

# Jesus at the Center

## Leaders Notes

These studies can be done as a stand alone or they can be done together. Each is designed to focus on one story in the Gospels. With each story, we focus on what Jesus has done for us and how through the Holy Spirit, we can model that behavior in our own life. Young people will be able to see how we fail to resist temptation and comfort, fail to pray and miss the extent of God's love for us in Jesus. In the same way, we will see how Jesus saved us from our sin and models for us a way of sanctified life.

The four sessions are:

- Jesus in the Desert – Resisting Temptation
- Jesus Raises Lazarus – Time to Mourn
- Jesus in the Garden – Talking to God
- Jesus' Crucifixion – The Full Extent of Love

In each session, there will be activities to be prepped. Youth will also need Bibles, pens, and paper available.

## Jesus in the Desert – Resisting Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

### Opening Activity

Would you rather: Bible edition

*Leader Says: For our opening activity, we are playing a version of would you rather with situations from the Bible. How this is going to work is we'll give you two options. You have five seconds to find someone and share your answer with them. Then when another 'would you rather' is read, you have to find someone new to share your answer with.*

Would you Rather Options

Would you rather:

- Eat a diet only consisting of mana and quail or eat a diet of locusts and honey
- Wander the desert for 40 days or be stuck in the belly of a fish for 3 days
- Have the name Nebuchadnezzar or Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz
- Have a donkey talk to you or have God talk to you via burning bush
- Be able to e all animals or name all plants
- Live in a stable or live in a cave
- Walk on water or part the Red Sea
- Be a shepherd who visited Jesus in the stable or be one of the first people Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection

## Introduction

*Leader will say, Picture this. You're wandering through the desert. You've been there for 40 days. You haven't eaten. Someone appears and tells you to turn rocks into bread. Then they tell you to throw yourself off a building and say if you do, the angels will save you. Then after that, they tell you to bow down because, if you agree, you will have all the power in the world, and you won't answer to anyone.*

*Temptation is one of the oldest things known to mankind. With origins first referenced in Genesis 2 when Eve ate the fruit from the one tree that God told them to stay away from, it gave birth to original sin. Fast forward hundreds of years and we have the temptation of Jesus in the desert.*

## Bible Exploration

To give some biblical context for this moment, this story takes place right after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist which was the official start of his public ministry. Jesus enters a time of isolation...to be alone, to fast, to pray. Here we see the first of many times in the New Testament that Jesus would take some time away from everyone and just "be". Since this is one of those stories that you may have only heard about but may never have read, we're going to break down the story of Jesus in the desert into the three sections: The first, second, and third temptation.

Read Matthew 4:1-4

Jesus enters the desert to fast for 40 days. Think about that for a little bit. We are humans can barely go a few hours without eating, let alone 40 Days. In this passage, we see the first temptation; the devil shows up and tells Jesus to turn the rocks into bread. Jesus takes this temptation and raises him a quote from the Bible: "Men shall not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the Word of God". Jesus was tempted. But Jesus resisted. Let's look at look at the second temptation.

Read Matthew 4:5-8

The devil brings Jesus to the top of the temple where he instructs Jesus to throw himself off the roof because the angels would protect him. Jesus simply replies, "You should not put the Lord your God to the test." The devil tempts Jesus by asking him to throw himself off the top of the temple, God could immediately save Jesus, but it would be a sin to put God to the test. We know our God is all powerful, but Jesus points out we are to trust and not test God's power. We can look at so many of Jesus' interactions with people-religious leaders, pharisees, etc. and see that he sees what is happening and always knows the perfect way to respond. For the second time, Jesus is tempted. But Jesus resists. Now let's look at the third and final temptation.

Read Matthew 4:8-11

The devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of all the words and says that this could all be his if Jesus just bows down and worships the devil. For the third time, Jesus'

refusal comes straight from Scripture and he says, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." With that final refusal, Jesus sends the devil away and the angels show up to serve Jesus. Jesus was tempted. But Jesus resisted.

