

rethinking jesus

HONEST QUESTIONS.
REAL DISCUSSIONS.



GREEK
INTERVARSITY.






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REAL DISCUSSIONS.



five weekly studies

- 1 Who is Jesus really? **Text:** John 4:4-26
- 2 Is being good enough? **Text:** John 3:1-21
- 3 Why did he have to die? **Text:** Luke 23:32-49; Romans 3:22-24
- 4 Is He worth it? **Text:** Matt. 13:44-46; Luke 18:18-30
- 5 Following Jesus means going to Church, right? **Text:** 2 Corinthians 5:14-21



Notes for leaders

This study was created as a tool to be used with people who have grown up with a Christian background, but don't really understand what it means to know and follow Jesus. The goal is to help them take a fresh look at Jesus and what he really said about salvation. The emphasis throughout each passage is to point out the difference between a religious observance of rules versus the heart transformation that comes from an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Working with people who have grown up in church hearing the stories about Jesus can be especially difficult. Many people spend years in church without really understanding the gospel. Some may have even made a verbal commitment to follow Jesus, but have never really allowed God to transform their hearts.

a few tips on leading this study

- *Challenge their assumptions about faith, Jesus, the Bible, etc.*
- *Never accept “churchy” answers. Always challenge them to dig deeper and form their own opinions.*
- *Make sure they draw their responses directly from the text.*
- *Get at the real meanings behind the answers they give and ask them to explain what they mean.*
- *Help give people fresh perspectives on stories they may have already heard.*
- *Emphasize real heart transformation, as opposed to a works-based, irrelevant faith. Help them to understand the importance of having an open mind and acknowledging that we have much to learn from a passage even if we have heard the stories already*



1 Who is Jesus really?

JOHN 4:4-26

Introduction

In Jesus' time bitter hostility existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Samaritans were a mixed race made up of Jews who had intermarried with Gentiles. Jews considered them half-breeds and inferior. When Jewish people traveled in the area near Samaria they would take the long way around just to avoid having to interact with these "unclean people."

Getting Started


Imagine the neighborhood or city that your parents said you should stay away from, and now imagine you find yourself in the middle of it. How would you feel?

Read John 4:4-26



Questions for discussion

- 1) Describe what happens in the conversation between Jesus and the woman
- 2) How do you think the woman feels when Jesus, a Jewish man, shows up at the well and begins speaking with her?
- 3) Note the woman's initial reaction in v.9. Why does it change by verse 11?
- 4) Compare and contrast the type of water that the woman is thinking of (vv. 11, 15) and the type of water that Jesus is talking about (vv. 13-14)
- 5) How is Jesus' statement in v. 16 a turning point in the conversation?
- 6) Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher and mathematician, once said that we all have a God-shaped vacuum in our hearts that can only be filled by God. People try to fill the vacuum with all kinds of things, but they end up just as dissatisfied. What does this woman try to fill it with?
- 7) What are ways that people try to fill their emptiness in life today?

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- 8) How can Jesus' "living water" satisfy some (or all) of those needs?

 - 9) John 4:26 records the first instance when Jesus clearly declares himself to be the Messiah, the savior the Jewish people had been waiting for. Why choose a Samaritan woman to share this with first?

 - 10) In this account we see that Jesus broke through three major barriers: Spending time in Samaria with "unclean" people, breaking through the gender barrier and relating to a woman and not being afraid to interact with a woman with a shameful reputation.

 - 11) How does this Jesus compare with the Jesus you grew up knowing?

 - 12) If Jesus walked up to you today and started a conversation like he did with this woman, what kinds of things would he bring up about your life?

Challenge

Spend some time alone this week asking Jesus to reveal to you who he is and what you might be filling your own emptiness with. At least once this week, try to set aside 20 minutes where you can quietly reflect without any distractions.



2 Is being good enough?

JOHN 3:1-21

Introduction:

In this passage Nicodemus a religious leader of the day was coming to visit Jesus. As a Pharisee he would be a fanatic about keeping of the religious law and pursuing religious purity. In short, he was a good person and a good rule-follower. He was today's version of a pastor or priest. But Jesus tells him there is something missing...

