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2023 Bible Reading Plan



Live in Community



Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Pursue Jesus

“If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”
([Jeremiah 29:13](#))

Jesus’ offer is remarkably clear: If we look for Jesus, we’ll find Him. He’s not hiding from us, but closely connecting with Him does take us being intentional. We’re called to

follow Him, to pursue Him. In this volume, we’ll look at how individuals pursued Jesus through the challenges of their circumstances. Pursuing Jesus is not only a mental exercise for personal growth, but it also means living out our faith in tangible ways: showing up, listening carefully, receiving grace, and trusting Him.

Session Overview

Show Up

Biblical Encounter: Zacchaeus Looks for Jesus ([Luke 19:1–10](#))

Outcome: Look for ways to interact with Jesus for transformation in your life.

Every healthy relationship we have in life requires us to show up! We need to make a proactive effort if we want to grow closer to someone. This story about Zacchaeus shows us that our relationship with Jesus can also benefit from doing what is necessary to move closer to Him. Growing in Christ requires us to spend time with Him. But relationships work both ways. Jesus desires to have a growing relationship with us as well!

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Engage

QUESTION

What’s the boldest thing you’ve ever done or seen someone else do to be noticed?

Posting selfies on social media is one of many things people do to be noticed. In today's social media saturated society, getting noticed is worth risking death for some people. In the last decade, more than 250 people died in selfie-related accidents. By comparison, only fifty people died from shark attacks in that same timeframe.

Why do we so desperately pursue the attention of others? More importantly, are we willing to go to the same lengths to pursue Jesus—the only One who matters? What are we willing to do to position ourselves in the path of Jesus and what He is doing on this earth?

Watch

Before we look at what God's Word has to show us about pursuing Jesus, let's watch a video. As we watch, think about your answer to this question: What is most likely to distract you as you pursue Jesus?



QUESTION

What is most likely to distract you as you pursue Jesus?

Consider What the Bible Says

Jesus spent the majority of His ministry (approximately three years) in the northern part of Israel. He often ministered near the Sea of Galilee. [Luke 9:51](#) records the turning point when Jesus began His final trek to Jerusalem. Directly between the region of Galilee and the city of Jerusalem was the region of Samaria. Some Samaritans wouldn't welcome Jesus into their village, so He took a different route to Jerusalem instead ([Luke 9:53, 56](#)). Along the way, Jesus taught in the synagogues and healed people who were sick. Having gone south, He turned west toward Jerusalem, passing through Zacchaeus's hometown of Jericho.

Did You Know?

Jewish tax collectors served the Roman government by collecting taxes from their fellow Jews. Typically, they earned these positions by bidding and paying to be the collector for an area. Their bidding money was recouped through their standard collections. Then they made their living by adding commission on the taxes they collected. Choosing to serve the

oppressive Roman government already made them unliked. But the fact that many used the authority of Rome's backing to collect excessive amounts and become wealthy elevated them to hated status in Judea. This is why Jewish leaders often spoke negatively of tax collectors as a whole and automatically considered them to be sinners.

Zacchaeus Looks for Jesus

Read [Luke 19:1–4](#).

We're told that Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector for the area. This would have made him very unpopular with his neighbors. He also would have been a man of means and influence in the region. So, was Zacchaeus interested in Jesus simply because of the influence Jesus had over others or was it something deeper?

QUESTION

Why do you think Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus?

QUESTION

What do you imagine that Zacchaeus's community life, friendships, and family relationships might have been like?

QUESTION

Why is it so distasteful to us to see those of influence use it only for themselves rather than for others?

Jesus Sees Zacchaeus

Read [Luke 19:5–7](#).

Jesus looked up in the tree and saw what others couldn't. Jesus apparently saw Zacchaeus's heart and his future. Instead of seeing what Zacchaeus had done, Jesus saw who he could become. Jesus called him by name and invited himself into Zacchaeus's home. In the same way, Jesus knows each of us by name, and He is asking for an invitation into our life too ([Revelation 3:20](#)).

QUESTION

Who looked at you (when others might have thought you weren't worth it) and believed in what you could become?

The people of Jericho were unhappy when Jesus decided to go to Zacchaeus's home. They grumbled about Zacchaeus's character and even called him a sinner! But Jesus declared that He came into the world to save sinners—not the righteous ([Mark 2:17](#); [Luke 19:10](#)).

QUESTION

What are some reasons you imagine the people were displeased by Jesus' decision?

Zacchaeus's Transformed Heart and Life

QUESTION

Based on what you know about Zacchaeus's story, what do you think his character and heart were like before he met Jesus?

Read [Luke 19:8–10](#).

The moment we see Zacchaeus's outward life change is obvious. However, there's really no way to know when Zacchaeus changed on the inside. From simply reading the text, we can only speculate when Zacchaeus's heart was transformed by Jesus. Was it the moment Zacchaeus decided to climb the tree and saw Jesus? Was it the moment Jesus called him by name? Was it during his interactions with Jesus in his home? Was it some other time that we don't see in the story?

QUESTION

When do you imagine that Zacchaeus actually had a change of heart?

QUESTION

At what point in the encounter do we see a change in Zacchaeus?

In a shocking turn of events, Zacchaeus committed to give away a lot of his money. First, he promised half of it to the poor. Then from the remaining half, he promised to repay people four times as much if he had cheated them. This was much more generous than what the Old Testament Law required. It said people should repay anyone they've cheated an additional 20 percent ([Leviticus 6:5](#); [Numbers 5:7](#)). But Zacchaeus increases this to 400 percent ([Luke 19:8](#)). That's twenty times the Old Testament requirement!

QUESTION

Have you ever witnessed a life change in someone that was so complete it was shocking? Tell us about it.

QUESTION

Can you think of someone you know who often does more than is expected or required? What do you think motivates them?

Reflect

Look for ways to interact with Jesus for transformation in your life.

Maybe you've lost hope that some area of your own life can ever change. We often feel trapped by sins that seem to have a recurring hold on our life. But Jesus clearly demonstrates that nothing and no one is beyond His reach. God can transform those among us that seem to be too far gone. Sometimes we see change quickly, like with Zacchaeus, and sometimes God seems to move slowly. We can never give up praying for and believing in God's ability to transform. Likewise, we cannot give up on God's ability to transform the worst parts in each of us.

What if Jesus had traveled through Samaria and *never* entered Jericho? What if Zacchaeus had not climbed the tree to get a better look? We'll never know if this would have changed the outcome of Zacchaeus's life because Jesus *did* travel through Jericho, and Zacchaeus *did* position himself for the best opportunity to see Jesus. And, most importantly, Jesus *did* transform Zacchaeus's life.

What about you? Are you looking for ways to interact with Jesus in your daily life? Are you positioning yourself to have the best opportunity to allow Him to transform you? Are you inviting Him into every area of your life?

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What did you learn about life change in yourself and others based on Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus?

QUESTION

Does a specific area of your life need to change? Have you regained hope after seeing the story of Zacchaeus?

QUESTION

How has the Holy Spirit spoken to you about specific ways you can interact more with Him?

Activate

Jesus looked at Zacchaeus and likely saw who he could become. In the same way, someone looked at you and saw who you could become. Has God put someone into your life who might even frustrate you because they have so much potential that they seem to be squandering?

Challenge

Write that person's name and list the strengths, talents, and potential you see in them. Then look for opportunities to reinforce those things to them. Send them text messages when you see them using their strengths and talents. As you pray for them, talk to God about the kind of person you believe they could become and the amazing life they could have. Then trust Him with the outcome. And as often as you can, remind them of what you see in them and that you're trusting God for their future.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Because it's important to listen to God through His Word both in community and individually, personal devotions have been provided as an extension of this discussion. These are a great way to interact with Jesus. Expect Him to transform your life as you spend time with Him.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Zacchaeus Looks for Jesus

Read [Luke 19:1–10](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is Jesus saying to you about how you interact with Him?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Pursue Jesus in Your Heart

Read [James 4:7–10](#).

Zacchaeus literally repositioned his body in pursuit of Jesus. At times, we too may need to change our physical positions such as stopping sinful habits, leaving a relationship, or changing jobs. But the passage we read in James calls attention to the position of our heart when pursuing God. This must always be a part of our pursuit.

QUESTION

Why do you think that James begins and ends his instructions with humbling ourselves?

QUESTION

Sandwiched between the two phrases about humility is a list of instructions. Which of these instructions speaks most to where you are today and why?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Pursuing Jesus Causes Compassion

Read [James 2:14–17](#).

Zacchaeus's life change was evidenced by his willingness to repay those he had cheated and use his wealth to help the poor. James tells us that all true pursuers of Jesus will be moved by the needs of others.

QUESTION

Do you believe that people can change their actions without first having a transformed heart? Why or why not?

QUESTION

Do you believe that people can have a transformed life without changing their actions? Why or why not?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Jesus Pursues Us First

Read [Luke 15:1–7](#).

Like the Good Shepherd that He is, Jesus noticed Zacchaeus among the great crowd. As this passage describes, He looked beyond the ninety-nine to see the one who was missing. At times we may feel small and insignificant. We may wonder if Jesus really cares about us. But the Bible promises that He will draw near to those who pursue Him ([James 4:8](#)).

QUESTION

List reasons why a shepherd or farmer would be concerned about one sheep wandering off if they have ninety-nine more. (List as many as you can think of.)

QUESTION

What characteristic of the shepherd's relationship to his sheep do you need to be reminded of today?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: God's Generous Call

Read [Isaiah 55:1-7](#).

Isaiah's prophetic poetry in today's reading is a beautiful depiction of the Lord's love and His invitation to find restoration and fulfillment in Him. Jesus echoed the initial call of this chapter over six hundred years later ([John 7:37](#)). It's a reminder that God's offer to those in need is an ongoing reality even today. Yet, though the Lord is calling and willing, Isaiah's message makes it clear that we must also respond by turning to God to receive His generous offer.

QUESTION

What does God's offer in these verses tell you about His character?

QUESTION

Why do you think God makes His offer conditional on our coming to Him?



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Volume Overview

Pursue Jesus

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Session Overview

Listen Carefully

Biblical Encounter: Nicodemus Seeks Jesus for Answers ([John 3:1–21](#))

Outcome: Seek Jesus to know His truth.

In this session, we’ll look at the story of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night, seeking truth from Him. Our world is still filled with people wanting to know truth. We’re bombarded with all sorts of messages, making it difficult to know what’s true and what isn’t. It’s when we turn to Jesus for answers that we can fully grasp what real truth is.

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QUESTION

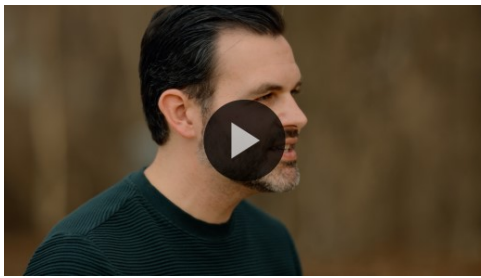
What was the last question you needed to search the Internet to find the answer?

Searching for answers has never been easier. We live in a day and age where knowledge is available at the swipe of a finger or the push of a button. Need to know the number of ounces in a cup? Forgot what time zone you live in? Worried about some symptom your body is experiencing? No problem. Just grab your closest device and search.

While it's convenient to have much of the world's knowledge in the palm of our hand, it's exactly that: the *world's* knowledge. When it comes to the deep, burning questions of our soul, the Internet isn't necessarily the best place to look. We need truth that only God can provide through His written Word and spoken voice. When we're questioning our existence, overwhelmed by life's circumstances, or concerned about our future, we need absolute truth. God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours ([Isaiah 55:8-9](#)), and His answers for our life will exceed any search engine.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: How well would God say you listen to Him?



QUESTION

How well would God say you listen to Him?

Consider What the Bible Says

Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a religious group within Judaism. They emphasized strictly following the Law and religious traditions. Because of this, they had a tendency to be very judgmental. These men challenged Jesus' behavior and questioned His teaching. They even made plans to destroy Him.

However, at least one Pharisee was moved enough by Jesus' activity to do something about it. After witnessing Jesus' miraculous signs, Nicodemus was convinced that God was with Jesus. Nicodemus was so convinced that he insisted on meeting Jesus. But to protect his reputation as a Pharisee and high-level Jewish leader, Nicodemus went to Jesus at night to ask Him some burning questions.

Did You Know?

Nicodemus was likely one of seventy-one members of the great Sanhedrin, the highest self-governing body of the Jews. This group of leaders could be compared to a Jewish supreme court of legal, political, and religious justices. It was made up of priests, elders, and scribes. During much of the Roman reign over the Jews, the Sanhedrin was a powerful influence on secular government.

Nicodemus Goes to Jesus

Read [John 3:1–3](#).

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus had access to more religious information than most people. He was an expert on the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and all that this law of Moses required. Nicodemus was an expert on legal matters, politics, traditions, and rituals. Yet none of that prepared him for what Jesus said was necessary to be a part of His kingdom: being born again. Nicodemus’s understanding of God and the miracles of Jesus had led him to recognize Jesus as a teacher from God, but Jesus was more than that. Not only did He tell Nicodemus the truth, He *is* the Truth. Though Nicodemus likely didn’t know it, he had gone straight to the Source to better understand God.

QUESTION

What do you think Nicodemus was hoping to accomplish by meeting with Jesus?

QUESTION

What did Nicodemus risk by going to meet with Jesus?

QUESTION

What risks have you taken to seek Jesus?

Nicodemus Has Questions for Jesus

Read [John 3:4–9](#).

Up to this moment with Jesus, Nicodemus had probably thought he understood a lot about God’s kingdom. After all, he was a prominent member of a Jewish religious group. But after hearing just a sentence of truth from the Savior of the world, he had a lot of questions. Nicodemus knew about the laws and commandments that a person must follow to stay pure and holy, but no one probably had ever told him that he needed to reenter his mother’s womb! He was confused—like most people would have been in his shoes. He was hearing about how to truly have spiritual life and what Jesus meant by “born again.” Needless to say, this was probably blowing his mind. Nicodemus was quick to ask questions. But his conversation with Jesus proved that when we have questions, Jesus has answers.

QUESTION

What do you imagine it was like for Nicodemus to hear these truths being spoken by Jesus for the first time?

QUESTION

What questions would you have had for Jesus if you were Nicodemus?

Nicodemus Listens Carefully to Jesus

Read [John 3:10–21](#).

It's likely that as we read this passage, you recognized one of the most quoted verses of the Bible: [John 3:16](#). In this verse, and in this conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus revealed so much about God's great loving plan to rescue us from our sin. It's interesting that Nicodemus, who as a leader was perceived to have all the answers, had a lot to learn about how to really live a life free from sin and receive eternal life. Had Nicodemus assumed he knew everything and not really listened to Jesus, he would have missed the most life-transforming conversation a person can have. We can be confident that when we listen carefully to Jesus, we'll hear His transforming plans for our life too.

QUESTION

Imagine if Nicodemus had assumed he already had all the answers and stayed home that night. How different would his life have been if he had not gone to meet with Jesus?

QUESTION

What do you think Nicodemus did after he left the meeting with Jesus?

QUESTION

Who would be the first person you would tell about an encounter like this? Why?

Nicodemus at Jesus' Burial

Our first picture of Nicodemus was someone who met secretly with Jesus ([John 3:2](#)). He seemed to be more concerned with his own reputation than he was with having a public relationship with Jesus. However, something must have changed during or after that dark night when Jesus spoke personally to Nicodemus about God's love and His plan for eternal life.

Read [John 19:38–42](#).

QUESTION

What do you think this says about how Nicodemus viewed Jesus after their talk?

As we encounter Nicodemus following Jesus' crucifixion, we see a man who was no longer a secret disciple. Nicodemus's choice to help Joseph prepare the body for burial was a public admission of his commitment to Jesus. Chapters earlier, Nicodemus had heard about a Savior who would die for his sins, and now he was physically carrying that Savior's body to a tomb. When we seek Jesus and allow Him to answer our burning questions, we will encounter His truth. As we respond to His truth, our life is forever transformed.

QUESTION

Have you ever stood up for Jesus in front of a crowd? Tell us about it.

QUESTION

How have people seen the change in your life as you seek Jesus?

Reflect

Seek Jesus to know His truth.

"There's no such thing as a stupid question." You've probably heard this phrase at least once in your life. It's important to recognize that Jesus is not bothered or intimidated by our questions. The questions we ask Jesus lead to answers, and His answers lead to His truth. Questions motivated by a hunger to know Jesus more can lead us to the kind of truth that transforms our life.

Nicodemus had witnessed Jesus' power and had seen His miracles firsthand. He was convinced that Jesus was sent from God. Nicodemus was hungry to meet with Jesus and learn more from Him. He had deep, burning questions and needed answers. Nicodemus was even willing to risk his reputation to talk with and honor Jesus. He is an example of how much knowing truth should matter to us.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

If Jesus were standing in front of you right now, what burning questions would you have for Him?

QUESTION

Nicodemus took a big risk to meet with Jesus. When it comes to your relationship with Jesus, have you settled into a life of comfort or are you taking risks to encounter Him in a deeper way and show others that you believe in His truth?

QUESTION

Nicodemus was convinced that Jesus had more to teach him. What's the most recent truth Jesus has revealed to you? How did you respond to that truth?

Activate

Nicodemus heard about God's great plan of salvation after a powerful encounter with Jesus' truth. Today, as Jesus' representatives, we have the opportunity to be like Jesus in our life encounters. Chances are, God has placed someone in your life who is currently questioning if God loves them. Knowing His truth, you can share God's great plan of love with them like Jesus did with Nicodemus.

Challenge

Identify someone in your life who needs to know that God loves them so much He sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to die for their sins and give them eternal life. Make plans to tell that person this week. Following your conversation, ask if you can pray with them. Pray that Jesus would continue to reveal himself to them and answer every question they might have.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

As we seek Jesus, we will know His truth. Regular quiet times are a great way to do that. Before next time, continue to seek answers with the personal devotions.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Nicodemus Seeks Jesus for Answers

Read [John 3:1–21](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

Like Nicodemus, are you actively seeking Jesus for answers in your life? If not, what can you do to change that?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Accept the Invitation

Read [Matthew 7:7–11](#).

Have you ever known someone who seemed completely unapproachable? Maybe you were afraid to talk to them or ask them for anything. Thankfully, Jesus is not that way. In fact, He invites us to engage with Him. He doesn't judge us or condemn us for having questions. He gives us permission to come boldly to Him ([Hebrews 4:16](#)) whenever we are in need. He is not bothered by our questions or overwhelmed by the number of times we might ask. Instead, He lovingly turns His ear toward us and invites us to ask for anything we need.

QUESTION

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus will listen to you?

QUESTION

What prevents you from bringing all of your questions to Jesus?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Start a Conversation

Read [Matthew 6:5–13](#).

When was the last time you had a deep meaningful conversation with a close friend? When we open our mouth to pray, we're starting a conversation with our Heavenly Father, God. When we pray, we have His full attention. We shouldn't feel like we're talking to someone far off or someone uninterested in our life. We should be confident that we're engaged in a conversation with a loving God who cares about every detail of our life and has our best interest in mind. God is waiting for you to start a conversation with Him.

QUESTION

When was the last time you had a deep conversation with God? What was the topic of your conversation?

QUESTION

What could be the benefits of setting aside a consistent time for prayer?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Listen for Revelation

Read [Proverbs 2:1–6](#).

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who did all the talking? A conversation is only healthy if both people are able to equally contribute with honest dialogue and active listening. When we start a conversation with God and communicate our questions to Him, He wants to have an opportunity to give us the answers we need. So it's important for us to listen carefully and pay attention as He speaks to us. Time spent listening to God's voice will yield the wisdom we so desperately need.

QUESTION

When you reflect on your conversations with God, who does most of the talking? You or Jesus?

QUESTION

How might incorporating moments of silence change your prayer time and its outcome?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Experience Life Transformation

Read [John 7:40–53](#).

When Nicodemus finished his late-night conversation with Jesus, we're left not knowing what happened between them. Did Nicodemus become one of Jesus' followers or did he walk away unchanged? With a little digging later in the Book of John, we discover that Nicodemus appeared to be devoted to Jesus. How sad that the religious leaders challenging Nicodemus told him to search the Scriptures to find truth. Sadly, they didn't see truth for themselves.

QUESTION

Why do you think Nicodemus spoke up to the Pharisees?

QUESTION

What do you think Nicodemus was feeling as he challenged his peers?



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Session Overview

Receive Grace

Biblical Encounter: A Sinner Comes Humbly to Jesus ([Luke 7:36–50](#))

Outcome: Don’t let past sin and shame keep you from Jesus.

In this session, we’ll read about an unwelcome guest who interrupted dinner to pour a bottle of perfume on Jesus’ feet. This woman’s past sin and reputation caused the host to be frustrated. After all, the host thought that if Jesus was who He said He was, He should have known what type of woman she was and turned her away. Instead Jesus gave him and us a clear picture of how He addresses past sin and the shame that can prevent people from approaching Him.

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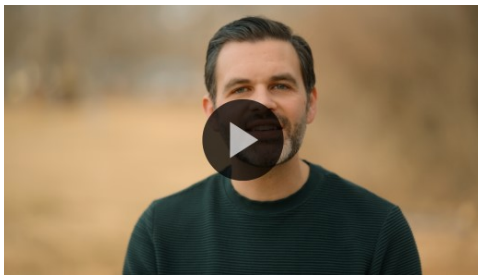
QUESTION

Imagine you receive a social media notification from someone you knew in school. What’s the one photo or memory of you from that time frame you would hope they don’t share?

Almost everyone has had a phase in life they wish to forget. It might have been as simple as a photo taken during an awkward time with problem skin, braces, or a bad haircut. But more often it's a time when we made awful choices. We said or did things we wish we could change. The good news is that as we pursue Jesus, we can find freedom from our past. He helps us walk through our past sin and shame into forgiveness and wholeness.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Is it easy for you to accept grace and forgiveness from Jesus? Why or why not?



QUESTION

Is it easy for you to accept grace and forgiveness from Jesus? Why or why not?

Consider What the Bible Says

Jesus likely spent most of the first thirty years of His life living with His earthly family in their small town. The Bible reveals very little about those years. However, once He stepped into public ministry, we read about how His influence began to grow. Many people loved Him and thought He was wonderful, but many Jewish leaders saw Him as a threat. They wanted to keep an eye on Him. Though we can't be sure of his motives, one of the religious leaders invited Jesus to a dinner that was interrupted by an uninvited guest.

Did You Know?

Today's Bible account includes an incredibly expensive gift—a perfumed ointment in an alabaster container. This container was a long-neck flask likely made of a soft material called alabaster—a white or light-colored variety of gypsum stone. The material, often imported from Egypt, was believed to help preserve ointments and perfumes. Though the passage does not say, if the cost of this perfume and container were similar to others in the Gospels, it could be worth as much as a year's wages.

Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman

Read [Luke 7:36–38](#).

The woman who showed extreme kindness to Jesus had a past she probably would have liked to erase. She had lived a sinful life, and everyone in town knew it. But at some point, it appears she had encountered Jesus and experienced His healing and help. In appreciation, she brought a very expensive jar of perfume and lavished it on Jesus as a gift of thanks.

She probably felt that everyone there that night thought she was worthless. Most likely, she had a hard time deciding to come in. She would have known that it was scandalous for her to touch Jesus in her culture. But she also knew Jesus was different. He had likely already given her freedom and forgiveness. He was worth all the trouble she would face to give Him this special gift of worship.

QUESTION

What do you think this woman was like before she met Jesus?

QUESTION

What might you have thought about her gift if you had been at the dinner party that night?

Jesus Teaches with a Story

Read [Luke 7:39–43](#).

QUESTION

Do you think Simon would have ever invited this woman to be his guest too? Why or why not?

It's so interesting to notice that the Bible says Simon, "*said to himself*, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!'" (verse [39](#), emphasis added). Then we read that Jesus answered his protest perfectly! That means Jesus knew Simon's thoughts, proving His prophetic nature. It's not hard to imagine that at least some of the other people at the party would have heard Jesus tell Simon the story about two debtors. However, they wouldn't have known why Jesus decided to tell that story just then.

Jesus knew what they needed to hear. Simon and his friends thought they knew all about God and how to serve Him. But they had forgotten entirely about God's grace; that was what Jesus came to remind everyone of. Even Simon had to admit that whoever had been forgiven most would love most. This woman had been forgiven of so much that she worshipped Jesus extravagantly. Her response is an encouragement and inspiration to all of us Jesus has forgiven.

QUESTION

Why do you think the woman might have chosen that night to give her gift to Jesus?

Jesus Changes Hearts

Read [Luke 7:44–50](#).

Jesus painted a clear picture for Simon. In that culture, a guest should have been treated well and offered many comforts when they arrived. But none of those things had been done for Jesus that night, letting everyone there know He was not an honored guest in Simon's home. At the same time, a woman they all looked down on had shown Jesus much honor.

Jesus let everyone know they had things backwards. What appears on the outside of a person is not nearly as important as what's happening in someone's heart ([Luke 6:45](#)). The religious leaders thought they knew best how to serve God, but they didn't even recognize His Son when He came right into their party. They thought they knew about worship and honoring God, but they dishonored Jesus. Instead, a sinful woman who had accepted His grace and forgiveness showed Jesus great honor and love in return. Though her past could have kept her away, as the host of the party thought it should, she pursued Jesus in spite of it. Pursuing Jesus isn't about following a religious system or acting a certain way to earn God's favor. It's about having a real relationship with Him and letting Him change us from the inside out.

QUESTION

What questions would you like to ask this woman about this encounter with Jesus?

QUESTION

What might Simon have been thinking after everyone left his home that night?

Reflect

Don't let past sin and shame keep you from Jesus.

The Bible is a wonderful gift that shows us how to live today. Story after story helps us see that we can be changed through God's power and forgiveness, and that we can live in healing and restoration. In this encounter, Jesus ministered to both a sinful woman and to Simon, a religious leader. Jesus also has a message for us: God's grace is His love freely given in spite of our past sin. We cannot earn it or demand it; we can only receive it with a grateful heart. No one can be made right by doing what the Law commands ([Romans 3:20](#)). Only Jesus can save us from our sin. The wonderful news is that no one has sinned too much or too badly for Him to reach out and forgive if we ask Him. His grace is greater than all our sin and shame.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

Who in the story can you relate to more—the sinful woman or Simon the host? Why do you think so?

QUESTION

The woman in the story gave Jesus a lavish and generous gift of worship and thanks when she experienced His forgiveness. What might that look like for you?

QUESTION

Is there a past sin or shame that you struggle to forgive yourself for? How can this woman's example help you to do so?

Activate

This story shows us one person's response to Jesus' amazing grace. Her life was a mess, but Jesus set her free from all her sin and shame. He changed her life and gave her the power to walk in freedom. Her extravagant worship reflected the great work that Jesus had done in her life. What Jesus had done in her heart and mind overflowed to those around her.