### Application

*Leader says:* Looking at this account of Jesus in the desert, we know Jesus was tempted just as we are everyday by the devil, the world and our sinful nature. With every temptation, Jesus resisted using God's Word.

Read Hebrews 4:15-16

We know that Jesus understands temptation. He experienced every kind that we do. Yet, Jesus was perfect, and we are not. There can often be seasons of our lives where the temptation feels endless. Those seasons where it feels so easy to give into that one thing...that one thing we think will make people love us. That one thing that we think will put us ahead. That one thing that we think will give us everything we need. But the thing is that these temptations, they never help us, they never benefit us. Temptations only put an even bigger wedge between us and God.

- What are some ways we are tempted by our sinful nature, the world and the devil in our lives?

Are we able to perfectly resist every temptation thrown our way just like Jesus? Of course not. We are naturally sinful people, desperately in need of God's grace through Jesus' death on the cross. But what we're able to do is be open and honest with God about each temptation we're facing because our God promises to take the weight of all we're facing...the good, the bad, and the ugly and carry it with ease. Our God promises to forgive and to love.

Jesus was tempted and was without sin. Because of this, we can be confident to draw near to God through grace in Jesus. In a little bit, we're going to spend time diving deeper into these passages but know that no matter what temptation is hanging over your head, God sees you, he loves you, and through him you have the strength to resist.

Let's break off into small groups to dive deeper into this story and in about 15 minutes (*or whatever time frame works best for you*) we'll come back together for our closing activity

### Small Group Discussion

1. What sticks out to you about this account from Matthew?
2. Read this story in the different gospels: Mark 1:9-12, Luke 4:1-13. Like all gospels, each author tells the story slightly differently. What are some of the differences you notice? What are some of the similarities?
3. Jesus uses God's Word to resist temptation. Through the Holy Spirit, how can knowing and reading God's Word help us resist temptation?
4. Why do you think it's so easy of us to be tempted? How is that tied to why we include confession and absolution in worship each week? Where can we go when we fall to temptation?
5. How can God empower you to repent and overcome the temptations you face?

6. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. What does this verse tell us about God? about ourselves?
7. Share highs and lows and pray together as a small group

### Closing Activity

*Leader Says:* We're going to end our time together the same way: reflection and prayer. This may seem uncomfortable but it's important to find new ways to deepen our understanding of God and see him more clearly. Up on the screen (or Flipchart paper or on the whiteboard...really whatever you have will work) are three questions:

1. What does this story reveal about God?
2. What does this story reveal about me?
3. How does this story prompt me to pray?

The third question may be difficult to answer right away. But it's an important one. Looking at this story of temptation and God's faithfulness, how does that guide our prayers? *(It's important to remember that we can come to God no matter what and in any manner...we can talk to God just like we talk to the trusted adult in our lives)* So let's take five minutes (or longer, if need be...feel free to adjust this time as the weeks go on) and think through/journal these questions. Then after the time is up, we'll close in prayer.

*After reflection time,* as you head into this week, whatever it may look like, know that our God goes with you and through Him, you are strong. Let's pray:

Dear God,

We thank you for your word. We thank you for how you promise to carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. As we head into this week, give us the strength to resist temptation and when we fail, remind us that you forgive us and you love us.

In Your name we pray,

Amen

# Jesus Raises Lazarus – A Time to Mourn

John 11:1-44

## Opening Activity

He Stinkith!

Items needed:

- Rolls of toilet paper

*Leaders Says:* Our story for today is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus. For this game, you're going to break up into groups of four and choose one person to be a Lazarus. During the first round, you'll take toilet paper and wrap the Lazarus. The first team to wrap their person, gets 50 points. For the next round, the person has to stay wrapped and when you shout out "He Stinkith!", the person wrapped in toilet paper has to break free so no toilet paper is on them, and sprint to a designated line. First person to cross the line gets 75 points. The team with the most points wins.

