

CHRIST IN THE CELLBLOCK

A Bible Study for Jail Ministry

Leader's Guide



Created by The Prison Ministry Task Force of the Indiana District—Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS)

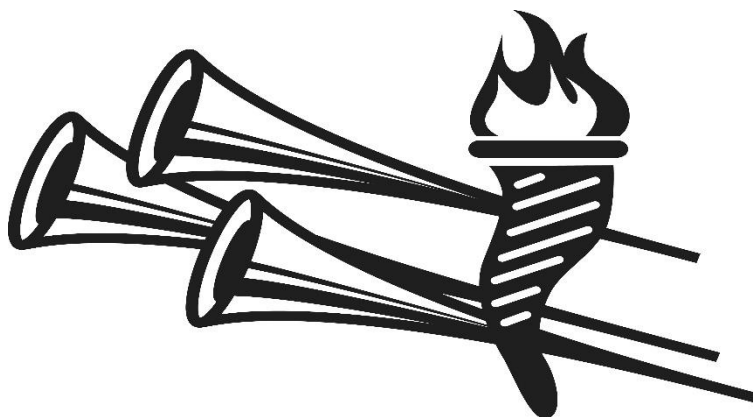
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Preface



This book of Bible studies for use in jails came about when the members of The Prison Ministry Task Force of the Indiana District—Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) discovered that there were not many readily available resources for congregations to use for outreach to the incarcerated in local jails. Jail ministry is different from prison ministry in that the pastor or layperson leading the Bible study may only have contact once with a jail inmate because of the shorter duration of sentences than those in prison where Bible studies can go on for years. Thus, it was necessary to create stand-alone Bible studies which present the Gospel message clearly and succinctly in each individual lesson.

This book has been designed specifically for pastors/laypeople to lead the Bible studies in a small group setting with the inmates of the jail. It is not intended for an individual inmate to use as a personal Bible study, although he/she could still learn much that way. Ideally, the pastor/layperson would lead each Bible study, guiding the inmates through the study, answering specific questions as they arise, and facilitating group discussion. It is best for each inmate to have his/her own book, but if that is not possible, then the lessons have been designed so that the Bible study leader can go through the lessons orally with the inmates with the same impact. Each lesson is designed to take about one hour.

If a layperson is leading these Bible studies, it is recommended that he/she go through the Bible studies first with the pastor before presenting them to the inmates so that his/her answers are doctrinally sound. Ideally, the pastor would lead a congregation's jail ministry team in these studies prior to use in the jail setting, teaching the jail ministry team before they teach others. We recommend that the Bible study leader use the Leader's Guide which contains the explanation of the verses and the answers to the questions.

The book begins by introducing who we are in relation to God and why we need a Savior from our sin. Especially for those inmates who come from a non-Christian background, this introductory lesson is essential for laying the groundwork for the lessons that follow. Lessons

One through Seven deal with Jesus' personal interaction with individual men and women in the Gospels and how His words to them are speaking to us today.

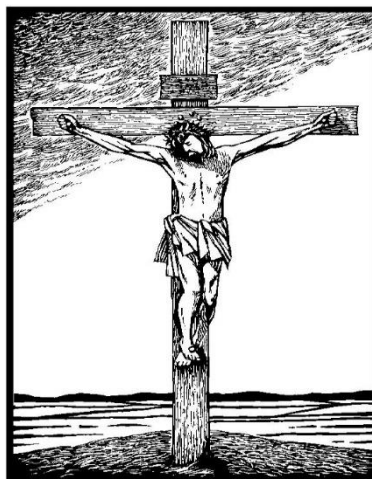
The Lessons begin with delving into the text first and pointing out what is going on verse by verse. Several Biblical commentaries (see the bibliography) were consulted with care to assist in the unpacking of the meaning of each Bible story presented. After the discussion of the Biblical text, there are a series of questions related to the Bible story and its application. Bible study leaders are encouraged to go through the studies in the order presented so that the inmates will get the most out of each lesson.

We recommend using Zondervan's paperback NIV Giant Print Reference Bible with each Bible study for several reasons. First, it is paperback, which is usually the only kind of book permitted in jails (please check with your local jail before taking anything in). Second, the font is large enough for older inmates to read easily in the possible dim light of the cell block. Third, there are maps and a glossary available in the back of the Bible for quick reference. And finally, it is helpful because many inmates are not familiar with the location of specific books of the Bible and a common page number can be given so everyone stays together and the Bible study can run in an efficient manner.

We pray this Bible study book will be a blessing to all who use it by its clear message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2) We rest on God's promise that His Word will not return to Him empty, but will accomplish what He desires and achieve the purpose for which He sent it (Isaiah 55:11). God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth; for there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

Lift High the Cross!

The Prison Ministry Task Force of the Indiana District—LCMS, February 2018



Introduction: Who God Is, Who We Are, and Why We Need Jesus

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are holy and we are not. Yet in Your mercy You desire to be in a close, loving relationship with us despite our sinful condition. We admit we cannot do anything on our own to earn Your love or favor because of our sin. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ into the world to rescue us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Such amazing grace deserves nothing but our thanks and praise now and forever, Amen.