Challenge

We can let what Jesus has done for us overflow to the people around us too. One of the easiest ways to share the hope of Christ is just to talk about what Jesus is doing in our own life. This week, look for at least one opportunity to encourage someone else with a story of Jesus' grace and forgiveness in your own life.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

This woman and Jesus showed us a powerful lesson of grace and forgiveness. Let Jesus speak to you throughout the week about walking out of your sin and shame into freedom and health through the devotions.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: A Sinner Comes Humbly to Jesus

Read [Luke 7:36–50](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is Jesus saying to you about walking in freedom from past sin and shame?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: A Woman of Great Faith

Read [Joshua 2:1–24](#).

This Old Testament story is about the Israelites as they were just beginning to step into the land God had promised them. They needed help to overcome some obstacles in their way. One person who helped them was a woman named Rahab. We might skip right over what verse [1](#) says about her: She was a prostitute. Without her help, the two spies might have never made it safely out of Jericho.

If we were writing the script, most of us would never choose a prostitute to play a major role in Bible history, but God did just that. Her past didn't disqualify her from being used greatly by God. In fact, we can read about her further in [Hebrews 11:31](#), where she was listed in the great hall of people of faith. In [Matthew 1:5](#), she was listed as an ancestor of Jesus himself. The Bible plainly teaches that our past sin and shame should never keep us from pursuing Jesus.

QUESTION

What pieces of Rahab's life surprise you?

QUESTION

How does Rahab's story challenge you?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: A Sinner's Cry to God

Read [Psalm 51:1–19](#).

This beautiful song was written by the great King David after being confronted about his fall into adultery and murder. Twice in the Bible, David is called a man after God's own heart ([1 Samuel 13:14](#); [Acts 13:22](#)), but here we see him reeling and repenting after a horrible series of choices. He had known God's goodness and mercy all his life, but then he walked away from it into sin and selfishness.

The prophet Nathan had to help David understand how great his sin was ([2 Samuel 12:1–14](#).) [Psalm 51](#) was David's cry of sorrow for turning away from God. It has been a comfort to so many who have read its words. We can follow David's example of being greatly sorry over our sinful choices. And we can also follow his example of repentance or turning away from sin and back toward God.

QUESTION

What verses of this psalm stood out to you most as you read it?

QUESTION

What did David learn through this experience?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: The Unmerciful Servant

Read [Matthew 18:21–35](#).

One of the greatest lessons for all Christians is that what God does in us, He always wants to do through us. The blessings of God are never supposed to stop with us. God means for them to flow through us to help other people know Him, too.

Jesus told this sobering story about a person who was forgiven a huge debt, but then refused to pass that on. He took God's grace and forgiveness, but then did not share it. We must be careful to learn from this lesson. We cannot accept the mercy of God ourself and then refuse to be merciful to others. We have been forgiven so much, and we must let God's grace shine through our life.

QUESTION

What do you think it would feel like to watch a story like this happen in real life?

QUESTION

How is God challenging you through this passage?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: God's Grace Is Sufficient

Read [Acts 7:54–59](#); [8:1–3](#).

This passage is the introduction to a man named Saul. We see that he held everyone's coats while they killed Stephen. Then he began to try actively and aggressively to destroy the Christian church. But if we keep reading through [Acts 9](#), we see that Saul (also known as Paul) finally met Jesus and had his entire life turned upside down.

One encounter with Jesus turned a man from being full of hatred to being full of love. He went from being the worst persecutor of the Church to the greatest church planter and Christian author of all time. If anyone could have been crippled by shame and guilt for what he had done, it would have been Paul. But God's grace is sufficient ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). He can free us from all of the baggage that comes from our sin. No one knew that better than Paul, and his writings have helped countless people walk in freedom and victory.

QUESTION

How does God's work in Paul's life inspire you?

QUESTION

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about grace and forgiveness?



Live in Community

 Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Pursue Jesus

“If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”
([Jeremiah 29:13](#))

Jesus’ offer is remarkably clear: If we look for Jesus, we’ll find Him. He’s not hiding from us, but closely connecting with Him does take us being intentional. We’re called to follow Him, to pursue Him. In this volume, we’ll look at how individuals pursued Jesus through the challenges of their circumstances. Pursuing Jesus is not only a mental exercise for personal growth, but it also means living out our faith in tangible ways: showing up, listening carefully, receiving grace, and trusting Him.

Session Overview

Trust Him

Biblical Encounter: Peter Walks toward Jesus on the Water ([Matthew 14:22–33](#))

Outcome: Don’t let fear keep you from trusting Jesus.

In this session, we’ll see that fear sometimes causes us to question our faith in Jesus and His ability. When our focus is on what we fear, we lose sight of trusting in Him. We need to remember that fear is one of the greatest and most often used tactics of the enemy. In the biblical encounter, we’ll see how when Peter had faith, he experienced the miraculous. But when Peter let fear take over, he was limited to doing only what he could do by himself. Jesus wants us to walk in faith, but He is willing to step in when our life sinks back into fear.

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Engage

QUESTION

If you went to an amusement park, what kind of rides or activities would you go to first?

Many people love to do things that bring a thrill, like riding a daring roller coaster or watching a suspenseful movie. But there's a big difference between fearing things that give a rush of adrenaline and fearing things that keep us from moving forward in life. Life experiences can leave us with long-lasting fears or trauma. But walking with Jesus can bring so many changes to our life. Regardless of our circumstances or experiences, we can grow as we pursue Him and learn to trust Him.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: When have you struggled to believe Jesus was with you during a difficult time?



QUESTION

When have you struggled to believe Jesus was with you during a difficult time?

Consider What the Bible Says

As Jesus' ministry progressed, people increasingly either loved Him or hated Him. In [Matthew 14](#), we read that His relative and faithful follower, John the Baptist, was beheaded by the wicked King Herod. Jesus tried to be alone after He heard the news, but He was followed by a large crowd of people as usual. His disciples wanted to send them away, but Jesus had compassion on them.

As the chapter continues, what happened next was a tremendous miracle. Jesus took one lunch and multiplied it to feed the entire crowd of thousands of people. Jesus' disciples saw all of this and even helped pass out the food and collect the leftovers. This short span of time was packed with major events for Jesus and His closest followers before He sent them on ahead across the Sea of Galilee.

Did You Know?

Much of Jesus' ministry took place in the area around the Sea of Galilee. This body of water is also noted elsewhere as the Sea of Tiberias, Lake of Gennesaret, and Lake Kinnereth. Located in northern Israel, this large lake takes about two hours to sail across.

Because the sea is surrounded by hills, sailors can experience sudden violent storms¹ with waves up to ten feet high.²

The Disciples Obey Jesus

Read [Matthew 14:22–24](#).

The disciples all obeyed Jesus' directions for them. They immediately got into the boat to go to the other side of the lake. They did what Jesus said and were right where Jesus wanted them to be. Even so, the wind and the waves began to pick up and fight against the boat. Sometimes it can feel disconcerting when circumstances end up being more difficult than we expect, especially when we know we have obeyed God. This encounter with Peter and the other disciples gives us an opportunity to think about how we might or might not trust Him in spite of our circumstances.

QUESTION

After a long day of ministry, how do you think the disciples were feeling as they got into the boat to go to the other side?

QUESTION

How do you think the disciples reacted as the storm began to get stronger?

Peter Walks toward Jesus on the Water

Read [Matthew 14:25–29](#).

We know from other Bible accounts that some of the disciples, including Peter and his family, were fishermen. He was used to being on boats and on the water all the time. We also know that Peter had a strong personality and was not afraid to speak his mind. Still, we read that he and all the others were terrified and fearful when they saw something coming toward them across the water in the middle of the night with the storm making it even harder to see. The irrational fear immediately overcoming their mind led them to conclude that the strange sight might actually be a ghost. But Peter believed Jesus when He spoke to them. Peter put aside his fear to miraculously walk on the water toward Jesus.

QUESTION

What do you think the conversation on the boat might have been like when the disciples saw something on the water?

QUESTION

What do you think was going through Peter's mind as he walked toward Jesus?

Peter Takes His Eyes off Jesus

Read [Matthew 14:30–33](#).

Peter did something miraculous when he walked on the water toward Jesus. He believed in who Jesus was and what He said. As a result, Peter was filled with faith that overcame his fear at first. But as soon as Peter took his eyes off Jesus and put them on his difficult circumstances, he began to sink.

Jesus saved Peter when he cried out, but imagine what might have happened if Peter hadn't been distracted by the waves and wind. He might not have sunk. Perhaps all the other disciples would have stepped out of the boat, too. We won't know. But we do know that Peter did something bold that the other disciples chose not to—he didn't let fear keep him in the boat. And from the Bible and church history, we learn the trend continued as Peter became a great leader in the Early Church.

QUESTION

In what way might Peter's faith in Jesus have changed that day?

QUESTION

What question would you like to ask Peter about his experiences?

Reflect

Don't let fear keep you from trusting Jesus.

In this passage about Peter, we can see how Jesus helped His disciples discover that life is not always easy, but that He is always good. Their obedience to Jesus led the disciples into rough waters. But in a short amount of time, the disciples saw Jesus miraculously override the laws of nature twice. Through it all, Peter and the other disciples learned that Jesus is faithful in spite of how circumstances appear. Their response was to worship Him.

As we follow Jesus, we can see His faithfulness to us, too. Are things from your past or current circumstances causing you to feel fear in moving forward? Keep your eyes on Jesus and trust His Word to you. Like Peter, let Jesus build your faith so that it overcomes your fear.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

If you had been in the boat that day, what would you have done?

QUESTION

How can you keep your eyes on Jesus when circumstances make it difficult?

QUESTION

What is an area in your own life that fills you with fear? What might it look like for you to “step out of the boat”?

Activate

Peter had known Jesus for a while before he stepped out of the boat. But that day he knew Jesus in a different way. Peter’s faith in Jesus helped him overcome his fear, and he was able to do something great because he trusted Jesus.

Challenge

This week, step out in faith to try something you’ve been afraid to do. Maybe it will be to ask someone at work if you can pray for them. Or to share what God has done in your life with a family member. Perhaps it could be to give generously in a missions offering. Let God stretch and use your faith in Him to bless someone else.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Jesus helps us learn to trust Him as we walk with Him: not just in easy times, but in difficult circumstances, too. Let Jesus speak to your heart about trusting Him in everything. One way to listen to Him is through the Bible. Check out the personal devotions that have been provided as an extension of this discussion.

Endnotes

¹ Charles McCracken, “The Sea of Galilee, Part Two,” *Israel My Glory*, May/June 2014, accessed April 28, 2022, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-sea-of-galilee-part-two/>.

² Lorence G. Collins, “Calming of the wind and waves by Jesus or the calming of frantic disciples by Jesus?” August 15, 2014, accessed April 28, 2022, <http://www.csun.edu/~vcgeo005/Calming.pdf>.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Peter Walks toward Jesus on the Water

Read [Matthew 14:22–33](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about letting faith in Him overcome your fear?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Trusting God for Provision

Read [2 Kings 4:1–7](#).

As we learn more about trusting God, it's helpful to read about others who have done the same thing. In this Old Testament story, a woman who was all out of options asked the prophet of God what she should do. She didn't have to ask anyone for help. She could have just suffered in silence and given in to her awful circumstances. But she trusted God with her situation.

Then, she fully obeyed everything she was instructed to do. If she had brought just one or two jars and stopped, that would have been all the oil she had. Instead, she and her sons had faith to find as many jars as they could find—and every single jar was filled! Her great faith and obedience led to a miracle in an impossible situation.

QUESTION

If the woman in the story had asked your advice about her situation, what might you have told her to do?

QUESTION

How do you think her sons' faith in God was impacted by this situation?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Trusting God for Healing

Read [Mark 5:25–34](#).

In the time and culture when this story happened, it would have been unthinkable for a person who was bleeding to go out into a crowd where she might touch a lot of people. Having an issue of blood made a Jewish woman unclean, and touching anyone else made them unclean, too ([Leviticus 15:19–33](#)).

But this woman had suffered long enough to make her desperate for Jesus' help. She'd heard of the miracles and healings He had done wherever He went. She believed that He could help her even though no one else had been able to. Her fear of what everyone would think did not hold her back. And she was right! Just one touch of His robe made her whole. In the end, approaching Jesus made an incredible change in her life.

QUESTION

What might other people have thought about this woman who touched Jesus?

QUESTION

If Jesus were coming to your town tomorrow, what need would you bring to Him?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Trusting God for Others

Read [Matthew 8:5–13](#).

The centurion was someone with authority over others in the Roman world. It might have been seen as weakness by his fellow soldiers for him to talk to the religious teacher. Their job was just supposed to be keeping the peace. Not only that, but he wasn't asking Jesus for himself. Instead he asked for help on behalf of his servant. So many things in this scenario could have kept the centurion from bothering Jesus with his request. But his faith overcame his fears, and Jesus commended him for it. Because the soldier trusted Jesus, his servant was healed, even from some distance away.

QUESTION

What kind of conversations might have happened at the centurion's house later that day?

QUESTION

Who in your own life could you bring to Jesus, like the centurion brought his servant?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Trusting God Forever

Read [Luke 23:26–43](#).

After some likely terrible choices, a man was facing his final moments on earth when he was being executed for his crimes. He could have remained bitter like the other criminal on a cross that day, scoffing at Jesus. He could have joined in with the soldiers and the crowd mocking Jesus. But in one of the most encouraging conversations of all time, the criminal seemed to recognize Jesus right at the very end.

Maybe he'd seen Jesus teaching or healing people at some point. He knew Jesus was more than just another person being rightfully executed. He humbly asked Jesus to remember him. With that small request, Jesus promised the man that he would be with Him that day in paradise. The criminal's faith in Jesus overcame his regret.

QUESTION

At what moment do you think the criminal actually had a change of heart?

QUESTION

How can you compare this man's response to the others who were at Jesus' cross that day?



Live in Community

 Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Be Different

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. ([Romans 12:2](#))

Christians have long understood that we live and walk a fine line. We are to be in the world—all things to all people, as Paul put it—yet not of the world. God's people have always been a chosen people, holy and set apart from the world's ways. To pull it off, to be truly different, means we must each hold fast to the truth, speaking it when needed, all while humbling ourselves and faithfully serving others.

Session Overview

Humble Yourself

Biblical Encounter: Party Guests Discover the Best Seat ([Luke 14:1, 7–15](#))

Outcome: Become first by humbly putting others first.

In this session, we'll explore how Jesus changes our heart in ways we might not expect. We all have ideas about ways followers of Jesus can have a positive impact on the people around them. But most likely humility wouldn't be high on our list. Jesus' ways are distinct from anything else the world has ever seen. Moving up in Jesus' kingdom happens as we take the position of humility. He truly calls us to be different, and we can do that by putting others first.

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Engage

QUESTION

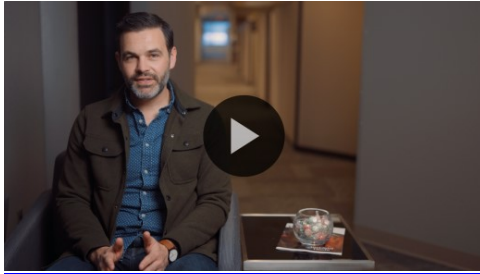
Some high school yearbooks have a recognition section for awards like, "Most Likely to Succeed," "Most Athletic," and so on. What category could you have been recognized in and why?

Our society uses very distinct markers for what it means to be a person of success or power. Media is saturated with images of famous and celebrated people. Many people look to wealth, looks, or status to judge how important a person is. Something in each of us wants to be noticed and appreciated for being special in some way. And much of our society is built on the dreams of being and having more.

At the same time, everyone can see that the world is broken and needs help. Jesus came to save and change people. He showed us how to be people who aren't stuck in the world's standards of loving position, money, and power. His kingdom is absolutely different from what people would expect. Jesus taught and demonstrated that to win, we have to lose; to be first, we need to be last; and to lead, we must humbly serve others.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: How do you react when others pursue recognition and honor?



QUESTION

How do you react when others pursue recognition and honor?

Consider What the Bible Says

The dinner party in [Luke 14](#) was hosted by one of the Jewish religious people in town, and he invited his friends. Jesus was invited too, and everyone was curious to find out more about Him. Parts of the Jewish Law deal with caring for your neighbor and welcoming others. If anyone should have known the real heart of God about serving others, it should have been the teachers of the Law and the religious leaders at this party.

Yet, the party guests were competing to get the best seat at the table. They might not have been as interested in knowing Jesus as they were in looking important. But the guests at the party learned—and we are about to learn—what Jesus had to say about what's really important.

Did You Know?

The word translated as *hospitality* in the New Testament has a level of depth that's easy to miss. It's the Greek word *philoxenos*, a combination of the words *philos*, which means "to love" and *xenos*, which means *foreigner* or *stranger*. In Bible times, hospitality was not limited to just caring for your friends. It often included caring for those you didn't know. God specifically commanded this of His children in [Deuteronomy 10:19](#) which says, "So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt."

Invited to the Table

Read [Luke 14:1](#).

If this event had happened today, it would be like going to a church leader's house after church to get to know him or her a little better. These guests had surely been to many dinner parties with many special teachers over the years. This was just another Sabbath day meal. But Jesus was different from anyone they had ever met before, and many would have been curious to be around Him more. This passage says they were watching Him closely as they gathered in the religious leader's home. They were listening to what Jesus had to say and watching how He handled himself.

QUESTION

What might the dinner guests have been thinking as they arrived for the dinner that day?

QUESTION

Why do you think they watched Jesus so closely?

Challenged by Reality

As all the guests arrived, everyone began looking for the place they would sit during the meal. Jesus was watching them.

Read [Luke 14: 7–11](#).

With their eyes on Jesus, many of the guests may have already known that this wasn't going to be a normal dinner party. As people looked for somewhere to sit, Jesus watched. Then He later made it clear that everyone was doing it wrong! Jesus was already proving to be an exciting party guest.

Jesus challenged the way they typically did things by using an illustration everyone would have understood. It's embarrassing to sit in the wrong seat and have to be moved. Jesus used common sense to challenge the social customs of these guests. He began to teach a new way of looking at things by first helping them see their situation clearly. Being humble isn't pretending to be less than we really are. It's recognizing that others are also important.

The party guests were acting just like everyone else in the world by trying to push others out of the way to make themselves look better. But Jesus wasn't trying to take power by force or status, and they shouldn't have either. In this passage He revealed one of the most beautiful truths of Christianity: "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." ([Luke 14:11](#))

QUESTION

How do you think the dinner guests felt as Jesus corrected everyone?

QUESTION

What might the guests' whispered conversations have been like after Jesus said that?

Inspired to Be Different

Read [Luke 14:12–15](#).

Then Jesus took things to another level. The host of the party was one of the religious leaders. It's likely that most of the guests that day were his friends and associates. Just like today, he might have invited others to his home to look important or to show off what he had. Just as we would now, his guests might have felt compelled to invite him again later.

Often when we read the Bible, it's easy to put ourselves in the place of good and virtuous people, but harder to put ourselves into the place of those being corrected. This story is no different. Jesus challenged all of us, then and now, to stop acting like the rest of the world. He has given us life and power so we can share and not hoard for our own.

The real and lasting reward comes in sharing joy and hope with "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" ([Luke 14:13](#)) who can't pay anything back or give the host a status boost. Jesus brings real change to our life, but it isn't just for us and our close friends and family. Everything He does *in* each of us, He wants to do *through* us. As we humbly serve and invite those who can't help us in any way, Jesus helps us truly be different.

QUESTION

In what ways were the dinner guests' faith challenged by Jesus that day?

QUESTION

How can we be different in why we invite people into our life?

Reflect

Become first by humbly putting others first.

In this session, we explored how Jesus transforms our heart and mind in ways we might not have expected. In our world, the rich and powerful like to stay that way, and the poor people wish to have more. But Jesus' ways are distinct from anything else the world has ever seen. He came to love and serve. He taught us that living means we must die to ourself. To be first, we must be last. He taught us that humility is not just thinking less of ourself, but also thinking of others more. He challenges us to humbly put others first.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What would you like to ask one of the dinner guests about their experience that day?

QUESTION

What might it look like for you to invite some people you don't know well to your own table?

QUESTION

Is it easy for you to humbly put others first? Why or why not?

Activate

So much of what we do is about how it makes us look to other people. We often just want people to think highly of us. As Christians, we need to check our motives for what we do. Do we act a certain way so people will think we are generous or kind, or do we actually want to be generous and kind? One way to restore our poor motives is to do things for people who have no way of knowing who helped them.

Challenge

This week, find someone in your community who needs help. Then help them without telling anyone about it. You might give a financial gift anonymously. Perhaps you could mow a lawn or weed a flowerbed while they're away from home, or secretly leave a bag of groceries for

someone who could really use them. Prayerfully consider who you could bless and help without getting any sort of credit from anyone else.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Jesus came to save us from our sin and to show us how to live an abundant life. His teachings challenge us to be different from the rest of the world. Instead of striving for status and wealth, Jesus teaches us that the greatest person is the one who puts others first. The Bible has so much more to say about this, which the devotions for the rest of the week will explore.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Humble Yourself

Read [Luke 14:1, 7–15](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about becoming great by putting others first?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Jesus Is Servant of All

Read [John 13:1–17](#).

The disciples all walked into the room, ready for a nice evening together with Jesus. In that day, guests often could expect their feet to be washed by a servant of the host. But this was a borrowed room, and there was no servant for the customary foot washing. All the disciples would have seen the basin and towel, but none of them had made a move. Any one of them probably would have washed Jesus' feet. But would they have been humble enough to wash each other's feet?

In a powerful display, Jesus himself assumed the position of servant and washed their feet. They were shocked that He would stoop to that low position for them. Jesus showed all of us that to be truly great, we must be willing to put everyone else first.

QUESTION

What do you imagine the disciples were thinking as they watched Jesus getting ready to wash their feet?

QUESTION

Jesus said we'll be blessed if we follow His example. What acts of service are you challenged to do?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: God Is Concerned for All

Read [Matthew 15:21–28](#).

The disciples were annoyed by a woman who kept pestering Jesus with her problem. In their minds, she shouldn't be allowed to bother Jesus. To their surprise, Jesus not only helped the woman, but even gave her a great compliment.

We can often be like the disciples were, thinking that we should help and serve only certain people. Even though they were being taught that the greatest person is the one who serves others, they still had ideas about who deserved it and who didn't. Jesus lovingly showed them and us that there are no qualifications required to be served. The greatest person is the humble servant of all.

QUESTION

What kind of conversation do you think the woman Jesus helped had with her family when she returned home?

QUESTION

Who in your life could benefit from an interaction like this one with Jesus?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: God Looks at Our Heart

QUESTION

If you had to choose a new leader, what things would you look for in that person?

Read [1 Samuel 16:1–13](#).

The nation of Israel needed a new king. Saul, who had really looked like a leader ([1 Samuel 9:2](#)), was their first king. But he had disobeyed God. Now God directed the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem where the new king would be found. To Samuel's surprise, God didn't choose any of the older sons in David's family.

God revealed that He doesn't look at outward qualifications like we do. People tend to judge others by their outward appearance, but God is always looking at our heart. In God's estimation, to be the greatest person doesn't mean being the best looking, or having the most money or power. To God, a great person has a heart full of compassion and concern for others.

QUESTION

What are your thoughts about knowing God is more interested in your heart than in your outward appearance? Does your life reflect that?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Jesus Is the Greatest of All

Read [Philippians 2:1–18](#).

Throughout the session and devotions, we've seen that many people are looking for status, wealth, or appearance to determine who is important. People in the Bible were not that much different from what people are today. They wanted to take the best seats for themselves. They had ideas of who did and didn't deserve attention. They expected others to serve them, not the other way around.

We're still the same. But Jesus came to save us from our sin and selfishness, and to show us His plan to restore the world. His willingness to leave everything and to come here to die a criminal's death on a cross shows us what true greatness means. Because of Jesus' willingness to give everything for others, God gave Him the name above all other names. He is the true King and the greatest of all.

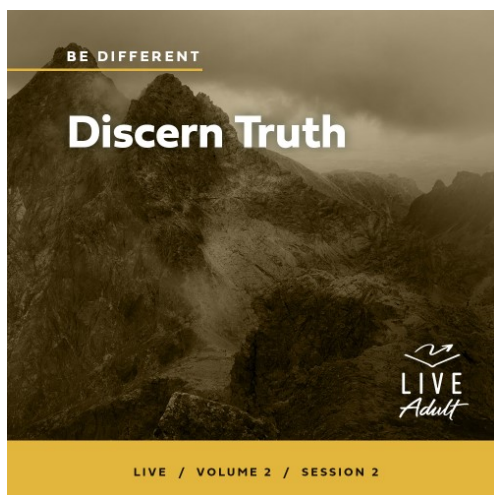
We no longer have to wonder how to become the greatest. It's our turn to show the world how great Jesus is by acting like Him. To be truly different, we should be humble like Jesus. To be truly great, we can give all for others like Jesus did. We can have the same attitude as Jesus who joyfully and willingly is the servant of all.

QUESTION

Which verses in this passage of Scripture challenge you most? Why?

QUESTION

How is God challenging you to be less like the world and more like Him?



Live in Community

 Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Be Different

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. ([Romans 12:2](#))

Christians have long understood that we live and walk a fine line. We are to be in the world—all things to all people, as Paul put it—yet not of the world. God's people have always been a chosen people, holy and set apart from the world's ways. To pull it off, to be truly different, means we must each hold fast to the truth, speaking it when needed, all while humbling ourself and faithfully serving others.

Session Overview

Discern Truth

Biblical Encounter: Peters Declares Who Jesus Is ([Matthew 16:13–24](#))

Outcome: Commit to listening to the right voices and be open to know the truth.

In our media-soaked culture, we're surrounded by hundreds of voices that almost overwhelm us with information. Sometimes it seems so confusing. It's difficult to know what is and isn't true. As we grow closer to Jesus, we learn to recognize His voice apart from all others. He guides us through His Holy Spirit to discern truth.

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To access session content and videos from a computer, visit:

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Engage

QUESTION

What is the most humorous telemarketing pitch, false ad, or email scam you've ever encountered?

So many voices are competing for our attention every day. Some are telling blatant lies, like the many scams we've all seen. But others are telling much more sophisticated lies, making it hard to know what's true. As followers of Jesus, we must be careful to let Him show us His truth, so we can more easily recognize what's true and what's false.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: When is it easy for you to share the truth of what Jesus has done for you? When is it most difficult?



QUESTION

When is it easy for you to share the truth of what Jesus has done for you? When is it most difficult?

Consider What the Bible Says

The disciples spent time with Jesus for close to three years. They had listened to Him teach and watched Him heal countless sick people. They'd seen Him perform so many miracles! Even more than all of that, they'd been near enough to talk with Him every day and get to know Him up close. They probably knew what songs He liked, what food He liked to eat, and what made Him laugh. One day, the time came for Him to ask the question that would change their life forever.

Did You Know?

During the days of the New Testament, the expectancy for the Messiah's arrival was incredibly high. However, there was a large amount of disagreement about the form the Messiah would come in. Although some people sought a peaceful Davidic Messiah, the politics of the world at that time had many hoping for a militaristic Messiah who would overthrow the Roman government. The Book of Acts speaks of some of those who amassed followers who believed that they were such a militaristic Messiah ([Acts 5:36–37; 21:38](#)). It was not even uncommon to find some who believed the Messiah was from a line other than David's, such as the followers of John the Baptist who believed for a time that he was the Messiah regardless of the fact that he was a Levite.