## Introduction

*Leader Says:* Mourning something we all experience at some point in our life. Maybe you're in a season of mourning right now. Before we get in too far, let's talk about what exactly mourning is. We know that mourning is often equated with death...when someone close to you dies, you mourn and are sad about their death. But this feeling of mourning spans the loss of anything significant...a relationship (whether it be romantic or friendship), a dream that doesn't get to become a reality, a season of life you'll never get back. It is also not something that has a time frame.

We may experience mourning and loss our entire lives, particularly if we have lost someone important to us. We all haven't had someone close to us die, we have probably experienced a loss of some sort (*author's note: it's also important to note that mourning looks different to literally everyone. I have often said that we mourn the way we mourn in order so that we can heal.*)

When we are mourning, no matter what we're mourning, there is a comfort when someone is experiencing it with you. When someone sits with you in the heaviness. When they don't try to fix what is going on, but they look at you and say, "I may not have the answers. But if you keep talking, I'll keep listening." You should look to the Bible and see stories of the importance of showing up for your people in a way that reflects God's love.

God did make us to mourn in isolation. Instead we have a community who can point us continually back to God and His promises. When Moses' arms grew tired and he knew he had to keep them raised so the Israelites would continue to win, Aaron and Hur came and held up his arms for him. When Job lost literally everything, his friends came and sat with him. When Jesus died, the disciples gathered together in the Upper Room and mourned. When Lazarus died, Jesus mourned with Mary and Martha.

## Bible Exploration

*Leader Says:* When we look at the gospel of John, you see detailed Jesus' interactions with those around him. You see Jesus with the disciples. You see Jesus experience anger, joy and sadness. You read of Jesus having human interactions with the people around him. Through John's gospel, we're reminded that the Son of God, the second part of the Trinity, was an embodied, walking-around, human.

Today, we're going to look at the story of Jesus and Lazarus. In this story, Jesus performs a miracle that only Jesus can do. But in this story, we also see Jesus model how to process seasons of mourning.

The reading for today is a long one, so we're going to break it up into three chunks. As we read through this story, pay attention to how you see Jesus react to the loss of one of his friends. Listen for how Jesus points forward to the time when all will be resurrected because of Jesus' own resurrection.

Read John 11:1-16

Jesus receives word that his friend Lazarus is sick. But instead of leaving the second Jesus received word, he waited for a bit. Why? Because God's glory would be revealed through Lazarus. Here we see this important precedent set: even in our hardest seasons, we still live and trust in our God. In all of the seasons of life, the good, the bad, the in between, God will work through us to show His faithfulness and His grace. Take a couple of minutes and discuss this with someone near you:

- Who would you want Jesus to bring back to life and why (could be someone you know, could be a historical figure)?
- There are multiple times in the New Testament where Jesus makes it obvious what He came down to do and yet the disciples are still confused. Why do you think this was?

Read John 11:17-27

Jesus arrives at Bethany four days after Lazarus died. Commentators note that the number of days was important because in Jewish tradition, they believed that the soul hovered above the body for three days. By showing up four days later, Jesus was proving that the healing that was about to happen was truly an act of God.

Jesus shows up on the scene and is greeted by Martha. Martha tells Jesus that Lazarus is gone but she believed that he would be raised on the final day. Jesus then speaks these well-known words, "I am the Resurrection and the life". That's a bold and important statement. This is one way that Jesus was giving comfort to Martha. Jesus is reminding her that he would die to pay for our sins and restore us to God so that we may live eternally.

