blessedness of being the object of God's favor. They may weep now, but theirs is a blessed state, for God's kingdom belongs to them."¹⁰

LUKE 6:20

"Both here and in Matt 5:1-2 the beatitudes are addressed to the disciples, not to the crowds, i.e., to believers and not humanity in general. The beatitudes therefore are not addressed to the poor and hungry of the world but to the believing poor and hungry."¹¹

LUKE 6:20-26

"The unusual nature of these affirmations must be candidly acknowledged: 'Jesus here, paradoxically, calls those happy whom the world commonly pities: the discouraged, sorrowful, lowly, spiritually depressed, merciful, the inwardly pure, the peacefully inclined, and the persecuted. This is the exact opposite of the world's standards. But in each case the blessing is not in the unfortunate condition itself, but in the glorious rewards of the future.' It is a summons for the Kingdom person to live in the light of eternity, believing that the ultimate reckoning is in the hands of a loving, gracious, faithful God."¹²

OUR WAY IS COUNTERCULTURAL

LUKE 6:27-36

"If we find that our love is limited to people like us—say, our skin color, our education level, our political party—and if we find ourselves doing good only for those who have done us some favor, then that may only be self-love spread over a slightly wider area. However, the love of God is not self-interested but selfless. It is sacrificial. Genuinely supernatural, God-like love includes our enemies who wrong and abuse us. This is how Christian love surpasses the sinner's love. Christian love extends to enemies."¹³

CONTEXT

Jesus taught His disciples a series of beatitudes, which describe what it means to be “blessed” in the kingdom of God. Each beatitude characterizes citizens in God’s kingdom, which is counter to worldly kingdoms, and points to the meaning of “blessed.” When we think of blessing, we think of health, wealth, and happiness, but Jesus took these worldly expectations and flipped them on their head: The poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the hated are blessed. How? While we attach blessing to earthly comfort, Jesus pointed to the eternal value of spiritual blessing. “Blessed” can be defined as “favored,” more about our standing with God rather than earthly comfort. Old Testament authors recognized that blessing (happiness or favor) is rooted in trusting God for salvation (Deut. 33:29; Pss. 32:1-2; 34:8). Luke included only four beatitudes compared to Matthew’s eight (Matt. 5:2-12), highlighting four characteristics of citizens in God’s kingdom. Each beatitude is paired with a parallel woe for those who reject Jesus. The disciples gave up everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:27-28; Mark 10:28), but many people Jesus met, taught, and even healed weren’t willing to leave everything and follow Him (Luke 18:22-23). The beatitudes encourage us that rejecting worldly comfort, though difficult, leads to eternal peace in the kingdom of God.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Sin as Selfishness

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mindset that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is revealed in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mindset that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE THE ETERNAL VALUE FOUND IN LIVING FOR YOUR KINGDOM. WHEN OUR STUDENTS GET DISTRACTED BY WORLDLY PLEASURES, QUICKLY DRAW THEM BACK TO YOUR HEART. HELP US TO FOLLOW YOU INSTEAD OF CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS.

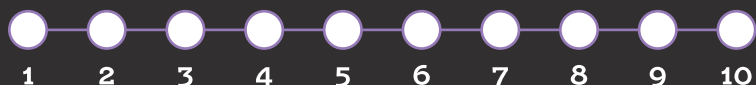




KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

How blessed are you (1=Not at all; 10=#blessed)?



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

REWARDS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHAT IS THE BEST REWARD YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED FOR AN ACHIEVEMENT, SERVICE, OR ACCOMPLISHMENT?**
- **HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN YOU DON'T RECEIVE THE REWARD YOU WORKED FOR?**
- **DO YOU WORK HARDER WHEN THE REWARD IS MORE VALUABLE? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

Rewarding a behavior reinforces the desire to repeat it. Parents reward their children for doing chores; teachers reward students for good grades and good behavior; even stores reward customers so they'll return. Rewards can be strong motivators. When it comes to our faith, we must stay focused on our great reward in heaven.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever heard the advice, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket"? This advice is another way of saying that we should have a backup plan or have other options. But when it comes to following Jesus, this advice isn't helpful. Jesus warned that we can never serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). When we place our faith in Jesus and begin following Him, we commit to serving Jesus only—not Jesus plus something else. We will battle the temptation to serve lesser "gods"—idols of this world, like sports, social media, popularity, self-image—rather than worshiping and serving our Creator. We search for peace and joy in these things, when Jesus taught that we can find peace and joy only in a relationship with Him. Money falsely promises security and invites us to give our lives to accumulate more. Material possessions give us temporary happiness. Food promises satisfaction and invites us to enjoy more of it. Our hearts may long for lesser "gods," but Jesus reminds us that nothing worldly can go with us into eternity. He calls us to deny ourselves and to find true satisfaction in Him—peace and joy worldly circumstances can't diminish.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

The way of Jesus calls us to live counterculturally.

OUR REWARD IS IN HEAVEN

READ LUKE 6:20-26

THE DISCIPLES WOULD FACE TRIALS AND PERSECUTION. HOW DO THESE VERSES HELP PREPARE THEM? AND US?

Jesus contrasted two types of people: those in need who long to be satisfied and those without need who are satisfied. The disciples gave up everything to follow Jesus; they were hated, excluded, insulted, slandered, and even killed for identifying with Him (v. 22). The world may look at the disciples' fate and pity them, but Jesus said they were rich, full, and blessed—as are all His followers, even when they face pain and persecution. We are blessed when we surrender temporary treasures for eternal peace. **Our momentary trials, though painful, don't compare to our reward in heaven (2 Cor. 4:17-18).**

HOW IS GOD'S KINGDOM OPPOSITE FROM THE WORLD? WHAT PART OF THIS PASSAGE CHALLENGES YOU MOST? WHY?

People often describe God's kingdom as backward or upside-down, meaning that His kingdom is utterly unlike our world. What matters most in our culture often has no value in heaven. What we give so much of our time and attention to here won't matter when we take our last breath. Our world says we're blessed if we have a lot of money and possessions, if we're popular, if we have a good job or good grades. These things tempt us because they're visible now, while eternal rewards feel far away. **But according to Jesus, we are most blessed when we recognize our need for Him.** In Jesus, we find true fulfillment. When we seek happiness and satisfaction in what the world offers, we are pitied. Why? Because that happiness and satisfaction fades, leaving us empty. The money is never enough; material possessions lose value; status and popularity fade. And in the end, those who invest in these things are left bankrupt. Jesus's kingdom is unlike our world! We are blessed when we root all of our joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in Him. **We are most satisfied when we are satisfied in the Lord. And even if we never experience comfort or pleasure here, Jesus secured our abundance in heaven.**



WHAT DISTRACTS US FROM VALUING ETERNAL REWARDS MORE THAN EARTHLY REWARDS?

Jesus didn't teach that we shouldn't care for our basic needs or enjoy His creation but to focus on heavenly rewards (v. 23). He taught us to make His kingdom the aim of our lives; we often make our kingdom—our comfort and our status—the aim. **We lose sight of eternal rewards because we're too distracted by weak, temporary rewards here.** We compare ourselves to our friends or to people we follow on social media, falling for the lie that we'd be happy if we had what they have. When we value what Jesus values, Jesus said we'd be like the prophets—misunderstood, mistreated, but richly blessed (v. 23).

OUR WAY IS COUNTERCULTURAL

READ LUKE 6:27-36



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO “LOVE YOUR ENEMIES”? WHY IS THIS SO DIFFICULT?

Here, the Greek word for “love” is *agape*, genuine care for a person that is given, not earned. Jesus explained that even sinners love those who love them, repay good for good, and loan to those who will pay back debt (vv. 32-34); but to love as God’s children means having no expectation of receiving anything in return (v. 35). **Loving your enemy may look like praying for someone who gossiped about you, helping someone who hurt you, or giving to someone who took from you.** Is this easy? Not at all. Our sinful nature seeks revenge, but Jesus showed us a better way.



HOW ARE WE “SONS OF THE MOST HIGH” IF WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES? WHAT IF WE *DON’T* LOVE OUR ENEMIES?

We are most like God when we love like He loves, similar to someone looking at you and saying, “Wow! You look just like your parents.” We best represent God and His kingdom when we love even those who hate us (Matt. 5:46-47). Why? Because God loved us before we loved Him—while we were still His enemies (Rom. 5:8-10). **God demonstrated His love in giving His Son for His enemies, and as representatives of His kingdom, God calls us to demonstrate this love to our enemies.** Being “sons of the Most High” means not just accepting God’s love but demonstrating this love to the world. If we can’t do this, if we refuse to look like our Father, then how can we call ourselves His children?



CAN LOVE AND SELFISHNESS COEXIST? EXPLAIN.

Selfishness is at the core of sin. Love, though, is selfless. The two are like oil and water, refusing to mix. Sin selfishly seeks personal comfort and happiness. Because our hearts are distorted by sin (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20-23), we seek our own good. When people attack us, we retaliate. But God made a better way: While we were God’s enemies, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-10), setting us free from sin! **Receiving God’s mercy helps us to see our enemies with merciful eyes; being loved helps us to love. Jesus’s selfless sacrifice shows us how to put others first.** Sin curves our hearts inward, but the Father’s love and mercy transform our hearts to love our enemies and to consider their needs before our own (Phil. 2:3).