Getting Started:

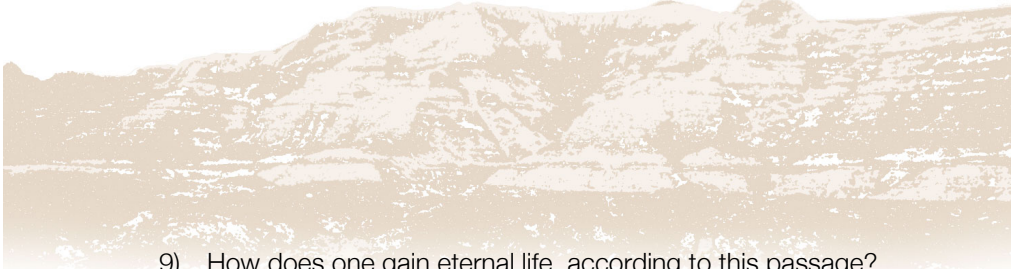
Have you ever gone to someone to ask for advice and end up getting more than you asked for? What was that like?

Read John 3:1-21



Questions for discussion

- 1) How would you describe a religious person today
- 2) Jesus' initial response does not seem to go with the flow of the conversation. Why might he have responded as he did?
- 3) Jesus responds to Nicodemus with the idea of being "born again". This phrase is used frequently in many churches. As the first person to hear it, how do you think Nicodemus responds? What would have been your response?
- 4) Nicodemus was a religious leader and believed that he knew how to get to God. Why would Jesus tell him that he needed to be "born again"?
- 5) Nicodemus seems surprised that there is something else he must do to see the kingdom of God. Why might this surprise him?
- 6) Jesus explains the idea of "born again" as a spiritual birth. What does this mean?
- 7) When Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be "born again", Jesus is telling him that being moral and following the rules isn't good enough to see God. What is his response to this news?
- 8) According to vv. 16-17, what is Jesus' identity and purpose?



9) How does one gain eternal life, according to this passage?

10) If a person truly believes something, how is it reflected in his or her life?

11) What happens to those who *don't* believe in Jesus?

Challenge:

At the end of John 3, we don't really know if Nicodemus decides to engage in a spiritual rebirth and follow Jesus or if he continues with just being a good person and a religious teacher. What might it look like for you to experience a spiritual rebirth and follow Jesus?



3 Why did He have to die?

LUKE 23:32-49; ROMANS 3:22-24

Introduction

The week leading up to the crucifixion was by far the most difficult week in Jesus' ministry. He came to Jerusalem with hundreds of thousands of others during the week of the Passover (the biggest celebration in the Jewish year). After being hailed as a coming king and going through public verbal tussles with the religious leaders, he was unjustly accused of being a criminal. After enduring a farce of a trial and getting sentenced to death, he was publicly beaten and scourged. Jesus was in the midst of the most difficult day of his life. Crucifixion is the cruelest and most painful death ever devised as a means of capital punishment. Let's look at how Jesus, in excruciating pain, endures this distress.

Getting Started:

Can you think of a time when you or someone close to you was unjustly punished? How did you respond?

Read Luke 23: 13-25, 32-49



Questions for discussion

- 1) In verses 32-34 we read that Jesus was crucified with two criminals. Given his situation, what surprises you about the way Jesus prays?
- 2) In verses 35-39 the rulers and soldiers mock Jesus, and one of the criminals insults him. What do their comments have in common?
- 3) What do you notice about the other criminal? What does he say and what might he believe about Jesus and about himself?
- 4) If this criminal is guilty and Jesus is innocent, how can Jesus say (v. 43) they will be together in Paradise?

Background Note

In the center of the Temple in Jerusalem was a room called the Holy of Holies. It was thought to be the place where the very presence of God dwelt. The high priest was the only one who could enter and even he could only go in once per year. The room was separated from the rest of the temple by a floor to ceiling curtain, 6" thick, made of cloth. Nobody dared go past the curtain for fear that they would be consumed by the presence of God.



Questions for discussion

- 5) Given this information, why is the tearing of the curtain significant? What does it symbolize in terms of how we can relate to God? (See v.45)

- 6) Being a Roman army officer, the centurion had probably overseen dozens, maybe even hundreds of crucifixions. Why would the events of this particular crucifixion be so stunning to him? (See v.47)

- 7) In ancient Israel, beating one's breasts was a symbol of remorse and repentance. What attitudes and behaviors would the audience be remorseful of?

Reflect

Jesus death was unfair, so was it really necessary? We read in Romans that because God is just, someone had to die as punishment for all the evil of humanity. The tearing of the temple curtain is a sign that Jesus death was required in order to reconcile us to God.

Read Romans 3:22-24



Questions for discussion

- 1) According to verse 22, how can someone be righteous? Can someone be righteous any other way?
- 2) Why does God require atonement? What does that really mean?
- 3) How does the injustice of Jesus death coupled with the necessity of it, affect your view of Jesus? What motivated him to go to the cross?