Read John 11:28-44



Mary comes to greet Jesus and a crowd of mourners follow her (*authors note: I think mourning is one of the loneliest, most isolating moments one can feel. Think of what a game changer this would be if, when someone in your life died, all these people showed up to mourn with you. Mourning probably wouldn't feel so lonely then*). When Mary gets to Jesus, she falls at his feet. In that moment,

Jesus show comfort in a different way now. He shifts from saying, "I am the Resurrection and the life" to showing very real emotions. Jesus knew that Lazarus wasn't going to be dead for much longer. He knew that he just had to say the words and Lazarus would walk out. But in that moment, Jesus mourned His friend. "Jesus wept." Think about the weight of that two-word long Bible verse. Jesus, the Son of God, wept. He mourned. Then he brushed himself off, called out to God, and told Lazarus to come out. Let's take a couple of minutes and discuss this question with the person near you:

- Jesus showed comfort by pointing to how He is the resurrection and the life and by crying with His friends. How can the Holy Spirit help us to model both when people around us are mourning?

### Life Application

*Leader Says:* We can look to the Bible to know how God is and what God has done for us. We see our sin and how God can work through us to live, love, forgive and serve. The Bible also teaches us is how to respond to our emotions and how to navigate through those seasons of life that knock us off our feet. It shows us the importance of taking the emotions we experience, feeling them, but pointing ourselves and others to Jesus in the midst of everything. Being a follower of Jesus doesn't mean pushing any hard feelings or seasons of life to the side. It doesn't mean using platitudes to try and make ignore how we feel. Instead, we sit in the brokenness of sin, navigate difficult things, mourning, but praising God for the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Through Jesus, we can be confident that God's light will shine the brightest in our darkest of seasons.

Just like last week, we're going to spend some time in small group discussing some questions from our Bible story for tonight and then we'll come back together for some reflection time.

### Small Group Discussion

1. Who is the person (or people) you turn to when life is hard?
2. How do you react when you are mourning something important?
3. How can God's Word and Sacrament be a comfort when life is hard?
4. How can the Holy Spirit help us to point people to Jesus without dismissing their feelings in difficult times?
5. John 11: 35 is the shortest verse in the Bible. Even though it's only two verses long, it's a powerful one. What does it mean to you that Jesus mourned his friend?
6. Multiple times in the New Testament, the disciples are surprised when they see Jesus do these incredible things. Why do you think they were so surprised when Jesus raised Lazarus?
7. Share highs and lows and pray as a group

### Closing Activity

*Leader Says:* Just like last week, we're going to spend some time on our own pondering or journaling the same three questions we looked at last week:

1. What does this story reveal about God?
2. What does this story reveal about me?
3. How does this story prompt me to pray?

If you need a refresher on the story, spend some time looking through John 11. Then after the time is up, we'll close in prayer.

*After reflection time,* as you head into this week, look for ways that the Holy Spirit can help you to give comfort to others in everything you do and in all seasons. Let's pray:

Dear God,

We thank you for this time together. We thank you that we can look to your Word for everything; from how to praise to how to mourn. Thank you for sending Jesus to the part to teach us and show us how to respond in all of life's seasons. Remind us it's ok to mourn. Remind us that your light can still shine in the darkest of times.

In your name we pray,

Amen.



# Jesus in the Garden – Talking to God

John 17

*The activity for this week's lesson is choosing a specific psalm and using it to help guide your prayers. It can be placed wherever it works best for your context.*

## Introduction

*Leader Says:* We all have people in our lives who know us very well. Think for a moment of who in your life could tell how you're doing completely based on how your body language or an answer to a simple question.

Now think of how you interact with them. The tone of your voice is probably informal. You say what you are thinking. You probably don't interact with them the same way you would a teacher or a stranger.

Now think about what your prayers sound like. Do they carry a more informal tone like when you talk with someone who knows you? Or do they sound more like you're talking to a stranger? Or maybe you're sitting here thinking, '...outside of the prayers I listen to at church, I don't really pray...' Just to be clear, there isn't a "wrong" way to pray. Prayers can vary widely, but God will still hear every prayer said in His name. In our Bible story for today, we're going to look at one of the final recorded prayers of Jesus. As we dive into this passage from John, I just want you to think about this question: What do my prayers sound like? How does Jesus give us an example for prayer here?