Who Is God?

Let's explore some Bible passages which answer this question:

- Genesis 1:1—In this passage we learn that God created everything that is. It is also important to note that the word for God used in the Hebrew is plural and is followed by a verb in the singular. This is important because as we shall see, God is three persons and yet one God.
- Deuteronomy 32:6—In this passage we learn that God is Father.
- Deuteronomy 32:4—God is a just and truthful God. He is righteous.
- Deuteronomy 6:4—This portion of Scripture clearly tells us that God is three in one. In Hebrew, “Yahweh” (singular) is used as well as “Elohim” (plural), which reinforces the fact that God is one God in three persons.
- Numbers 23:19—God is not a man, nor does He need to repent because God is holy and sinless. God is an eternal being.
- John 4:24—God is Spirit
- 1 John 4:16—God is love. God lives in Christians (see 1 John 4:15).
- Revelation 4:8—God is holy and almighty. He has always existed and will exist forever.

Who Are We?

Let's find out what the Bible has to say:

- Genesis 1:26-28—We (male and female) are created in the image of the Triune God. Since man is made in God's image, every human being is worthy of honor and respect. Mankind was made to rule over and care for the earth.

Note that God says, “Let **us** make man in **our** image. . .” We read in Deuteronomy that God is One, yet He uses the plural “us” and “our” when speaking of the creation of mankind.

God is three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one divine being. Let's look at some verses which describe our Triune God:

- Matthew 3:16-17—In this passage the three persons of the Trinity are present.
- Matthew 28:19—In this passage Christ commands the Church to Baptize in the name of the Triune God.
- John 17:21—Jesus prays that those who believe in Him as their Savior would be united with God the Father and Jesus Christ as well as with other Christians.
- John 14:23 and 14:26—God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ choose to dwell in Christians. God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to Christians in their Baptism to live in them.

So, we are created in the image of the Triune God (not that we look like Him physically, but that we reflect His character). The Holy Trinity is a great mystery; yet we can confidently state that God is Three in One based on what He has revealed about Himself in Scripture.

1. What is the important role of mankind according to God in Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:15? Humans are to rule over the other creatures and to care for the earth. Since man was created in the image of the Divine King, delegated kingship was bestowed on him.
2. How did God view all of creation, including mankind, according to Genesis 1:31? He saw it as very good. Man is seen as the crown of creation.

The Problem:

3. What does God tell Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:16-17? He tells them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because if they do, they will die.

Read Genesis 3:1-7

4. In Genesis 3:1, who raises doubt about what God has said? Satan in the form of a snake
5. With what does Satan tempt Eve in Genesis 3:5? He tempts her with being God-like, knowing good and evil.

6. How is this breaking the first commandment (see Exodus 20:3)? **Eve's desire to be like God shows she does not fear, love, nor trust in God above all things.**

By not trusting in God completely and by desiring to make themselves gods, Adam and Eve sinned and were thrown out of the Garden of Eden by God so that they would not eat from the Tree of Life and live eternally in their sinful condition. That would be a fate worse than physical death: eternal life without God. Sin separates us from God--sinful man cannot be in the presence of Holy God. The close, intimate relationship which Adam and Eve originally enjoyed with God is broken because of sin.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we have inherited their sinful nature. Let's look at some Bible passages which speak of this:

- Genesis 5:3—**Adam's imperfect sinful nature is now transmitted to his son.**
- Romans 5:12—**Sin is inherited in all men from Adam which leads to death.**
- Ecclesiastes 7:20—**Everyone sins.**
- 1 John 1:8—**The truth is that we are full of sin.**
- Galatians 3:22—**All mankind is imprisoned by sin.**

To make atonement/payment for the sins of the ancient Israelites, God commanded the priests to sacrifice animals, such as sheep, goats, and bulls and place their blood on the altar to the LORD. Forgiveness received through such sacrifices was won by Christ on the cross.

Who is Jesus Christ?

Let's examine Scripture to answer this question:

- Matthew 1:21—**He is male. He will save people from their sins. The name "Jesus" means "God saves."**
- Matthew 1:23—**Jesus is "God with us," emphasizing the fact that God will take upon Himself human form to physically be with His people. Jesus is fully God and also fully human.**
- Matthew 3:17—**Jesus is God's Son whom He loves.**

- John 3:36—Jesus is the source of eternal life, which is fellowship with God in the present and into eternity.
- Romans 3:21-25—Jesus is our righteousness.
- 1 John 2:2—Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for all sins. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross.
- John 3:16-18—Jesus is God's Son sent into the world to save the world from sin, death, and the devil.

What Does Jesus' Death on the Cross and Resurrection Mean for Those Who Believe in Him?

Let's look at what Scripture has to say about it.