WRAP-UP



HOW DO WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES IN OUR DAILY LIVES? HOW DO WE BALANCE THIS WITH STANDING UP FOR OURSELVES?

To be a representative of God’s love in a world that is hostile to the gospel is incredibly challenging. At times, you might feel like a pushover or weak, but we best represent Jesus to the world when we love others sacrificially. What would change if you prayed for your enemies? What would happen if you forgave someone because Jesus has forgiven you? This merciful love is what God desires most for His disciples (Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6), and when we give this love to others, however imperfectly, we reflect God’s heart and character. Think of people you consider as too sinful, too hateful, too evil to turn to God. The difficult truth is that you were in this position before trusting in Christ. **We were enemies of God because of our sin, but through Jesus’s selfless and sacrificial love, we were able to understand God’s love for us.** Imagine all the ways God could use you to reveal this same love to others, even those the world says are too far gone. **May we never forget the grace God has shown us (v. 35), and may this urge us to show grace to others.**

"THE ONE"

MAIN POINT.

We can look to Jesus's works to settle our doubts.



CHRIST CONNECTION

When Jesus answered John the Baptist's question, He pointed to miracles only the Messiah would have authority to do. Jesus would later demonstrate His authority over sin and evil in a greater way through His crucifixion and resurrection. While many continue to reject Him, one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess He is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).



EVIDENCE FOR FAITH

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 11

JESUS GAVE US EVIDENCE

MATTHEW 11:1-10

1 When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. 2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'"

JESUS CALLS US TO FAITH

MATTHEW 11:11-19

11 "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 16 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We can look to Jesus's works to settle our doubts.

Leaders: Our God isn't offended by our questions. Instead, He shows us compassion when we bring Him our doubts in an effort to know Him more deeply.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS GAVE US EVIDENCE

MATTHEW 11:4-6

“Interestingly, the passages that Jesus alluded to in Isaiah refer not only to healing but also to the judgment that the Messiah would bring. Jesus's miraculous works were evidence of the in-breaking kingdom; therefore John needed to trust that Jesus would indeed bring full and final judgment, a judgment that comes to the fore in verses 20-24. God will be true to His Word, and to try to fight doubt without a foundation in the truth of His Word is futile. God's Word is a rock, not because it makes everything easy, but because it keeps your feet out of sinking sand amid difficult situations and unmet expectations.”¹

MATTHEW 11:5

“In the entirety of the Old Testament, no blind person ever received sight, nor is there any story in the New Testament, apart from Saul's conversion (Acts 9:17-18), where Jesus's followers restored a blind man's sight. Jesus was fulfilling what Isaiah had long ago prophesied, ‘Then the eyes of the blind will be opened’ (35:5).”²

JESUS CALLS US TO FAITH

MATTHEW 11:19

“We probably tend to underestimate the extent to which Jesus entered into joyous table-fellowship with people who had known only exclusion but who now knew the joy of forgiveness and acceptance. This was the background to the koinonia so important to the early church. It foreshadowed the Lord's Supper and the ultimate ‘messianic banquet’ (Acts 2:42; Rev. 3:20). This table-fellowship with such people probably more than anything else aroused the wrath of the Pharisees.”³

CONTEXT

John the Baptist and many other Jews wanted to know for sure that Jesus was the Messiah. Before we can understand their confusion and questions, we have to understand what the word “Messiah” would’ve meant to them. Messiah (or in the Greek, Christos; where we get the title “Christ”) means “anointed one.” The idea of anointing appears repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. Yahweh (the Lord) anointed people, or approved them for special roles or positions. Most often, anointed ones represented God and delivered His words to His people. God anointed priests, prophets, and kings—even pagan kings—to carry out the tasks He’d planned for them (Rom. 13:1). But the Messiah was a special prophesied deliverer, who would come from the line of King David. People expected Him to come as a warrior prince, who would overthrow the Romans and establish His own kingdom on earth—a kingdom where the Jews would rise above all their oppressors. However, the people missed that though the Messiah was a prophesied deliverer from oppression, He was also the prophesied deliverer from sin and its effects on the world. Jesus redirected John’s attention to this truth. Jesus was doing exactly what prophecy said the Messiah would do: healing, sharing the good news, and setting people free.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION



Illumination of Scripture

Because of the vast difference between God’s wisdom and ours and because of humanity’s sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to applying the meaning of God’s Word, Christians do not rely ultimately on human reason in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely on an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian’s ultimate reliance is on the work of the Holy Spirit who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (John 14:15-18; 16:7-15).

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, TURN OUR ATTENTION TO YOU WHEN WE WRESTLE WITH DOUBTS. REMIND US OF THE WORK YOU’VE DONE IN THE PAST THAT REVEALS YOUR FAITHFULNESS. HELP US TO USE THESE EXPERIENCES TO ENCOURAGE OUR STUDENTS THAT THEY’RE NOT ALONE IN THEIR QUESTIONS OR IN THEIR DESIRE TO BE SURE OF WHAT THEY BELIEVE.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Many people struggle with imposter syndrome—extreme self-doubt or feeling fake, even if they actually know what they’re doing. But some people suffer from the opposite, the Dunning-Kruger effect. They overestimate their abilities and lack enough awareness of their flaws to grow.⁴

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

DEALING WITH DOUBT

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHEN HAVE YOU DOUBTED SOMEONE'S STORY?**
- **HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN SOMEONE IS LYING? WHAT DO YOU LOOK OR LISTEN FOR?**
- **WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECTED SOMEONE YOU TRUSTED WASN'T TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO YOU?**

We've all heard stories that sounded unbelievable. Our minds constantly scan the words people say, their facial expressions, and their body language to help us know if they're being real. Doubts are a very normal part of our lives. But doubts aren't always bad; they can actually lead us to ask questions that strengthen our faith and draw us closer to Jesus.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Where do you go with your doubts? When we scroll social media, we can find influencers for almost anything. If we aren't careful, reels and stories can convince us that these people have all the answers we could ever need. Sometimes, other people do have answers we need and can help us make wise choices. But unless we truly know the people behind the accounts, it's impossible to trust completely that they are exactly who they appear to be. That's not to say we can't be inspired by something they say or learn something new from them—we definitely can! However, when it comes to doubts about our faith, about Jesus, we need to make sure we're taking our questions to the right places and holding up the answers against the truth of God's Word. While going to godly, trustworthy people with our doubts or questions isn't wrong, Jesus should always be our starting point—just like He was for John the Baptist.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We can look to Jesus's works to settle our doubts.

JESUS GAVE US EVIDENCE

READ MATTHEW 11:1-10

JOHN PROPHESED ABOUT JESUS AS THE ONE WHO WOULD TAKE AWAY SIN, SO WHAT DO YOU THINK MADE HIM DOUBT?

Leaders: See context note on Messiah. As the prophet who'd prepared the way for Jesus's ministry, John had every reason to believe Jesus was who He claimed to be (John 1:29-34). But Jesus wasn't doing what John expected: He wasn't overthrowing Rome; He was hanging out with "tax collectors and sinners" (v. 19). John also wasn't in the best situation: He was in prison for calling out King Herod's sin. **Doubt often comes to us when we're struggling with the weight of unmet expectations or a difficult situation.** Like John, we might wonder: "Is Jesus really who I thought He was?" But the truth is: **He's even better.**



WHAT EVIDENCE DID JESUS GIVE JOHN TO PROVE HE IS WHO HE CLAIMS TO BE?

When John questioned Jesus's identity as the Messiah, Jesus didn't snap back or ignore John's disciples. Instead, Jesus answered them plainly, pointing to specific events in His ministry, like healing the sick and sharing the good news of the gospel. The evidence Jesus gave John fulfilled prophecy from the book of Isaiah—prophecy John would've known. Jesus both reassured John of His identity and shifted John's attention away from promises of judgment and toward promises of salvation. **When we have questions and doubts, we can turn our attention to God's Word and find the answers we need.**



WHEN IS IT DIFFICULT TO BATTLE DOUBT? HOW DOES IT COMFORT YOU TO KNOW JESUS MEETS US WHERE WE ARE, EVEN WHEN WE DOUBT?

We can imagine that John's time in prison was filled with dark, depressing days. John desperately needed hope, and despite his doubt, he reached out to the one Person he knew could give it. **Jesus met John there in his doubt, and He'll do the same for us.** We may wrestle with doubt when we face sickness, the death of someone we love, friends betraying us, or uncertainty about the future. But when we feel overwhelmed by life or don't know when the pressure will let up, we can run to Jesus and trust Him to help us. He doesn't reject us or put us down when we come to Him with our doubting hearts; He invites us close and promises we'll find rest (Matt. 11:29-30). **We often attempt to hide our doubt or stuff our questions down deep, maybe because we fear God's response. But through the life of Jesus, we see the Father's heart for us. We can trust Him with our questions.**

JESUS CALLS US TO FAITH

READ MATTHEW 11:11-19

WHAT ADVANTAGES DO WE HAVE NOW TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH THAT JOHN DIDN'T HAVE?

Jesus knew what was coming, but John could only see what was happening in the moment. We weren't made to hold it all or know everything. Our perspective (and John's) is limited. We only know what we can see and understand, but God is greater than us, and His plans are greater too. **We have two advantages John didn't have: We can see the rest of Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection on the pages of Scripture. And when we trust in Him as Savior, we receive the Holy Spirit, who helps us know and trust that Jesus is who He claims to be.**



WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT JESUS WAS "A FRIEND OF . . . SINNERS" (V. 19)? HOW DOES THAT COMPARE TO THE WAY PEOPLE THINK OF JESUS TODAY?