## Bible Exploration

*Leader Says:* To set the stage a little bit: we are now entering Jesus' final days on earth before He was crucified. Everything in Jesus' life is starting to get very intense, very fast. He had just finished the Last Supper and washing the disciples' feet. Jesus knows what is coming next and, like He has done multiple times before, He goes off and prays. He brings a couple of disciples along and asks them to keep watch. Jesus enters the Garden of Gethsemane to have a very honest conversation with his Father. Let's dive in

Read John 17:1-5

There are some Bible translations that break down chapter 17 into three sections: prayers for himself, prayers for the disciples, and prayers for all believers. As you would expect, Jesus, prays for himself the least and spends most of the time praying for others.

As Jesus prays for himself, we see that Jesus is essentially saying, "Well. I came to this earth, I did all that you told me to do. I showed who you were. And now I realize it's time for me to join you again so that it was like it was at the beginning of time."

As we read, it's important to keep in mind that Jesus knows everything that is about to happen. He knows the suffering, the pain, the mockery, the ridicule that awaits him over the next 24 hours. Yet, at that moment, He does not hesitate to do what He came to earth to do and die on our behalf. Jesus always had our restoration and salvation on His mind. But before the journey to the cross begins, Jesus spends time in prayer for His friends and the people who He came to save.

Read John 17:6-19

We were designed for community. Look at the beginning of Genesis. God saw that Adam needed Eve. Humans weren't meant to do life alone. Over the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, the disciples weren't just individual men who followed Jesus, but they became close, personal friends. They broke bread together, traveled together, and did life together. Jesus knew that these men would continue to teach and heal in His name. Jesus also knew that these men would be mocked, ridiculed, and even persecuted. Jesus just wanted to make sure that they could build the community around Jesus together with the Holy Spirit's help.

Quickly discuss with the person next to you: Looking at how much of this prayer is spent praying for his friends and praying for others, what does this teach us about what Jesus valued?

Read John 17:20-26

As Jesus wraps up this prayer, he prays for everyone. Now, looking at John 17:21-23, it can get a bit confusing. Let's break it down verse by verse so we understand who/what Jesus is praying for:

John 17:21 Jesus wants us to be one/united with each other in the same way He and God are one. He wants us to be in/connected to/united with Himself and God because in that way the world will believe that God sent Jesus.

John 12:22 God gave Jesus glory and Jesus passed it on to us, his believers, so that we may be united just like He and God are united.

John 17:23 Jesus in us, and God in Jesus, so that we, His followers may be perfectly united, and because of that the world will see that

- a) God sent Jesus, and
- b) God loves us the way He loves Jesus

To sum it all up: Jesus wants everyone to know that God has sent Him and be united in Jesus' love and salvation. We are united through God in our faith, and we can take live that unity so the world may know Jesus' name. God loves us and gives us gifts and brings us together as one. With that final prayer, Jesus ends his prayer and rejoins the disciples who were keeping watch and begins his journey to the cross.

## Application

*Leader Says:* We can never be done learning about Jesus and all He did during His time on earth. He taught about who God is and what He will do/has done for us. He showed us our need for a Savior as well as mercy and grace. He got down and washed the disciple's feet and told us to go and do likewise.

One thing we can look at is how Jesus modeled the importance of prayer. We see it throughout the gospels and the entire New Testament. Jesus gives us certain words in prayers like the Lord's Prayer and he models other prayers for us to hear. Most importantly, Jesus' prayers remind us that God wants to hear from us.

Prayer can be an intimidating thing, especially in public. You don't want to say the wrong thing or sound like a fool in front of God or others. Maybe you don't pray as much as you should because you find it hard to concentrate and you become easily distracted. But prayer shouldn't be unapproachable or scary. Instead, prayer should be this time where you get to talk to your Heavenly Father.