Simon Peter Recognizes Jesus

Read [Matthew 16:13–16](#).

Jesus had been walking with and teaching His disciples for some time. One day, He led them to a place called Caesarea Philippi, a hill in Judea overlooking an area of Roman idol worship. The place was wicked and dark, and represented the false religions of the world. Many people came to the temples and worshipped the idols there in unspeakable ways, hoping for favor and reward.

QUESTION

What do you think the disciples were thinking as they looked out over the place of idol worship?

Against this backdrop, Jesus asked His closest followers who people thought He was. They were honest and repeated the responses people were giving about who Jesus was. Some thought He was a new version of one of the great prophets of old.

In one of the most important moments of world history, Simon Peter speaks out the revelation of just who this Man was that they'd been following. This wasn't just a special teacher or a new prophet: this was the Messiah that Scripture had long foretold ([Psalm 2:7](#); [Proverbs 30:4](#)). Simon Peter realized that Jesus was the Son of God.

QUESTION

How would people today respond if asked who Jesus is? How would you respond?

Peter Receives a New Name

Until this time, Simon Peter had always been known as Simon son of John and brother of Andrew. His whole identity was about to change because of the revelation of truth God gave him.

Read [Matthew 16:17–20](#).

Jesus praised Simon for the God-given truth he had recognized. In fact, he was the first disciple recorded to confess this part of Jesus' identity. Because Simon embraced this reality and received this truth, Jesus gave him a new name and identity. No longer was he just Simon son of John. Now he was Peter, which means *rock*. The whole church would be built on and the entire world changed on the strength of the revelation he received that day: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

From there, Jesus began to teach plainly what His kingdom would be like. Unlike the false gods and strange worship they could see from where they were standing, Jesus' kingdom would be filled with true, life-changing power. Standing at what must have seemed like the very gates of hell, Jesus encouraged His disciples that being a part of His kingdom came with authority.

QUESTION

How do you think Peter reacted when Jesus gave him a new name?

QUESTION

What do you think the rest of the disciples were thinking as Peter confessed Jesus was the Messiah? How about when Jesus proclaimed who Peter would become?

Peter Learns Truth

At some point after Peter made his confession and Jesus gave him a new name, a terrible thing happened. Another voice entered the picture, trying to convince Peter not to trust the words and wisdom of Jesus.

Read [Matthew 16:21–24](#).

For thousands of years, Satan had easily fooled many people into physically worshipping false gods in temples. The disciples would have remembered this as they stood at Caesarea Philippi. But Jesus was about to change all of that forever. So the enemy resorted to his old trick ([Genesis 3:1–4](#)) of making Peter question the truth. Part of learning to discern truth is what Peter learned here: We can't pick and choose which parts of truth are real.

Peter was right to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God, but he was wrong to speak against the Messiah's calling to suffer and die for our sins. This is still a common temptation. Many people today reject God's truth because the idea of punishment for sin sounds harsh to our modern ears. Jesus rightly rebuked Peter for listening to the enemy's voice. He reminded Peter—and us—to listen to God for truth, not anyone else.

QUESTION

How do you think this conversation with Jesus changed Peter's life?

QUESTION

How can we hold onto God's truth when the world and the enemy makes it so difficult?

Reflect

Commit to listening to the right voices and be open to know the truth.

One of the most surprising ways Jesus transforms us is that He helps us to learn, hear, and recognize truth. In a world with so many voices saying so many different things, it can be hard to know what real truth is. Some voices sound so reasonable, but they're often rejecting reality. They overlook God's plan for our eternity. We can't pick and choose which parts of truth to accept or reject. Jesus reminds us that all truth is built on Him, and His voice and word are true and

trustworthy. As we walk with Jesus, we learn to recognize His voice apart from all others. He helps us to discern truth.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What are some voices you may need to limit or eliminate in your life? Who may you need to listen more to in your life?

God's Word is the primary source of truth. But we must also listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit to know how to apply that truth to situations we face.

QUESTION

How often would you say you recognize that the Holy Spirit is helping you: never, once in a while, often, daily?

QUESTION

What might you do to increase your awareness of the Holy Spirit's voice guiding you toward truth?

Activate

Many of us struggle with letting lies and false statements affect our life. Years of false thinking can develop patterns of thought and behavior that affect us every day. The best way to overcome lies is to combat them with truth.

Challenge

This week, take some time to recognize one or two harmful and destructive thoughts that might have taken root in your mind. Use your Bible to find verses that diffuse the lies. For example, a person who struggles with poor self-image might choose [Psalm 139:13–14](#).

Write the verses and put them where you'll see them frequently throughout the week, like on your car dashboard or on your refrigerator door. Let the truth of God change your heart and mind.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

As we walk with Jesus, He helps us to change and grow. We don't have to copy what the rest of the world is thinking and doing. God really does transform us into new people by changing the way we think. The devotions for the rest of the week will dig further into what the Bible says about learning to hear His voice and discern truth.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Discern Truth

Read [Matthew 16:13–24](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about committing to His truth and listening to the right voices?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Truth Can Be Trusted

Read [Psalm 33:1–12](#).

Many people have interesting ideas about truth. Some believe that every person can have their own personal idea of truth. Others think that truth is determined by how many people believe something is true. But truth is actually just an honest description of reality. The Bible teaches that the Word of God, Jesus, is true and that we can trust everything He does. God's Word is what the whole universe is built upon. ([Colossians 1:15–20](#))

When we embrace this reality, everything else in life makes sense. The Word of God teaches that God created us, but we selfishly chose to sin. Jesus came to set us free from that sin, so we can be with Him forever. This should frame everything else we believe. It makes sense of suffering, and it makes sense of what life is all about. When we recognize real truth, we can know and trust that God causes everything to work together for His purposes. We don't have to live in fear and confusion like the rest of the world. We can trust in the reality and truth of God's Word.

QUESTION

What verses of this passage speak to you the most?

QUESTION

How can not believing in God's truth cause your life to be unsteady?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Truth Can Be Twisted

Read [Matthew 4:1–11](#).

When we think of great battles, we generally think of those that involve lots of weapons and physical violence. This passage of Scripture describes one of the greatest and most important battles of all time, yet there was no physical weapon or bloodshed. Jesus had been fasting and praying for forty days when the devil came to fight. Of course, they already knew each other. The devil is an angel who had rebelled against God.

When the devil tempted Jesus, his tactics revealed that he recognized the reality that God's truth is real. What the devil said that day came straight from the Word of God. The way he fights is to confuse what the Bible actually says so we'll question it. He did it in the Garden of Eden to Eve ([Genesis 3](#)), he tried it with Jesus in the wilderness, and he uses this trick on us all the time. We must follow Jesus' example to resist the devil's twisting of God's Word with what it actually says. Jesus defeated the devil that day by always replying, "The Scriptures say," and we can do the same.

QUESTION

What are some of the things that the devil tempts you with?

QUESTION

How is God challenging you to respond through this passage?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Truth Sets Us Free

Read [John 8:21–32](#).

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people. Many of them were Pharisees and teachers of the Law who thought He was out to destroy their religious system. Many others were just curious people who recognized that Jesus had some unusual and wonderful things to say. He plainly told them all that, “unless you believe that I AM who I claim to be, you will die in your sins” ([John 8:24](#)).

All God’s truth hangs on this revelation of who Jesus actually is. The world and even many religious systems interpret what’s true by what they see, how they feel, or what they desire. So many people are hurt and in despair from believing these lies. Jesus promises that embracing truth will set us free from the dead-end way of living the world offers. He transforms our heart and changes the way we think. As we study and learn the Word of God, the Holy Spirit helps us to discern truth ([1 John 2:26–27](#)).

QUESTION

What are some ways that lies keep you from being free?

QUESTION

Think of the people closest to you. How could they benefit from knowing that God’s truth sets us free?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Truth Can Be Known

Read [John 18:28–40](#).

This passage of Scripture details what happened after Jesus was arrested. Religious leaders were furious about what Jesus had been teaching and doing because it went against their beliefs and threatened their power. Jesus was actually helping and healing people, but the religious leaders hated Him for disrupting their small world. The people who should’ve known truth couldn’t recognize truth.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of the region. The religious leaders wanted him to condemn Jesus to death even though He'd done nothing wrong. Pilate was genuinely confused by the whole situation. He was even annoyed by this trouble. So he took some time to ask Jesus several questions. In this short interview, Jesus patiently answered Pilate's questions, and revealed to him that He came into the world to testify to the truth.

In the end, Pilate was too busy and flustered with the cares of his region to take the time to answer his own question, "What is truth?" He was too caught up in his own ideas to discover what was real. What both Pilate and the religious leaders of the day stubbornly would not realize is that Truth had come to earth as a Person, and His name is Jesus. ([John 14:1-7](#))

QUESTION

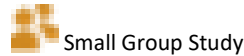
Why do you think the religious leaders hated Jesus so much?

QUESTION

Read Jesus' answers to Pilate again. What stirs in your heart from His words?



Live in Community



Volume Overview

Be Different

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. ([Romans 12:2](#))

Christians have long understood that we live and walk a fine line. We are to be in the world—all things to all people, as Paul put it—yet not of the world. God's people have always been a chosen people, holy and set apart from the world's ways. To pull it off, to be truly different, means we must each hold fast to the truth, speaking it when needed, all while humbling ourself and faithfully serving others.

Session Overview

Speak Truth

Biblical Encounter: Paul and Barnabas Confront Falsehood ([Acts 14:8–20](#))

Outcome: Challenge wrong thinking with God's truth.

In this session, we'll see Paul and Barnabas share the good news of the gospel with the people of Lystra. These people didn't reject or resist the truth. Instead, they distorted the truth to make it fit their culture. It seems that each society and even each generation defines their own truth. But if truth can change based on time or location, is it still accurate? As followers of Jesus, we must first determine to know truth by understanding the Bible and accepting it as God's timeless Word. Then when we see distorted versions of the truth in those we know and love, it's our responsibility to lovingly correct those distortions and point them to the truth of the Bible.

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Engage

QUESTION

Have you ever received a surprising response to a post on social media?

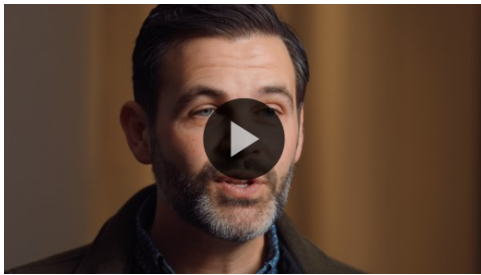
Maybe you got a huge number of likes and shares or you attracted the attention of someone famous. In the opposite direction, maybe you were censored by the platform or blasted with critical responses.

Like posting on social media today, Paul was used to getting a variety of responses to his evangelistic message. Some people asked questions and wanted to hear more ([Acts 13:42](#)). Some heard and believed ([Acts 13:12](#)). Still others responded in opposition and anger ([Acts 13:8, 50](#)). Sound familiar?

Today, we'll see the surprising response that Paul and Barnabas received when they shared the truth of the gospel with a group of "unchurched" people in the town of Lystra. But we can only wonder if this response had ever occurred to them as a possibility they needed to be prepared for. Regardless of others' response, Paul and Barnabas continued to speak about Jesus wherever they went.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: When is it easy for you to speak up about what Jesus has done for you? When is it most difficult?



QUESTION

When is it easy for you to speak up about what Jesus has done for you? When is it most difficult?

Consider What the Bible Says

Paul had been dramatically transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Later the Lord placed a special call on his life. Paul would go as God's voice not only to fellow Jews, but also to the Gentiles, the non-Jews ([Acts 9:3-18](#); [13:1-3](#)). So Paul went on missionary journeys to share the gospel in many places. Today we catch up with Paul and Barnabas on one of these journeys, in the town of Lystra.

QUESTION

Have you ever gone on a trip with the purpose of sharing the gospel (commonly called a missions trip)? If so, what were some needs you encountered?

Did You Know?

Polytheism, the worship of more than one god, could only be found in a few towns in Israel during the days of the New Testament. But when Jesus' disciples traveled to other countries with the gospel message, they were faced with a world entrenched in the worship of all types of pagan deities. In the Roman world, it was not uncommon to worship any number of gods based on day-to-day life. For example, a craftsman would worship the Greek god of metal work: Hephaestus. A hunter might worship the Roman goddess Diana, the patron goddess of the countryside. The desire to worship any possible god became so progressive and problematic that the Book of Acts reveals that some people even sought to worship gods they had yet to imagine!

Paul Responds to a Man's Faith

Read [Acts 14:8–10](#).

Wow! We see so many unbelievable things in such a short space. In fact, it's difficult to determine which part of this text is most amazing. Was it the fact that the man was miraculously healed? Or how the man still had faith to be healed after living with a disability for years? Then there's Paul who through the Holy Spirit was literally able to see this man's faith and respond to it. One thing is for sure. God brought all the right pieces together at the right time for this miracle.

QUESTION

In your opinion, which of these events in this passage is most amazing?

QUESTION

What do you think Paul saw in the man's eyes that made him realize that the man had the faith to be healed?

It's worth noting that Paul was preaching to a crowd, yet he still looked into the eyes of one person. When we're speaking about truth, we can't lose sight of its impact on a person either. We must be willing to lovingly help people understand and walk in the truth. It's a difficult thing to change all that you know, even if it's right or necessary.

Jesus reminded us of His care for each person in His Parable of the Lost Sheep. The Good Shepherd left the ninety-nine other sheep to go and search for His one lost sheep ([Matthew 18:12](#)). We may speak truth to ninety-nine people, but Jesus may ask us to hold the hand of just one as that person makes their journey into His truth.

QUESTION

What about Paul's message might have inspired this man's faith?

The Truth Twisted

Read [Acts 14:11–13](#).

Roman society included the worship of many gods. These gods were often worshipped at shrines or temples. So, it's possible that this preaching and healing took place at or near a local temple or shrine. The large crowds gathered at a place like this would have provided the perfect audience for Paul's preaching. People who brought offerings as worship would have also provided an ideal opportunity for beggars.

QUESTION

Contrast the crowd's response to the healing miracle with the blind beggar's response of faith.

The beggar's response of faith resulted in his healing. The crowd's response was anything but apathetic. Their passion was evident, too. But just because someone is zealous about something doesn't make it true. People can passionately pursue a lie just as easily as they can pursue the truth. Even Paul did that before he became a Christian.

QUESTION

What are some lies people zealously pursue in our society today that are counter to God's truth?

While the Roman government allowed the worship of many gods, history shows us that the Roman Empire considered Christianity to be a threat. That's because Christians preached that there is only one true God. So, Paul's teaching was a threat to the Roman way of life.

QUESTION

How do you see this same dynamic in our society today?

Grieved by the Deception

Read [Acts 14:14](#).

Paul and Barnabas responded quickly to the claim that they were gods. The practice of tearing clothing was a familiar response in Judaism. In Old Testament times, prophets, priests, and even kings had been known to tear their clothes. Sometimes it was a sign of grief. And at other times people did it to humble themselves.

We can easily imagine that Paul and Barnabas may have wanted to counter people's worship of them by humbling themselves. However, the Bible gives another possible reason: a response to hearing blasphemy ([Mark 14:62–64](#)). They honored God in a way others could see.

QUESTION

Have you ever taken a stand publicly for God's truth? If so, what was the situation and what did you do?

Confronting the Lie

Read [Acts 14:15–20](#).

Paul and Barnabas firmly stopped the crowd's attempt to worship them. They made it clear that they had come to preach the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They wanted the people of Lystra to understand that there is only one true God.

But instead, people ignored the truth Paul shared about Jesus. First, they treated Paul and Barnabas as earthly manifestations of their gods. When Paul tried to correct their misunderstanding, they didn't want to hear the truth. Then some Jews swayed the crowd completely in the other direction. In a short time, Paul and Barnabas went from being considered gods to being left for dead on the edge of town.

QUESTION

In what ways do you see people twist the message of Jesus today?

Reflect

Challenge wrong thinking with God's truth.

Paul and Barnabas were not traveling, enduring hardship, and suffering beatings for their own fame. They were doing it all for the glory of Jesus. Even during Jesus' own life, people often misunderstood His purposes and tried to make Him into an earthly king.

We too must be on guard against the obvious lies and subtle deceptions of the enemy. These lies are all around us and, even more concerning, they can creep inside us. Our best weapon against the enemy's lies and deception is God's truth. We must engage with God's Word regularly, so we won't drift off course. Then we can be prepared to challenge others' wrong thinking with God's truth too.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What might it cost you if you were fooled into believing some distortion of biblical truth

QUESTION

Are there those in your life who are confused about God's truth? If so, in what ways?

QUESTION

What do you believe Jesus is asking you to do in response to this revelation?

Activate

Facing our own confusion about God's truth can ultimately prepare us to speak truth to others. Determine to study and learn more about any area of deception that you've believed in the past. Look up Scriptures on the topic. Search for books written by trusted authors. Talk with a pastor or trusted spiritual leader to shore up your own understanding of truth in this area.

Challenge

Once you've anchored your faith in the truth of God's Word and sound theology, be willing to share what you have learned with others. If you have believed a lie in the past, you most likely learned it from or were affirmed in it by family, friends, or coworkers. Ask God to give you opportunities to share what you have learned, and then be ready to speak His truth. You can do it!

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

It was normal for Jesus to teach crowds of people, but He taught His smaller group of disciples on a deeper level. In the same way, we can value what Jesus can teach us in our group. But we also want to set aside time to be alone with Him, so He can teach us in a deeper, more individual way. So make time to do the devotions in the Bible Engagement Project app this week. You'll uncover so much more of His truth when He teaches you one-on-one.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Speak Truth

Read [Acts 14:8–18](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about being willing to speak His truth?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: The Lie of Blame

Read [John 9:1–12](#).

We see here that people believed a lie that sickness or disease was always caused by their sin or their parents' sin. But Jesus confronted this lie and reshaped their thinking. He wanted them to see that it was for God's glory that this man had been born blind.

We may at times face great difficulties that aren't caused by anyone's actions. This story reminds us that we shouldn't be quick to judge others based on their circumstances. Instead we should pray for them and ask the Lord to keep our heart tender toward those who are hurting.

QUESTION

Have you ever felt judged by others for something that you couldn't control?

QUESTION

Is there a situation or group of people that you admittedly are quick to judge without knowing the context?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: The Lie of Peer Acceptance

Read [John 9:13–23](#).

The man's parents were afraid of what the Pharisees would do to them if they supported their son's claims that Jesus had healed him. Instead of declaring the truth, they deflected the question to their son.

Unfortunately, we've probably all had times when we were more worried about being accepted by people who treated us poorly than about standing up for God's truth. The reality is that those people probably will never accept us anyway. And yet, we may be tempted to betray or ignore God's truth in the hope that they will.

QUESTION

Have you ever felt betrayed by someone who wasn't willing to stand up for the truth?

Because of our human nature, we can often quickly think of a time when others have wronged us. But we tend to easily forget times when we've been the one on the wrong side of truth.

QUESTION

What's a lie you've been tempted to believe when faced with peer pressure or the desire to be accepted by others?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Set Free from the Lies

Read [John 9:24–34](#).

Unlike his parents, the healed man didn't seem to care what the Pharisees thought or might do to him. So he boldly spoke the truth about what Jesus had done for him without any regard for the social consequences.

QUESTION

Why do you think the man had a different response than his parents'?

In verse [34](#), the Pharisees were indignant and accused the healed man of lecturing them. If you look at what the man said to them in verse [31](#), he was likely quoting back to them some religious teaching that he had learned. To this point, the Pharisees' questions had been focused on trapping the man into denying Jesus. But now they're the ones who had been trapped by their own words. When we tell or promote lies, we just might be setting a trap for ourself.

QUESTION

Have you have been caught in the trap of your own lie?

QUESTION

Looking back now, how much trouble could you have saved yourself by just being truthful from the beginning?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: The Rewards for Truthfulness

Read [Psalm 34:11–22](#).

This psalm contrasts all the benefits for those people who avoid evil and do good with those who do evil and tell lies. Go through this passage and list or underline the benefits you see. Then make another list of, or underline in a different color, the consequences of evil. When we look at the stark contrast between being on the right side of God or being counted as one of His enemies, we can't help but be encouraged to do the right thing even when it's difficult.

QUESTION

Which of the things in these two lists stood out most to you?

QUESTION

Referencing this psalm, write out an encouragement to your future self. Then read it the next time you're tempted to get on the wrong side of the truth.



Live in Community

 Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Be Different

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. ([Romans 12:2](#))

Christians have long understood that we live and walk a fine line. We are to be in the world—all things to all people, as Paul put it—yet not of the world. God's people have always been a chosen people, holy and set apart from the world's ways. To pull it off, to be truly different, means we must each hold fast to the truth, speaking it when needed, all while humbling ourself and faithfully serving others.

Session Overview

Serve Others

Biblical Encounter: James and John Get a Lesson on Greatness ([Matthew 20:20–28](#))

Outcome: Be different by leading through serving others.

So much has been written on leadership. Climbing the ladder of greatness and success is an admirable goal, but it can be a slippery slope. What's the true cost of greatness when it comes to service in the kingdom of God? Jesus was approached by James and John's mother, asking for her sons to be seated next to Jesus in greatness. This bold request from her was met with a highly quotable portion of Scripture. Jesus gave James and John, and each of us, an honest look into what it means to be great in God's kingdom. Our definition of greatness must be different from that of the world around us. Jesus teaches us that true greatness is only achieved by serving others first.

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Engage

QUESTION

Who or what do you consider to be the greatest of all time?

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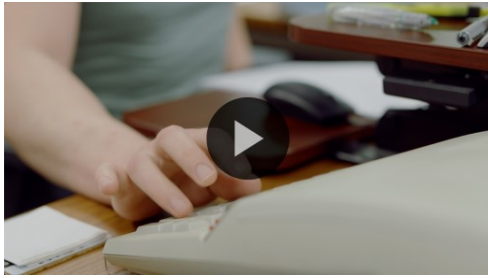
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Who is the GOAT? Maybe you've heard that question and wondered if it was a reference to your favorite farm animal. Actually, it stands for the "Greatest of All Time." The acronym GOAT has been used to label people or things that others love and admire most: favorite athletes, sports teams, singers or music groups, songs, actors, movies, and more. Even things like favorite foods and restaurants are described by GOAT.

We may have an opinion about what it means to be the greatest of all time. We even create expectations for what greatness looks like in our own life. In today's Bible encounter, Jesus painted a very clear picture of what it takes to be the GOAT in God's kingdom. You might be very surprised by His definition!

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Is it easy for you to serve others? Why or why not?



Question

Is it easy for you to serve others? Why or why not?

Consider What the Bible Says

Who is the greatest? How many times am I going to be asked that question? Perhaps that's what Jesus was thinking each time His followers asked Him. People wanted to know what true greatness looked like. But there's a difference between appearing great in the eyes of others and being truly great by God's standards. In today's passage, we'll see that even Jesus' own disciples were confused about what it takes to be great in God's eyes.

Did You Know?

The Gospels tell us that James and John's father, Zebedee, owned a fishing business, and the brothers worked alongside the hired hands ([Mark 1:20](#)). On the Sea of Galilee, fishing was big business. It was not only because of the number of fish that could be caught, but also what was done with the fish after they were caught. Archaeology of the city of Magdala has revealed that the fish were preserved in salt, which was often worth more

than gold in the ancient world. Because of the investment required for this type of family business, James and John appear to have come from wealthy means. This possibly speaks to the reason their mother took a bolder approach to Jesus than one would normally expect of women at that time.

James and John Wanted to Be Great

Read [Matthew 20:17–21](#).

Can you believe the boldness of this mother? Just moments before, Jesus was talking privately with His disciples about what to expect in the days ahead. He had explained the terrible things that were going to happen to Him in Jerusalem, including the torture that He must suffer.

Seemingly without even pausing to acknowledge His pain and suffering, the mother of James and John took this chance to ask Jesus about her sons' future seating arrangements. She didn't ask for courtside seats to their favorite basketball game. She didn't ask to let them sit at the head table of an event. No, she asked for James and John to be seated at Jesus' right and left side in His kingdom!

QUESTION

What do you think the motivation was for her request?

QUESTION

In your opinion, was her request unreasonable? Why or why not?

QUESTION

Were your parents "helpful" like James' and John's mother? In what way?

James and John Misunderstood Greatness

Read [Matthew 20:22–24](#).

James, John, and their mother really had no idea what they were asking. In their minds, being seated to the right and left of Jesus was the ultimate achievement. Maybe James and John were convinced that they had somehow earned those seats.

QUESTION

In your own words, what was James and John's definition of greatness?

The ten other disciples were furious when they heard this selfish request. After all, what qualified James and John to make this request? Were they better disciples? Did Jesus love them more than He loved the others? Did these two men and their mom wholeheartedly believe that they were the greatest disciples of all time? How could they believe that they were worthy of such seats?

QUESTION

If you were one of Jesus' other disciples, how would you have reacted to James and John?

QUESTION

At what moment do you think James and John realized their definition of greatness was wrong?

Jesus Shows Real Greatness

Read [Matthew 20:25–28](#).

Jesus knew that James and John really had no idea what they and their mother were asking for. Their idea of greatness was defined by earthly values and selfish thinking. Jesus, being full of grace, used this opportunity to teach His disciples what true greatness looks like. He told them that seats of honor and authority wouldn't make someone great. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

Jesus' definition of greatness was completely different from anything they had ever heard or seen. Becoming great starts with servanthood. Greatness looks like taking the lowest place, not demanding the seat of honor. Greatness is focusing more on others and less on yourself. It's giving your life away to others through service. Greatness has nothing to do with your title and everything to do with your heart.

QUESTION

How does our world define greatness today?

QUESTION

What might it look like to serve in today's world the way Jesus taught?

QUESTION

How can you actively give your life away?

Reflect

Be different by leading through serving others.

Choosing to follow Jesus is committing to be different. This isn't the kind of different that's based on your hair color, the clothes you wear, or an interesting personality. Being different in Jesus' kingdom is defined by the way you treat and value others. It's choosing to put the needs of others above your own.

Like James and John, maybe you've lived with a misunderstanding of greatness. Perhaps you've focused on having an important title or holding some other honor. But Jesus clearly taught that if you want to be truly great, you must commit to serving others and favor them above yourself.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What is your definition of greatness? How has this Bible encounter impacted that definition?

QUESTION

Think of someone in your life right now who demonstrates Jesus' definition of greatness. Make a list of the qualities that you see in that person that make them great.

QUESTION

What must you give up, change, or start doing immediately in order to live a life of serving others?

Activate

Jesus' words challenged James and John to redefine greatness. From that day forward, James and John would have to be intentional about putting others' needs above their own if they were serious about being leaders. Now that you know what being great looks like, you know what you must do to live it out, too.

Challenge

If you're going to effectively serve others, you must first make yourself aware of the needs that exist. In your journal, mark off three columns. Label the first column "Family," the second column "Church," and the third column "Community." Your community can include everything from your neighborhood, your job, and even your city. Take some time to make a list of all the current needs that exist in each area. You might even consider asking family members, friends, pastors, and coworkers what needs they have.