- Romans 5:6-11 and 5:1-2—Jesus' death on the cross as payment for our sin enables us to be reconciled to God, to have close fellowship with Him.
- John 11:25—Jesus is life. Believers in Christ have an enriched life in that they enjoy intimate fellowship with the Triune God that will continue after physical death. Being united with Christ in our Baptism, our bodies will also be resurrected, raised on the last day (Christ's 2nd coming) so that our soul will be reunited with our body which will be in a new, perfect, and glorious state.
- Galatians 4:4-7—In Baptism, God claims us as His own child and gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. As God's heirs, all that He has is ours.

How Does God See Christians Because of Jesus' Sacrifice?

- Hebrews 10:10—God sees us as holy.
- 1 Peter 2:9-10—We are God's chosen people who are holy.
- 1 John 3:1—We are beloved children of God!

- Galatians 3:26—**When God looks at us He sees Christ.**

That's right, when God looks at Christians, he does not see our sin—He sees His Son, Jesus Christ whose blood covers all our sin and washes it away!

In Isaiah 43:4, God says that His children are precious and honored in His sight.

So when we are feeling dirty, guilty, ashamed, or worthless because of sin, we, His children can turn to God's Word to rest secure in our identity in Him and how He sees us. Our identity is not wrapped up in what we have done or in how we feel about ourselves or how others see us—our identity is bestowed on us by God through Jesus Christ. And God's Word is truth. May you find peace and comfort in this fact.

The remaining lessons in this book center on Jesus' interaction with various people in the Bible, where He reveals Himself to them and to us. Let's find out more about Jesus and how much He loves us.

Finish with a closing prayer that includes the prayer requests of those in your group.



Lesson One: Jesus Teaches Nicodemus What It Means to Be Begotten From Above

John 3:1-21



Jesus Talks With Nicodemus

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have created all people and desire to be in a close, loving relationship with us. Thank you for the gift of Baptism in which You claim us as Your children and heirs of eternal life. Help us to live out our Baptismal life each day as we become more conformed to the likeness of Your dear Son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read John 3:1-21 out loud verse by verse, explaining the following points as you read:

Verse 1:

- Look up the words “Pharisee” and “Sanhedrin” (the Jewish ruling council) in the glossary in the back of the Bible so that students get a better idea of who Nicodemus is, especially that he is a rather prominent man in the community/a leader.

Verse 2:

- Note that Nicodemus comes at night. This can be interpreted in a couple of different ways:
 - A. Perhaps Nicodemus comes concealed in the darkness of night because he does not want to be seen with Jesus openly for fear that he might lose his position of power in the Sanhedrin for doing so. After all, Jesus has just turned the tables in the temple courts, and many Jews thought Jesus was an upstart trying to change the established order of their way of life.
 - B. Or perhaps Nicodemus comes at night because that is the only time he can have a lengthy, personal discussion with Jesus who is surrounded by crowds of people during the daytime.
 - C. Or it could be that John mentions night here as part of his theme of darkness and light which runs throughout his gospel. Nicodemus comes at night, suggesting that

he is in spiritual darkness. That is, he does not yet know that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus will reveal that He is the light from God who lightens the way to God (ref. John 3:19, 8:12, 14:6).

- Also note that Nicodemus addresses Jesus with respect as “Rabbi,” which means “teacher.” Nicodemus has either personally witnessed some of the signs or miracles Jesus has performed, such as the changing of water into wine in Cana (John 2) and/or some of the other miracles Jesus performed during the Passover in Jerusalem (John 2:23) or he has heard about them secondhand. Jesus’ miracles have convinced Nicodemus that Jesus “is a teacher who has come from God,” and he is curious and wants to learn more. Yet Nicodemus is still in the dark about Jesus’ true identity of being Immanuel, God with us in the flesh. That is, he does not yet see that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world as John the Baptist saw and confessed (John 1:29, 1:36).

Verse 3:

- Jesus’ statement may seem a little odd as a response to Nicodemus’ comment at first. Jesus is really cutting to the chase and getting at the heart of the issue at hand: Jesus’ true identity. He is more than a mere teacher; He is the Son of God, the Savior to be crucified on the cross to take away our sins for us.
- “The kingdom of God” is not just “heaven” here. It has more to do with the person and work of Jesus Christ. So Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he cannot see/know/experience Jesus as Lord unless he is “born again.” In Greek, “born again” is more along the lines of “begotten from above.” Mothers bear children, but fathers beget. “Beget” means to procreate as the father, to sire. Thus, to be “begotten from above” means that God is our Father and we are His children. (Reference John 1:12-13) Jesus will later explain how this is possible.

Verse 4:

- Nicodemus just does not get it! He is stuck on the notion of a second physical birth rather than a spiritual rebirth.