God knows your life and your heart. In prayer God gives you opportunity to lay your burdens at your feet, knowing and trusting that He will carry them with ease. With a God who knows all things, we can be honest in prayer with just like Jesus was in the garden. We can also focus our prayers on not just ourselves, but on others who need God's help.

It's possible that you might need some prompts to help you pray and that's ok! We're going to spend some time looking at three different Psalms of prayer. The prayers have different tones so you can pick the one that best fits where you're at in your life right now. First, you'll read them a couple of times. Then you'll underline words or phrases that stick out to you. Finally, you'll take that Psalm and put it in your own words as a prayer to God. This is sometime between you and God. After a couple of minutes, we'll break up into small groups before coming back together for our closing activity

*Feel free to change up the flow of the evening. If you'd rather do small group and then during the normal reflection time, work in some time with the Psalm, that's great! Do whatever works best for your context.*

### Small Group Discussion

1. What's difficult about prayer? (Encourage honesty)
2. How can the Holy Spirit help us to pray regularly and with the right focus?
3. Look at this same prayer in the other gospels: Matthew 26:39, 42, 44, Mark 14:32-36, and Luke 22:39-46. Which gospels are the similarities and what are the differences?
4. Thinking through the Psalm activity. What was easy about it? What was hard about it?
5. If you were Jesus, what would be going through your mind as you prayed that prayer in the garden?
6. Share highs and lows and pray as a group

## Closing Activity

*Leader Says:* Let's spend some time on our own pondering or journaling the same three questions we've been looking at:

1. What does this story reveal about God?
2. What does this story reveal about me?
3. How does this story prompt me to pray?

If you need a refresher on the story, spend some time looking through John 17. Then after the time is up, we'll close in prayer.

*After reflection time,* as you head into this week, be mindful of what your prayers look like. Look for new opportunities to pray. Remember: God just wants to hear from his children. Let's pray.

Dear God,

God, we thank you for being the God who is always ready to listen. Remind us to come to you in everything and with anything. There will be times where we know that we need to pray but we're not sure exactly what to pray. God, remind us that when we're in those places, that we trust the Holy Spirit to intercede on our behalf. Always remind us we don't have to hide from you because you already know our hearts and our world.

In Your name we pray,

Amen.

## Prayer Psalm Options

### Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.  
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.  
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret  
heart.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.  
Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your  
righteousness.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would  
give it;

you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will  
not despise.  
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem;  
then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

### Psalm 13

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I take counsel in my soul  
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over  
me?  
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;  
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of  
death,  
lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"  
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.  
But I have trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

## Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is high; I cannot attain it.  
Where shall I go from your Spirit?  
Or where shall I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light about me be night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light with you.  
For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's  
womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully  
made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.  
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
If I would count them, they are more than the  
sand.  
I awake, and I am still with you.  
Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!  
O men of blood, depart from me!  
They speak against you with malicious intent;  
your enemies take your name in vain.  
Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up  
against you?  
I hate them with complete hatred;  
I count them my enemies.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!



## Crucifixion of Jesus – The Full Extent of Love

Luke 23:32-43, Mark 15:33-39

### Opening Activity

*Leader says,* Today, we're entering Jesus' final hours on earth before he died. These passages can be hard for us to read but so important for us to read. For centuries, artists have depicted what they think those final hours of Jesus' life looked like and no two paintings look the same.

We're going to look at a painting called "The Descent from the Cross" by Rembrandt. Rembrandt is a well-known artist who, over the course of his life, painted hundreds of paintings based on stories from the Bible.