The Jews called Jesus "a friend of . . . sinners" as an insult because they pictured their Messiah as a conquering king who didn't associate with the lowly. But to us, these words are grace: **We are all sinners in need of a Friend who loved us enough to lay down His life to free us from our sin. Jesus went to people who'd only ever known life as outsiders—and He invited them in.** Despite what many people might believe today, Jesus doesn't reject us because of what we've done; He invites us in to experience freedom from sin because of what He has done for us.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE IN JOHN'S DOUBT AND THE JEWS' UNBELIEF JESUS CALLED OUT IN VERSES 16-17?

Jesus called out the Jews by comparing them to children who only wanted to play a game if they could do it their way. In other words, the Jews refused to believe in Jesus or the words of John the Baptist because Jesus wasn't the Messiah they wanted or expected—a powerful ruler and conqueror. Unbelief comes from a lack of faith, a complete rejection of Jesus and His way of life. Faith is trusting what we can't see (Heb. 11:1), and doubt is acknowledging our desire to be sure we're trusting the right idea or person. John's question teaches us that we're not alone when we struggle with doubt and that doubt doesn't mean we lack faith. **Unbelief, however, separates us from God because it's the choice to reject what we've seen and heard about Jesus. But if we turn to Jesus with our questions, like John, doubt can draw us closer to Jesus instead.**

WRAP-UP



JESUS IS THE FRIEND OF SINNERS. HOW CAN WE IMITATE HIM WHILE ALSO KEEPING OURSELVES FROM FALLING INTO SIN?

The Jews called out Jesus for hanging out with sinners as if it was a bad thing. But Jesus knew His mission, and He based His ministry around it: He came to give hope to those who were lost and hurting and who recognized their need for something more. Jesus could hang out with people who didn't live like Him without fear that their words and actions would draw Him into sin. But He still shows us how to be friends to sinners without falling into sin: **We ground ourselves in our identity as children of God, recharge by spending time in God's presence, learn Scripture so we can stand firm on God's Word when someone challenges us, and surround ourselves with close friends who follow Jesus and can hold us accountable to do the same.** These practices build a solid spiritual support system for us, a safe place where we can return again and again to find rest, truth, and restoration as we go out into the world to invite the lost and hurting to come and see Jesus.

"GOD HAS VISITED HIS PEOPLE!"

MAIN POINT.

When we face the reality of physical death, we can cling to the hope of eternal life.



CHRIST CONNECTION

When Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead, He showed that He has power over death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, we have full assurance that Jesus will one day defeat death forever and resurrect us from the dead.



POWER OVER SIN AND DEATH

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 7

DEATH IS THE EFFECT OF SIN

LUKE 7:11-13

11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER DEATH

LUKE 7:14-17

14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

When we face the reality of physical death, we can cling to the hope of eternal life.

Leaders: You and your students have likely walked through grief. Take comfort in knowing that Jesus is moved by our grief and cares for our sorrow (Luke 7:13).

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

DEATH IS THE EFFECT OF SIN

LUKE 7:11-13

“Since Jesus addresses the son as ‘young man’ (v. 14), we may assume that the woman has been left alone at a relatively young age. She lived in a man’s world in which a woman had no legal rights. The testimony of women and slaves was unacceptable in judicial proceedings. Thus a woman without a man to represent her was particularly helpless and defenseless. The Gospels testify that Jesus had ‘compassion’ on people like this.”⁵

LUKE 7:12

“She has already buried her husband. Perhaps the son’s tone of voice, physical appearance, and gestures were reminders of her dearly departed spouse. So now all that existed of that former life heads to the grave. And, with no husband and no son, she had no way of providing for herself in that culture and time. She’ll soon be alone. Perhaps that’s why ‘a large crowd from the city was also with her.’ It’s like the entire community knew what grief and difficulty lay ahead.”⁶

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER DEATH

LUKE 7:16

“Some commentators have seen a close link between this story and a similar one in the Old Testament where a non-Israelite widow at Zarephath had her son restored to life by the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:8-24). At the end of that account, the widow told Elijah: ‘Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the LORD truly speaks through you’ (1 Kings 17:24). The successful prophetic intervention had convinced her of the prophet’s authenticity. Similarly, in the Gospel story, the people declared, ‘A mighty prophet has risen among us’ (7:16).”⁷



CONTEXT

When Jesus met this widow in the town of Nain, women had little rights and few choices to earn a living. Men not only provided financially for the women in their lives, but they also provided physical and legal protection. A woman's testimony wasn't accepted in court, so if facing legal accusations, widows were completely defenseless. Once her husband died, the widow's son would've cared for, provided for, and protected her. So, when Jesus stepped onto the scene, the widow in this passage was mourning so many losses: the death of her son, the death of her security, and the death of life as she knew it—again. The townspeople would've known her situation and likely had sympathy for her, but they could do nothing to make it better. Thankfully, Jesus could and did. And this isn't the only place we see Jesus care for the women in His day: He offered hope and forgiveness to a Samaritan woman who was looked down on and treated as an outcast by the Jews (John 4); He stood up for a woman caught in adultery, keeping her from being stoned to death and offering grace instead (John 8:2-11); He included women in His ministry and even appeared first to a group of women after His resurrection. Once again, we see that Jesus often discarded cultural norms in favor of loving people and inviting them to experience salvation.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Resurrection

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was resurrected, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives believers confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

LEADERS' PRAYER

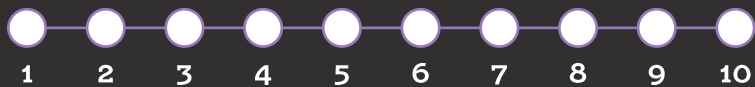
LORD JESUS, WHEN WE'RE HURTING OVER LOSS AND GRIEF, REMIND US OF THE HOPE WE HAVE IN YOU. HELP US TO SUPPORT ANY STUDENTS WHO MAY BE GRIEVING, OFFERING THEM THE SAME HOPE AND COMFORT YOU HAVE GIVEN US.



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

On a scale of 1-10 (1=Not at all; 10=Completely), how much of a rule follower are you?



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

CONSEQUENCES AND LOSS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHAT KINDS OF CONSEQUENCES DO YOUR PARENTS OR GUARDIANS GIVE FOR BREAKING THEIR RULES?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU LOST SOMETHING YOU VALUED—EVEN A DREAM YOU HELD?**
- **WHEN HAVE YOU LOST PEOPLE YOU LOVED, EITHER THROUGH BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS OR DEATH?**

When we break rules, we face consequences. This reality is just as true today as it was for Adam and Eve in Genesis. When they broke God's rules for living with Him in Eden, sin entered the world—and so did disorder, sickness, and death. But the biggest loss that day was their close relationship with God. Thankfully, because of Jesus, who has power and authority over everything, we have hope that sin and death are not the end.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

None of us fully understand why bad things happen. We ask, "If God is good, why does evil exist? Why hasn't Jesus come back already? Why do people die—'good' people, young people, and those who still have so much to give to the world?" Knowing the answers wouldn't take our pain away, but we struggle with these questions anyway because we want a reason for the pain. Ultimately, we want to know God's heart. While God's mind and plans are so far above anything we can understand (Isa. 55:8-9), we can trust a few general truths about God: God is good. Since God is good, He allows us free will, and sometimes we choose sin and evil. Since God is good, His timing seems slow because He wants more people to experience His grace, mercy, and forgiveness (2 Pet. 3:9). Since God is good, He invites us to trust Jesus for salvation and promises that we'll spend eternity with Him—and all other believers who have died before us. He is good. And one day, all that is wrong and evil will come undone because of His goodness.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

When we face the reality of physical death, we can cling to the hope of eternal life.

DEATH IS THE EFFECT OF SIN

READ LUKE 7:11-13

WHAT DETAILS DOES LUKE GIVE US ABOUT THE WOMAN IN NAIN (V. 12)? HOW DO THEY HELP US SEE THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON THE WORLD?

Leaders: Share context on widows. Can you imagine this woman's grief? Not only had she buried her husband, but now she was burying her only son. She was alone, despite being surrounded by several people from her town. **Sin's effect means that we all eventually know what it's like to grieve or to feel completely alone, even when we're with other people.** Their presence is helpful but doesn't take away the pain. The people from the widow's town could mourn with her, but they couldn't give her what she needed—only Jesus could. Thankfully, He was already moving toward her.



WHICH TITLE DID LUKE USE TO REFER TO JESUS IN VERSE 13? WHY DO YOU THINK HE CHOSE THAT TITLE HERE?

Because of sin, death is a part of life for everyone, so Jesus passing this funeral procession isn't surprising. But for the widow, everything changed on this day. Life kept moving while she grieved, but Jesus didn't. Jesus saw her, stopped for her, and showed that He is Lord. **"Lord" indicates someone who has authority or power over something, so Luke's use of this title was a fitting acknowledgment that Jesus could do anything because He is Lord over everything—including death itself.** Her seemingly hopeless situation changed when she encountered living Hope—Jesus.