After you identify the needs in these areas, begin to circle the needs that you could personally meet. Decide over the next thirty days to begin taking the opportunity to serve others by meeting those needs.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

If Jesus' closest disciples needed a lesson on greatness, there's an excellent chance that we do too. This week, you'll have an opportunity to redefine true greatness. You'll likely need to evaluate some of your thoughts and attitudes toward serving. The truth is Jesus wants you to be great. But you might have to take a different approach than you had planned to get there. Lean into the devotions this week. Choose to be different.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: James and John Get a Lesson on Greatness

Read [Matthew 20:20–28](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

Like James and John, what is Jesus saying to you about living differently and serving others first?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Choose True Greatness

Read [Mark 9:33–35](#).

Imagine sitting down to watch the medal ceremonies of the Olympics. But instead of celebrating the gold, silver, and bronze finishers, there is a special podium for every athlete who finished in last place. And as each last place finisher steps onto the podium, the crowd goes crazy with applause. Watching this, wouldn't you be so confused?

The truth is that Jesus asks you and me to choose last place on purpose. Jesus isn't asking us to deny success. He's simply asking us to put the needs of others before our own. He's asking us to put all earthly titles and fame aside and focus on adding value to the people around us. To Him, that's what true greatness looks like. We've truly served His kingdom when we purposefully choose last place.

QUESTION

How would your friends define greatness? Your family? Your coworkers?

QUESTION

What does it mean to choose last place?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Choose Humility over Honor

Read [Philippians 2:3–8](#).

Have you ever stopped to consider the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made for us? He chose to step away from His majestic throne of heaven and step into our broken, chaotic world. He embraced the ordinary and endured rejection. He traded the crown of heaven for a crown of thorns. And as if that wasn't enough, He personally took the punishment of our sins ([Isaiah 53:3–5](#)).

Jesus showed us what true humility looks like. Jesus could have come to earth as a king, but instead He chose to meet us as a servant. He could have been born into royalty, but instead He chose to be born into far less. He wasn't focused on impressing us. He was fully focused on loving us. And the only way to show love like His was by giving His life away through serving.

QUESTION

Today's passage encourages us to "have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had" ([Philippians 2:5](#)). How would you describe Jesus' attitude?

QUESTION

What changes do you have to make in your attitude to be more like Jesus?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Choose Others over Yourself

Read [Romans 12:1–13](#).

Give yourself to God as a living sacrifice—have you ever been presented with such an intense challenge? That's an incredible description of someone choosing to put others first.

Unfortunately, choosing others over yourself is not very common in our world. That's why today's passage reminds us to not only be transformed by God, but to change the way we think ([Romans 12:2](#)). If we don't change our thinking, we will continue to think and act selfishly. We will focus more on what we can get and less on what we can give. Choosing others over yourself isn't easy. It's a daily sacrifice.

QUESTION

What does it mean to be a “living sacrifice”?

QUESTION

What gifts and abilities has God given you to serve others?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Choose to Be Different

Read [1 Peter 2:9–12](#).

Jesus calls His followers to be different ([Matthew 20:26](#)). He doesn't want us to blend into the world. Instead, He wants our love to stand out. It's important to remember that God has set us apart from the world. He has chosen us to put His love on display. We show the world His love by loving the same way that He has loved us—selflessly and unconditionally. When we choose to lead through serving, we are pointing others to God and His wonderful light. By serving our world we will help meet both physical and spiritual needs.

QUESTION

Who has impacted your life the most through serving?

QUESTION

Who could you impact the most today through serving?



Live in Community



Volume Overview

Get Going

[Jesus] said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” ([John 20:21](#))

The gift of the Holy Spirit was sent so that we might have power—power to go and make disciples. Some go to the farthest corners of the globe. Some only cross the

street in front of their house. Still, God’s people always go. They go to work, school, grocery stores, kids’ soccer games, and family reunions. And wherever they go, they take their witness of Jesus with them. True believers live going and carrying out His mission.

Session Overview

Let Go

Biblical Encounter: The First Disciples Leave Everything ([Luke 5:1–11](#))

Outcome: Choose Jesus’ mission over your current situation.

You may know Peter as one of Jesus’ disciples. You may have even heard him referred to as St. Peter. But Peter’s life before he met Jesus was quite different. When Jesus engaged with him, Peter’s life went in a completely different direction. This is the story for us as believers too. When we stop living for ourself and begin living for Christ, we learn to let go of former things and our purpose changes. We now serve at His pleasure. Our purpose requires intentional action and a focus on sharing the good news of Jesus with others.

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Engage

QUESTION

What’s the most extreme, positive change you’ve ever seen in someone’s life or circumstances?

Big life changes can be exciting, inspiring, and even entertaining, especially as we observe them in people we know. There's always a story to discover as we watch a person's circumstances, behavior, or health take a wild or unexpected turn. Sometimes in the Bible, we see a complete shift in a person on the heart level—someone who was going a completely different direction until God interrupted them. Peter's story in [Luke 5](#) is one example of this.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: What might you need to let go of to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?



QUESTION

What might you need to let go of to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?

Consider What the Bible Says

Today's encounter happened early in Jesus' ministry. He had been traveling around the region of Galilee, teaching and preaching. Word about Him was spreading across the land and crowds were beginning to gather. In [Luke 5:1](#), the crowds were pressing close to hear His words. No modern amplifiers or microphones existed in that day, so Jesus had to project His voice over a large area. One way to do this was to teach from a boat on the water so the crowds could both see and hear Him. It seems that using this specific boat had a greater purpose.

Did You Know?

Although not the norm for the ancient world, fishing in the Sea of Galilee was an incredibly prosperous industry. Both archaeology and documentation tell us that fish from the lake were brought to the city of Magdala (also known as Taricheae) where they were salted for preservation and shipped to Jews throughout the Roman world. The salt used was an incredibly valuable resource, at times even serving as a form of currency in the Roman Empire. The actions of some of Jesus' followers to leave the lucrative fishing profession speaks highly of their desire to follow Him.

Peter Let Go

Read [Luke 5:1–3](#).

We don't know what Peter (also known as Simon) was thinking or feeling, but he must have been exhausted. He had been fishing all night. Maybe he was almost finished cleaning his nets and was eager to go home. In spite of the situation, something made Peter say yes to letting Jesus use his boat to teach the crowds from. Maybe Peter was one of the members of the crowd who was also having trouble hearing Jesus teach. Maybe he was honored to help Jesus' ministry. We don't know exactly what prompted Peter to yield to this simple request, but we do know that Peter let go of his resources and said yes to Jesus.

QUESTION

How might Peter's life have turned out differently if he had denied Jesus' request to use his boat?

QUESTION

Do you think Peter said yes to Jesus willingly or do you think he hesitated?

Peter Took a Risk

Read [Luke 5:4–7](#).

In first-century Israel, fishermen caught fish from their boats using large nets. They often worked at night so the nets weren't as visible to the fish. We can only imagine how exhausted and defeated Peter and his partners were after catching nothing that night. Then they had to use more energy on the unpleasant task of cleaning their nets of debris instead of fish. They had hoped for a good catch to reward their hours of tough manual labor, but they had nothing to show for it. Since they were likely tired and disappointed, trusting the word of this nonfisherman Teacher must have seemed like a risk. Even though he doubted that he would catch any fish, Peter agreed to go back out and try again.

QUESTION

How would you have responded to Jesus if He'd asked you to go back out and fish some more?

QUESTION

What do you think pushed Peter to say yes to Jesus' command to go back out to fish?

When Peter pushed his boat into the water to help Jesus, it's likely that he didn't expect anything in return. But catching fish wasn't Jesus' only purpose. Sure, Jesus wanted to meet a need in Peter's life. But Jesus had so much more in mind for Peter. When Jesus tells us to give things up for Him, He often has something better for us in return. But first, we have to let go and take the risk to trust Him.

Peter Was Awestruck

Read [Luke 5:8–9](#).

After this miraculous catch of fish, Peter became painfully aware of his sinful nature. He knew he was in the presence of Someone so mighty and holy that He could cause such a turn of events. Peter was awestruck by what Jesus had done for him.

QUESTION

If you were Peter, what would have been the most amazing thing to you about this turn of events?

QUESTION

Why do you think Peter responded to Jesus' miracle with such a great realization of his sin?

Jesus Called Peter

Read [Luke 5:10–11](#).

Peter must have been completely shocked by this revelation from Jesus. Peter had none of the typical qualifications of someone that a teacher like Jesus might invite to follow Him. Peter was a fisherman, not a scholar! But Jesus told Peter not to be afraid because He now had a new purpose for Peter's life: to fish for people instead of fish! Amazingly, Peter immediately left everything behind and began to follow Jesus.

QUESTION

Do you think Peter understood what Jesus meant by "fish for people"? Why or why not?

QUESTION

What do you think compelled Peter to leave things behind to follow Jesus?

QUESTION

What's something Jesus has directed you to give up? Did you follow through quickly, slowly, or not at all?

Peter on Mission

It's striking that Peter was quick to leave the fishing trade he knew well to follow Jesus. We don't know for sure what motivated Peter. But he certainly had a new mission. He had to make some huge shifts in his life to fulfill the mission Jesus had for him. This required his time, energy, and resources to take on a new purpose.

QUESTION

List some things you imagine Peter may have left behind in order to follow Jesus.

QUESTION

What do you think Peter's friends and family thought of this major life-shift?

QUESTION

What shifts have you made in your life to fulfill God's purposes for you?

Reflect

Choose Jesus' mission over your current situation.

Peter received a very specific call from Jesus: to be a fisher of people. This was a phrase Peter could relate to based on his life experience. Jesus wanted Peter to gather people to Him, so they would be able to hear about His love and forgiveness. But to fulfill this call, Peter had to go! He needed to learn what he could from Jesus, give his time and resources, and then take action.

Jesus' call for us to follow Him can often feel extreme. He wants and deserves *all* of our life—not just bits and pieces or even just the biggest piece. Perhaps you, like Peter, have been awestruck by Jesus. Maybe He's done something extreme or life altering for you. Maybe you've been awestruck by the power of His sacrifice on the Cross for your sins. But have you taken that next step? Like Peter, have you answered the call of Jesus to follow Him, to be on mission with Him to "fish for people?"

To love God is to obey Him ([1 John 5:3](#)). Peter had to let go of the familiar, the steady and reliable, and even cultural conventions in order to follow Jesus. Jesus' call requires your action, intention, and purpose. It will require your time, energy, and resources. It may require you to leave some things behind. But what Jesus gives in return is so much more than we can ever give Him.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What in Peter's story do you relate to the most?

QUESTION

What in your life do you need to let go of to follow Jesus and His purpose for you?

QUESTION

How can you partner with Jesus in your daily life to connect people to Him?

Activate

Understanding Jesus' mission and purposes for our life is critical to helping us know how to live for Him. He wants all of us: our affections, our time, our resources, our giftings and abilities. He also wants us to be awestruck by Him and by what He is doing in and through our life. Does your heart fully belong to Him? Is there anything you need to give up in order to fully follow Him?

Challenge

If the Holy Spirit brought anything to mind that you need to change or give up in order to fully follow Jesus and His mission to reach people, write it down. Pray over it and offer it to Jesus. Trust Him to fill the gap and give you what you need. Allow Him to equip you with His resources to fulfill His purposes.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Jesus' mission requires us to let go of our own agenda and offer our whole life to His purposes. We always want to listen to Him through His Word, both in community and individually. The personal devotions that follow have been provided to help you further explore what it means to let go and choose to follow Jesus.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: The First Disciples Leave Everything

Read [Luke 5:1–11](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about choosing Jesus' mission over your current situation?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Letting Go

Read [Romans 12:1–5](#).

Just as Peter had to let go of things to follow Jesus, so do we. Letting go of the parts of our life that do not please God is another way we worship Him. We let go of our selfish thoughts. We give up the idea that we can do it better or that we're in control. Instead, God wants us to embrace who He is and remember all He has done for us. Then we can respond to Him in awe and live a life full of worship, offering our whole self as a sacrifice to Him.

QUESTION

How have you been awestruck by God in your faith journey? How about in this past week?

QUESTION

What should our response be to what God has done for us? Does your life reflect that response to Him?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Jesus Calls Us to Go

Read [Matthew 28:16–20](#).

The Great Commission in [Matthew 28](#) is similar to Peter’s call to fish for men. Jesus gave instructions for all of us to make disciples of all nations and to teach them how to obey Him. We can’t just sit around and wait for that to happen. We must be intentional and actively go!

QUESTION

How is God specifically calling you to go—to a neighbor, coworker, or a family member? Perhaps on a short-term missions trip? Something else?

QUESTION

God’s heart is for all the nations to know Him! How are you partnering with His heart for missions?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Get Going on His Mission

Read [Acts 1:1–8](#).

Peter soaked in the teachings and life of Jesus in such a personal way. He heard the Great Commission straight from Jesus’ mouth. It’s exciting to read about all the ways God used Peter to fulfill His calling and purpose after Jesus returned to heaven. The Book of Acts highlights some of those events, including Peter’s preaching to crowds.

Peter couldn’t have fulfilled his mission without the power of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus went back to heaven, He gave the Holy Spirit in a new way. Jesus promised that we would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us in order to give us boldness in sharing Christ with others.

QUESTION

How do you feel knowing that Jesus promised His Holy Spirit to help you be His witness?

QUESTION

How has the Holy Spirit helped you with boldness in past situations?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Going with His Presence

Read [John 14:23–27](#).

Along with Jesus' call for us to go make disciples and the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, we're given this powerful truth: Jesus' presence is with us wherever we go! Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us all we need to know and remind us of the things Jesus had said. In His presence, we can have peace of mind to help us not fear. As we go on mission with Him, we can be sure that He is with us. We can go with His presence!

QUESTION

Describe what God's presence feels like to you.

QUESTION

How does the knowledge of God's presence help you to fulfill His purposes for your life?



Live in Community



Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Get Going

[Jesus] said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” ([John 20:21](#))

The gift of the Holy Spirit was sent so that we might have power—power to go and make disciples. Some go to the farthest corners of the globe. Some only cross the street in front of their house. Still, God’s people always go. They go to work, school, grocery stores, kids’ soccer games, and family reunions. And wherever they go, they take their witness of Jesus with them. True believers live going and carrying out His mission.

Session Overview

Embrace Your Role

Biblical Encounter: John the Baptist Points to Jesus ([John 1:19–34](#))

Outcome: Embrace your role in Jesus’ mission.

In today’s session, we’ll see that we all have a part to play in the mission of Jesus. The Holy Spirit’s appearance confirmed to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah. Because of John’s willingness to hear and obey God, he got to baptize Jesus in water! I think we can agree that’s a pretty special role. John the Baptist understood his part in Jesus’ mission. His job was to point to Jesus—not to be the Messiah. You and I have a part in Jesus’ mission as well. Jesus is telling us all to point others to Him in some way. Each of us has a unique purpose just as John did.

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Engage

QUESTION

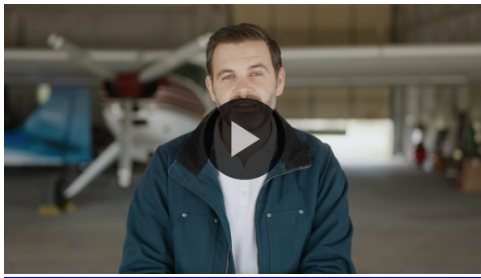
When have you wished that you could switch roles with someone else?

Sometimes we can be uncomfortable or dissatisfied with where we are in life. We might desire our boss's job. Or perhaps we have an unfulfilled dream, wishing we had more or could do more. We often see our role as small and someone else's as more important. That thinking is not a path that leads to fulfillment, but we often get caught by it anyway.

Why is it so hard to accept that we might be better suited for our current role rather than one we think is more meaningful? That's not to say we shouldn't want to grow or advance. But how often does the desire for what others have take us on unnecessary and costly detours away from where God wants to lead us? Learning to embrace our role is crucial to fulfilling it the way God wants us to.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: When have you felt like you found your place in God's work?



QUESTION

When have you felt like you found your place in God's work?

Consider What the Bible Says

John the Baptist's ministry mostly took place near the Jordan River in the east part of Israel. His message of repentance caught fire with people, and crowds quickly gathered.

But with an eye on any disruption to their power, the religious leaders in Jerusalem sent a group to ask John the Baptist who he was. John told them he wasn't a prophet who had returned to the people of Israel. He also wasn't the Messiah they longed for. He had been sent by God to point the way to the One that God was sending to save them. John clearly knew his role in Jesus' mission. Let's begin by looking at the last part of this encounter where John testified about who Jesus really was.

Did You Know?

In the New Testament period, ritual immersion in water (the predecessor to water baptism as we know it) was not an action to be completed only once. Instead, the ritual

was repeated often, even daily, due to the commands in the Torah for purity. Although most Jews in the land of Israel did not enter the temple daily, the overarching mindset of the people was a desire to be ritually pure whenever possible. As a result, most Jewish settlements in the land of Israel had baptismal tanks, known as *mikvaot* (plural). And some of the wealthiest people had their very own *mikvah* (singular) inside their homes. What made John's baptism unique was that it focused not only on ritual purity, but also included personal repentance.

God Spoke to John

Read [John 1:32–34](#).

How did John the Baptist know he was supposed to point to the Messiah? His father, Zechariah, had been a priest. John would have been expected to follow in his father's footsteps. But God had a different plan for John even before he was born.

As an adult, God directed John and he obeyed. He spent many years in the wilderness, separated from most of society. In that separation, God called him to share a message that many would accept, but powerful leaders would scorn. It wasn't an easy assignment. It didn't earn John money or fame in his own time. But he had a unique and important role in Jesus' mission.

QUESTION

If you had planned all your life to have a specific job or career, but God called you to a very different one, how do you think you would respond?

QUESTION

Like John the Baptist, how can we be prepared to respond to God's leading through His Holy Spirit to do the unexpected in our own life?

Now let's look at what happened before John's primary role in Jesus' mission was fulfilled.

John Chose to Stay the Course

Read [John 1:19–28](#).

When the religious leaders came from Jerusalem to talk to John the Baptist, they doubted his message and authority. They were wary of his activity. So they came to investigate John's message.

Then John had a choice: he could be intimidated by the questions of those who had earthly power or he could continue to obey the One who has all power. When we state it that way, the direction we should go seems obvious. But in real time, the decision is always more difficult. We may have external forces and voices questioning our purpose just as John did. These distractions attempt to discourage us from the mission of Jesus.

QUESTION

How do you think John managed to fulfill his mission despite being questioned by religious leaders?

QUESTION

How might John's unbending response to the religious leaders have strengthened or weakened his message? How do you think it impacted the crowds he was preaching to?

John Declared Jesus as Savior

Read [John 1:29–31](#).

When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River ([Matthew 3:13–17](#)), the moment was powerful for both of them. That experience strengthened John's confidence and boldness to tell others about Jesus being the Savior. It was a message the religious leaders likely worried about.

Standing up to leaders put John's life at risk, but he didn't back down. This is the power of God's voice at work. As He speaks to us through His Spirit and Word, we can declare Jesus with the boldness John did. When our hearts are truly changed, we become determined to speak up about what we believe. The message of Jesus must be shared no matter the risk or cost to us personally.

QUESTION

John the Baptist's powerful encounter with God surely sustained him in times of powerful opposition. How have your encounters with God done the same for you?

QUESTION

Like John, how can we proclaim the message of Jesus when those in power are opposed to us?

Reflect

Embrace your role in Jesus' mission.

Everyone has a role to play in the mission of Jesus. John the Baptist's was unique, but so is our role. We can't get distracted by the role others want us to play. The religious leaders' questioning offered John an opportunity to claim to be someone God didn't call him to be. Yet John remained faithful to his role.

We also can't wish we had someone else's role. John wasn't jealous of Jesus and didn't try to keep the crowds for himself. Instead, John wholeheartedly embraced the role God uniquely created him for.

Will we be able to accept the role God has for us in His mission, even when pressure mounts against us? What if our family wants something else for us? What if our boss or coworkers are uncomfortable with our message of Jesus and His love? The same God who transformed John and emboldened him is available to us as well. With His help, we can embrace our role in Jesus' mission and make the impact He has planned for us.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

How does John's encounter with Jesus—and the life he lived in light of it—cause you to rethink how you've lived out Jesus' impact on you?

QUESTION

What areas of your life need attention so you can boldly proclaim the message of Jesus and His salvation as John did?

QUESTION

How do you feel the Holy Spirit is leading you to embrace your role and proclaim the message of Jesus to those around you?

Activate

We all have a part to play. The mission of Jesus is the greatest cause in history and you have a role! We don't discover it by sitting back or watching from the stands. We have to get going and join the action. The same God who guided the life of John the Baptist still leads us today. How is He leading you?

Challenge

Find a way you can serve your church or community and share the love of Jesus. Are you interested in a certain area of ministry but hesitate to get involved? Step up and serve! Seek the Holy Spirit's direction for your life. *We all* have a role to play. It might be singing on the worship team, serving in kids ministry, or cleaning up behind the scenes. But one thing is sure—the mission of Jesus needs *you!*

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

The message and mission of Jesus' love is too important for us to stand back. Every one of us is uniquely gifted and called. No one else can serve Jesus like you or for you. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you. Even if your next step is costly or risky, like John's was, God's Spirit is enough to help you overcome fears that might dissuade you. Personal devotions have been provided to help you explore this further and take the next steps.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: John the Baptist Points to Jesus

Read [John 1:19–34](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about embracing your role in His mission?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Don't Compare Roles

Read [John 21:18–22](#).

Jesus delivered some difficult news to Peter about the cost of following Him: Peter would be martyred for his faith. Peter's immediate response was to wonder about the fate of another disciple.

But not everyone's faith journey ends the same. Some, like Peter's, may end with the ultimate sacrifice. Another's journey may end in peace. It's not up to us to decide. Part of following Jesus faithfully is to truly turn over control to Him.

QUESTION

Why do you think Peter wanted to know if the other disciple would also be martyred for following Jesus?

QUESTION

How have you been tempted to compare your journey of following Jesus with that of someone else? How might this keep you from being fully obedient?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: The Inner Circle

Read [Matthew 17:1-6](#).

Only Peter, James, and John were asked to go to the top of the mountain with Jesus. Do you wonder what it must have been like for the remaining nine disciples who were left behind? Circumstances like these can be fertile ground for the sin of comparison and jealousy. It's easy to look at what others have and let that impact our sense of self-worth.

Why did those three get to go with Jesus? Why didn't I get chosen? We can imagine these questions bouncing around in the other disciples' minds all too easily. Maybe that's because we'd ask those same questions. In those moments, we need to remember we all have a part to play in Jesus' mission. We may miss out on some moments, but that doesn't mean our role isn't valuable.

QUESTION

Why is comparison with others a dangerous habit for followers of Jesus?

QUESTION

What kinds of problems can arise in our life if we give in to the temptation to compare our role in Jesus' mission to that of someone else?

QUESTION

What can you do to guard your heart against the sin of comparison and the discord it can bring within the family of God?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Waiting Tables

Read [Acts 6:1–7](#).

The Early Church grew rapidly as many came to faith in Jesus. That growth created a logjam of sorts, and some people were feeling underserved. The apostles couldn't handle their responsibilities and also manage the logistics of feeding certain members of the growing community. So, they chose people who could help to serve others by distributing food.

The people chosen for this role weren't less than other leaders within God's family. How do we know? Look no further than what the Bible says of Stephen. He was a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." The role we are called to doesn't define our value to God. What matters to Him is our faithfulness and our humble attitude that serves others well. Being filled with Holy Spirit helps us with both of these qualities.

QUESTION

John the Baptist's role was to prepare the way for Jesus. Others preach, wait tables, and fill many other roles. Why is it so important that each of us discover where we fit within Jesus' mission?

QUESTION

What steps can you take to further discover the gifts God has given you and find the place where you can serve Jesus most effectively?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Faithful to the End

Read [Acts 7:54–60](#).

When we commit to follow God, we never know how He will use us. When Stephen was one of the people chosen to distribute food, it's unlikely anyone would have guessed he would also be asked to give his life for Jesus as a martyr. No one predicted that he would preach a sermon that would become an entire chapter in the Bible and be read by billions of people for many centuries.

Like John the Baptist, our job is to be faithful where we are called. God has direction for each of us. Stephen was faithful to follow His direction. God will guide us as well.

QUESTION

How does Stephen's story help you see the importance of being filled with the Spirit as you embrace your role in Jesus' mission?

QUESTION

What are some practical ways you can make sure you are living in the power of God's Spirit every day?



Live in Community

 Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Get Going

[Jesus] said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” ([John 20:21](#))

The gift of the Holy Spirit was sent so that we might have power—power to go and make disciples. Some go to the farthest corners of the globe. Some only cross the street

in front of their house. Still, God’s people always go. They go to work, school, grocery stores, kids’ soccer games, and family reunions. And wherever they go, they take their witness of Jesus with them. True believers live going and carrying out His mission.

Session Overview

Go Forth

Biblical Encounter: The Disciples Choose to Go ([Luke 10:1–20](#))

Outcome: Move in faith and community into Jesus’ mission.

In this session, we’ll look at Jesus’ call to serve in His mission. Following His call was first the privilege of Jesus’ closest followers, His twelve disciples ([Luke 9:1–6](#).) Then Jesus sent out a larger group of seventy-two followers. Their willingness to go and minister to people, not knowing how they would be received, is a model for us as we follow Jesus today. We have the gospel to share. And even though we aren’t in charge of the results, we are responsible to share it with a waiting world.

First time leading Live for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](#).

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit:

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Engage

QUESTION

If you were assigning a group project at home or at school, what guidelines would you give to the team members?

We've probably all been a part of a group project at some point. Think about how well or how poorly your group worked together. Would others say you took more of an active part in the group or mostly sat and watched the others work?

Jesus doesn't want anyone to sit on the sidelines when it comes to serving Him. In the passage we'll look at today, Jesus told His disciples to pray that God would raise up workers for the harvest. Then He immediately commissioned them to be the answer to that very prayer. But He didn't send them out to serve alone. He gave clear guidelines about how they should minister together.

Jesus didn't leave them with any illusions. Despite the message of hope for the world, not everyone the disciples met would be happy when Jesus' followers came to town. Still His followers stepped out in faith to share His love with a world that was desperately in need. This was and is the mission of every follower of Jesus.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to these questions: Who is someone you have partnered with to serve others? How was it beneficial to serve together?



QUESTION

Who is someone you have partnered with to serve others? How was it beneficial to serve together?

Consider What the Bible Says

Until now, most of Jesus' followers had spent their time watching and learning as He ministered to people. Now the time had come for a large group of them to go out in pairs and do what they'd seen Jesus doing. He had already sent out the twelve disciples to minister in villages, telling them

to stay where they were invited. (See [Luke 9:1–6](#).) Now Jesus was preparing to send out this larger group of His followers.

Did You Know?

Places for travelers to stay were quite common in Jesus' time because all Jewish men were supposed to make a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year. The most common form of lodging was a *kataluma*, an additional room built onto an individual's house. Inns or hotels known as a *pandechion* were also established businesses in the first century. This lodging was referenced by Jesus in the story of the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:34](#)). Inscriptions have also revealed that even synagogues served as guesthouses when needed.