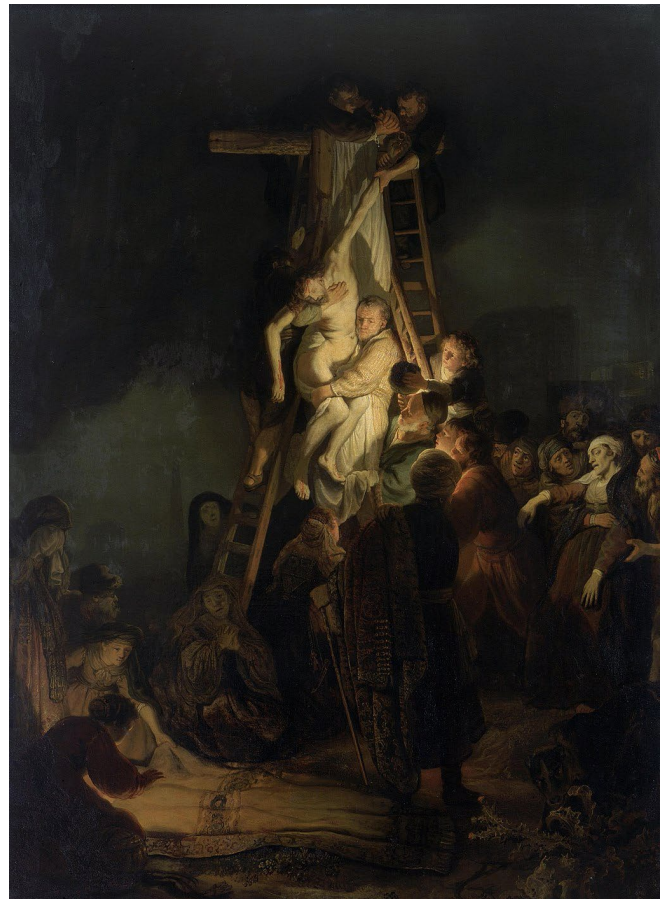
To set the stage for our time together, find a partner and spend some time really looking at this painting. Discuss these questions:

1. What's the first thing you notice about this painting?
2. What do you notice about the crowd?
3. Describe the painting.
4. Look closely at the faces of the people in the painting. In this painting, each person is depicted with a different facial expression, what are those expressions?
5. What would your facial expression be if you were painted into this picture?

Title: Descent from the Cross

Artist: Rembrandt

Date: 1634, Hermitage Museum,  
St. Petersburg, Russia



## Introduction

*Leaders Says:* The story of Jesus' crucifixion is one of those stories where, no matter how many times we read it or experience it, we should never get numb to it. This isn't one of those stories that we take lightly or casually read when we want to dive into the Bible on a Tuesday afternoon. It feels like this passage is reserved for very specific times.

Why does it feel this way? It could be that we don't like to see Jesus like this. We don't like to see him beaten, ridiculed, and destroyed because we know that it was our sin that put Him on that cross. But this story, as hard as it is to read, is such an important story and one that we truly need to meditate on regularly. This story shows us our salvation and how deeply we are truly loved by God.

To set the stage for today's story, let's give some context. Jesus had just finished praying in the garden and He's greeted by Judas who hands him over to the guards. Jesus begins His journey to the cross. The gospel writers don't discuss what was going through Jesus' mind in these times. We know He felt the pain that was being inflicted. He also felt the weight of the sin of the world as He was brutally tortured. Yet, Jesus endured it all. He endured it all because He loves us and wants to redeem us to Himself.

## Bible Exploration

*Leader Says,* If you've been around the church at all, a lot of this probably sounds familiar so not a lot of context is needed before we dive into our passage for today. As we read, let's look for how Jesus shows love.

Read Luke 23:32-43 and Mark 15:33-39

When we look at these two accounts from Luke and Mark, we see a lot of emotions. But before we go any further, we need to realize the tension that we live in. Today, we can read this story knowing it does not end at the cross but at the empty tomb three days later. We know that Jesus will rise from the dead. The tension comes as we read about these final hours on the cross with all its heaviness and sadness. We cannot skip past this moment. It's a time to remember our sin which brought Jesus here.

At this point, Jesus isn't only experiencing the physical, human pain that comes along with being crucified but he is also experiencing the pain that we can never understand and thankfully will never experience: the weight of the sins of the world that have ever been committed and ever will be committed.