 **HOW DOES JESUS SHOW US WE CAN HOLD ON TO HOPE, EVEN WHEN WE GRIEVE?**

Before Adam and Eve chose their own way over God's way, they enjoyed a home untainted by death and grief. All pain, sickness, and death are the result of sin's presence in the world. So, in life after the fall, our stories are often colored in the shades of gray that follow unthinkable hurt, tragedy, and loss. But Jesus steps into our moments of deepest pain, as He did for the widow in Nain. When Jesus saw her, His heart was filled with compassion, and He reached out to offer hope. He does the same for us. **His offer of salvation not only gives us the hope that comes with freedom from sin and spiritual death but also carries the hope of reuniting us with other believers who have already died. While we experience the heartbreak of living without them on this earth, we can rest in the unshakable truth that because of Jesus, we won't have to live without them forever.**

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER DEATH

READ LUKE 7:14-17



WHAT DID JESUS DO TO BRING THE WIDOW'S SON BACK TO LIFE? HOW WOULD YOU HAVE RESPONDED IF YOU SAW THIS MIRACLE?

Telling a dead man to get up and actually having it work seems impossible to us. Death seems so final because we don't have power over it, but we know the One who does. Jesus's words alone held the power to raise the dead. That's why He simply commanded a dead man to get up. The man sat up and spoke, and the people were filled with wonder and awe for what Jesus had done. **With words, God gave life to the world and everything in it (Heb. 11:3). And with words, Jesus gave life to this widow's son.**



WHAT DID JESUS'S POWER OVER DEATH DO FOR THE PEOPLE WATCHING? WHAT DOES IT DO FOR US?

The people who witnessed Jesus raising the widow's son were amazed and gave glory to God. They believed God had "visited" them, referring to the powerful work Jesus did, not seeing He is God. **They saw Jesus the prophet, not Jesus the Savior—Immanuel, "God with us" in the flesh. Yet, their words held a truth they completely missed: God was with them.** Here, Jesus proved to them and us that He has the authority to speak and erase death's power, replacing it with the gift of life. He is more than a great prophet or good teacher; He's the only One with the power to save us from sin and death.

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT JESUS FROM HIS MEETING THIS WOMAN'S NEED (AND OURS) BEFORE SHE KNEW HIS IDENTITY?

The widow didn't ask Jesus for a miracle, but He offered one anyway. He gave her the one thing she desired most, that only He could give: life. **Before we knew we needed Him, Jesus came to us while we were trapped in sin and offered us something even greater: eternal life in Him (Rom. 5:8).** We have no power to save ourselves, no matter how "good" we are. We can be saved from sin and eternal separation from God only through faith in Jesus and because of His grace toward us. He loved us first. He died to save us. And He "always lives" to intercede for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25). **Even when we hadn't asked for a miracle, Jesus saw our need and stepped in to give us the greatest miracle we never knew we needed: forgiveness from sin, a restored relationship with God, and freedom from spiritual death to live forever in His presence.**

WRAP-UP



WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THIS PASSAGE TEACHES US TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE WHO ARE GRIEVING? HOW CAN YOU HELP THEM KNOW JESUS SEES AND CARES?

Especially if you haven't experienced grief, trying to comfort someone who's hurting after a heartbreaking loss can seem intimidating. Even if you're no stranger to grief, every person handles grief differently, so you still might struggle for the right words to say or the right ways to support your friend. But Jesus shows us some simple ways to help people who are grieving: We can show up; just offering our presence helps. We can see our friends with compassion by providing a safe space for them to talk about their hurt. And instead of letting difficult emotions turn us away, we can come close to offer any practical support they might need (like coffee dates, walks outside, or even a good cry on the couch). **If they're believers, when they're ready to hear it, we can also gently remind them of the hope we have in Jesus: One day we will be reunited with our loved ones who love Him too. And if they're not believers, we can lovingly share the hope of the gospel and pray for them and with them.**

"THE LARGER DEBT"

MAIN POINT.

Jesus forgives us when we humbly come to Him in faith.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Our sin created debt, a payment so extreme that we could never repay it with our own good works or sacrifice. Instead, Jesus willingly surrendered Himself as the sacrifice for our sin. He paid our debt with His blood and covered us permanently.



FORGIVENESS AND GRATITUDE

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 7

JESUS IS WILLING TO FORGIVE US

LUKE 7:36-39

36 One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

FORGIVENESS PRODUCES GRATITUDE

LUKE 7:40-50

40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Jesus forgives us when we humbly come to Him in faith.

Leaders: Consider when you've been like the woman, spilling out your sin and receiving forgiveness; consider when you've been the Pharisee, comparing your sin to someone else's.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

JESUS IS WILLING TO FORGIVE US

LUKE 7:37-38

"In Jewish society at that time, it was scandalous and indecent for a woman to let down her hair in public. It seems probable that she was a prostitute or perhaps an adulteress (7:37), so perhaps she was callous to the cultural norm, but it is more likely she was overcome with repentance and thankfulness (2 Sam. 6:16-23). Accordingly, Jesus passed over the scandal and emphasized to her and to those around him the forgiveness and salvation available to all who repent and believe (7:48,50). Christian women were later instructed to dress modestly and decently (1 Tim. 2:9)."⁸

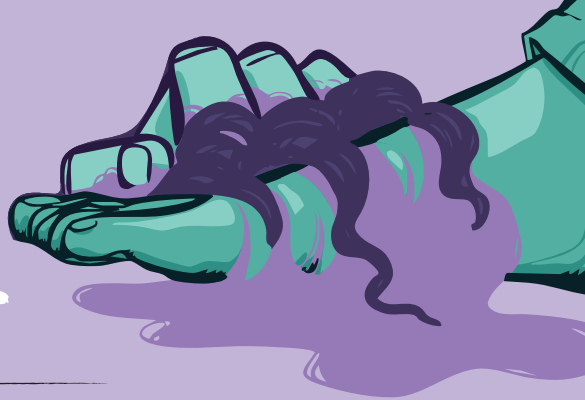
LUKE 7:39

"With relationship to others, man is a fellow-debtor whose pretensions of moral and religious superiority are completely irrelevant. . . . All are hopelessly in debt, but some delude themselves into believing that theirs is not so great by comparison with others. The parable also teaches that God is not like men, harshly demanding his pound of flesh. He freely forgives men their debts."⁹

FORGIVENESS PRODUCES GRATITUDE

LUKE 7:44-46

"It would have been expected that the host would have provided water for his guest's feet (Gen. 18:4; Judg. 19:21). Jesus had not received this courtesy, but he had had his feet washed with the woman's tears. Similarly in place of the kiss of welcome that might have been expected from the host (Gen. 29:13; 45:15) he had received kisses on his feet. And finally, whereas Simon had omitted to anoint Jesus's head (Pss. 23:5; 141:5), the woman had anointed his feet (oil is olive oil, which was plentiful and cheap; there is a contrast with ointment, which was rare and expensive perfume)."¹⁰



CONTEXT

When we invite people over, we follow certain steps to prepare our home so guests are comfortable while they're visiting. We call this hospitality. People in Jesus's day showed hospitality by offering specific things when guests entered their homes too. For example, people wore sandals and traveled mostly by foot on dirt roads, so hosts usually offered guests water to wash their feet. Failure to do so would've been considered an insult—which is exactly what happened when Jesus entered the home of Simon the Pharisee. But that wasn't the only common courtesy Simon ignored: He didn't greet Jesus with a kiss (elsewhere called a "holy kiss"; an affectionate but not inappropriate or romantic greeting that shows respect), and he failed to anoint Jesus's head with oil (to show honor). However, the woman, only described here as a "sinner," did all these things for Jesus: She washed Jesus's feet with her tears and wiped them clean with her hair, and she kissed His feet and anointed them with expensive perfume. Scripture doesn't tell us Simon's motive for inviting Jesus into his home, but his lack of hospitality tells us he probably didn't hold a high opinion of Jesus. Though Simon believed he was a prime example of righteousness, this woman proved him wrong. She humbled herself before the One who deserves our honest worship, and He forgave her sin.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Faith

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

LEADERS' PRAYER

LORD JESUS, YOU ARE OUR PERFECT SAVIOR. THANK YOU FOR HUMBLING YOURSELF TO DIE ON THE CROSS FOR US. MAY WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BEFORE YOU IN WORSHIP AND TEACH OUR STUDENTS TO DO THE SAME.



KICK STARTER

♥ HEART CHECK

Let's check in on how you're doing spiritually. Last week, we talked about some heavy things. How has the truth that Jesus has power over life and death helped you feel more hopeful about death, loss, and grief? What opportunities have you had to walk with others and point them to hope?