Verses 5-6:

- Jesus is saying here that being Baptized into Christ enables us entry into God’s family, with God as our Father (Reference John 14:6 and John 1:33).
- The imagery of water and the Spirit here takes us back to the story of creation in Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters of the earth. Thus, in Baptism God makes us a new creation by washing away our sin and putting His Holy Spirit in us. It is in this washing of water in His Triune Name (“I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”) where God declares He is our Father and we are His children—He begets us. The Holy Spirit nurtures and grows the new spiritual life that

God begins in us in our Baptism, and we become more conformed to the likeness of God through our faith in Christ who is our righteousness. Just as children grow up to resemble their earthly fathers in many ways, so the children of God are enabled to grow in the likeness of God as they mature spiritually. Jesus, our older brother, is the One who truly shows us the Father (ref. John 14:7-10). (Note that because we are simultaneously saint and sinner here on earth because of our inherited sinful nature from Adam, we will not have the image of God until we are with Him in eternal glory).

Verses 7-8:

- We cannot fully comprehend the power of the Holy Spirit working in us in Baptism—it is truly a great mystery. We simply cling to what God says He accomplishes. God can do what He says!

Verse 13:

- The title “Son of Man” is Jesus’ most common title for Himself. It is a title which indicates the suffering He will undergo on the cross, which He alludes to in the next verses.

Verses 14-15:

- Read Numbers 21:4-9 out loud together and then discuss the parallel between the bronze snake being lifted up on the pole and the trust in God’s Word for healing—a rescue from death—and Jesus being lifted up on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.
- “Must” be lifted up means it is necessary for salvation to happen in this way. It is God’s will.
- Note that “may have eternal life” is in the present tense. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world has eternal life. Eternal life is not just everlasting life in *the future*, but it is also the fullness of life in Christ in *the present* for those Baptized into Him. Read John 10:10.
- So Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus that becoming a child of God in Baptism is only made possible to us by His crucifixion. Our sins separate us from Holy God who is without sin. The Son of God took God’s punishment for our sins on the cross so that our sins are washed away in His blood and we are restored as sons/children of God. In other words, Jesus was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Verses 16-17:

- Verse 16 is often called the Gospel in a nutshell. The love of God is evident in His plan of salvation for all people from sin, death, and the power of the devil: sending His Son Jesus Christ in the flesh to die on the cross and rise from the dead.

Verse 19:

- John's theme of light and darkness continues here. Jesus is the Light which has come into the world (ref. John 8:12).

Digging Deeper:

1. Nicodemus receives a lesson in who Jesus really is. Who is Jesus to you? A teacher? A wise man? An example to follow? God in the flesh?
2. Just as Jesus reveals Himself to Nicodemus, He reveals His true identity to us. How does He do that with people today? **Jesus reveals Himself to us today as our Lord and Savior in His Word, the Bible. He also gives us the indwelling of His Holy Spirit in Baptism, and He gives us His very body and blood in the bread and wine served at the Lord's Supper/Holy Communion.**
3. Just as Nicodemus does not fully grasp what Jesus is telling him, we too often do not understand what Jesus says in the Bible. Is there something in the Bible that you've often wondered about or were wanting someone to explain more fully to you? If so, what is it?
4. What is Baptism? Are you Baptized? If so, when and where? If you are not yet Baptized, do you have a desire to be Baptized? **Baptism is God's gift to us. In Baptism, God claims us as His dear child, washes away our sin, gives eternal salvation, and gives us the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, Baptism is something God does for us, not something we do for God. Furthermore, Christ commands his disciples to Baptize in His name (Matthew 28:19). A Baptism done in the name of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is valid for one's entire lifetime (Ephesians 4:5). Unfortunately, many people reject God's gifts.**

Martin Luther, the great leader of the Reformation, said that Baptism is a great treasure. No matter what our circumstances are, we can find comfort in our Baptism because it delivers the benefits of Jesus' cross. Luther says we confess our sins daily and cling to God's promises in our Baptism. In his Large Catechism Luther states, "Thus, we must regard baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and say: 'But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in body and soul.'"¹ And "Thus we see what a great

¹ *The Book of Concord*, Ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 462.

and excellent thing baptism is, which snatches us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, overcomes and takes away sin and daily strengthens the new person, and always endures and remains until we pass out of this misery into eternal glory."²

5. At some point after his conversation with Jesus, Nicodemus defends Him against the attacks of some of the other Pharisees (see John 7:48-51). Nicodemus is also one of the men who takes Jesus' body down from the cross and buries it reverently, showing his devotion and love (see John 19:38-42). Is there someone you know who was in the dark about Jesus but now is a Christian? Share what you know about their experience.
6. In John 7 we discover that Nicodemus boldly speaks up on behalf of Jesus in the midst of his peers, the Pharisees. Have you ever had to stand up for Jesus? If so, describe that instance. How do we get the courage to confess Christ? (Ref. 1 Corinthians 12:3).
We can only confess Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit working in God's Word through preaching and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) creates and sustains our faith in Christ.

Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will remind us of what Jesus says in the Bible (ref. John 14:26). Jesus also states that the Holy Spirit also gives us the right words to say when we are under attack for our faith (ref. Mark 13:11). That is why it is so important to be in God's Word regularly and to learn verses by heart so that the Holy Spirit can help us readily pull those verses to mind in times of need. What are some Bible verses which you know by heart and have been an encouragement to you, especially during your incarceration?

If you don't have any Bible verses memorized yet, then make an effort to memorize John 3:16 from today's lesson so that you can "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

Finish by reciting John 3:16 together out loud. Then have a closing prayer that includes the prayer requests of those in your group.

² *The Book of Concord*, 466.

Lesson Two: Jesus Speaks with the Woman at the Well

John 4:1-30, 4:39-42



Opening Prayer: Gracious Father, You desire that all people on earth be restored to a right relationship with You through the precious blood of Your Son Jesus Christ. Thank you for searching out sinners like the woman at the well and me. Your gift of the forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of Your Holy Spirit, and eternal life which You give us in our Baptism are our greatest treasure. Help us cling to these Your faithful promises in our Baptism. In the name of Your dear Son Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Fun Fact: John 4:1-42 contains the longest recorded conversation between Jesus and any person in the Bible!

Read John 4:1-30 and 4:39-42 out loud verse by verse, explaining the following points as you read:

Verse 1:

- Review the meaning of the word “Pharisee.” Use the glossary in the back of the Bible and discuss as needed to refresh students’ memory from Lesson One.
- Discuss that Baptism is a washing away of sins. (Be aware that the glossary in the Zondervan *Giant Print NIV Reference Bible* defines Baptism from a Reformed view that it is a *symbol* of cleansing from sin. Be sure to teach the correct Lutheran view of Baptism as the *actual* cleansing of sin via the power of God’s Word in Baptism).
- In order to eliminate any confusion, make sure that students know that the “John” referred to in verse one is John the Baptist and not John the Evangelist who wrote this Gospel.

Verses 3-5:

- Refer to the map entitled “Jesus’ Ministry” in the back of the Bible so that students can see that Samaria is between Judea and Galilee. Point out the location of Sychar.
- In verse 4, “he had to go through Samaria” conveys the meaning that it was *necessary* for Jesus to go through Samaria, even though most Jews would go out of their way to

avoid traveling through Samaria. Look up “Samaritan” in the glossary for details on the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. Also mention that the Samaritans expected the Messiah, but because they only accepted the first 5 books of the Old Testament (the Books of Moses) as inspired text, they knew little about the coming Messiah.

Verse 6:

- Jesus is tired because the journey from Judea to Galilee takes about 3 days on foot and so he is about halfway through the trip. He is also tired because it is noon, or the heat of the day.
- It was customary for women during that era to draw water in the cool of the day (early morning or evening), not during the noonday heat. So the Samaritan woman’s coming alone to the well at this time of day is unusual—we will explore the reason behind her coming here at this time a little later in this study.

Read verses 7-10 and then discuss the following points:

Verse 7:

- Point out that Jesus initiates the conversation.

Verse 9:

- Jesus breaks all the rules by speaking with a Samaritan, and a Samaritan *woman* at that! It was not proper in this culture for an unchaperoned woman to speak with a man other than her husband in a public area.

Verse 10:

- Point out that Jesus does not directly answer the woman’s question. Her question emphasizes the distinction between Jews and Samaritans, but Jesus’ response eliminates such distinctions by making it clear that the gift of God the Father is available to *all* (ref. “whoever” in verse 14). The “gift of God” is associated with “living water.” The living water is Christ Himself who sends the Holy Spirit (ref. John 1:33, 7:37-39). The Holy Spirit works faith in Christ, sustains and strengthens our faith during our life on earth, and gives eternal life.
- Also emphasize the “gift” language—God’s grace in Christ is given freely at no cost to us (ref. Ephesians 2:8-9).

Read verses 11-15 and then discuss the following points:

Verse 13:

- Point out the difference between physical and spiritual thirst.

Verse 14:

- “Welling up” in the original language is “jumping/leaping” so the imagery here is of gushing water. It is the only time in the Bible where this term is used to describe water. Thus, there is emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Baptized.

Verse 15:

- Note the irony that at the beginning of this passage, Jesus asks the woman for water; but now it is she who is asking him for a drink. She does not yet fully understand who Jesus is or what He is offering to her, as she is still stuck on the idea of physical water.

Read verses 16-18 and then discuss the following points:

Verse 18:

- To move the woman to an understanding of who He is and the gift of salvation He offers, Jesus reveals that He is God who knows the intimate details of her life. Jewish tradition held that a woman could be married 2-3 times, so this woman has exceeded the limit. Furthermore, she is presently living in sin by sleeping with a man who is not her husband. So we may now see the reason why she may be coming to the well at noon alone-- she is perhaps looked down upon by the other women in town.
- Jesus is pointing to Himself as our true Bridegroom/Husband who desires to be united with us (ref. John 3:29).