As his death gets closer, Jesus yells out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and breathes his last breath.

What comes next is something that we've read multiple times but maybe never fully understand. When Jesus dies, the earth begins to shake, and the temple curtain is torn in two. These supernatural events point to the impact of Jesus' death for us. With the curtain that acts as a barrier

gone, the everyday person can approach God directly (this would prove to be a huge shift for God's people in the New Testament). Jesus, the Son of God, showed us the importance of love by dying for us. Again, we know that this isn't the end of the story, but we can't skip ahead. We should stay in this moment for all it shows us about God's love for us even in our sin.

### Application

*Leader Says:* What does this love mean for us? It means everything. We can read in God's Word when the death we deserved because of our sin was re-written. Jesus' death is everything the Old Testament points to and the center of our saving faith now. Without this, everything we believe falls apart. Because of God's gift of faith to us, Jesus' death changes everything about how we want to live our lives, how we interact with other people, how we grow, how we forgive. Because of this, we know that even as we fail, God will always forgive us. We love because God first showed us love in Jesus. Everything we do to flow out of that:

- Because Jesus died for me, I can love
- Because Jesus hung on the cross, speaking words of forgiveness to me, I can forgive that person who hurt me.
- Because Jesus hung on the cross, being more broken than we will ever be, the brokenness we experience will never be too much for Him to handle. In fact, it's through Jesus that our brokenness is forever and completely made whole.

None of us love perfectly. We mess up in relationships, we may not forgive easily. Maybe instead of opening up, we shut down and run. Trusting in our own love us fickle and faulty. We naturally only want to love those who love us or who are easy to love.

- Who in your life feels difficult to love?

Instead, because Jesus' love was so deep that it went to the cross for us, in faith we can reflect that love to others. We are always failing, but with the Holy Spirit, always striving to love better, in a Christ-like way. We want to reflect God's love in a way so that when people look at me, they see me living for a God who loves, who forgives, who shows up for his people. Our God saw our sin and brokenness, but graciously loved us enough to go to the cross on our behalf, despite it all.

Our goal in life should be to be like Jesus. When we look at these stories (and so many others in the New Testament), we see how Jesus models action for us. We will never resist temptation, provide comfort, pray or love perfectly. Yet we know how God desires for us to live out forgiveness, love, service and grace.

We're going to spend some time in small groups discussing questions based on the story for tonight then we'll come back together for our closing activity.

### Small Group Discussion

1. How do you show love? How do you receive love?
2. Read the crucifixion account in the other gospels: Matthew 27:32-50, Mark 15: 27-39, Luke 23:32-46, and John 19:17-30. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

3. There's a good chance you've heard the Bible story tonight multiple times. But as you heard it today, what part sticks out to you?
4. As you think through the story of Good Friday and all the events that had to take place, what is the hardest part for you to hear?
5. Why is this story the center of everything in God's Word? Why is it central to our faith?
6. Why is it important for us to constantly come back to this story and hear it again? What does Jesus dying on the cross mean to you?
7. Share highs and lows and pray

### Closing Activity

Leader Says: As we reflect on this hard story of Jesus' crucifixion, look for what God is trying to tell you through this story by journaling/reflecting upon these questions:

1. What does this story reveal about God?
2. What does this story reveal about me?
3. How does this story prompt me to pray?

*After reflection time*, we know that Jesus' death is only temporary. We know that he rises on the third day but for now, let's be thinking of what exactly it means that Jesus died for us. That he took all of our sin and hung with it on the cross. Let's pray.

Dear God,

We thank you for sending your son to this earth. We thank you that, while he was here on earth, he taught us everything. We don't deserve to be saved but you see us for who we truly are: your children and your creation. We pray that we always remember the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. We thank you that, through the cross, we are made whole. Remind us to show your love to those around us and remind us to always live lives that are honoring to you.

In Your name we pray,

Amen