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

GIVING THANKS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHAT'S THE MOST UNUSUAL THING SOMEONE HAS THANKED YOU FOR?**
- **HOW WOULD YOU EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE TO SOMEONE WHO HAS DONE SOMETHING HUGE FOR YOU?**
- **WHEN DO YOU STRUGGLE TO SHOW GRATITUDE? WHY?**

Showing gratitude isn't always easy—whether an unexpected gift leaves us shocked or speechless or our thanks feels forced because the gift didn't live up to our expectations or come from the right person. But Jesus deserves all our gratitude and worship. Despite our sin against Him, He willingly died to offer us forgiveness, salvation, and a restored relationship with God forever. Today, we'll see what it means to humble ourselves and be forgiven.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

When people hurt us—even people we don't know—letting go of the hurt isn't easy. We might vent to our friends or even share a post on social media. Our temptation is to hold nothing back, to give up every detail. Maybe our goal is to shame the other person or to justify our feelings or responses; maybe we're just looking for sympathy on a bad day. Over time, maybe we cool down and offer forgiveness. Or, maybe we double down, and bitterness grows into a grudge. But here's the whole, tough truth: We have no right to hold grudges or withhold forgiveness. If anyone had a right to hold a grudge, Jesus did. But He did the opposite; He withheld nothing from us, giving His very life to bring life to us when we were dead in our sin (Eph. 2:1). Certainly, we might need to set boundaries for physical and emotional safety, but forgiveness can exist within those boundaries. Forgiveness heals our hearts and sets us free; unforgiveness holds us captive. Just as Jesus forgave us and set us free, so we must be willing to forgive others.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Jesus forgives us when we humbly come to Him in faith.

JESUS IS WILLING TO FORGIVE US

READ LUKE 7:36-39

DESCRIBE THE WOMAN IN THE PASSAGE. WHAT DO HER ACTIONS REVEAL ABOUT HER HEART?

Labeled a sinner, this woman demonstrated great courage by visiting Jesus in the home of a Pharisee. She approached Jesus humbly, recognizing her sin, His holiness, and her desperate need for forgiveness. With tears, she mourned over her sin and held on to the hope Jesus offered. She didn't put on a show for others; she showed love and commitment to the One who would save her from her sin. **May we recognize our brokenness and sin, and may we also kneel at Jesus's feet with humility and hope, admitting our desperate need to be forgiven.**



WHAT DOES OUR VIEW OF PEOPLE LIVING IN SIN REVEAL ABOUT OUR HEARTS? HOW DOES JESUS TEACH US A DIFFERENT WAY?

The Pharisees were rigid rule followers who looked down on people they considered more sinful than themselves, and Simon was no different. He couldn't believe Jesus would allow such a sinner to touch Him. This woman was caught up in a darkness she couldn't defeat on her own, and Simon condemned her for it. But Jesus didn't; He invited her into His light. **So often, we find ourselves sitting in Simon's seat, judging people who don't know Jesus for not knowing any better or writing off people who do know Jesus when they stumble.** But Jesus's way—the way of humility and grace—is better.

WHY DO THE THOUGHTS AND MOTIVES BEHIND OUR ACTIONS MATTER? CAN WE TRUST JESUS TO REALLY SEE US? EXPLAIN.

Leaders: Share context on hospitality. Luke doesn't tell us why the woman washed Jesus's feet with her tears. Maybe she recognized the host's failure to provide water for Jesus to wash His feet as an insult. Maybe she knew no other way to show her love for Jesus. Whatever her reason for her action, her heart was set on honoring Jesus—and He saw her. Jesus doesn't want empty worship; He wants humble, repentant hearts set on honoring Him. What we fill our hearts and minds with matters because all of it will spill out in our actions. Others might not notice when we're faking it, but Jesus will. He knew Simon's thoughts, after all. **Jesus isn't like anyone else; He sees our hearts clearly. He knows when our love and repentance are real, and to offer Him anything else is empty worship.**

FORGIVENESS PRODUCES GRATITUDE

READ LUKE 7:40-50



HOW DID JESUS CONFRONT SIMON'S THOUGHTS? HOW DOES HE CONFRONT US ABOUT OUR THOUGHTS TODAY?

Simon was clearly unhappy about the woman coming into his home and making such a grand gesture of love toward Jesus. He probably thought no one would know his feelings about the woman or Jesus. But Jesus doesn't look at what's on the outside—He looks at our hearts. Jesus used a story to make His point about what was going on in Simon's heart—and it wasn't love or gratitude. **For believers today, Jesus speaks through His Word and the Holy Spirit. Both convict us and help us see which of our thoughts honor Jesus and how to “take . . . captive” (2 Cor. 10:5) the ones that don't.**



WHY DOES JESUS DESERVE OUR GRATITUDE, REGARDLESS OF OUR PAST OR HOW GREAT OR SMALL OUR SIN SEEMS?

Simon mistakenly assumed that he was set because he was a law-following Pharisee and that only the woman was a “sinner” because she'd been caught in a sinful lifestyle. But both deserved death because their sin made them enemies of God; Jesus offered both life instead (Rom. 6:23). **Here's the thing: No sin is so great that God's grace can't cover it, and no sin is so small that it doesn't need God's grace.** All of us have every reason to be grateful for Jesus's offer of salvation because even one seemingly tiny sin condemns us to death. Thankfully, no one who accepts Jesus's gift of salvation is condemned (Rom. 8:1).

WHY DO WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE DEPTH OF OUR SIN AND HOW IT HURTS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? HOW DOES THIS UNDERSTANDING MAKE JESUS EVEN BETTER?

Imagine what the woman in this scenario might have been remembering when she came to Jesus to wash and anoint His feet with perfume. It's not fun to think about when we've messed up—or to look at Jesus's holy perfection and see our mistakes clearly for what they are: rebellion against a good and loving God. **But the more clearly we see our sin, the more we realize our need for a Savior. The more we see that we are powerless to save ourselves, the more we lean into Jesus and see that He is better than anyone or anything else we might trust to save us.** So, we can come to Him with confidence, trusting that He has already paid the price for our salvation.

WRAP-UP



WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN OTHERS AS TOO SINFUL TO BE WORTH YOUR TIME? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE FOR YOU TO SEE THEM AS JESUS DOES?

Jesus made people a priority, and He didn't discriminate because of people's different cultural or religious beliefs. Jesus went to the people who needed Him. Period. We need to be wise about who we approach—and when and how we approach them—but seeing people as Jesus saw them starts with our hearts. We have to turn our gaze inward to examine ourselves—false beliefs, prejudices, unforgiveness, misunderstandings, and all—before we can ever turn our gaze outward with love and compassion for others. Jesus offers salvation to those we see as “big” sinners just as freely as He offered it to us. **When we start with humbly remembering our own need for Him—with remembering the great depths Jesus brought us from—then we remember that we did nothing to deserve salvation. Jesus freely offered it. He paid for our sin with His blood.** Like Jesus, we must see those who need Him, approaching them with compassion and leading them to His feet, where they'll find all the mercy and grace—and ultimately the salvation—they need.

"TEACH US TO PRAY"

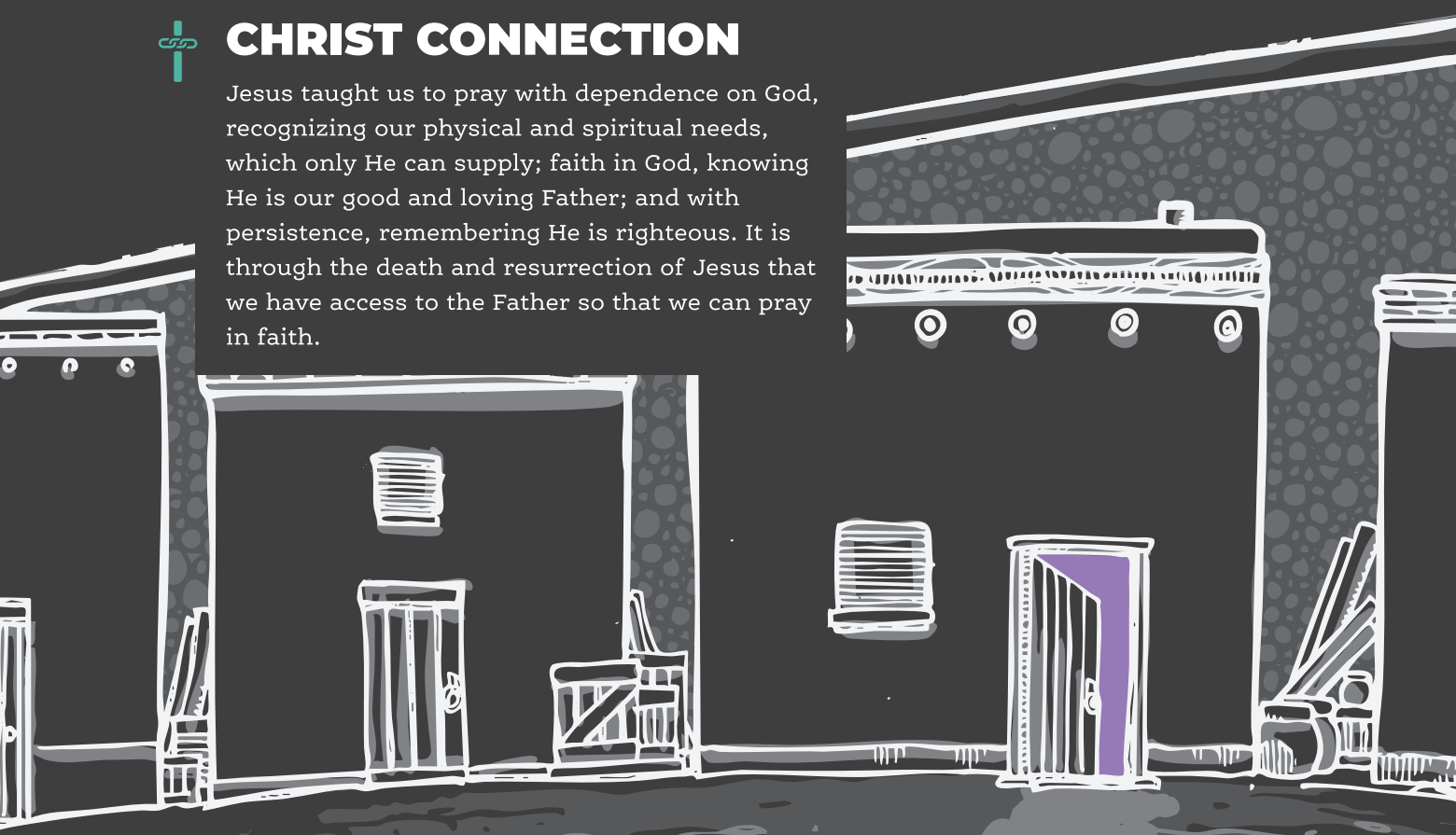
MAIN POINT.