Go Forth Together

Read [Luke 10:1–4](#).

Following Jesus has never been a spectator sport. We sometimes experience seasons for stepping back to grow and learn. But those seasons are followed by seasons of going out into a hurting world to share the love and hope only Jesus can give. We won't know how we'll be received by the world. What we do know is that we are called to go. And thankfully Jesus doesn't expect us to serve alone.

QUESTION

Have you ever gone out with others to share Jesus? If so, what was that like?

QUESTION

How do you think the people Jesus chose for this mission felt when He sent them out to minister likely for the first time without Him?

Go with Peace

Read [Luke 10:5–7](#).

Jesus commanded His disciples to speak peace over the households where they stayed as they traveled. Their job was to obey and offer the message of hope. How people received them was out of their control. Jesus didn't call His followers to persuade everyone to agree with them. They were sent to offer peace, blessings, and hope to be a part of God's kingdom. The rest was up to the choice of those who heard the message. We can become confused about our job of proclaiming, thinking we have to coax or beg others to accept the gospel of salvation.

We can't control how others receive our message, yet we still must share it. Also, our proclamation doesn't control when or how the Holy Spirit convicts. Jesus knew we would struggle with this, and He made it clear to His followers that not everyone would receive Him or the message we proclaim about Him.

QUESTION

Why do you think the disciples were willing to go minister to people without even knowing how it would turn out?

QUESTION

How do you think this step of going out in faith changed or impacted the disciples' relationship with Jesus?

Go with Healing

Read [Luke 10:8–15](#).

Wherever the mission of Jesus is being accomplished, the supernatural often follows. Jesus seemed to tell His followers to heal the sick as normally as if He were asking them to take out the trash. Then Jesus reemphasized the point He had already made: Not everyone would receive the message of hope His disciples were offering. That also meant not everyone who needed healing would be healed.

Our mission is to go and share regardless of people's response. We can't be defined by how others respond to the gospel message. If they refuse it, we didn't fail. They just didn't receive it. Our role is to follow the commands of Jesus while operating in the spirit of Jesus. Like these first followers, we are to offer peace, pray for the sick, and love the lost. God is in charge of the outcome.

QUESTION

How can we be workers for Jesus without letting ourselves become defined by the results of our efforts?

QUESTION

If you had to "wipe even the dust" from your feet as you go, how well do you think you would have handled the rejection?

Go with Confidence

Read [Luke 10:16–20](#).

Not knowing the results of our efforts should *never* deter us from going to all the world with the gospel. Jesus replied to these excited disciples in [Luke 10](#) with a boost of confidence, reminding them that He had already seen Satan fall from heaven in defeat. Ultimately, the battle is already won. We can walk in boldness knowing God's Spirit is with us and Jesus has already defeated both Satan and sin. So, even if we first do not seem to succeed, we can never underestimate the spiritual victory happening all around us.

QUESTION

How do you think seeing people healed and delivered through their own ministry impacted the disciples?

QUESTION

What are the benefits of having a ministry partner to share these experiences with?

QUESTION

Who are some people in your life who need the peace and healing Jesus is calling us to offer?

Reflect

Move in faith and community into Jesus' mission.

Maybe you've partnered in ministry with others or shared the gospel with neighbors, family members, or friends. But some didn't accept the hope and peace that Jesus offers. It can be a difficult tension to manage in our relationship with Jesus and our desire to keep serving with others. We can begin to wonder why things aren't going better if we're obeying Jesus' call to go. After all, Jesus said the harvest was ready to be reaped, didn't He?

The harvest is ready, and people will respond to the gospel. But ultimately, we can't force anyone to receive the hope we've found in Jesus. That's not our calling. The question is, will we continue to go and share the love of Jesus even if we're rejected and hated by others?

Jesus didn't offer His followers an easy path. He offered them the right path and the opportunity to minister together. He's doing the same for us today. He's calling us to follow Him on a journey out into a hurting world to people who won't always be glad we came. Our job, like the original disciples' job, is to go anyway and faithfully share Jesus with those around us.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Question

Who is the Holy Spirit calling you to go to and share the gospel with?

QUESTION

What can you learn from Jesus' desire for you to partner with others as you serve Him?

QUESTION

How should the truth that Jesus has ultimately defeated Satan impact your willingness to go out into the world?

Activate

Jesus makes it clear in the Gospels that it's time to go out to the world. A harvest is waiting, and Jesus has called us to be the workers. He didn't leave any room for confusion. Our job is to go into all the world and share His gospel ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

This week ask someone to partner with you in ministry. Together choose someone in your neighborhood or community who needs the hope Jesus offers. Think of a way to show Jesus' love to them. Our God is creative, and we can be too! What can you do that will not only allow them to hear about Jesus, but will also help them to experience His love through your kindness or compassion? Could you take them some food, or offer to help them with a project around their home? Don't underestimate the small acts of love we can bring to someone else's life.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Jesus is calling us to go. That will require some fuel for the trip. So, we've added some personal devotions to help you further think and pray through what we've learned today.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: The Disciples Choose to Go

Read [Luke 10:1–20](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is Jesus saying to you about living out His mission through serving with others?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: The Spirit's Voice

Read [Acts 8:26–40](#).

Jesus has clearly called us to go forth. But sometimes we can feel like we don't know exactly who we're supposed to go to first. This story helps us see that we don't need to look any further than the person right in front of us. We don't always have to go across an ocean to find someone in need of Jesus. We can just go across the street. The key is first doing what Philip did: Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit to go and minister to someone. Then follow His leading.

QUESTION

Why do we often miss the opportunities right in front of us to minister to people?

QUESTION

How can you better tune in to the voice of the Holy Spirit, so you can clearly hear Him leading you to those who are in need?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Trusting through Trouble

Read [John 16:28–33](#).

Jesus doesn't promise us a life free from trouble. In fact, He guarantees the exact opposite. We can wish it were the reverse, but trusting Jesus means we choose to believe His ways are higher than ours ([Isaiah 55:8–9](#)). We will sometimes experience trouble as we share the love of Jesus with a broken world. But as we saw in [Luke 10](#), Jesus has already seen Satan fall in defeat. That's a truth we can stand on as we boldly proclaim the message of Jesus.

QUESTION

What is your initial reaction to hearing Jesus promise us that we will have trouble in our life?

QUESTION

How does the truth of Jesus' ultimate victory impact you in the face of these troubles?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: We're Not Alone

Read [Matthew 28:16–20](#).

As we go out into the world to tell about Jesus, we have a promise that is powerful enough to see us through. As we know, it's not a guarantee of a life free from trouble. It's a promise that Jesus will be with us. Think about that for a moment. He has guaranteed we will not be alone. As we are all called to the Great Commission in these verses, we can depend on each other as we all depend on Him. Jesus' presence is with all those who share in His mission through the Holy Spirit. We can all find rest in the fact that the One who is with us is the One who is in charge of the world (verse [18](#)).

QUESTION

Have you felt alone at times as a follower of Jesus? How does this promise make you feel?

QUESTION

What are some practical ways you can work with other believers to fulfill the Great Commission?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Worth the Cost

Read [John 15:18–25](#).

To embrace the mission of Jesus is to embrace the life of Jesus. He was hated. He suffered. But He knew it was worth the cost. He did it all so we could experience His love. Now as His followers, we must step out in faith together to do what He did—the way He did it. Like Jesus, we will all pay a cost too. People will hate us because of the gospel, but Jesus reminds us that this makes us like Him because the world hated Him first. The cost may be great, but the reward is even greater.

QUESTION

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus told us we will be hated and persecuted as He was?

QUESTION

How might sharing in Jesus' suffering draw you even closer to Him?



Live in Community



Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Get Going

[Jesus] said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” ([John 20:21](#))

The gift of the Holy Spirit was sent so that we might have power—power to go and make disciples. Some go to the farthest corners of the globe. Some only cross the street

in front of their house. Still, God’s people always go. They go to work, school, grocery stores, kids’ soccer games, and family reunions. And wherever they go, they take their witness of Jesus with them. True believers live going and carrying out His mission.

Session Overview

Share the News

Biblical Encounter: Matthew Follows Jesus ([Matthew 9:9–13](#))

Outcome: Serve Jesus’ mission by sharing His good news with those who need to hear.

In this session, we will look at how Matthew the tax collector immediately followed Jesus when Jesus called him. This calling resulted in Matthew inviting his friends to meet Jesus. This should always be the case: Following Jesus must result in sharing Jesus. We must get going by inviting the people we know to meet the Jesus we know!

First time leading Live for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](#).

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Engage

QUESTION

What is something great you’ve experienced that you were excited to tell others about?

We share what is rare. We share what is powerful. We share what is beautiful. For example, many of us drive around in cars every single day. But do you ever blurt out excitedly, “Wow! Look at that old junker. What a great car!” Probably not. Instead, people sing praises and turn heads to

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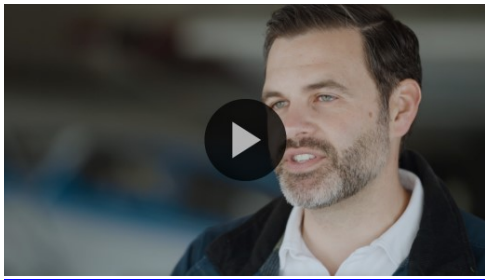
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look at valuable and rarely seen cars like a Tesla, Mercedes, or Lamborghini, to name a few. Similarly we talk willingly about football scores. We share joyfully about movies that made us laugh or cry. In all these instances, we're like evangelists, sharing good news about something we love and appreciate.

The preface to sharing news of any kind is for something—or Someone—to capture our attention and our heart. That seems to be what happened to Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples. Matthew experienced the gift of Jesus' willingness to connect with people the rest of the religious world would avoid or cast aside. This inspired Matthew to tell people what he knew about the Jesus he had met. He wanted to see Jesus change their lives too.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to these questions: What's a simple way you can share the good news of Jesus? Who is someone in your life who needs to hear it?



QUESTION

What's a simple way you can share the good news of Jesus? Who is someone in your life who needs to hear it?

Consider What the Bible Says

Matthew was a Jew, but his job was to gather taxes for the Roman government. This meant that Matthew took money from his own people in Israel, then gave it to another nation who ruled them. In those days, many tax collectors took even more money than the government required, so they could keep extra for themselves.

With a job like that, many viewed him as a sellout and a cheat. While Matthew's wallet might have grown, his standing in the town would have shrunk. Matthew was not accepted by many in his own country. He gained worldly success with his job, but he lost something important. That is until he met Jesus.

Did You Know?

In New Testament-era Israel, a person who taught disciples was called a *rabbi*. Having disciples was considered no small feat due to the sacrifice disciples were required to make. Ancient Jewish literature tells us that rabbis would often only work half a day in order to spend the remainder of the day pouring into their followers. This often resulted in a life of poverty due to their love of teaching God's Word to others. Their disciples often followed this same pattern of foregoing a significant portion of their potential wages in order to study under their teacher.

Matthew Responds to Jesus

Read [Matthew 9:9](#).

Jesus' shocking invitation is matched by Matthew's shocking reaction. He immediately left his job to follow Jesus! It makes one wonder, *why?* It's possible that Matthew had heard about Jesus before this moment. While that's uncertain, we know from the passage that Jesus took a step in Matthew's direction. He literally showed up at Matthew's work during a time where people were more likely to avoid tax collectors than approach them. This reveals the great length Jesus would go to reach people. This idea will come up again by the end of today's Bible passage.

The Matthew in this story is also the author of the Gospel bearing his name. He could have cleaned up his story if he wanted. Matthew could have omitted his profession, or the less-than-reputable friends he mentioned later. But he didn't. One has to wonder if Jesus' acceptance of Matthew in spite of his situation inspired Matthew to lay bare his honest story as a testimony of the character of Jesus.

QUESTION

Why do you think Matthew responded to Jesus so quickly?

QUESTION

If you had been Matthew's friend, what would you have thought about what Matthew did that day?

QUESTION

Are you more likely to candidly share or censor your testimony? Why?

Matthew Invites His Friends to Meet Jesus

Read [Matthew 9:10](#).

Matthew didn't waste any time sharing about Jesus. Matthew invited Jesus and His disciples over for dinner so Jesus could meet his friends. Matthew knew Jesus was different from his usual crowd. Some of his friends were tax collectors, and some were likely greedy. Jesus was unselfish. Other friends were sinners. Jesus was holy.

We tend to split our life into the parts we will give to Jesus and the parts we won't. But Matthew blended the two by having Jesus meet his nonspiritual friends. Matthew was not ashamed to introduce his friends to Jesus. When you love someone, you include them in your entire life, not just part of it. You share what you've been given, what's important to you. This means inviting the people you know to meet the Jesus you know!

QUESTION

How have you separated your life into spiritual and nonspiritual parts? What can you do to let Jesus be included in all the parts of your life?

QUESTION

What about Matthew's experience with Jesus challenges you to change something in your life?

Jesus Points Out His Priorities

Read [Matthew 9:11–12](#).

The Pharisees were offended that Jesus had dinner with Matthew, other tax collectors, and sinners. But Jesus rebuked the religious leaders by saying sick people need doctors. Could this be why Matthew quickly followed Jesus? Did he know his life was troubled and Jesus was the solution? Jesus could make him and others whole. Matthew likely knew his friends' lives were broken too and wanted Jesus to make them whole. Before we share the news of Jesus, it's helpful to be confident that Jesus can make broken lives whole again.

QUESTION

How would you explain the meaning of Jesus' quote of the Scripture, "I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices"?

QUESTION

What is something in your life that Jesus has or can make whole?

QUESTION

What do your friends face that only Jesus can heal?

Reflect

Serve Jesus' mission by sharing His good news with those who need to hear.

Before Matthew shared about Jesus with his friends, he met Jesus himself. Maybe he followed Jesus because Jesus healed. Maybe he followed Jesus because Jesus is holy. We don't know for

sure what caused Matthew to walk away from everything to follow Jesus. We do know he saw Jesus for himself, and then he shared about Jesus with others. This happened to others in the Bible. Isaiah saw God's holiness, which made him see his own sinfulness ([Isaiah 6:1-5](#)). Paul saw the truth about Jesus, which made him see the lies he had believed ([Acts 9:3](#)).

How do you need to see Jesus, so you can share the good news of Jesus with others? Do you need to see Him as a friend to introduce Him to your friends? Do you need to see Him as loving to share His unconditional love? Do you need to see Him as King to share His unshakable kingdom? Do you need to see Him as Savior to share the good news that He has come to save people from their sins?

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all obedient and 10 being fully and immediately obedient, how would you rate yourself at obeying Jesus?

QUESTION

Reflect on what Jesus means to you. What characteristics of Jesus can you see in your own life? How can you share that with others?

QUESTION

How can you invite the people you know to meet the Jesus you know?

Activate

Many people in our life, in our home, in our neighborhood, and in our workplace need to hear about Jesus. How can we better see Jesus to tell others about Him?

Challenge

Start by spending time each day with Jesus. Do the personal devotions provided with this session. Spend time praying, worshipping, reading books about Christian faith, or perhaps all of the above. Then, turn that time with Jesus into one conversation about Jesus each week with someone you

know. The goal is to increase our time with Jesus, so we will increase our conversations about Him.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

If we truly see Him, we will share about Jesus like Matthew did. May we see Him and may we immediately obey Him. May we invite the people we know to meet the Jesus we know. We have learned in community about Him today. So let's not neglect our time alone with Him, which influences how and what we share with others. You can use the daily devotions as an extension of this discussion.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Matthew Follows Jesus

Read [Matthew 9:9–12](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is Jesus saying to you about inviting the people you know to meet Him?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: The Cost of Following Jesus

Read [Matthew 8:18–22](#).

When Jesus said, "Follow Me," Matthew immediately responded. A quick response, though, did not always happen. In today's Scripture reading, two people learned that following Jesus comes with a cost. In only a couple of responses, Jesus made a powerful statement on the nature of being His disciple.

QUESTION

What are areas of your life where you, like Matthew, immediately followed Jesus?

QUESTION

What are the reasons why you are more like a would-be follower who does not respond quickly to Jesus?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Elisha Burns His Plan B

Read [1 Kings 19:19–21](#).

Matthew left his profession to follow Jesus. Elisha, a farmer, did the same to follow God's call, but he took it a step further. He immediately burned his backup plan. He slaughtered his oxen, then burned the wood of his plow to cook the meat as a feast for his family and friends. Elisha burned the tools of his earthly job before following God's call.

If obeying Jesus doesn't work out, we may be tempted to want something to fall back on, a safety net, a plan B. But Elisha burned his plan B, so to speak. This doesn't mean if God calls us to be a missionary, we should go and set our house or office on fire. But saying yes to God means eliminating things in our life that might keep us from God's call. Matthew left his tax collecting business behind. Many missionaries have left family and the comforts of home to go far away to serve Jesus.

QUESTION

What in your life is God asking you to stop or start doing for Him?

QUESTION

What is the plan B in your life that you need to burn to say yes to Jesus?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Andrew Invites His Brother to Meet Jesus

Read [John 1:40–42](#).

When Matthew became Jesus' disciple, he joined the group of disciples including a disciple named Andrew. From the very beginning, Andrew seemed to understand the value of bringing people to Jesus. Sharing our faith in Jesus can be incredibly tricky when it comes to family. Yet after meeting Jesus, Andrew introduced his brother Peter to Jesus.

And Peter said yes to being Jesus' disciple too. Peter would go on to write two books of the Bible, preach the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and serve as one of the most important leaders in the Early Church. We have no idea what Jesus will do with those who follow Him. But inviting them to meet Jesus is the first step to finding out.

QUESTION

Who introduced you to Jesus? How did you express your gratitude to them?

QUESTION

What kind of life change do you want to see Jesus complete in someone you love?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: To See Jesus Is to Share Jesus

Read [Isaiah 6:1–8](#).

In a vision, Isaiah saw God's awesomeness and terrifying winged creatures declaring God's holiness. Isaiah then called himself a sinful man with unclean lips. But he had also seen God! So, when he heard God ask who His messenger would be, Isaiah immediately said he would go. This revelation of God created a personal revelation for Isaiah.

QUESTION

Write out a description of a life-changing encounter you've had with God.

QUESTION

God is still asking who will give His message to His people. What can you do in your life to become the answer to God's question?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Expect the Unexpected

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. ([Proverbs 3:5–6](#))

We all make plans—plans for where we’re going and what we want to do. But life is more often a story of unexpected interruptions. Our faith helps us to recognize God’s hand

at work in unanticipated ways. By faith we learn to embrace life’s interruptions as the place God so often does miraculous things. We learn to respond with compassion and faith when things seem impossible.

Session Overview

Welcome Interruptions

Biblical Encounter: Peter and John Encounter a Beggar ([Acts 3:1–11](#))

Outcome: Make time for the interruptions God puts in your path.

In this session, we’ll explore how it might look to allow time in our life for the unexpected. Modern life is busy, and sometimes our days are planned out to the minute. Work, school, getting everyone to every event, keeping up with household chores, and managing our responsibilities all leave little time for anything unplanned. But just as Peter and John welcomed an interruption into their lives, we can learn to trust God with our plans and embrace the path He has set for us to take.

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Engage

QUESTION

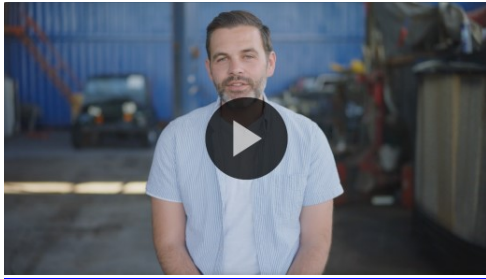
If you had an opportunity to be part of planning a special birthday party for yourself, which would you choose: total surprise or knowing every detail? Explain.

Some people love surprises and look forward to them, but others really dislike being caught off guard. Similarly, many people find it very frustrating to have life's plans interrupted by something unexpected.

But what if God was the One who planned the interruption? It's so helpful to realize that sometimes God allows our life to intersect with someone who needs Him. When we trust God and don't just lean on our own understanding of daily events and priorities, we might find that He wants to let us be a part of some amazing things.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: When has your life been interrupted and you could see God at work in it?



QUESTION

When has your life been interrupted and you could see God at work in it?

Consider What the Bible Says

The kingdom of God is unlike anything we could design or plan. It's full of unexpected things because God's ways are so different from our ways.

QUESTION

If you had to plan how the Church would spread from just a handful of people to more than a billion around the world, what might you do first?

Today's Bible encounter takes place sometime after Jesus was resurrected and went back to heaven. Before this incident, His disciples had done what Jesus had told them to do. They waited together for the great gift God was going to send. They could never have guessed all of what Jesus meant when He told them that God was going to baptize them with the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:4-5](#)). But as they waited in obedience, God filled them with boldness and power to be witnesses. He gave them exactly what they needed to share what they knew about Jesus with people in their own city and all around the world ([Acts 1:8](#)).

Peter had been afraid and denied Jesus in the hours before His death. But after Peter was baptized in the Holy Spirit, he was instantly filled with the boldness to preach and share the good news of Jesus. Thousands of people became followers of Jesus that day, and a whole new faith community formed that continued to grow daily. Right away, all these disciples of Jesus learned that God is full of surprises, and the unexpected can be a good thing.

Did You Know?

In the ancient world, begging was the common profession for those who were destitute and unable to work for themselves. Unlike the pagan world, which looked down upon begging, the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) accounted for the reality in life that some people would always be in severe need. As a result, the call for mercy and giving is so deeply engrained in Judaism that the terminology used for giving alms to the poor is the same word for righteousness in Hebrew: tsedeq.

Peter and John Meet a Beggar

Read [Acts 3:1–4](#).

This day seemed to be like many others. Peter and John were going to a prayer meeting at the temple, as they often did. A man was brought to the temple gate, so he could beg for help from passersby, as he often did. Neither Peter nor John grew up in Jerusalem, but we know from the New Testament that they had been in the city for at least a couple of months. Chances are they had passed by this same man many times before and may not have noticed him. Peter and John might even have passed by the beggar a time or two when they were at the temple with Jesus. We don't know for sure.

But something about this day was different. Maybe because the beggar directly asked them for money. Maybe the Holy Spirit had made them more aware of others. Talking to the beggar doesn't seem to have been in Peter and John's plans that day. But they stopped. Then Peter, full of the Holy Spirit and His boldness, spoke with someone whom God himself had an appointment with that day.

QUESTION

Do you think anything was unusual about how the beggar called out to Peter and John that day? Why or why not?

QUESTION

What would you have done if the beggar had called out to you?

QUESTION

At this point in the story, how would you expect it to end?

Maybe Peter and John recognized God's divine appointment in that moment. Maybe their boldness from being filled with the Holy Spirit caused them to stop and look. And what happened next changed the man's life forever.

The Beggar Meets Jesus

Read [Acts 3:5–8](#).

This man was used to his way of life. Every day, he went to beg. Every day, he called out to people for money and help. Every day, people walked by and either ignored the beggar or threw him money without stopping, just as many of us would do in a similar situation today.

The man was probably very comfortable with his routine. When Peter called for him to look at them, the beggar naturally hoped they would give him money. What a surprise when instead of money, they gave him something infinitely better! Peter and John knew Jesus healed people and had come to set people free ([Isaiah 61:1–2](#); [Luke 4:18–19](#)). They had seen Jesus do incredible things, and He had promised they would do even greater works with His help ([John 14:12–14](#)). Now full of His Holy Spirit, they took the opportunity that God put in their path that day. And the results were life-changing!

QUESTION

What do you think the beggar thought about God before he was healed?

QUESTION

If you had been Peter or John, would you be more or less surprised than the beggar about the miracle that happened?

Many People Are Impacted

Read [Acts 3:9–11](#).

God's heart is for every person on earth to know Him and to spend eternity with Him. His gracious plan of reconciling people to himself has always included us sharing what we know about Him with others ([Matthew 28:18–20](#)). We don't ever have to wonder if He wants us to share our faith; we already know that He does! He can empower us through the Holy Spirit to share the good news. More than that, He actually sends us opportunities that can have a big impact. Just like Peter and John, God can lead us to appointments with people in the middle of our everyday routines.

Everyone in Jerusalem that day was impacted by their willingness to engage in an unexpected encounter. A man was healed of a lifelong disability and his relationship with God was transformed. All the people who'd surely seen him begging by the temple gate for years knew God had done something amazing. They likely were ready to hear more about Jesus and the gospel message after that, and Peter went on to preach to them. God was, and is, building His Church, and He helps all of us share our faith in so many ways when we let Him.

QUESTION

How would you compare the response of the man who was healed with the others who were there?

QUESTION

If you had been the beggar, what would you have done after Jesus healed you?

Reflect

Make time for the interruptions God puts in your path.

God is challenging us to make room in our heart and life for the unexpected. We're all busy and pack the most into every day, which leaves little time in life for the unplanned. But just as Peter and John welcomed this interruption into their lives, we can learn to trust God and embrace the path He sets for us to take, too. We can be confident that God wants to let us be a part of helping others to know Him. As we seek His will in all that we do, we should expect Him to bring us unexpected opportunities.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

How do you normally respond to interruptions in your schedule?

QUESTION

How can you continually remind yourself that interruptions may be divine appointments?

QUESTION

Are you a very scheduled person or do you usually just go with the flow? If you're very scheduled, where could you allow pockets of time in your schedule so that interruptions are less inconvenient?

Activate

Learning to embrace unexpected interruptions in life is not easy for everyone. It takes some practice to be ready to be interrupted as Peter and John were. Allow the Holy Spirit some room to develop this new discipline in your life.

Challenge

This week actively expect the unexpected. Begin each day this week with a prayer for God to open your eyes to see what interruptions in life might be His divine appointments. Watch for opportunities to share your faith with someone else, pray for someone who might be hurting, or demonstrate the love and generosity of Jesus.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

As we walk with God, He helps us to change and grow. We'll begin to think differently and to see things from God's perspective. The devotions for this week will help you dig further into what the Bible says about learning to expect the unexpected.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Peter and John Encounter a Beggar

Read [Acts 3:1–11](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about making time for the interruptions He puts in your path?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: A Risky Request

Read [Esther 4:1–17](#).

Esther was a beautiful young woman who had been raised by her older cousin, Mordecai. She was one of many Jews who no longer lived in their homeland, but lived in captivity under the powerful King Xerxes of the Persian Empire. If anyone could have felt sorry for herself about her life and circumstances, it was Esther. But through a series of events that seem like a reality TV show, Xerxes needed a new queen and chose Esther.

Around the same time, a wicked leader under Xerxes named Haman hated Mordecai. Haman wanted to destroy not just Mordecai, but all of the Jews. Haman convinced the king to decree that all the Jews would die. The king's decree could not be revoked; it seemed like a final decision. Esther could have easily lost her own life as she tried to save her people. But God was with her, and Mordecai rightly pointed out that God himself had put her in the right place at the right time.

God's heart is for every person on earth to know Him, and for every believer to be strong in their faith. None of us would choose difficult circumstances as a way to become strong, but God often uses hard and unexpected things that happen in life to help us grow. He also puts us in a position to help others. Esther's powerful story reminds us that no matter our circumstances, we can hold tightly to our faith in Him, even when confronted with the impossible. We can continue to expect the unexpected.