Read verses 19-24 and then discuss the following points:

Verse 19:

- “The woman recognizes that the exposure of her sin means that she is confronted by a prophet; and since it is the work of a prophet to point also to the place of forgiveness, she asks Him to make known to her the proper place of worship.”³

Verses 21-24:

- Jesus shifts the focus away from the *place* of forgiveness to Himself as the *person* through whom forgiveness is granted. In verse 22 Jesus mentions salvation. Jesus’ very name means “God saves,” so Jesus is pointing to Himself as the way of salvation. Further indicators of Jesus pointing to Himself as the way of salvation include the words “in spirit and in truth” in verse 24. In John 14:6 Jesus says “I am the way and *the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (italics added). John 1:33 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit abides with Jesus and that Jesus is the one who Baptizes with the Spirit.

³Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), 1:266.

Read verses 25-26 and then discuss the following points:

Verse 25:

- Have students look up “Messiah” in the glossary in the back of the Bible. Mention that “Messiah” means “Anointed One” –anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jewish kings were anointed with oil, so when we say “Jesus Christ,” we are saying that He is our King, the One anointed with the Holy Spirit through whom the Holy Spirit comes.

Read verses 27-42 and then discuss the following points:

Verses 28-29:

- By leaving her water jar behind, the woman shows that her spiritual thirst supersedes her physical thirst. What was once so important pales in comparison to Jesus and what He offers. She simply cannot keep the Good News about Jesus to herself. Note that it is ironic that the woman at the well in the beginning of the text may have wanted to be alone, away from people because of her sin, but that by the end of the text, after meeting Jesus, the Christ, the Savior of the world who forgives sins, she eagerly seeks out people with whom to share the news.

Verse 39-41:

- Many Samaritans come to faith in Jesus Christ through the testimony of the woman at the well and even more believe in Him based on His **words**, not miracles. This emphasizes the fact that faith comes from hearing God’s Word. Furthermore, it underscores the Samaritans’ great faith which takes Jesus at His Word and does not demand a sign (compare to the Jews in Galilee in the next section where Jesus has to do miracles in order for the people to believe in Him).

Verse 42:

- This is the only place in the New Testament where the expression “Savior of the world” is used. God cares for *all* people (ref. John 3:16).

Digging Deeper:

1. The Samaritan woman comes to the well looking for water but finds Jesus. Is their meeting a coincidence? Read Jeremiah 10:23. Who’s in control? How is this a comfort to us?

According to the Jeremiah passage, God directs our steps. Thus, it is not by chance that Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well meet. Jesus purposefully traveled through Samaria to encounter her and inform her of the good news that He is her personal

Savior and the Savior of the whole world. What a comfort to know that God is in control! He is all-knowing and all-powerful, and He relentlessly seeks us out to save us.

2. Jesus initiates the conversation with the woman at the well. How does Jesus speak to us today?

Jesus speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. He uses pastors to preach the message of salvation in Him. Note: It is important to point out that God is the initiator, the main actor in our relationship. Because of our sinful nature, we are not naturally inclined to seek God on our own. Rather, He seeks us and by the power of His Holy Spirit working through His Word, creates in us faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

3. The woman at the well is thirstier than she realizes. What are you thirsting for spiritually? Have you been reaching for something other than the living water Christ offers? Has it quenched and completely satisfied your thirst?
4. There are two important points from this passage about the woman at the well:
 - A. When we encounter Christ, our sins cannot remain hidden-- we need to confess our sins openly to Him. Are there any sins which are troubling you that you would like to confess in prayer today?
 - B. The Good News is that we have the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ's death on the cross (ref. Matthew 26:28). The woman at the well cannot keep the excitement of meeting the Messiah to herself—she has to go and tell others about Him. Who are some people you know (even in jail) with whom you can share Jesus?

5. Are you Baptized? What is Baptism? How can our Baptism be a comfort to us?

See Lesson One, Question 4.

6. Although the name of the Samaritan woman at the well is never revealed, be assured that God knows your name. Read Isaiah 43:1 and Luke 10:20.

Fun Fact: The image of the woman at the well was used by the early Christian Church as a symbol for Baptism.

Finish with a closing prayer that includes the prayer requests of those in your group.

Lesson Three: Jesus Anointed By A Sinful Woman

Luke 7:36-50



Opening Prayer: Holy Father, You know our innermost thoughts and hidden sins. By Your Holy Spirit active in Your Word, help us confess our sins to you openly, trusting fully that You forgive all our sins through the blood of Your dear Son Jesus Christ. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

Read Luke 37-50 out loud verse by verse, explaining the following points as you read:

Verse 36:

- Review the term "Pharisee" if necessary by using the glossary in the back of the Bible.
- "Reclined at the table" implies that this meal was truly a banquet, a feast. In Jesus' day, people ate at tables from couches placed around the table, with their feet facing away from the table.