Challenge

Jesus suffered an unfair and miserable death, because it was the only way for people to relate to God. Spend some time responding to Jesus death and gift of salvation. You may respond with anger, grief, remorse or joy in his grace. You may want to take a few minutes as a group for silent reflection and prayer. Or encourage the group to spend time reflecting over the next week.



4 Is He worth it?

MATTHEW 13:44-46; LUKE 18:18-30

Introduction:

Sometimes being a Christian feels like a burden. There are rules to follow and time commitments to fulfill - like going to church. Not everyone likes Christians either. Sometimes you might ask, "Doesn't God want me to be happy?" And sometimes following Jesus doesn't seem popular and doesn't feel like it will make us happy. But Jesus actually teaches and promises that nothing in the world will make us more joyful than following him.

Getting Started:

Describe a time in your life when you were truly joyful. What brings you true joy in life?

Read Matthew 13:44-46



Questions for discussion

- 1) How is the kingdom of heaven described?
- 2) What do you think the kingdom of heaven is?
- 3) Why do you think Jesus uses these stories to describe the kingdom of heaven?
- 4) Why should we give up everything for the kingdom of heaven?
- 5) Jesus even notes that the first man “in his joy” sold everything he had? Have you ever thought about someone giving up everything with joy to follow Jesus?
- 6) Have you ever experienced the kingdom of heaven?

Reflect

Jesus asks us to be willing to give up everything to follow him, but he isn't asking us to live downcast lives, regretting the things we are “missing out” on. Let's take a look at how Jesus interacted with a man who wanted eternal life, but loved something else more than Jesus.

Read Luke 18:18-30



Questions for discussion


- 1) What did the ruler think was necessary to inherit eternal life? What kind of answer do you think he was looking for?
- 2) Was the ruler a very moral man? Was good morality enough for eternal life?
- 3) Was the man willing to give up everything to follow Jesus? Which did he love more - his money or Jesus?
- 4) What type of life does Jesus promise for his followers here on earth? How about in heaven?
- 5) Why is it difficult for rich people to get into heaven? Is it impossible?
- 6) What would be the most difficult thing for you to give up in order to follow Jesus?

Challenge

Take a step this week to give up the thing that you mentioned in the previous question, believing that Jesus will give you joy.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

- Jim Elliot, missionary



5 Following Jesus means going to church, right?

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21

Introduction:

Paul is writing these words to a group of predominantly Gentile Christians in the culturally diverse city of Corinth. This particular group struggled with false teaching, quarrels and immorality. This passage speaks very clearly about Jesus death on the cross and what that means for believers in their everyday lives. The cross is not just a good story, or our ticket to get into heaven. It's all about reconciliation and transformation. This is a challenging passage that gives us a clear picture of what it looks like when the broken relationship between God and people is restored.

Getting Started:

Have you ever had to act as a representative for your chapter? For example: Greek leadership meetings, dinner announcements, school newspaper, rush council, IFC exec member, etc.? What was the experience like?


As a representative of your chapter, what values or ideals do you try to embody? Are there any stereotypes you carry with you as a member of your chapter?



Read: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Questions for discussion

- 1) Who does “we” refer to in this passage? Who is speaking?
- 2) Make a list of words, images, ideas that stick out to you.
- 3) List all active agents/characters/people in this passage.
- 4) What images are confusing? What questions do you have about the passage?
- 5) What do you think is the central truth in this passage and why?
- 6) What does it mean to die to ourselves? What does it mean to live for Christ? Sometimes these are commonly used phrases in Church, but what do they mean for you personally?
- 7) What does the idea of new creation bring to mind? How might someone’s life be changed if they were to become a new creation?
- 8) Why is God choosing to make his appeal through us? Couldn’t he just do it himself? (v.20)

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- 9) Reconciliation takes place between two parties whose relationship has been damaged and broken. What has caused our relationship with God to be broken?

 - 10) Why does Paul implore us to be reconciled to God? (v.20)

 - 11) What needs to take place for us to be reconciled to God?

 - 12) Are you at a place where you could say that you are truly reconciled with God? If yes, how do you know? If not, what would need to happen for you to arrive at that place?

 - 13) Based on your current lifestyle, priorities, values, etc. would your brothers/sisters identify you as an ambassador for Christ?

 - 14) What would it look like for you to live as an ambassador or representative for Christ? How would this change the choices you make and the things you value?

Challenge:

Would you consider committing to live as an ambassador for Christ in your chapter? What would this look like for you personally? What things in your life would you need to surrender to Jesus for this to become a reality?

Spend some time in prayer individually or as a group, asking God to show you what you need to surrender in order to be his ambassador.





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