QUESTION

What questions would you like to ask Esther about her life and story?

QUESTION

If you had been Esther, how would you have reacted to Mordecai's request that you speak with the king?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: An Unexpected Visitor

Read [Luke 1:26–38](#).

Mary was a young woman, engaged to be married. She had her whole life ahead of her. Just like young women everywhere, she surely had hopes and dreams for what her future life and home would be like. So it's easy to believe that Mary really must have been confused and disturbed when she received an unexpected visit from the angel Gabriel. What the angel said was going to happen in her life was surely very different from everything she had planned for herself. She was just a humble young woman, and the angel informed her that her child would be a great King and the very Son of God!

The Bible tells us that Mary was favored of God for He knew her heart and character. He knew she could be trusted with such an important task as bearing and raising the Savior of the world. Her faith-filled yes fulfilled God's plan that literally changed the course of human history. Our lives have all been impacted by her willingness to graciously welcome the unexpected interruption God brought into her life. Like Mary, we can learn to welcome the interruptions God puts in our path too.

QUESTION

What questions would you like to ask Mary about her life and experiences?

QUESTION

What is God speaking to you about welcoming unexpected interruptions in your own life?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: A Voice in the Night

Read [1 Samuel 3:1–21](#).

Israel was the nation the Lord had chosen to show the rest of the world what it looked like to be God’s friend. He had delivered them from their oppressors and brought them to their own good land. He gave Israelites the Law to show them how to be in right relationship with Him and with each other. The priests were to be the special group who ministered before God and cared for the people. But the priest Eli had sons who were selfish and wicked. They had no respect for God or for their duties as priests. Their behavior reflected very poorly on God, whom they were supposed to represent.

Samuel was a young boy who had been pledged to serve God by his grateful mother. God had heard and answered her prayers for a child. As a boy, Samuel helped and served faithfully in the tabernacle. One night his sleep was interrupted by a Voice. Thinking his mentor, Eli the priest, was calling him, Samuel responded with a humble and willing heart.

Finally realizing what was happening, Eli instructed Samuel to answer, “Speak, LORD, your servant is listening” (verse [9](#)). God did speak to Samuel, who continued listening and obeying all the days of his life. Samuel’s unexpected encounter with God led him to become a trusted and faithful prophet and encourager over Israel as it became a great and godly nation.

QUESTION

If you had been Samuel, what do you think you would have done after hearing from God?

QUESTION

What do you think were the most important differences between Eli’s sons and Samuel?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: An Unplanned Trip to Egypt

Read [Genesis 37:18–36](#); [41:37–44](#).

Joseph was a real pain to his older brothers, especially since their father loved Joseph best ([Genesis 37:3](#)). Then one day, Joseph’s boasting and dreaming finally got the best of them, and his brothers sold him into slavery. They considered selling Joseph into slavery as better than actually killing him.

So, at no real fault of his own, Joseph experienced a very unexpected interruption in his young life. He had dreams of being great, but he was now just a slave. Joseph's story is long and interesting with high points and low points. Again, through no fault of his own, he was thrown into prison and essentially forgotten.

Anyone looking in from the outside would think Joseph's whole life seemed wasted and meaningless. But the Bible tells us in [Genesis 39:21](#) that "the LORD was with Joseph in the prison and showed him his faithful love." The unwelcome life interruptions of being sold into slavery by his brothers, then being thrown into prison by Potiphar put Joseph in exactly the right place at the right time. He became indispensable to the Pharaoh of Egypt and became the second-highest leader in the entire land. God used these unexpected turns in Joseph's life to bless many nations for generations to come.

QUESTION

What do you think Joseph thought after he was betrayed by his brothers?

QUESTION

How is your own faith impacted by hearing Joseph's story?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Expect the Unexpected

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. ([Proverbs 3:5–6](#))

We all make plans—plans for where we’re going and what we want to do. But life is more often a story of unexpected interruptions. Our faith helps us to recognize God’s hand

at work in unanticipated ways. By faith we learn to embrace life’s interruptions as the place God so often does miraculous things. We learn to respond with compassion and faith when things seem impossible.

Session Overview

Respond with Compassion

Biblical Encounter: Jesus Interrupts a Funeral Procession ([Luke 7:11–17](#))

Outcome: Respond compassionately when faced with others’ needs.

In this session, we’ll see the compassion of Jesus on full display. As Jesus entered the village of Nain, He came upon a funeral for a widow’s only son. Jesus, moved with compassion, stopped the crowd and performed a miracle. When we come across hurting people around us, we can respond like Jesus by being a compassionate and healing presence in their life.

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Engage

QUESTION

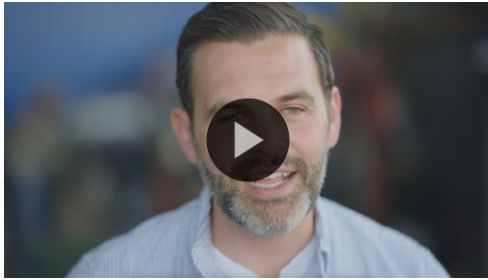
What keeps our compassion from becoming action?

Think about situations in your life that moved you to compassion but didn't lead you to take action. Why didn't you act? Lots of things can get in our way. Sometimes we feel inadequate to meet the need. We may feel overwhelmed by how many needs we encounter. Or perhaps we simply don't have the time or resources to meet the need. But none of these reasons are impossible to overcome.

If we're going to point people to Jesus, we can't simply feel compassion for them without meeting their needs. The power of Jesus' compassion wasn't in the emotion itself, but in His actions that followed. Having compassion for hurting or lonely people is only the first step. We can ask the Holy Spirit to show us what actions we should take to meet people's needs and show His love to others.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: How are you most likely to respond to unplanned opportunities to show compassion?



QUESTION

How are you most likely to respond to unplanned opportunities to show compassion?

Consider What the Bible Says

For much of His ministry, Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee teaching and performing miracles. He was familiar with this region because His hometown of Nazareth was there. Today, we'll see the compassion Jesus felt as He entered the town of Nain, just a few miles from where He grew up. While there, Jesus encountered the unimaginable grief of a mother at her only son's funeral. We'll see how Jesus turned His compassion into action.

Did You Know?

In the biblical world, one of the most difficult positions socially for a woman to find herself was to be a widow. As the ancient world didn't have any true forms of social welfare and professions for women were few and far between, a woman was often left with only a few options after the death of her husband. If she was young enough, she

might remarry. If her children were old enough, a widow would then rely on her children to provide through either her son's income or her daughter's marriage price. However, if a woman lost both her husband and her children, she had very little hope apart from begging.

Jesus Was Filled with Compassion

Read [Luke 7:11–13](#).

This is one of those moments in the New Testament when we can easily see why people loved Jesus so much. When He saw that a woman who had already lost her husband had now lost her only son, the Bible says Jesus' heart was full of compassion. It broke His heart to see her in so much pain, and He immediately said, "Don't cry!" That command must have seemed out of place to the others at the funeral. But they had no idea that Jesus was about to step into the mother's pain and perform a miracle.

QUESTION

Suppose you had come upon this funeral procession. How would you have reacted?

QUESTION

What do you think people thought when Jesus stopped the funeral procession and instructed the grieving mother not to cry?

Jesus Acted on His Compassion

Read [Luke 7:14–15](#).

It's one thing to have our heart filled with compassion for someone in need. But feeling emotion is only one step. We can be sensitive to God's Spirit, so we know when to act on our emotion and take the opportunity to express our compassion. Jesus didn't just watch the crowd cry in pain. He stepped in to do something about it. In this case, He performed a jaw-dropping miracle. We know a miracle isn't always going to happen, but that doesn't mean our actions can't be used to do incredible things in the life of someone in need.

QUESTION

If you could have talked to the widow following this encounter with Jesus, what questions would you have asked her?

QUESTION

Not every miracle is as dramatic as someone being raised from the dead. What are some other ways we could be a healing presence in the life of someone in a hard situation?

The Crowd Spread the News about Jesus

Read [Luke 7:16–17](#).

As the story ended, the need to act switched to the crowd who had witnessed Jesus' healing power. Their response was to tell everyone about it. They were overwhelmed to have seen a miracle. Who wouldn't be? And they couldn't stay silent about it. Jesus didn't just bring healing that day—He also brought hope. And the message they shared about this prophet named Jesus spread that hope like wildfire to those around them.

QUESTION

Do you know someone who consistently shares the hope of Jesus with others? What can you learn from that person?

QUESTION

What are some of the miraculous things Jesus has done in your life? Do you know someone who needs to hear what Jesus has done for you?

Reflect

Respond compassionately when faced with others' needs.

Hurting people all around us desperately need the hope and healing Jesus provides. Their needs must call us to compassionate action! Every encounter may not end in an eye-popping miracle like a young man being raised from the dead, but that's not what most people need either.

As we see people's needs and are moved with compassion, we have to remember that everyone's greatest need is to be spiritually brought to life. This isn't a miracle we can work in our own power any more than we could bring someone back from the grave. But if we're willing to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's direction, stop when we see someone in need, and offer them the kind of compassionate action that Jesus did, we may get to witness Jesus' power in their life!

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

How does Jesus' willingness to act on His compassion cause you to rethink your willingness to go out of your way to help others in need?

QUESTION

What are some of the obstacles that keep you from feeling compassion for those who are in need—or acting on that compassion?

QUESTION

How is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about being more active in helping those who are in need?

Activate

As followers of Jesus, we should be moved with compassion toward others. Like Jesus, we also must do what we're able to about the suffering around us. Although we can't meet every need like Jesus can, we must be open to the needs God wants each of us to meet.

Challenge

Allow the Holy Spirit to show you one or two needs you can meet for those around you. Take a moment to pray and reflect. The Holy Spirit will bring people and situations to your mind as you focus and wait on Him. Then write down what you feel the Spirit is directing you toward. As you pray, allow your heart to be filled with the compassion of Jesus, and then put those emotions into action.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

People are in need everywhere we look. We can be overwhelmed. Remember, God isn't calling us to do everything for everyone. But we shouldn't use that as a reason for not stepping out in faith to bring hope and healing when the Holy Spirit leads us. The more we read God's Word, the more we become like Jesus. So, we've provided devotions to help you cultivate the compassionate heart of our Savior.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Jesus Interrupts a Funeral Procession

Read [Luke 7:11–17](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about you responding to others with compassion?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Compassion Doesn't Always Require Our Resources

Read [1 Kings 17:7–16](#).

We aren't always going to have the means to meet the needs of everyone around us. The good news is that we can still respond in compassion. To be clear, we need to use resources we *do* have to help the hungry and hurting. But when we cannot end someone's suffering on our own, we must pray and know that God is responsible for what happens in the end. We won't always see dramatic miracles of provision like Elijah did, but we will see God work in the hearts of those in need.

QUESTION

Why is it so important to rely on more than our own resources when we're confronted with needs around us?

QUESTION

What would have happened if Elijah had passed by this woman simply because he didn't have what she needed?

QUESTION

Who are some people you might have overlooked because you couldn't meet their requests for help?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Compassion Does Require Mercy

Read [Luke 10:25–37](#).

Mercy means that we don't get what we deserve. Jesus shows us mercy and teaches us that we must do the same. To meet the needs of our broken world, we must become merciful toward others as the Spirit helps us. Lacking mercy can short-circuit our ability to be moved with compassion. Though the Samaritan didn't cause the traveler's problems, he helped anyway. Remember, Jesus taking the initiative to act opened the door for us to receive His healing and compassion. We can do the same thing for others as well.

QUESTION

Why can it be so easy for us to withhold mercy from others? How can we overcome this desire?

QUESTION

Who are some people you find it hard to show mercy to? How has this impacted your ability to be compassionate about their needs?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Compassion Is Our Responsibility

Read [John 5:1–15](#).

In the middle of this story, we find an interesting question. Jesus asked a man who had been ill for many years if he wanted to get well. This man felt like he couldn't be healed because he had no one to lift him into the waters of the pool. (Some people believed that the pool had healing properties). The sick man didn't need the waters; he just needed Jesus—but he didn't realize that.

We're going to come across people just like this man as we move in compassion for those in need. Some people have come to believe that their situation can't change, they can't get better, and they can't be helped. But we must remember that their response isn't our responsibility. Our job is to continue to be compassionate even if our efforts are turned down.

QUESTION

If we are compassionate toward someone in need and they refuse what we're offering, did we fail? Why or why not?

QUESTION

Why do you think some people believe they can't get better or be helped? Have you ever been in a place like that in your own life?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Compassion for Individuals

Read [Matthew 15:29–31](#).

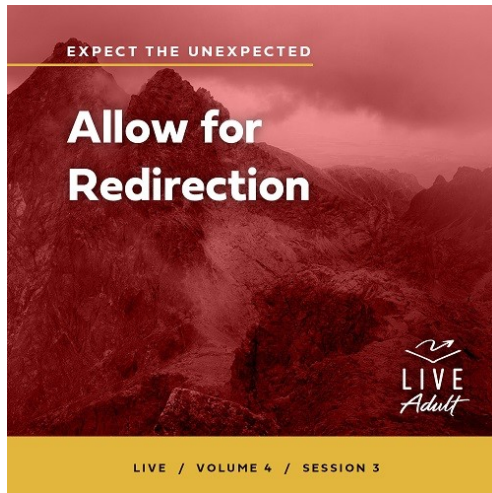
This story says that Jesus was confronted by a huge crowd of people in need of His healing touch. Matthew tells us that He healed *all* of them. The best way to read this story is to consider everything we know about the life and ministry of Jesus from all four Gospels. We're justified in understanding that Jesus healed them *one by one*. We never see a miracle story where Jesus healed a massive group by speaking one loud prayer over the multitude. He always interacted with each person individually. Compassion requires us to see every individual as a person and minister to each one in a personal way. That's the kind of compassion Jesus is calling us to live out.

QUESTION

Why do you think Jesus emphasized healing individuals rather than helping huge groups of people with one prayer or with the wave of His hand?

QUESTION

Why is it so important for us to reach out in compassion to each person as an individual even when the number in need is so great? How might this better demonstrate the heart of Jesus to a person in need?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Expect the Unexpected

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. ([Proverbs 3:5–6](#))

We all make plans—plans for where we’re going and what we want to do. But life is more often a story of unexpected interruptions. Our faith helps us to recognize

God’s hand at work in unanticipated ways. By faith we learn to embrace life’s interruptions as the place God so often does miraculous things. We learn to respond with compassion and faith when things seem impossible.

Session Overview

Allow for Redirection

Biblical Encounter: A Woman’s Life Is Changed at a Well ([John 4:5–30](#))

Outcome: Welcome God’s radical redirection of your life story.

In this session, Jesus unexpectedly interrupts a woman’s daily trip to the well. This interruption proves to be more than just a chance encounter. Instead, in a divine moment Jesus offers the woman an opportunity for a radical redirection in her life. Welcoming this new direction, the woman’s life is changed forever.

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Engage

QUESTION

When was the last time you shopped for a specific item and ended up with something else? What unplanned item(s) did you buy?

You've probably asked yourself this question as you unpacked a shopping bag or opened a shipping box : *How did I end up with all these items? I only intended to buy one thing!* Whether you're an impulse buyer or not, you've likely walked into a store with a list and walked out with more than you planned. Maybe your favorite treat or the latest gadget caught your eye at the checkout line. Or you searched for something you needed online and ended up choosing all the items the site said were frequently bought together. Maybe you went to the grocery store on an empty stomach. In your hunger, there's no telling what you unintentionally threw into the shopping cart. No doubt, you grabbed more items and spent more money than you intended.

It's funny how our spiritual journeys can sometimes feel a lot like the shopping experience described above. Many times, we think we have life completely figured out and know exactly what we need. Then we encounter Jesus. And we discover that we've been focused on all the wrong things. Jesus gently shows us that what we really need is His peace, His love, His healing, and His grace.

It's important that we give Jesus the opportunity to show us what needs to change. We need to make space for Him to redirect our life in any way that He sees fit. After all, He knows exactly what's best for us to be truly fulfilled.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Tell about a time when you accepted Jesus' redirection in your life. What happened as a result?



QUESTION

Tell about a time when you accepted Jesus' redirection in your life. What happened as a result?

Consider What the Bible Says

In the Bible encounter we're going to look at, we'll meet a Samaritan woman on her way to draw water from the local well. Little did she know that she would unexpectedly encounter Jesus. Her simple trip for water was about to be interrupted by the One who had the power to quench the thirst in her soul.

Did You Know?

Water wells served as some of the most important fixtures throughout the three thousand years that encompass the narratives of the children of Abraham in Israel. This Promised Land God gave to the Israelites had hard ground with little natural water. So the people relied heavily on God for the rains to fill their wells. Because water was scarce, wells became sources of power and control in the land. If someone were denied access to a well, they could be denied life itself.

A Samaritan Woman Seeks Water

Read [John 4:5–9](#).

The Samaritan woman left her home that day with plans to complete a simple, ordinary task. She'd no doubt made the trip to get water many times before. As far as she knew, this journey would be like all the others. Only this time, Jesus was waiting unexpectedly by the well.

At first, the Samaritan woman seemed cautious. After all, she recognized the Man at the well was a Jew. Much animosity existed between most Jews and Samaritans. So why was He sitting there by the well? Most Jews would have gone out of their way to avoid a Samaritan. Yet, Jesus sat at the well as if He had been waiting for her to arrive. The two engaged in conversation, and Jesus asked her to give Him a drink of water. She simply asked Jesus why He would ask *her* for a drink.

QUESTION

Knowing that Samaritans and Jews had a history of tension, what do you think the woman was feeling as she approached the well?

QUESTION

Why do you think Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water?

QUESTION

Imagine you were going to the well that day. How would you have responded to a stranger asking you for a drink of water in that situation?

A Samaritan Woman Finds Living Water

Read [John 4:10–15](#).

The Samaritan woman believed her mission that day was to retrieve physical water. But then Jesus pushed their conversation further. Jesus offered the woman a different kind of water—living water. Jesus told her this water He offered has the power to provide everlasting life. Then she would never thirst again.

In a moment, this unexpected encounter with Jesus, a Jewish stranger, changed her life forever. The Samaritan woman thought she was on a simple quest for water that day. Little did she know

that Jesus was waiting to give her living water and redirect her life. The woman quickly answered Jesus with the best response: “Please, sir, ... give me this water!”(verse [15](#)).

QUESTION

Do you think Jesus had this conversation in mind before He arrived? Why or why not?

QUESTION

What do you think the Samaritan woman thought when Jesus engaged in deeper conversation with her?

QUESTION

What does her immediate response to Jesus tell you about her desperate need for living water?

A Samaritan Woman Finds More Than Water

Read [John 4:16–30](#).

Jesus didn’t just offer her living water. Jesus began to tell her things about her life that a stranger couldn’t possibly know.

QUESTION

How would you have reacted if a stranger knew things about your life like this?

Note that Jesus didn’t treat her with disgust. He confronted her sin with love. Rather than offering her judgment, Jesus offered her the opportunity to have a new life. Rather than labeling her a sinner, Jesus called her to a life of worship. Jesus then revealed His true self to her. He was the Messiah she and others were waiting for.

The Samaritan woman could have chosen either to return home to her life of sin or to follow Jesus, the Messiah. She not only chose to welcome a new life, but she couldn’t wait to tell the world about it. Leaving her water jar beside the well, she ran back to the village to tell everyone about her experience.

QUESTION

Before her encounter with Jesus, how do you think the Samaritan woman was treated by others in her village?

QUESTION

Does it surprise you that people listened to her and went to meet Jesus? Why or why not?

QUESTION

When have you seen Jesus look beyond your sin and see something greater in you?

Reflect

Welcome God's radical redirection of your life story.

God has a radical life redirection waiting for everyone. But if we aren't careful, we can go through the motions of life and miss God's best for us. If we don't pay attention to God's activity, we could easily overlook the life-changing path He offers us. The Samaritan woman could have ignored Jesus and gone about her day. She could have rejected His offer to quench her spiritual thirst. She could have returned home to her broken life. Instead, she took a big gulp of His life-transforming living water!

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

How do you respond to God's unexpected interruptions in your day?

QUESTION

How have you personally responded to Jesus' offer of living water? How has your response changed your life?

QUESTION

Are you allowing Jesus to look deep into your life and speak to you about your sin? What changes has Jesus pointed out that you need to make?

Activate

Meeting Jesus that day was a divine moment God used to redirect the Samaritan woman's life. But can you imagine how different her story would have turned out if she had rejected Jesus' offer? It would have been the greatest mistake of her life to continue in the direction her life was already headed.

The truth is that God wants you to have the same life-changing experience. God offers you the same living water Jesus offered the Samaritan woman that day. God offers you the same opportunity to change the direction of your life in big ways and small ways. And it would be tragic for you to reject His direction. How thirsty is your soul? Have you ever thought about that question? Jesus said that His living water would become a fresh, bubbling spring within you ([John 4:14](#)).

Challenge

Think about the three images listed below. Which of these images best describes your soul in relationship to Jesus? Take some time this week to gauge how well your soul is hydrated:

1. Drought—no evidence of living water
2. Puddle or pond—no movement of living water
3. River or spring—flowing, fresh living water

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

If you aren't experiencing the fresh, life-giving water Jesus offers you every day, it's time to make a change. One way to do that is through the personal devotions that have been provided as an extension of this discussion.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: A Woman's Life Is Changed at a Well

Read [John 4:5–30](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

How open are you to God's radical redirection of your life?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Rethink Your Current Direction

Read [Psalm 32:8–11](#).

This passage reminds us that the Lord is the answer when we need direction in life. The Samaritan woman was stuck. Husband after husband, she just kept repeating the cycle of broken relationships. She was trapped in a life she couldn't escape. The only thing she knew to do was keep doing what she had always done. She needed to change, but didn't appear to know where to start. She was on a path that was destined to take her further from where she wanted to go. We can lessen sorrows like these in life when we turn to God.

QUESTION

Reflect on today's Bible passage. What does this passage mean to you?

QUESTION

Stop and evaluate your life. Are you going the direction God wants you to go? If not, what needs to change?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Recognize God's Redirection

Read [Isaiah 55:6–11](#).

This Scripture reminds us that God's perspective is different from ours. Because He is all-knowing, He can see a better path for us to follow. The Samaritan woman couldn't see beyond her current life and choices, but God had a better plan for her. The village likely saw an outcast, but God saw a potential faithful follower and future world-changer. Jesus offered her a radical redirection. He offered her living water that would quench her thirsty soul. But only she could choose to accept what He offered.

QUESTION

How could the living water Jesus offers satisfy your soul?

QUESTION

What radical redirection might God be leading you to right now?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Respond to God's Redirection

Read [Psalm 25:8–10](#).

These verses are a great reminder that God wants what's best for us. He always knows the best path for our life. But will we respond to Him like the Samaritan woman did? "Please, sir, ... give me this water!" ([John 4:15](#))

What a powerful response! The Samaritan woman wasted no time answering Jesus' offer of a lifetime. The Bible doesn't tell us how many years this woman had been living a destructive lifestyle. But we know that in a moment, she desired for her life to be forever changed.

QUESTION

Make a list of the changes that God could make in your life if you gave Him the opportunity.

QUESTION

How can you grab hold of this truth? What should you start doing? What should you stop doing?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Reveal God's Direction to Others

Read [John 4:39–42](#).

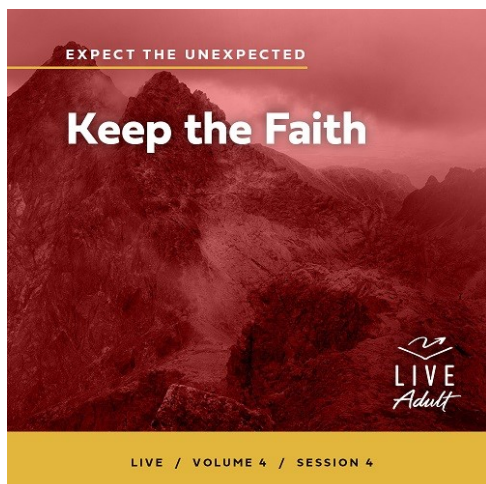
We can tell from these verses that the Samaritan woman truly experienced the life-giving water Jesus offered. Her transformational encounter with Jesus made her want to tell everyone in her village about Him ([John 4:28–30](#)). She wanted everyone to have an opportunity to have eternal life. She had found something truly great and wanted the world to know. She was convinced that if Jesus could transform someone like her, He could transform anyone. It became her mission to help others find Him.

QUESTION

Make a list of the radical changes God has made in your life.

QUESTION

Identify someone who would benefit from hearing about these radical changes God has made in you. Plan to share your story with that person this week.



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

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We all make plans—plans for where we’re going and what we want to do. But life is more often a story of unexpected interruptions. Our faith helps us to recognize

God’s hand at work in unanticipated ways. By faith we learn to embrace life’s interruptions as the place God so often does miraculous things. We learn to respond with compassion and faith when things seem impossible.

Session Overview

Keep the Faith

Biblical Encounter: A Religious Leader’s Daughter Is Raised from the Dead ([Mark 5:21–24, 35–43](#))

Outcome: Hold tightly to faith when confronted with the impossible.

In this biblical encounter, Jesus performed another eye-popping miracle. What’s on display, though, is not just Jesus’ power to heal or to raise someone from the dead. It’s faith that takes center stage as Jesus told the man whose daughter had died—while Jesus was on the way to heal her—to have faith rather than fear. That day Jairus had to keep the faith even when the situation looked impossible. It’s a lesson as relevant to us today as it was to Jesus’ first followers.

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Engage

QUESTION

What’s the most remarkable recovery from an illness that you’ve ever seen?

A simple Internet search can bring up multiple articles about people who have had remarkable recoveries from many types of illnesses. For example, we can find the story of Sarah Scantlin, a teenager in Kansas, who was hit by a drunk driver as she crossed the street. Sarah received a massive brain injury which put her in a coma for the next twenty years. One morning, however, in February 2004, Sarah awoke from her coma and began speaking to her family.

Dr. Bruce Greyson studied firsthand accounts of near-death experiences for over fifty years. What stood out to him was that the people who go through a near-death experience usually make dramatic life changes.

The family in today's reading had an experience they most likely would never forget. When Jesus walked into their home, He did a miracle that would change the direction of their lives. They had faith that He was able to heal, and His act built their faith even more.

Are you facing a situation today where your faith needs to be strengthened? As we move forward in this session, know that Jesus wants your faith to stay strong through difficult situations as you look to Him.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Do you struggle to keep your faith when things seem impossible? Why or why not?



QUESTION

Do you struggle to keep your faith when things seem impossible? Why or why not?

Consider What the Bible Says

Think of any famous person at the peak of their popularity—crowds usually push and shove just to get a glimpse of them. Crowds often followed Jesus everywhere He went too. News of His miraculous acts had spread throughout the region of Galilee. Just before the encounter we're going to look at, Jesus had healed a demon-possessed man. Then He sailed from one shore of the Sea of Galilee to another. When the boat pulled up, another crowd instantly gathered. People didn't want to miss seeing what Jesus might do next.

Did You Know?