We can imitate Jesus and pray honestly and faithfully, fully depending on God.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus taught us to pray with dependence on God, recognizing our physical and spiritual needs, which only He can supply; faith in God, knowing He is our good and loving Father; and with persistence, remembering He is righteous. It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we have access to the Father so that we can pray in faith.



LEARNING TO PRAY

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 11

WE CAN APPROACH GOD

LUKE 11:1-4

1 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." 2 And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread, 4 and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

GOD LISTENS AS OUR GOOD FATHER

LUKE 11:5-13

5 And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

We can imitate Jesus and pray honestly and faithfully, fully depending on God.

Leaders: What a privilege to teach students how to pray—how to come before our holy God, who cares and listens to their needs and who speaks to them in return, when they listen for His voice.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WE CAN APPROACH GOD

LUKE 11:1

“Jesus ‘was praying in a certain place’ (v. 1). A disciple saw him and asked, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ (v. 1). That request means prayer is not something learned automatically. Prayer is not natural. Effective prayer has to be taught and learned. There’s no shame in not knowing how to pray or feeling uncomfortable in prayer. There’s only shame if we don’t ask to be taught and as a result spend years of our Christian lives ineffective in prayer.”¹¹

LUKE 11:2

“By calling on God as Father, Jesus intended to teach his followers to regard their heavenly Father in a close, intimate way, as one who knew, loved, and cared for them (Ps. 103:13; Mal. 3:17; 1 Pet. 5:7).”¹²

LUKE 11:2

“It was unusual for Jews to refer to God as ‘Father.’ Such an address would seem too personal and familiar.”¹³

GOD LISTENS AS OUR GOOD FATHER

LUKE 11:9-10

“‘Ask’ . . . ‘seek’ . . . ‘knock’ refer to prayer and reflect the persistence theme emphasized in the story of vv. 5-8. The assurance that ‘everyone who asks receives’ does not mean that every prayer is answered as we want it to be. Rather, it means that if we persist in prayer, our prayers will eventually be answered according to God’s best for us.”¹⁴

CONTEXT

Disciples in Jesus's day would've often expected, even requested, their rabbis or leaders to teach them how to pray. Knowing that John the Baptist had instructed his disciples on prayer, Jesus's disciples wanted to hear what their teacher had to say. So, the disciples' question wouldn't have been unusual. The questioner could've been seeking specific words as an example (which is what Jesus gave here), a pattern for all prayers (which is how the Model Prayer is set up in Matt. 6), or general information on the topic of prayer. This prayer in Luke 11 may sound familiar because Jesus taught a similar prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. This is the prayer we're more familiar with, sometimes called "the Model Prayer" or "the Lord's Prayer." Though scholars disagree about whether this is the same teaching, just described differently by two different Gospel writers, some believe the most likely scenario is that Jesus taught the same prayer multiple times, since He wanted His disciples to be familiar with the pattern. Using this prayer as a pattern (to move from praising God to making our own requests) and praying the specific words are acceptable ways we can apply Jesus's teaching here.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Prayer and Providence

If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the means God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. Even though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that "prayer changes things," and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

LEADERS' PRAYER

FATHER, YOU ARE GOOD AND YOU WANT TO HEAR OUR HEARTS. TEACH US TO PRAY SO THAT WE MAY TEACH OUR STUDENTS TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY AND PERSISTENTLY. ENCOURAGE OUR HEARTS NOT TO GIVE UP BUT TO KEEP PRAYING FOR STUDENTS WHO DON'T KNOW YOU OR HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM YOU.



KICK STARTER

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know the book of Psalms is made up of prayers and songs to God? The Israelites used these to worship God, and they can guide our prayers and worship too!

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

GOOD GIFTS

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHAT'S THE LAST GIFT YOU RECEIVED THAT YOU'D CALL A GOOD GIFT?**
- **WHAT MAKES SOMETHING A GOOD GIFT?**
- **NAME ONE THING YOU NEED AND ONE THING YOU WANT RIGHT NOW.**

Because we're all designed uniquely with different needs, preferences, and desires, what we view as a "good" gift might vary. But we can probably agree that a good gift—an object, a relationship, or even a solution to a problem—makes our lives better somehow. God is the ultimate Giver of good gifts, and the cool thing is He wants us to come to Him and honestly tell Him what we need.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Sometimes, our most honest prayers are questions. Yet, some of us hesitate to come to God with our questions and requests. Isn't it wrong to question God? Yes, but questioning God and asking God questions are two totally different things. Questioning God's character or motives implies we think we know better or could do better; questioning His character stems from unbelief. Asking a question implies we want to know and understand God better. So, don't be afraid to ask God hard questions—He can handle them. He even encourages us to come to Him with our biggest hurts and doubts. He is the source of all things, including knowledge and comfort. But here's the key: Praying honestly doesn't mean praying irreverently, or disrespectfully. Even when we're hurting or confused, we need to remember who we're talking to: our good, holy, and sovereign (in control of all things and all people) God. He deserves our humility, respect, and trust—no matter what.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

We can imitate Jesus and pray honestly and faithfully, fully depending on God.

WE CAN APPROACH GOD

READ LUKE 11:1-4



WHY DO YOU THINK THE DISCIPLES ASKED JESUS TO TEACH THEM HOW TO PRAY? WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED WITH KNOWING HOW TO PRAY OR IF YOU'RE DOING IT RIGHT?

Leaders: Share context on model prayers. We overcomplicate it, but the truth is that prayer is simply communicating with God—our good, faithful, and loving Father who wants to hear from us. Instead of avoiding prayer, especially praying aloud, you can think of it as sitting down with the One who loves you unconditionally and telling Him exactly what's on your heart. **For times you feel overwhelmed or confused, Jesus gave you a model: Start by honoring God, then pray for the good of His people, and then ask God to meet physical and spiritual needs.**

WHERE DOES JESUS TEACH US TO FOCUS OUR PRAYERS? IS IT OKAY TO ASK FOR OUR WANTS OR NEEDS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

Jesus tells us to put God first in our hearts and to trust Him to provide for all of our needs (Matt. 6:33). What we put first in our hearts, we put first in our words. So, in our prayers, we focus first on praising God and seeking His will for our lives. But then Jesus teaches us to ask God to meet our physical and spiritual needs, big and small. **Because Jesus restored our relationship with God, we can ask Him directly for what we need and be confident that He will provide.**

WHY DOES THE WAY WE ADDRESS GOD MATTER WHEN WE PRAY?

Prayer is a conversation with God, and when we pray, we should keep in mind who God is. While God is loving, compassionate, and merciful, He is also all-powerful (omnipotent), just, and holy. And only because of Jesus can we come to Him in prayer. Our words and attitude before God should be respectful and humble, but prayer is also personal. This is why Jesus taught His disciples to address God as Father. Not only does this name remind believers we're part of God's family, but it also reassures us that God is not some far off, uncaring being who's constantly disappointed in us and waiting for us to mess up. **No, He is our good and loving Father, who invites us to come near with boldness and confidence, resting in His presence and asking for whatever we need (Heb. 4:16), while also respecting His holiness.**

GOD LISTENS AS OUR GOOD FATHER

READ LUKE 11:5-13



WHEN HAVE YOU SERVED OR GIVEN OUT OF EXPECTATION? HOW IS THE WAY GOD GIVES TO US DIFFERENT?

The man in Jesus's story would've given out of a sense of honor and because his friend kept knocking, not necessarily because he wanted to. If a man would do that for a friend, how much more would God do for His children—children He loves and sent His own Son to die for? **God wants to give us good things because He is a good Father. And He promises that we'll find Him when we seek Him (Jer. 29:13).** So, don't hesitate. Ask God for whatever you need, and keep asking without shame or fear, trusting that He hears you and will answer in His perfect timing and according to His perfect plan.



HAVE YOU EVER ASKED FOR SOMETHING OVER AND OVER? WHAT DO YOU THINK ASKING FOR SOMETHING WITH "IMPUDENCE" MEANS (V. 8)?

Sometimes we don't ask for what we need because we feel ashamed—from not having what others have or from not being able to do something on our own. But God invites us to set aside any fear, shame, or doubt and come before Him with boldness (Heb. 4:16); He promises to meet our needs (Matt. 6:25-34). So, we can approach Him with confidence, again and again, asking, seeking, and knocking until He opens the door to answered prayer—even if He doesn't answer the way we hoped or expected. God never gets tired of hearing from us, and praying persistently benefits us in so many ways. **Every time we ask God for what we need, we get to know Him more, and we confirm our trust in Him to provide. And every answered prayer, even the one answered with a solid "no," helps our faith grow.**



WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO TRUST GOD LISTENS TO OUR PRAYERS AND THAT HIS ANSWERS ARE SUFFICIENT?