Verse 37:

- Note that the woman has not been invited to the banquet at Simon the Pharisee's home. In that time and culture, a personal invitation to Simon's house would not have been required because the less fortunate were allowed to visit such public banquets in order to have the leftovers.
- We don't know much about the woman other than she is a local who "lived a sinful life." This may mean that she is a prostitute, or that she committed some wrong that had become public and damaged her reputation ever after. She must have heard Jesus

speak before this event or have heard about him from someone else. At any rate, she approaches Jesus believing He is the Messiah, the Savior, who can forgive her sins.

- Alabaster is a light creamy colored stone that was commonly used to hold perfume and ointment. The jar would have been small, approximately palm sized.

Read verse 38 and discuss the following:

Verse 38:

- The woman is at Jesus' feet, a place where servants and students typically sat. She is placing herself in a humbling position.
- Which emotions do you think start her tears to flow? (shame/guilt, sorrow for her sin, gratitude, joy, etc.)
- Wiping Jesus' feet with her hair is an intimate, loving gesture. For a woman to let her hair down in public in that time and culture was a big social no-no. Women were only allowed to let their hair down at home. It appears that she is so overcome with gratitude for the forgiveness which she recognizes that Jesus can give that she loses all sense of propriety. She simply cannot control her thankfulness and devotion.
- Kissing Jesus' feet can be seen as an act of worship. She recognizes Jesus as the Son of God who has authority to forgive sins.
- By pouring perfume on Jesus' feet, she is anointing him. The word "anoint" points to Jesus' true identity as the Christ/Messiah, which means "The Anointed One, the One filled with the Holy Spirit." Furthermore, in Jewish culture, to anoint someone with oil/perfume meant to set him apart in the service of God. So by pouring the perfume on Jesus, the woman is also preparing Jesus for his journey of suffering, death on the cross, and rest in the tomb—the ultimate service of God for mankind (ref. Luke 22:27 and also Matthew 26:6-13).

Read verses 39-40 and discuss the following points:

Verse 39:

- Note that the Pharisee thinks these thoughts silently to himself.
- There is no doubt that one of the reasons Simon the Pharisee invites Jesus to his home is to discover Jesus' true identity. Look up the word "Prophet" in the glossary in the back of the Bible. In this culture, banquets were opportunities for the honored guest(s) to teach, so the Pharisee is wanting to learn from Jesus to figure out who He is. The Pharisee cannot fathom how a prophet could allow a sinner to touch him, thereby making him unclean, so he concludes that Jesus cannot be a prophet of God.
- The Pharisee sees the woman as a "sinner," but does not recognize that he too is a sinner. Pharisees worked extra hard at trying to please God by keeping all His

commandments and by doing extra “good works.” The Pharisee is self-righteous.

Read verses 40-43 and discuss the following:

Verse 40:

- Note that we learn the first name of the Pharisee hosting the banquet for the first time here. By addressing him by name, Jesus is trying to get the Pharisee’s attention and to make the point He is about to make personal.
- Jesus answers the Pharisee even though the Pharisee had not spoken out loud. What does this reveal about Jesus? (He knows our innermost thoughts).
- Also note that the Pharisee has already concluded from verse 39 that Jesus is not a prophet. Thus, he addresses Jesus as merely a teacher, a step lower on the religious rung. The title “teacher” is still a term of respect, but by using it, the Pharisee shows that he sees Jesus as an equal, since the Pharisees were religious teachers of the people. Thus it is ironic that the sinful woman recognizes Jesus’ true identity as the Savior, whereas the Pharisee, the religious leader/teacher, is blind to that fact, mainly because he does not see his need for a Savior.

Verse 41:

- Jesus could have answered the Pharisee harshly but uses a parable instead. What is a parable? Look up the word in the glossary in the back of the Bible. Why do you think Jesus uses parables? (To allow the Holy Spirit to work through the Word to give spiritual insight and also for impact—to make the lessons more memorable)
- A denarri was a coin worth about a day’s wages.
- Make sure the students understand the parable—that is, that they can plug the correct character (Sinful woman and Pharisee) into the two people who owed money in the parable.
- The parable implies that the self-righteous Pharisee is a sinner too! It puts him in the same boat as the sinful woman. Read Romans 3:23 to make the point that all are sinners.

Read Verses 44-47 and then discuss the following points:

- “Do you see this woman?” Of course Simon the Pharisee has already seen this woman, as noted in verse 39 above. Here Jesus is inviting Simon to see the woman as Jesus sees her. That is, he invites Simon to see beyond the physical, to see with spiritual eyes.
- In Jesus’s day, a good host would have washed his guests’ feet upon entering the house to get the dust off and he would also have kissed the

cheek of the guests as a proper greeting. Simon the Pharisee has not welcomed Jesus appropriately, but the sinful woman has.

- “Whoever has been forgiven little loves little,” implies that the Pharisee has not seen himself as a sinner in need of a Savior. He does not comprehend the depth of his sinful nature nor the depth of Jesus’ gift of forgiveness.