The rapidly developing medical field during the New Testament period was a defining mark of the Greco-Roman world. Real strides were being made in the development of true medicine, but the Roman medical world was still very much wrapped in the pagan world. They intertwined the worship of the pagan god of healing, Asclepius, with their medical practices. However, in the Jewish world both before and after Jesus, people relied less on natural remedies. Instead they focused on righteous people of God, asking them to intercede for the miraculous. The fact that people brought others to Jesus, Paul, and Peter with the same hope of healing reflects what history shows us about this time in Jewish life.

Faith Begins with Trusting Jesus' Power

Read [Mark 5:21–24](#).

Jairus may have known Jesus was nearby because of all the commotion. He made his way through the crowd to Jesus and fell at His feet. Even though he was a religious leader, Jairus was desperate. His daughter was sick, and her situation was looking hopeless. So, he came to Jesus with his need and spoke in faith, asking Jesus to heal her.

Jairus didn't show a trace of doubt at this point. He knew Jesus could heal. He declared that if Jesus came to his house, his daughter would live. Jairus's request is what faith in Jesus sounds like. It's a plea for help and a declaration that He can meet our need.

QUESTION

What do you think Jairus was feeling before he found out Jesus was in town?

QUESTION

How do you think the crowd responded when Jairus approached Jesus with his need?

Jesus agreed to go to Jairus's house. But then He was interrupted by yet another need. A woman who had been suffering from an illness for twelve years touched Jesus and received her own healing. Jesus did not view this interruption as a distraction. Instead, He chose to give His undivided attention to the woman and the need right in front of Him while Jairus watched and waited.

Keeping Faith Requires Expecting the Unexpected

Read [Mark 5:35–36](#).

Jairus had faith in Jesus' power to heal his daughter, but the woman's interruption took precious time. Then a messenger came with the news that Jairus was dreading: his daughter had died. Instead of things getting better after approaching Jesus for help, Jairus's situation got worse, much worse.

QUESTION

If you had been Jairus, what would you have done at this point?

QUESTION

If you had been in the crowd, how would you have predicted the story would end?

Sometimes we set ourselves up for a greater struggle in our faith by failing to learn this lesson from Jairus's life: things don't always change immediately when we come to Jesus in faith. After receiving the dreaded news, Jairus could have lost faith that his daughter would be healed. We would all have given him a free pass. After all, it seemed impossible that Jesus could heal his daughter now.

QUESTION

How do you think Jesus' declaration impacted Jairus's faith at this moment?

Faith in Jesus doesn't mean things will always work out immediately or perfectly. It does, however, mean that no matter what happens, we can have hope. Even if we must wait for heaven or Jesus to come again, our faith can stay strong because our hope is secure.

Keeping Faith Requires Waiting for Answers

Read [Mark 5:37-43](#).

We know how the story ends: Jairus's daughter lived. So we might not think about what Jairus's walk home must have been like. It had to have been torturous for him. His mind and thoughts must have been swirling from doubt to faith and back again. He may have been frustrated that Jesus stopped to help the woman. The walk probably seemed to take an eternity.

However long it was, Jairus was in a season of waiting. Time probably seemed to pass slowly from when he approached Jesus in faith to when he actually received Jesus' final answer to his plea for help. Those seasons of waiting aren't a part of the faith journey we want, but they are sometimes a necessary part of Jesus' plan to grow our faith in Him.

QUESTION

What do you think changed for Jairus after this encounter with Jesus? Do you think he told others about the whole experience or settled for getting the miracle he desired?

QUESTION

How does this example change how you view the seasons of waiting in your own life between approaching Jesus for help and finally getting an answer to your pleas and prayers?

Reflect

Hold tightly to faith when confronted with the impossible.

Sometimes our situation can look impossible. Maybe we aren't experiencing something as extreme as the death of a child. But maybe a relationship has fallen apart, a step of faith ended in a failure, or a job change didn't work out like we'd hoped. No matter the source, we all have moments when we've asked for Jesus' help. But then, instead of things getting better, they got worse.

The Bible mentions a variety of times when Jesus told His followers to have more faith, but this is one of the most striking. Can you imagine what it was like for Jairus to hear that his daughter was dead? Then moments later, Jesus told Jairus to have faith. We might question if Jesus heard the news correctly. We often feel that Jesus has not heard correctly about our circumstances either. If He really knew how bad things were, He would surely understand why it's hard for us to believe that things will change. But Jesus consistently told His followers to have faith even when their situation looked impossible.

So what will we do? Jairus chose to trust Jesus. He could have refused to keep the faith and ignored that Jesus was nearby. Jairus could have gone home alone and planned a funeral. Often, when things look impossible, we choose to give up. We ignore Jesus. But we don't have to. Jairus's life teaches us to keep believing. Things won't always turn around quickly like they did for him, but faith in Jesus is always possible even if our situation looks impossible.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What are some of the obstacles that currently make it difficult for you to be strong in your faith?

QUESTION

Think about a situation that didn't work out like you hoped. How did it impact your faith?

QUESTION

Does the outcome of Jairus's situation cause you to rethink your ability to keep the faith when confronted with impossible circumstances? If so, how?

Activate

As Christians, we must learn to put Jesus between ourselves and our situation, rather than focus only on what we're facing. It would be nice if we mastered this challenge after a time or two, but the truth is it's an ongoing tension we must learn to manage.

Challenge

Take a moment to think about whether you are currently applying your faith to your impossible situation. Create a visual representation of this. On a piece of paper, write your name on the left side of the paper. Then write or draw the situation you're facing on the right side. Write the name of Jesus in between. Put the paper somewhere that you'll see it and be reminded to pray in faith. Believe that Jesus is between you and the situation.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

What should we do when our faith is dwindling in the face of impossibility? It's a great question. Part of the answer is to run to Jesus and plead for help, just like Jairus did. Another part is to quiet our heart and listen for His voice through God's Word. To help build your faith, the personal devotions for this session will give you the opportunity to grow your faith, even in impossible situations.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: A Religious Leader's Daughter Is Raised from the Dead

Read [Mark 5:21–24, 35–43](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about keeping the faith in the face of overwhelming circumstances you might be facing?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Determined Faith

Read [Psalm 119:105–112](#).

The Psalmist was facing impossible circumstances. We don't know all the details, but his life was in danger every day and his enemies were out to get him. So, what did he do? He determined to continue obeying God even though deliverance hadn't come. He trusted in God's Word to guide him. He didn't know all the steps in the journey ahead, but he did know the next one: to remain obedient to God today. The Psalmist knew that his life was in danger every day, yet he promised to keep following God.

QUESTION

How can you learn from the Psalmist's experiences?

QUESTION

The Psalmist didn't have all the answers, but he used God's Word to figure out what was next. How can God's Word guide your steps?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Give Me Faith

Read [Mark 9:17–27](#).

It's easy to be critical of the boy's father for his moment of doubt, but the truth is we all have doubts sometimes. We all have questions we can't answer and problems we can't solve. At times we wonder if God can either. What should we do in those times? Exactly the same thing that this father did: Ask Jesus to give us faith to overcome our unbelief. Keeping the faith isn't something we must do alone. God is more than happy to lend a hand.

QUESTION

Why do you think the lack of faith in this situation seemed to frustrate Jesus? What might this teach us about faith?

QUESTION

What would you have said or done if Jesus had responded to you the way He did to the boy's father?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Sustaining Faith

Read [2 Corinthians 11:23–31](#).

How did Paul survive all this hardship? Most likely he prayed to be delivered from much of it, but God's answer in these cases appeared to be no. We pray to be delivered from many things too. And God may answer us much like He did Paul. The question is, will we handle it like Paul did? He reframed his circumstances by openly recognizing his weakness. That weakness is where God stepped in and sustained Paul.

QUESTION

If you had been through what Paul went through, how would you have felt toward God?

QUESTION

Who do you know that has been through more suffering than you, yet has strong faith? What could you learn from that person about facing difficulty in your own life?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Faith and Faithfulness

Read [Luke 22:39–46](#).

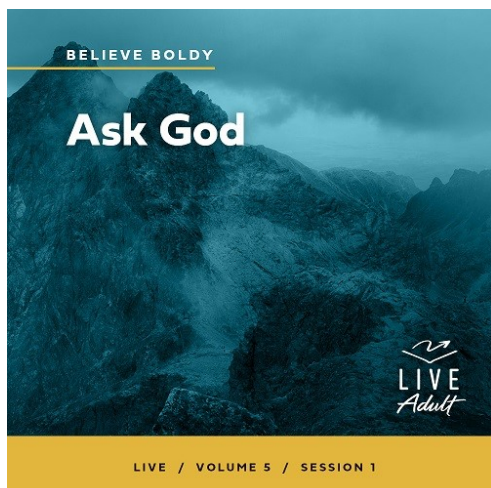
Many people are very familiar this time prior to Jesus' arrest, but it should never become so common that it loses the power to inspire us to be like Him. In the face of overwhelming suffering, Jesus asked His Father to accomplish His will another way if possible. If not, Jesus would still remain faithful. When we face impossible challenges, we can do what Jesus did. We can ask God to do things another way. The question is, will we commit to keeping faith in our faithful God if His answer is no?

QUESTION

Why do you think Jesus asked God to avoid His upcoming death? Do you think Jesus was wrong for praying this?

QUESTION

If you could ask Jesus a question about what happened in the Garden that night, what would you ask Him?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Believe Boldly

Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love. ([1 Corinthians 16:13–14](#))

The gospel message is shocking to many, shocking because of its implications. God has made himself known to us and promised to place His Spirit into our heart. We

have been given direct access to Him. The Bible encourages us to come to Him with boldness. Our boldness in approaching Him is not from our words or our achievements. Instead, it's based on God's promises. So we ask, remembering His power and faithfulness. And we encourage those around us to do the same. Believe boldly.

Session Overview

Ask God

Biblical Encounter: Blind Bartimaeus Calls to Jesus for Healing ([Mark 10:46–52](#))

Outcome: Boldly petition God even if others object or discourage you.

In this session, we'll explore a blind man's life-changing experience to consider what it means to believe boldly. The longer we walk with God, the more we realize that He's faithful and trustworthy. As we read what happened in the Bible and experience what He does in our own heart and life, our faith is strengthened. In time, we learn we can believe boldly even when faced with discouragement from others.

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Engage

QUESTION

Are you the kind of person who loves or hates to be the center of attention?

Many people find it difficult to be the center of attention. Some people love it when all eyes turn on them, but most people feel pretty uncomfortable and hope to get out of the situation as quickly as possible. Even worse is when the attention being given is negative, and we find ourselves on the opposite side of an opinion than those around us hold. It's encouraging to know that God can help us grow strong in our faith even when we're dealing with opposition. We can become people who can withstand discouragement. We can learn to be courageous and strong, and to stand firm in our faith.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: Do you find it easy or difficult to admit to Jesus that you need something from Him?



QUESTION

Do you find it easy or difficult to admit to Jesus that you need something from Him?

Consider What the Bible Says

Imagine being blind in a time and a culture without technology or social resources. Life would be very difficult and supporting yourself or a family would be nearly impossible. It would be a miracle to encounter Someone who could do something about your situation and turn your circumstances around.

Did You Know?

In the first century, it was not uncommon in Jewish communities for people to call out to their powerful God for healing. Many faithful men of God, referred to as the sages of Israel, were active in powerful and effective healing ministry in the first century. This created an atmosphere that paved the way for people to feel comfortable in crying out to Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others so that God's wonder could serve as a testament to their preaching and teachings.

Living With the Impossible

Read [Mark 10:46](#).

Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside on the way out of the city of Jericho. He likely did this every single day. He was blind and lived in a time and place that made his situation seem impossible. There was no braille, computer-assisting devices, or advanced optometry—nothing to make his life better or easier. His difficulty impacted every area of his life. He sat and hoped that people would be generous as they passed by, just so he could live. He'd learned to live with an impossible situation, trying to make the best of it, like so many people do today. We live with illness, broken relationships, discouragement, and destructive ways of thinking, just trying to make the best of it. We can easily settle into thinking life will never change.

QUESTION

How can impossible situations impact our daily life similar to what Bartimaeus experienced because he was blind?

QUESTION

What would you do if you were in his situation and knew Jesus was nearby?

Bartimaeus Called to Jesus

Read [Mark 10:47–48](#).

Bartimaeus sat outside the city of Jericho, which long before had been a part of a seemingly impossible situation for his whole nation ([Joshua 6](#)). Perhaps he had heard that story and remembered what an incredible thing God did back then. Maybe he had heard other stories from the past about the great power of God. He had probably already heard about Jesus, because as soon as Jesus came near, Bartimaeus began trying to get His attention. He didn't just calmly ask; he began shouting at Jesus for help and mercy.

When the people around him heard Bartimaeus's shouts, they told him to be quiet. Sometimes people around us are comfortable with the status quo. They don't want anyone to make a scene or to be too extreme about Jesus. But Bartimaeus must have heard what Jesus had said and done. Bartimaeus knew that if someone might help his impossible situation change, Jesus was the one. He wasn't about to miss his chance, no matter what others did or said. He called out to Jesus, and Jesus heard him.

QUESTION

If you had been Bartimaeus, what do you think you might have done when everyone told you to be quiet?

QUESTION

How can we keep our focus on Jesus when others make it difficult?

Bartimaeus's efforts were rewarded. Not only did Jesus hear him, but He had the crowd call out to Bartimaeus to come to Him.

Jesus Changed His Life

Read [Mark 10:49–52](#).

The voices from the crowd changed. At first, there were ones who had just told Bartimaeus to be quiet. Now, voices encouraged him to come to Jesus. Crowds often change their ways from one moment to the next. Basing our actions on what the crowd has to say isn't ideal. When they said that Jesus was calling for Bartimaeus, he jumped to his feet and ran to Him. Somehow, Bartimaeus knew that Jesus had the ability to make his impossible hope possible. He boldly asked Jesus for his sight, and his life was never the same.

When we struggle to believe boldly, we can remember what Jesus told the crowd at another time: "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you." ([Matthew 7:7](#))

QUESTION

What questions would you have asked Bartimaeus about his life and experience?

QUESTION

How do you think the crowd was impacted by what happened in Bartimaeus's life?

Reflect

Boldly petition God even if others object or discourage you.

The faith of Bartimaeus challenges us to grow in courage and boldness in our own faith. Bartimaeus had likely heard of Jesus' teachings and miracles, and that likely gave him the faith to boldly ask Jesus for the impossible. Today, we have the Bible! And from it we can learn about all the miraculous things God did for some who have sought Him. We also have the benefit of our faith communities, where we can learn about the wonderful things God still does for people today. Knowing and seeing all that God has done, we can be encouraged to ask God boldly for things that seem impossible.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

If Jesus came to your town today, what would you ask Him for?

QUESTION

What have you heard about Jesus that gives you courage to believe and ask boldly?

QUESTION

What situation in your life seems impossible?

Activate

Learning to ask God boldly, especially when people or circumstances are discouraging us, takes time and experience. We can learn to bring all our cares and needs to God.

Challenge

In your family or with a close group of friends, compile a list of one or two prayer requests for each member of the group. Commit to pray for each other's needs each day this week. Then, meet again at the end of the week to discuss how God worked in each of the needs. When we ask God to help, He moves. When we pay attention to how often He actively helps in life, our faith is increased.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Learning to live boldly for God happens in community and also on our own. The devotions are designed for you to be able to spend some time this week studying the Bible on your own. Each devotion will look more closely at trusting God in spite of discouragement or pushback, and will help us learn to believe and ask God boldly.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Blind Bartimaeus Calls to Jesus for Healing

Read [Mark 10:46–52](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about boldly asking Him for what you need even if others object or discourage you?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: A Leader Asks God

Read [Exodus 32:1–14](#).

In this incredible passage, we see one man who interceded for a whole nation of people. Moses had led the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt. After over a month of receiving God's Law on a mountain, Moses came back to find the Israelites worshipping a statue of a calf. They had all seen God do amazing miracle after miracle. They had left Egypt with great wealth and health. They had crossed through the sea to safety while their enemies were destroyed. But over time, they seemed to forget the goodness of God and chose to worship a lifeless idol.

This Scripture gives us an unusual insight into the close relationship Moses had with God. God actually told Moses that He would wipe out the people and start over through Moses. But Moses wasn't selfish or prideful, so he humbly asked God to spare the people from that total judgment and to remember the promises He had made to Abraham. Moses loved and trusted God so much that he boldly asked God to turn from His fierce anger and not bring total disaster on the people. Moses's prayer impacted God himself. Its inclusion in the Bible helps us understand how God really hears when His people pray. God truly does want us to ask boldly, even if no one else does.

QUESTION

Why do you think the people went to worshipping an idol so quickly?

QUESTION

How does this situation in the Bible challenge you to talk to God?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: A Wife Asks God

Read [1 Samuel 1:1–20](#).

Hannah was suffering from deep shame and disappointment. She was one of two wives, but she couldn't conceive. Hannah felt the sting of being taunted by her husband's other wife. Each time their family went to worship, her rival rubbed it in that she was the one who had children. It probably took an already demoralizing reality and made it worse for Hannah.

At one time, Hannah was deeply moved and crying out to God for a child. Her prayers were so intense that the priest even accused her of being drunk. Despite her challenging circumstances, Hannah trusted that God could change her situation. She asked God for a son and promised to dedicate the boy to Him. God responded to her prayer and remembered her. Hannah gave birth to her son, Samuel, who became a wise prophet and judge over Israel. Her willingness to boldly ask God for a child in the midst of discouragement caused her whole nation to be blessed.

QUESTION

How have you been discouraged by family or people close to you when you were boldly asking God for something?

QUESTION

When has God met you in the middle of a discouraging situation?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: A Prophet Asks God

Read [1 Kings 17:7–24](#).

The people of God had largely forgotten to love and serve Him. As a result, it appeared that they were seeing some of the things come true that God had warned them about ([Deuteronomy 28:15–24](#)). Elijah was a prophet who still listened to God and obeyed Him. He was the one who told the king and all the people that it would not rain for years because of their rebellion. Just as he said, the land experienced a terrible drought.

No rain meant no crops, and no crops in that day meant many people would starve. But God spared Elijah, a widow, and her son from starvation in a miraculous way. After God's miraculous provision, everything seemed to be going great for the widow and her son until the woman's son suddenly died of an illness. She seemed angry at God and Elijah. These circumstances threatened deep discouragement for the prophet.

Even in the midst of death, Elijah asked God to bring another miracle into that house. He'd seen God do many great things before, and he believed that nothing was impossible for Him. Elijah's boldness and faith to ask God for the impossible kept light and truth burning for the whole nation during a time of great darkness and disobedience.

QUESTION

Which part of this story stirs you most deeply?

QUESTION

When have you seen someone believe for something impossible?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: A Father Asks God

Read [Mark 9:14–29](#).

This man had a son who was in great danger of death from an evil spirit. The man had heard somewhere that Jesus might be able to help. But he could only find Jesus' disciples, and they

turned out to be no help at all! When Jesus joined His disciples, He helped the man learn that everything is possible for someone who believes.

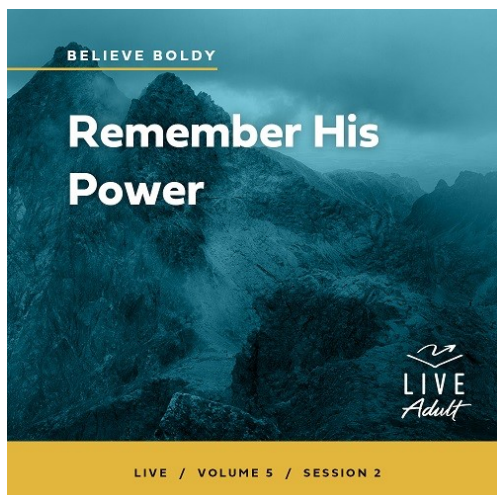
The father was honest and confessed, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" This is something so many of us can relate to. We do love and trust God, but sometimes circumstances discourage or scare us deeply. Jesus heard this man's request for his son, and He saw the man's faith. He met the man and his son where they were and delivered the boy from the evil spirit. Later Jesus taught His disciples (and us) that some things only come through prayer. We can be persistent ([Luke 18:1-8](#)) and bold in what we ask God. Jesus said so!

QUESTION

What do you think the disciples learned from this experience?

QUESTION

How is God helping you overcome unbelief?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Believe Boldly

Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love. ([I Corinthians 16:13–14](#))

The gospel message is shocking to many, shocking because of its implications. God has made himself known to us and promised to place His Spirit into our heart. We

have been given direct access to Him. The Bible encourages us to come to Him with boldness. Our boldness in approaching Him is not from our words or our achievements. Instead, it's based on God's promises. So we ask, remembering His power and faithfulness. And we encourage those around us to do the same. Believe boldly.

Session Overview

Remember His Power

Biblical Encounter: A Roman Officer Shows Impressive Faith ([Matthew 8:5–13](#))

Outcome: Believe in the authority and power of God to provide the impossible.

In this session, we'll look at a time Jesus honored the faith of someone many would have considered an outsider. When we spend time in the Bible, it helps us know how great Jesus' power is, and how much we can trust Him to do incredible things. As we get to know Jesus more, we see that nothing is impossible for Him and we learn to believe boldly.

First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](#).

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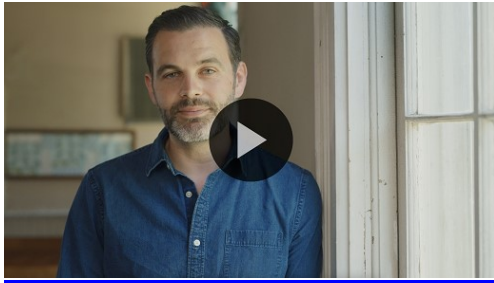
QUESTION

Share about a time that you felt like you were powerless to do or accomplish something you really wanted or needed to.

Have you ever stood close to a majestic waterfall? If you have, recall the feeling of strength and power you drew from the water falling at a high rate of speed. The famous Niagara Falls bordering the United States and Canada is one of the highest and widest falls—with the most water flow—in the world. It produces an incredible amount of electrical power for millions daily. We are all fascinated by things that show great power or strength. We also appreciate people who have power as well. In an unstable, unpredictable world, we want something or someone powerful to rely on.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to these questions: When you face something impossible, do you turn to Jesus quickly and expectantly or do you hesitate? Why do you think that is?



QUESTION

When you face something impossible, do you turn to Jesus quickly and expectantly or do you hesitate? Why do you think that is?

Consider What the Bible Says

During the time the New Testament events were taking place, the Roman Empire dominated Israel. This meant that Israel's capital city Jerusalem and all Israel's towns often included Roman troops and government. Roman soldiers from multiple parts of the world would have been stationed there. Because of their post, many would have heard about Israel's God. And they would have been aware to varying extents of the people's beliefs and religious practices. This makes the encounter in [Mark 8](#) even more interesting.

Did You Know?

An interaction of this type in New Testament times was rare as most Jewish people saw a Roman officer as an enemy and conqueror, rather than someone they would have a conversation with. This tension would eventually lead to all-out war about forty years after the events of the Gospels. This officer, however, appeared to be extremely different. He not only

broke social norms by going to Jesus, but according to [Luke 7:5](#), his true love for the Jewish people led him, as a Gentile, to help pay for the building of a synagogue.

A Soldier Looks for Jesus

Read [Matthew 8:5–6](#).

This officer challenges our stereotype of a typical Roman soldier. He was obviously a caring person. He paid attention to those in his household and was willing to make a petition on their behalf. The officer was even went as far as humbly pleading or begging Jesus—Someone subject to the very empire the officer represented.

Something about what the Roman officer knew or had heard about Jesus caught his attention. He appeared to know who Jesus was and came looking for Him just as He came back into town. Though he surely had come to Israel with his own ideas about religion, it's possible that what he heard about Jesus changed that. As we'll hear after reading more, the officer recognized Jesus for the powerful person He was.

QUESTION

What do you think the disciples might have been thinking when they saw the Roman officer approaching Jesus?

QUESTION

If the soldier had asked your advice about his situation before Jesus came into town, what would you have told him to do?

Jesus Is Amazed

Read [Matthew 8:7–10](#).

Jesus heard the officer's request and offered to go to his home to help the servant. The officer's response to Jesus' offer actually amazed Him. Jesus' authority over illness didn't require that He even go to the home. Jesus only needed to say the word.

The officer's position helped him understand how authority like this worked, and he recognized it in Jesus. The Roman officer had authority over others due to his submission to the power of the Roman Empire. Similarly, Jesus also operated under the authority of God the Father ([John 5:19–21](#)). This relationship was key to the authority Jesus walked in during His time on earth as He constantly helped everyone who came to Him with needs. The officer recognized Jesus as someone with great power who could also be trusted, so he boldly trusted Jesus for help, regardless of Jesus' distance from the servant.

QUESTION

Does this officer's faith surprise you? Why or why not?

QUESTION

If you had been present at that moment, how would you have predicted this story would end?

Great Faith Is Rewarded

In this passage, we see that Jesus interacted with all who came to Him, not just the people of Israel. Even though more than two thousand years have passed since this incident took place, our faith can be challenged and strengthened by the events that happened that day.

Read [Matthew 8:11–13](#).

The officer's bold faith in Jesus resulted in his servant being healed. We sometimes wonder if faith depends on how hard or how often we pray or believe for something miraculous to happen. This passage of Scripture reminds us that faith has less to do with what we say or do, and much to do with what or who we actually put our faith in. The centurion just made one simple request, fully recognizing and believing that Jesus had all the power to heal his servant. None of those present that day even went to where the sick person was. The officer believed in and asked Jesus to heal him from far away. Jesus was and is faithful and true, and brought healing to the sick servant. Like the officer, we can always trust and remember the great power of Jesus, placing all our faith in Him.

QUESTION

What question would you like to have asked the centurion?

QUESTION

How is the Holy Spirit challenging you about faith in Jesus?

Reflect

Believe in the authority and power of God to provide the impossible.

In this session, we have looked at a time Jesus honored a man's strong faith. The officer somehow knew of Jesus' great power. Through spending time reading the Bible, talking to God in prayer, and learning from others who walk with Him, we can also know how great Jesus' power is, and how much we can trust Him to do incredible things. As we get to know Jesus more, we see that nothing is impossible for Him. We learn to stand firmly in our faith and believe boldly.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

How does the centurion's life and story challenge you?

QUESTION

What do you sometimes put your faith in beside God?

QUESTION

Which people in your life need spiritual or physical healing from Jesus?

Activate

Consistently remembering how powerful God is takes some time. We read the Bible often, and we also watch and actively remember what God does in our own life and the lives of those around us.

Challenge

This week, make a list of prayers that God has answered in your life. Some people place strips of paper with answered prayers in a box or jar, and others might keep a list in a notebook or on their computer. Keep it somewhere that you can see often. It doesn't take long for the number of answered prayers to become impressive. When we purposefully remember answered prayer, we won't quickly forget how often God moves in our life. It builds our faith to look back and remember God's power and help.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

As we walk with Jesus, we see Him do wonderful things in the Bible and in our life, helping us to become bold and strong. We learn and grow both in community and on our own. In the devotions, we'll look at more instances in the Bible where people remembered the great power of God.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: A Roman Officer Shows Impressive Faith

Read [Matthew 8:5–13](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about believing in the authority and power of God to provide the impossible?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: A Future King Remembers

Read [1 Samuel 17:1–37](#).