We can trust God listens to us and answers our prayers because He said so. **While it can be hard to trust when God doesn't answer the way we want, His "no" is still sufficient because God Himself and His plan for our lives is a much greater "yes."** He is more than sufficient to meet all our needs. But God, our good and loving Father, has given us abundantly more than we could ask for or imagine: He sealed His promises to believers with the blood of His Son, poured out for our sins, and then with the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lives within us and helps us live life God's way. God's answers are sufficient, because ultimately, He has answered with Himself!

session 4 | "Teach Us to Pray"

WRAP-UP



WHAT HAVE YOU PRAYED FOR HALFHEARTEDLY INSTEAD OF WITH "IMPUDENCE"? HOW CAN YOU PRAY HONESTLY INSTEAD?

We live in a world of half-hearted commitments, of "maybe" and "almost." All too often, these words also describe our relationship with God and our prayers. But we can't halfway follow Jesus—that's impossible. The call to follow Jesus is a call to be all in. Our prayers should be all in, too. So, that thing you're afraid to ask for? **Request it, trusting in God's power to provide anything, trusting that He will only answer "yes" to what's best for you and to what aligns with His perfect plan.** That person you think will never come to know Jesus? Cry out to God on his or her behalf each day, trusting He knows the best way to convict people and draw them to Himself. That relationship you worry will never be restored? Ask God to soften the person's heart—and to soften yours. God is a God of peace and restoration, even when it seems impossible. **Pray boldly, pray persistently, and watch and see how God will move.**

HOW THE LILIES GROW

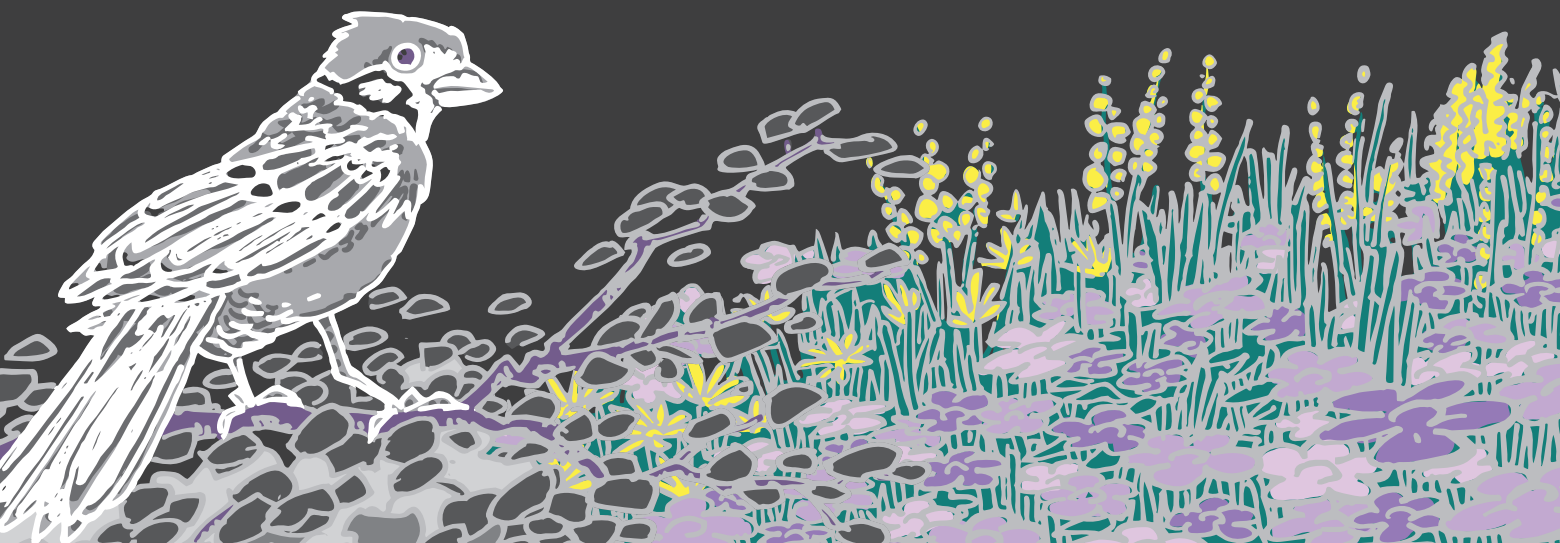
MAIN POINT.

The cure for our worry and anxiety is faith in God's ability to care for us.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is the great Provider. He takes care of all our needs, especially our need to be rescued from sin, guilt, and death. Through His sacrifice on the cross, we are forgiven and have new life in Him.



TREASURE OF YOUR HEART

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 12

WORLDLY WEALTH CAN'T GIVE US PEACE

LUKE 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." 16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM GIVES US PEACE

LUKE 12:22-34

22 And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 32 Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

The cure for our worry and anxiety is faith in God's ability to care for us.

Leaders: Consider listening to “O Great God” by Sovereign Grace Music, reflecting on God’s great love and care for us.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

WORLDLY WEALTH CAN'T GIVE US PEACE

LUKE 12:15

“Jesus pinpoints the real motivating factor behind this appeal for justice. . . . Then, as now, a person’s happiness and well-being was often thought to be determined by what he or she owned. Jesus flatly rejects this as a standard for measuring the worth of one’s life.”¹⁵

LUKE 12:16-20

“This parable is about the danger of greed, measured by the abundance of possessions (v. 15). The rich man was infatuated with hoarding his ‘goods.’ In his self-centered perspective (there are at least ten self-references in vv. 17-19), he thought this was an effective strategy for a long life of leisure and pleasure. But God views such an outlook as foolish and shortsighted.”¹⁶

SEEKING GOD’S KINGDOM GIVES US PEACE

LUKE 12:22

“The world is full of worry. We’re tempted to think that worrying is the same thing as thinking or planning or even protecting ourselves. But worry is completely useless and ineffective when it comes to adding to our life. We can’t even add one minute by worrying. The Lord calls adding a minute to our lives a little thing! So if we can’t add a minute to our lives by worry, why do we think things like protecting our children, getting good jobs, ending war, or making our neighborhoods safe will be done by worry? These are all good things, but not things that can be addressed by worry.”¹⁷

LUKE 12:22-24

“If God is truly looking after the material needs of the birds, then how much more would he care for the genuine needs of those who are far more valuable to him—those who are in a relationship with his Son! Worrying cannot contribute anything to one’s well-being. Obviously, worrying cannot increase one’s life span. Recent studies by psychologists reinforce Jesus’s teaching on the counter-productive effects of worry on longevity.”¹⁸



CONTEXT

Rabbis often settled disputes in Jewish culture, and since many people recognized Jesus as a rabbi, this man's question about inheritance makes sense. But Jesus refused to get caught up in such a small dispute. He came to settle a greater question—one of life and death—with eternal consequences. Jesus's purpose wasn't about earthly inheritance. Jesus came for the spiritually sick so those dying from sin (everyone) could know the only way to be healed: through faith in Him (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; John 14:6). Jesus's mission was about more than monetary inheritance among brothers; it was about the spiritual inheritance people would receive as coheirs with Christ if they trusted Him for salvation. Make no mistake: Jesus is a righteous Judge, and one day He will judge all people. But this is not a judgment believers should fear. He has covered us fully and finally with His blood—and we are judged not by our own works but by His. Charles Spurgeon said it this way: "If we trust him with our souls, he will not give us a bare salvation but a rich robe of righteousness to cover all our [sin]."¹⁹ God never does things halfway; everything He gives us is the best; the best evidence is Jesus's perfect sacrifice on our behalf. We can trust that our salvation is secure in Him. The dispute between us and God was settled on the cross through Jesus's blood.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Adoption

Adoption into God's family is one the positive benefits of justification. Not only are we freed from the judgment against us through justification, but we also experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). Through adoption our relationship with God, which was once lost through the fall, is now restored, resulting in the benefits of being an heir of God and a coheir with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17).

LEADERS' PRAYER

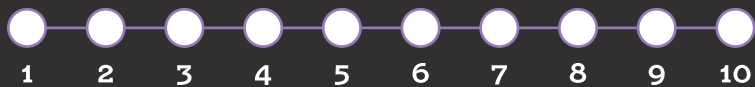
LORD, FORGIVE ME FOR THE TIMES WHEN I LET MY WORRY RULE MY LIFE. I CRAVE YOUR PEACE FOR MYSELF AND MY STUDENTS. PLEASE HELP ME TO REFOCUS MY HEART ON YOU, TRUSTING YOU WITH EVERYTHING. GUIDE ME TO SHOW MY STUDENTS HOW TO DO THE SAME.



KICK STARTER

RATE IT!

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=Never; 10=All the time), how often would you say you feel anxious?