Before David became a great king of Israel, he was known as the youngest son of Jesse, who faithfully watched his father's flocks. It's possible, based on imagery in many of the psalms he wrote, that David wrote or was inspired during his time in the fields. He learned about the beauty and majesty of God's creation ([Psalm 23](#); [42](#)). He recognized that the great God of the vast universe was also very personal and nearby. In the daily routine of life, David took time and effort to focus on God and to get to know Him.

When the big fight against a literal giant came to David's life, he remembered the Lord who rescued him from the lion and the bear. David recognized God's presence and power everywhere and knew that He would be with him in this seemingly impossible situation, too.

QUESTION

How does this story about David inspire you?

QUESTION

How are you learning to recognize God's presence in your own daily routine?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: A Servant Girl Remembers

Read [2 Kings 5:1–15](#).

This passage is filled with lessons for us today. God had revealed himself to the nation of Israel, so they could show the rest of the world what it looked like to walk with Him ([Deuteronomy 11](#)). As with people today, some of God's people remembered Him and some didn't. The king of Israel didn't have an answer, and he appeared to have forgotten how to appeal to God's power. On the other hand, a young servant girl remembered the goodness and kindness of God, so much so that she was glad to help even the people who took her captive.

God regularly encouraged His people to remember all the things He had done, so they could be a blessing to others when needed. We can learn both from this young woman who simply believed God and from Naaman who learned about trusting God's power. We can be like both of them and share with others the goodness and power of God.

QUESTION

What questions would you have liked to ask this servant girl about her life and faith?

QUESTION

Who could you share God's goodness with this week?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: A Son Remembers

Read [Luke 15:11–24](#).

This parable of Jesus is so encouraging because He revealed to His listeners about the great father's heart God has. Jesus' listeners may or may not have been surprised that a young man would want to take his inheritance from his father and waste it. Not many would have been surprised that the son remembered how much better his life was in his father's house and wanted to go back home. But some may have never heard of a father who was watching and waiting for his wayward child to come back, so he could hug him and throw him a party. But in this story, Jesus revealed that's exactly how God feels about every person who returns home to Him. He isn't thrilled to punish us or leave us out on our own. He is watching and waiting and has done

everything to make it possible for us to be with Him ([John 3:16](#)). Our faith and love for God should grow as we remember His kindness and mercy.

QUESTION

How does this story challenge your idea of God and His love for you and others?

QUESTION

Who in your life would benefit from hearing this story of God's fatherly heart?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: A Disciple Remembers

Read [1 Corinthians 11:17–34](#).

This passage from the apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian church is a powerful reminder of the night before the Crucifixion ([Luke 22:14–22](#)). Jesus knew what He was going to do, so He shared a last meal with His closest followers. During the meal, He gave them instructions, which Paul repeats, to celebrate Communion together often. This can be a powerful part of our Christian community. When we share the bread, we remember the way Jesus' body was broken for us and our healing ([Isaiah 53](#)). When we share the cup, we remember how His blood was shed to take away our sins ([Matthew 26:26–28](#)).

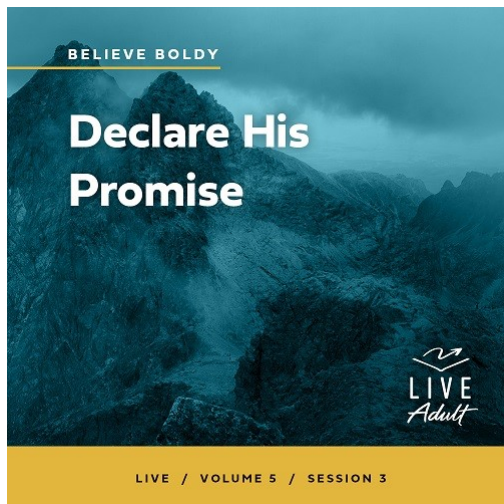
Jesus himself encouraged us to frequently remember His powerful work on the Cross, so that we can keep life in perspective. When we remember that Jesus defeated death, we know that nothing at all is too difficult for Him. When we remember that He's already won the war against evil, none of our daily battles will be able to knock us out of the race.

QUESTION

What is something powerful that God has done in your life recently?

QUESTION

How is your faith being strengthened in your life right now?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Believe Boldly

Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love. ([1 Corinthians 16:13–14](#))

The gospel message is shocking to many, shocking because of its implications. God has made himself known to us and promised to pour His Spirit into our heart. We have been given direct access to Him. The Bible encourages us to come to Him with boldness. Our boldness in approaching Him is not from our words or our achievements. Instead, it's based on God's promises. So we ask, remembering His power and faithfulness. And we encourage those around us to do the same. Believe boldly.

Session Overview

Declare His Promises

Biblical Encounter: Paul Proclaims God's Protection through a Storm ([Acts 27:1, 7–11, 20–26, 30–44](#))

Outcome: Trust God's truth in spite of the difficulty or uncertainty of your situation.

In this session, we'll discuss the benefits of boldly sharing God's promises with others. Jesus is the hope of the world. In Jesus, those who follow Him become hope bearers in the darkest times. How we depend on God as we face hard situations might help others know of His love and power. Paul's lifelong experience of trusting God's truth gave him the boldness to proclaim it publicly when facing trouble. When we learn to trust God in spite of the difficulty or uncertainty of our situation, we can become a light to a dark world.

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Engage

QUESTION

What is the biggest promise anyone made to you and kept?

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QUESTION

Has anyone ever made a big promise to you that they didn't keep? How did that make you feel?

QUESTION

Have you ever made a promise to someone that you didn't keep?

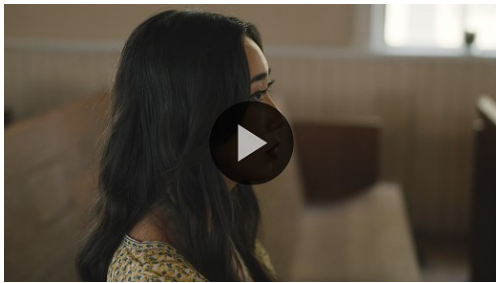
Our world is filled with people who make promises they can't keep. In the 1920s, a man named Ponzi promised investors a 50 percent return for their money within a few months. It was a deal that was too good to be true. Many people invested only to find out that Ponzi never meant to keep his promise. They lost their money to his fraud-filled scheme.

When a couple makes marriage vows or someone takes out a mortgage on a home, they are excited to live out that commitment. But circumstances can put us in a place where we can't keep even the most important promises to others.

With our history of experiencing broken promises, it's sometimes hard to trust God whose promises are unfulfilling. Yet, we can always trust His promises. Then when He proves to be true, we can boldly share with others about His reliability in an unreliable world.

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: What promise from God can you declare in your life right now?



QUESTION

What promise from God can you declare in your life right now?

Consider What the Bible Says

Paul had been telling both Jews and Gentiles about the good news of Jesus. The message of salvation to turn from sin toward God was being heard and followed. When Paul returned to Jerusalem, some Jews had him arrested with false claims, intending to kill him. God protected Paul's life by allowing him to be taken by Roman authorities. Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel before the Romans and made a request that his case be decided by their emperor.

Did You Know?

Traveling by boat in the days of the New Testament was an increasingly popular form of transport. Boat travel was a result of both the unification of the Roman Empire as well as the near-eradication of piracy in the Mediterranean only a few decades before the birth of Jesus. How ships operated, however, would have been different from what we might be familiar with today. Since most boats were more primitive and there were no true early weather detection instruments, they avoided open water whenever they could. Instead they usually traveled along the coasts so that if storms arose, they had a safe option.

Paul Heads to Rome

Read [Acts 27:1, 7–11](#).

Paul and other prisoners were placed in the custody of an officer named Julius. They were to set sail for Rome, even though the weather at that time of year was challenging for a trip by sea. After many days of terrible sailing, they landed in Myra. The ship's commanding officer found an Egyptian ship bound for Italy, transferring Paul and others to this ship.

But the wind caused problems and it became more dangerous to continue sailing. Paul spoke to the ship's officers and tried to warn them that there was trouble ahead and that they might lose the cargo, the ship, or worse, their own lives. But the men refused to listen to Paul.

QUESTION

Why do you think Paul chose to warn the men who were taking him to prison in Rome?

QUESTION

What do you think the guards and other prisoners thought about Paul at this point?

Paul Boldly Proclaims God's Promises

Read [Acts 27:20–26](#).

The storm had depleted the sailors of their resources, emotions, and hope. The men were anxious. They had not eaten in days. Paul may have been on the same ship with these sailors, but he was having a very different experience because of his faith in God.

An angel met Paul with a word from the Lord. Paul knew that a shipwreck was likely coming, but the angel assured the safety of everyone on the ship. Even though the others had ignored Paul's earlier warning, he still passed along this good news to them.

QUESTION

If your warning had been ignored by the sailors as Paul's was, would you still feel inclined to share the good news that their lives would be spared? Why or why not?

QUESTION

Paul stayed calm in the middle of a deadly storm. How do you think his demeanor compared to that of the anxious sailors?

The Sailors Begin Trusting Paul

Read [Acts 27:30–41](#).

It had been two weeks on the raging sea, and most of the passengers hadn't eaten any food. Paul was concerned about the well-being of his fellow passengers. The word of the Lord that came to him relieved any worry he may have had about their safety. Paul believed the word from God and refused to be anxious like the others on the ship were. This attitude allowed him to think logically and do things that were helpful for those around him. He took bread, gave thanks, ate it, and encouraged the hungry sailors to eat as well.

QUESTION

The sailors who had refused to listen to Paul finally began listening to him. What do you think changed their minds?

Their strength returned after they ate, and the crew took the next logical step of lightening the load of the ship. They threw cargo overboard to give the ship a fighting chance against the raging sea. Then they finally saw a bay with a beach and attempted to run the ship aground. But the ship got stuck too soon and violent waves smashed into it. As Paul had foreseen, they were shipwrecked.

QUESTION

Paul was able to trust God over what he could see, feel, and experience. How would you have responded in a similar situation?

Paul's Promise from God Comes True

Read [Acts 27:42–44](#).

The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to keep them from escaping. But then the very same commanding officer who refused to listen to Paul decided to protect his life. When we boldly proclaim God's Word to others, they will benefit from it.

When they have been helped by a promise of God, former enemies may even become our allies. As God had promised Paul, not a single life on the ship was lost. Those who could swim to shore. Those who couldn't swim held onto debris that brought them safely ashore. Every word from God about the situation proved true.

QUESTION

Have you had anyone else believe God's promises on your behalf like Paul did for the sailors? How did that affect you?

QUESTION

What do you think the nonbelievers on the ship learned about God when His promises were fulfilled?

Reflect

Trust God's truth in spite of the difficulty or uncertainty of your situation.

Could a promise from God really have such life-changing consequences? Paul's story teaches us that God's Word is reliable and true. Many times, we may fail to experience miracles because we are amazed that our simple trust in what God says could really be a valid solution. How many promises from God are sitting on the shelf in your life? If you haven't opened them, you probably won't experience them.

Can you imagine what would have happened if Paul had failed to believe the angel's promise to him? What a loss of witness it would have been if he hadn't shared the word from the Lord with the sailors! Their lives would have been saved without the knowledge of the God who saved them. Their bodies would have been safe, but their souls would still have been in jeopardy. We must trust and continue to boldly proclaim God's promises in spite of anything we may be facing.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What can you learn from Paul about trusting God in spite of the situation you may be in?

QUESTION

Do you remember the last promise God gave you? How are you actively trusting Him for this promise?

QUESTION

Paul proclaimed God's promises to people, even those who had power over him. Who are the people in your life who need to hear you boldly proclaim God's promises?

Activate

People all around us need the hope of God's promise in their life. Whose life will your faithfulness change? Think about your friends, family, and coworkers. Do you know someone who needs hope? Pray and ask God to guide you to a promise from His Word that you can share with them.

Challenge

In the upcoming week, ask for the Holy Spirit to lead you to one or two people in your life who need a word from Him. After you have prayed and listened for God's leading, share a promise from God's Word with them.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

Paul's belief in God helped even the nonbelieving sailors around him. When you tell others about God's promises, you are helping them build their faith in God. This is how our trust in God is lived out in a community of believers and in front of nonbelievers. This testimony can help us all grow closer to God. Because it's important to listen to God through His Word on our own, personal devotions have been provided as an extension of this discussion.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Paul Proclaims God's Protection through a Storm

Read [Acts 27:1, 7-11, 20-26, 30-44](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about trusting His promises in spite of the difficulty or uncertainty of your situation?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Trust in God's Truth

Read [Psalm 25:1-5](#).

Paul trusted God's Word above his terrible circumstance. While the other sailors focused on the rocking ship that would eventually fail them, Paul stood on an unshakable word from God. Paul trusted God above all things. This Scripture reminds us that God teaches us to trust Him. It shows us the benefits of trusting in Him.

QUESTION

What are some reasons the Psalmist gave for his trust in God?

QUESTION

Do you trust God? What parts of your life do you have the hardest time trusting God with? Prayerfully ask God to expand your capacity to trust Him.

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Learn God's Word

Read [Psalm 119:11–20](#).

Even before the angel came, Paul knew of God's character to care for him. From a young age Paul had learned and memorized God's Word. In times of trouble, God's promises can be a great encouragement to us. We can only find help from His Word if we know what it says. The Scripture we read today proclaims the benefits of learning God's Word.

QUESTION

What are some of the reasons we should learn God's Word based on today's Scriptures?

QUESTION

What is one thing you can do today to memorize and apply more of God's promises from the Bible?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Wait on God for His Promises

Read [Psalm 27:7–14](#).

Sometimes we need to wait to see God keep His word. In the situation on the rough seas, Paul needed immediate help. Time had passed since the angel appeared until the day the men were safe on land. The Scripture we read today teaches us the attitude we must keep as we wait. Waiting on Him requires both trust in Him and bold faith on our part.

QUESTION

What are some things the Psalmist reminded himself about as he patiently waited on God's promises?

QUESTION

Courage and confidence are present right beside worry in these verses. How can knowing this help as you wait on God?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Proclaim God's Promises

Read [Isaiah 12:1-6](#).

Paul did not keep God's promise of protection to himself. Just like he had shared the good news about Jesus with Jews and Gentiles, he continued to tell the sailors of God's good intent for them. Over our lifetime God has done many good things for us. We can't be shy about sharing our testimony with others. We need to remember the times God comforted us, provided for us, healed us, and delivered us as we tell it to others.

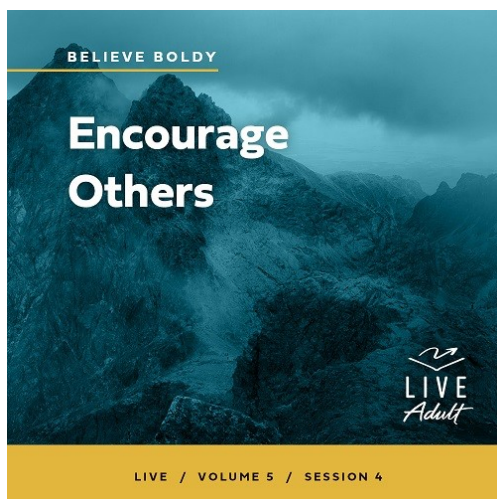
In today's reading, Isaiah offered a poetic reminder of God's trustworthiness and how it should compel us to praise and proclamation—even in song!

QUESTION

How can sharing our testimony with others benefit us?

QUESTION

Was there a time in your life when God met your need and helped you? How can you share this with others?



Live in Community

Small Group Study

Volume Overview

Believe Boldly

Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love. ([1 Corinthians 16:13–14](#))

The gospel message is shocking to many, shocking because of its implications. God has made himself known to us and promised to place His Spirit into our heart. We

have been given direct access to Him. The Bible encourages us to come to Him with boldness. Our boldness in approaching Him is not from our words or our achievements. Instead, it's based on God's promises. So we ask, remembering His power and faithfulness. And we encourage those around us to do the same. Believe boldly.

Session Overview

Encourage Others

Biblical Encounter: Four Friends' Enormous Faith Moves Jesus to Heal Their Friend ([Mark 2:1–12](#))

Outcome: Actively be a part of God's work in the lives of others.

In this session, we'll see a powerful example of how our pointing others to Jesus can be a part of God's work in their lives. We are not meant to live life alone. We need others, especially when our faith is weak or when we go through crises. In the same way, we want to be there for others in their time of need. The story of the paralyzed man's four friends who lowered him through a roof to see Jesus is an unforgettable example of sacrificial friendship and enormous faith.

First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](#).

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit:

BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads

Engage

QUESTION

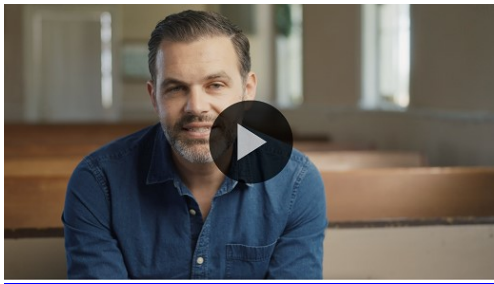
What's the greatest act of friendship you've ever experienced?

In a world full of selfishness and isolation, stories of truly sacrificial friendship are heartwarming and inspiring. We were created by God for fellowship and friendship. The help and encouragement we receive from others like the friendship we just described teaches us how to be a good friend ourself and inspires us to pay it forward.

In [John 15:13](#), Jesus told us there is no greater way to show love than to lay down our life for our friends. Jesus is our ultimate example of love and friendship. He was never a surface-level or social media-type friend. He engaged in our world and laid down His life, so we could have a closer relationship with God the Father. How can we learn from God's Word to be a true friend to others, to go beyond the surface, and show love to our friends?

Watch

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: How have you been an encouragement for someone when they were facing something difficult?



QUESTION

How have you been an encouragement for someone when they were facing something difficult?

Consider What the Bible Says

The Book of Mark tells us that Jesus had been traveling throughout the region of Galilee, teaching God's Word, healing the sick, and casting out demons. As [Mark 2](#) begins, we see that Jesus had returned to His "headquarters" of Capernaum, but this time His popularity had grown and many people were seeking Him out. Word had spread about a Teacher who could heal the sick, and hope and curiosity was rising among the crowds that gathered.

As a rabbi, a Jewish teacher, Jesus taught in a variety of locations. This time, He was in someone's home. It was probably just a typical day, but people had gathered to hear Him teach. So many had gathered that no space was available in the home or even at the door for more people to crowd in and listen to Him speak.

Did You Know?

In the area where Jesus was ministering, a house roof was typically constructed by taking branches and laying them across the top of the building. Then, the builders would slowly pack layers of mud and clay on top of the branches. When enough layers were applied, and while the material was still moist, the builders would then take stone rollers and go over the roof. They packed mud into the roof while making sure it could support enough weight to also serve as an exterior living area. Although the roof could be broken through in a short amount of time, breaking open a roof enough to pass someone through it would be a backbreaking job!

Friends Confronted a Big Obstacle

Read [Mark 2:1–4](#).

As Jesus was teaching and the crowds pressed in closely, others were pushed out. But four friends of a paralyzed man decided to act with enormous faith! They knew their friend had a desperate need. Their hearts were hopeful that maybe this Teacher could help.

In their compassion, they determined to somehow overcome the obstacle of the crowd. With no way in through the front door, they were curious and began exploring how else they might get their needy friend before Jesus. Maybe they argued back and forth about their different ideas. Maybe one friend got creative and looked up toward the roof as a possibility. Whatever the path, their desperation overcame any hesitation. They made their way to the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching, hoping this would allow their friend to see Him.

QUESTION

How do you think the paralyzed man's friends felt when they arrived to see such a crowd around Jesus?

QUESTION

Why do you think they decided to go through the roof?

QUESTION

Would you have come to the same conclusion? If so, would you have been willing to try what they did for their friend?

Jesus Responded to the Friends' Faith

Read [Mark 2:5](#).

Imagine Jesus' emotions as particles, debris, and dust from the roof began falling on His head as He taught. Maybe Jesus had to rub His eyes from the dust or shield His head from things falling—or even get out of the way! Jesus must have recognized immediately as He watched the man being lowered that here was a man with a huge need to be met.

Notice that the Scripture says, “Seeing their faith”. Jesus was responding to “their” faith, meaning the man’s friends. Though it’s likely the paralyzed man had faith of his own, the Bible writer here is directing us to think about the faith of those who helped the man. Their faith mattered! They had enough hope and determination that they went to great lengths to get their friend to Jesus, and Jesus responded to that faith.

QUESTION

Why do you think Jesus was so impressed by the actions of the paralyzed man’s friends?

QUESTION

If you were Jesus, do you think you would have felt more compassion toward the paralyzed man or toward his friends who worked so hard to get him there?

Jesus Confronted the Teachers of the Law

Read [Mark 2:6–9](#).

Jesus’ teaching took a different direction after He discerned the religious leaders’ reaction when He forgave the paralyzed man. Jesus began to question their thinking about the authority He had. He wanted them to know His power to forgive was of even greater importance than His power to heal. Jesus seemed more concerned with immediately handling the condition of the man’s heart and soul than the physical condition he was in.

QUESTION

How would you compare the reaction of the teachers of the Law with the faith of the paralyzed man’s friends?

QUESTION

How do you think the paralyzed man’s friends felt during this exchange? Do you think they were frustrated or confused that Jesus was more concerned about forgiveness than healing their friend?

Jesus Answered the Friends’ Request

Read [Mark 2:10–12](#).

With a crowd of onlookers wondering what would happen next, Jesus demonstrated His power and authority with a miraculous sign. He commanded the paralyzed man to stand, pick up his mat, and walk! Imagine the man’s joy and relief as his legs straightened and strength poured into his body, enabling him to stand, jump, and do what he had been unable to do for so long! Think about the surge of emotions the man’s friends felt, watching from above as their friend walked out the door instead of needing to be carried out again. The crowd and even the religious teachers must have been blown away by what they saw!

QUESTION

How do you think the four friends responded after they likely came down from the roof and reconnected with their healed friend?

QUESTION

How do you think this experience impacted the now-healed man? How do you think it affected his friendships with the men who selflessly made the encounter with Jesus possible?

QUESTION

In what ways do these men's faith and actions inspire you to be a better friend as you consider how to point others to Jesus?

Reflect

Actively be a part of God's work in the lives of others.

One of the greatest acts of friendship we can ever give to others is to bring our friends to Jesus. Like the paralyzed man's friends in this story, we need to search for ways to help meet the needs of people in our life. We can allow the Holy Spirit to make us aware of needs we can help to meet. But more importantly, we need to purposefully point our friends to the only One who can forgive and heal.

How aware are you of the spiritual needs of your friends? Have you spoken with them about your faith in Jesus? When they have a need, have you ever suggested Jesus as the solution to help meet that need? Be inspired and challenged today by the determination and love these friends demonstrated on behalf of their needy friend. Allow God to sacrificially love others through you as you point them to Him and the forgiveness and healing He offers.

Listen to God

Let's pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

Personal Reflection Questions

Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

QUESTION

What can you learn about friendship from this example of the paralyzed man's friends?

QUESTION

How are you engaging with the people God has placed in your life? How aware are you of their spiritual needs?

QUESTION

How can you point your friends to Jesus when they share a need with you

Activate

Like the paralyzed man's friends finding a way around the crowd, sometimes we face obstacles that make it difficult to bring people to Jesus too. We sometimes fear rejection, we doubt whether we have answers to their questions, and we lack faith to believe God can meet a specific need. These are all examples of obstacles we face. Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with faith to overcome challenges. He can help us to show love for our friends by pointing them to the One who has the power and authority to meet any needs in their life.

Challenge

When a friend shares a need with you this week, take time in that moment to pray with them for that need. Ask the Holy Spirit what role you should play in encouraging them or helping to meet that need. Follow up with them later in the week to see how they are doing. Celebrate and thank God together if the need has been met or offer encouragement and more prayer if God has not yet met the need.

Prayer Requests

Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.

We want to always be willing to be used by God to be an encouragement to others. It's important that we listen to God through His Word both in community and individually. Personal devotions have been provided as an extension of this discussion.

Live on Your Own

Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.

Day 1: Four Friends' Enormous Faith Moves Jesus to Heal Their Friend

Read [Mark 2:1–12](#).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven't already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

QUESTION

What is God saying to you about actively being a part of His work in the lives of others?

Live on Your Own

Day 2: Do Life with Others

Read [Acts 2:44–47](#).

In the Early Church, we see the example of believers gathering together, meeting each other's physical needs, eating together, and worshipping God together. It's obvious throughout Scripture that God never intended for us to walk out our faith alone. We need community!

You might have heard the phrase "do life together" when we speak about discipleship. We need examples of more mature believers walking out their faith around us, and we also need to learn to be an example to newer believers as we mature. When we live in community, God uses these relationships to help us point people to Jesus.

QUESTION

How do you think God uses the community of believers to point others to Him?

QUESTION

Are you actively a part of a group of believers who meets together regularly to worship God and meet each other's needs? Why or why not?

Live on Your Own

Day 3: Be the Church with Others

Read [Romans 12:4–13](#).

This passage teaches us how to be the Church. God never intended for us to live out our faith alone. As believers, we need each other, especially since we each bring something different to the group. God has graced each of us with certain gifts to help us serve with others. He desires for us to put these gifts into action, whether that be giving, encouraging, serving, teaching, or something else.

We should use our gifts in love and with excellence, enthusiasm, and in a spirit of honor. If we see a need, we should be ready to help that person. We should be eager to be hospitable to others. If each of us uses our gifts to love and serve others, together we can be the Church as we point others to Jesus through our example.

QUESTION

What gifts do you think God has given you to bless others with?

QUESTION

How do you think combining your gift(s) with others in the Church could help point others to Jesus?

Live on Your Own

Day 4: Serve Others

Read [Philippians 2:1–11](#).

As we think about seeking to be part of God's work in others, it's important to consider Jesus' example of servanthood. He was fully God and had access to all the riches of heaven, yet He humbly and willingly gave up His privileges to serve and die for us. If we want to become like Christ, our posture should be to serve others in the same way He did for us. When we serve others, we get to participate in God's activity in their lives as we put their needs above our own, show compassion and love, and look out for their interests.

QUESTION

How does serving others encourage them?

QUESTION

What do you think servanthood has to do with friendship?

QUESTION

In what ways do you struggle to serve others? Does thinking about Jesus' example help put those struggles into perspective?

Live on Your Own

Day 5: Love Others

Read [John 15:9–17](#).

It's obvious that loving others is a huge part of us being actively involved in the work of God in others' lives. Jesus clearly defined for us in [John 15](#) what kind of love He was talking about. It's the kind of love with which He loved us: the kind that lays down our life for our friends.

It may not necessarily mean physically dying for someone, but it does mean sacrificially giving your time and your resources, being attentive to their needs and finding ways to meet those needs if possible, praying with and encouraging them. It's choosing to treat them the way you would want to be treated if you were the one in need. When we love as Jesus does, He promised us overflowing joy!

QUESTION

What might loving others with this kind of sacrificial love look like in your life?

QUESTION

In what ways have you found Jesus' promise of overflowing joy to be true when you put this kind of love into practice?