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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

ANXIETY AND WORRY

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

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

- **WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?**
- **WHAT'S THE MOST "NORMAL," EVERYDAY THING YOU WORRY ABOUT? WHAT'S THE STRANGEST?**
- **HOW DO YOU FIGHT FEELINGS OF WORRY OR ANXIETY?**

Most of us worry about something—whether it's our family, friends, grades, sports or band performances, or making it to work on time after school. Having a plan and being responsible are good, but worry and anxiety aren't healthy for us. Jesus provides a better way. He shows that trusting God to provide all we need is the ultimate cure for worry and anxiety.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

What do you do, who do you look for, and where do you go when you want a moment of peace? Some of us might try deep breathing, venting to or crying with a close friend or family member, or spending time in nature. None of those things are wrong, but they simply aren't enough. At times, the world around us seems to spin out of control. Because we can't do anything to stop it, we stress, worry, and let anxiety steal our peace. No matter what we're facing in the moment, we can't solve anything with stress or worry. Or, as Jesus asks, can you really make your life any better by worrying (Luke 12:25)? Of course, the answer is "no." Our worry can't give us anything and can only steal from us—our peace, joy, self-discipline, and even our sense of security. But worry's biggest flaw? It takes our eyes off Jesus. When our eyes move away from our compassionate Savior, through whom God has provided for our greatest need, we sink. Thankfully, Jesus is always ready to catch us and keep us from drowning (Matt. 14:28-31). When we trust Him, we have everything we need.

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

The cure for our worry and anxiety is faith in God's ability to care for us.

WORLDLY WEALTH CAN'T GIVE US PEACE

READ LUKE 12:13-21

WOULD PEOPLE TODAY SAY THE RICH MAN WAS HOLDING ON TO THINGS THAT DIDN'T MATTER OR LIVING THE GOOD LIFE? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Many people today consider “the good life” as having everything they want. So, they pursue money and belongings, popularity and relaxation, academic success and fun experiences. None of these things are wrong; enjoying what God has given us and using it wisely is good. But nothing can bring us peace like God Himself. As Jesus pointed out, pursuing God's glory and building His kingdom matter most. He should be the heart and focus behind everything we have and do. **The good life, then, from a biblical perspective is pursuing God, who is good and wants what's best for us.**



WHAT DO WE TURN TO FOR SECURITY OR COMFORT? WHERE DID JESUS SAY WE WILL AND WON'T FIND SECURITY?

We look to all kinds of things for security and comfort, like our favorite people, our family's money and influence, our grades or athletic achievements, even our go-to foods, music, or hoodies when we have a bad day. The man in this story looked to his inheritance for security, but Jesus pointed him to being “rich toward God” (v. 21). We won't find security in anything or anyone here on earth; we find security in God, in using every gift and resource He gives us to glorify Him and build His kingdom. **Our efforts can't bring us security in God—Jesus does.** Through His sacrifice on the cross, God adopted us into His family, and the Holy Spirit living within us guarantees our eternal security.



WHY DO WE STRUGGLE WITH GREED, ENVY, OR WORRY? HOW CAN KNOWING THAT EVERYTHING WE HAVE COMES FROM GOD HELP US?

Greed, envy, and anxiety creep in when we look at people to our right and to our left instead of fixing our eyes on Jesus. We desire things that don't belong to us; we desire the gifts and blessings more than the Giver, our great God. Though we are tempted to complain about what we don't have or about what we do have not being good enough, the truth is that everything we have ultimately comes from God. Without Him and His provision, we would have nothing at all—certainly, nothing good. **As Job—a man of God who lost everything—said, God has the power to give us anything and the power to take it away. Either way, He is good. Either way, He is praiseworthy (Job 1:21).** Nothing on this earth will satisfy us like He will because nothing here truly lasts. But our good, unchanging, and eternal God does. In Him, our hope rests securely. In Him, we have everything we could ever need—peace for our souls forever. This truth can help us be content here, even when we don't have everything we want.

SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM GIVES US PEACE

READ LUKE 12:22-34

JESUS SAID WORRY ISN'T GOOD FOR US, SO WHY DO WE STRESS ABOUT THE DETAILS OF OUR EVERYDAY LIVES?

Worry isn't helpful at all; it adds nothing to our lives. In fact, it takes away from our well-being mentally, spiritually, and physically. Science even says that worry is bad for our overall health. So, why do we do it? We could say we want control or that imagining the possible outcomes is better than not knowing. **Ultimately, three things create stress: lack of trust in God, misunderstanding how much God values us, and taking our focus off Jesus.** The cure for worry, then, is to move our eyes away from our stress and back to God, who is aware of and takes care of our needs, who values us so much that He sent His only Son to die to save us from our sin, and who cares about every detail of our lives—big and small.



WHAT WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF WE VIEWED EVERY MOMENT OF STRESS AND WORRY AS AN INVITATION TO TRUST GOD INSTEAD?

Stress and worry often turn our focus inward. We want to know how to fix it, reduce it, or get out of it, right? But no matter how impossible our situation seems, God is in control. What we can control is how we look at and respond to the situation. **The more we stare at the problem, the bigger it seems; the more we look to God, the more we remember His faithfulness.** Setting worry aside requires a shift in perspective. Instead of looking at what's making us feel stuck, we can choose to look to God, whose arms are open in invitation to come and see that He is good and will provide for us. **When we step into His open arms, He promises we'll find rest for our worn-out, stressed-out, burned-out souls (Matt. 11:28-30).**



WHAT DID JESUS SAY WOULD HAPPEN WHEN WE SEEK GOD'S KINGDOM? WHAT DID HE MEAN?

Jesus promised that when we seek God's kingdom, "these things will be added to [us]" (v. 31). But hearing that we're supposed to seek God's kingdom doesn't bring clarity on how to do it. Jesus gave us a few examples here. He taught us to give and serve without holding back and not to be afraid when we do because God delights in giving our minds, bodies, and souls what they need to thrive. Seeking God's kingdom means we want and pursue God's will in the world. So, we make Him Lord of our lives, giving Him control over every area. We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us where He wants us. And we focus on glorifying God and helping others come to know Him. **When we focus on these things, we proclaim our trust in God to take care of everything else, and He does.**

WRAP-UP



WHERE ARE YOU CLINGING TO TIME, RESOURCES, POSSESSIONS, OR PEOPLE BECAUSE OF FEAR OR WORRY? HOW CAN YOU TRUST GOD IN THOSE AREAS?

We often hold a scarcity mindset, believing what we need to survive is limited and focusing on what we don't have rather than what we do. This mindset causes us to cling tightly to the things and people in our lives because we're afraid of losing them. **No matter how much we clench our fists around what's "ours," God has the final say in what stays and what goes. Because we don't know the scope of His big plan for the world, opening our hands to Him can feel scary. But God promises we'll have what we need because above all else, He is enough.** This week, challenge yourself to let go of one small thing you've been holding on to—whether it's an hour with your friends, giving beyond your tithe to support missionaries, or inviting a new person to hang out with you at lunch. God honors every effort to trust in Him. Start small and see what God will do in your heart and around you.

SOURCES & REFERENCES

UNIT TWENTY-TWO

1. Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, vol. 4, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 114-115.
2. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 84.
3. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 220-221.
4. Whitacre, *John*, 114.
5. Borchert, *John 1–11*, 221.
6. “Pan-American Highway is the longest road in the world,” dangerousroads, https://www.dangerousroads.org/north-america/usa/4638-pan-american-highway.html#google_vignette.
7. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 155.
8. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 78-79.
9. *Ibid.*, 82.
10. Ronald J. Kernaghan, *Mark*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 45-46.
11. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 50.
12. *Ibid.*, 52.
13. Henry E. Turlington, “Mark,” in *Matthew–Mark*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 276.
14. Kernaghan, *Mark*, 51-52.
15. Brooks, *Mark*, 55.
16. Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 37.
17. Devon Carter, “Liver regeneration: How the liver’s ability to recover plays into liver cancer surgery,” November 1, 2023, MD Anderson Cancer Center, <https://www.mdanderson.org/cancerwise/liver-regeneration-how-the-liver-s-ability-to-recover-plays-into-liver-cancer-surgery>. h00-159623379.html.

UNIT TWENTY-THREE

1. Kernaghan, *Mark*, 56.
2. Brooks, *Mark*, 59.
3. Kernaghan, *Mark*, 59.
4. *Ibid.*, 61.
5. Brooks, *Mark*, 71-72.
6. Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 171.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Frank Stagg, “Matthew,” in *Matthew–Mark*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 147.
9. “Jesus Christ and The Sabbath,” United Church of God, August 28, 2025, <https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-study-aids/sunset-sunset-gods-sabbath-rest/jesus-christ-and-sabbath#:~:text=Religious%20authorities%20added%20burdensome%20Sabbath,736>.
10. Stein, *Luke*, 200.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Allison A. Trites, William J. Larkin, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts*, vol. 12, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 108.
13. Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, 120.

UNIT TWENTY-FOUR

1. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 147.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Frank Stagg, “Matthew,” 143.
4. “Dunning-Kruger Effect,” *Psychology Today*, accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/dunning-kruger-effect>.
5. Malcolm O. Tolbert, “Luke,” in *Luke–John*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1970), 66.
6. Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, 132.
7. Trites and Larkin, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts*, 120.
8. *Ibid.*, 124.
9. Tolbert, “Luke,” 70.
10. Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 167-168.
11. Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, 187.
12. Trites and Larkin, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts*, 176.
13. A. Boyd Luter, “Luke,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1629.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Lyman Coleman, ed., *Life Connections Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bibles, 2019), 1671.
16. Luter, “Luke,” 1632.
17. Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, 207.
18. Trites and Larkin, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts*, 193.
19. Charles Spurgeon, *The Spurgeon Study Bible: Notes* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1395.