Read verses 48-50 and discuss the following:

Verse 48:

- Jesus speaks directly to the woman because the act of forgiveness is always personal with Jesus. In the Greek, the verb is in the perfect tense, which means her sins had been forgiven and still are.

Verse 49:

- Jesus has authority to forgive sins; the Pharisees thought this was blasphemous.

Verse 50:

- It is not the sinful woman’s love or act of love/devotion which bring about her forgiveness. It is her **faith** in Jesus’ power to forgive her. Her faith has been expressed in her actions rather than words (remember the old axiom: sometimes actions speak louder than words).
- The sinful woman can go in peace because in the forgiveness of her sin by Jesus, she now has peace with God. That is, she has been reconciled to God because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

Digging Deeper:

1. Do you think the sinful woman went and spread the good news about Jesus to others like the woman at the well did?
2. We have learned in this lesson that there is no one without sin. There is also not a ranking of condemning sin by God—all sin separates us from Him. Read Matthew 5:21-22 and 5:27-28. How is God’s view of sin different from the way many people see sin? The Good News is that Jesus died for **all** sins.

To God, all sin is reprehensible. All sin separates us from Him because He is perfect, He is holy. Man tends to want to rank sin from minor infractions of God’s law to major offenses (i.e., people will tend to

rationalize their sin and say, “Well, at least I haven’t done _____. Therefore, I’m not as bad as so-and-so”).

3. How can we know as surely as this woman that our sins are forgiven? Look up the following Bible passages which tell us so:

- Matthew 26:27-28

Jesus’ blood was poured out for you on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. His blood paid for all your sins. You receive this promise of forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper.

- John 3:16-17

God loves you so much that He sent Jesus into the world to take your sins upon Himself on the cross, removing those sins forever so that you can be in a restored, intimate relationship with God the Father now and into eternity.

- Acts 10:43

Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior from sin receives forgiveness.

- Romans 5:8-11

Because Jesus Christ paid for your sins with his very own blood, God declares you innocent, holy, and in a right relationship with Him

- Colossians 2:13-14

All of your sins, which are made known through God’s Ten Commandments, have been nailed to the cross. Therefore, your sins have been taken away by Christ.

4. What is your response to Jesus’ forgiving all your sin and removing your guilt?

Various answers. Some examples may include feeling thankful, grateful.

5. The sinful woman in this Bible passage does not speak at all, yet her faith in Jesus as her Savior from sin is evident to everyone by her actions at the banquet. What does 1 Peter 3:1-2 suggest as a powerful way to witness to our Christian faith to those closest to us?

Our faith is often evident by how we behave, how we treat others. As the old adage goes: “Sometimes actions speak louder than words.”

6. When we experience God’s amazing grace towards us in His forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ in His Word and Sacrament (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper), we are then able to extend forgiveness to others who have sinned against us.

Is there someone whom you need to forgive?

If you are having difficulty forgiving someone who has wronged you, do not become discouraged. In fact, it is good to acknowledge that you cannot do it on your own. You can pray openly and honestly to God about it like this: “Lord, thank You for your undeserved love and forgiveness which You have given me, a sinner, through the death of Your Son Jesus Christ on the cross. You know that I am struggling to forgive _____ for what they did to me. I want to forgive them as You have forgiven me, but I am having a difficult time of it. I cannot do this on my own—please help me. By the power of your Holy Spirit, remove all bitterness, resentment, and anger from me and enable me to forgive _____ as You have forgiven me, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.”

Depending on the severity of the hurt you have experienced, reconciliation may take months or years because of our human nature. Continue to pray to God for help in this area, just as King David did in Psalm 51:10:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

God is faithful. He will do it.

Finish the lesson with a closing prayer that includes the prayer requests of those in your group.

Lesson Four: Jesus Seeks Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Luke 19:1-10



Jesus Visits Zacchaeus

Opening Prayer: Merciful Father, You seek to have a relationship with us even when we have gone astray. Thank You for never giving up on us and for relentlessly pursuing us in love with the free gift of salvation through Your Son Jesus Christ. By the power of Your Holy Spirit enable Your abounding love for us and in us to overflow to others so that they too may come to faith in Christ and enjoy the fullest measure of life with You now and forever. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Read Luke 19:1-10 out loud verse by verse, explaining the following points as you read.

Verse 1:

- Look up Jericho on the map entitled "Jesus' Ministry" in the back of the Bible. Jericho was 15 miles Northeast of Jerusalem in a plain. The region was rather prosperous. Jesus was on the way from Galilee to go "up" to Jerusalem (note that "up" here does not mean "north." Rather, it means to go up/ascend the mountain upon which Jerusalem rests.

Verse 2:

- The term "chief tax collector" is a position which is referred to only in this passage in the Bible. Zacchaeus was in charge of the other tax collectors in that district. Tax collectors were hated by the Jews because even though Zacchaeus and the other tax collectors were Jewish, they collected money for the Romans who were the occupying military force at the time. They collected money from their own people on behalf of the Roman government. The tax collectors charged interest—more than what was owed to the Romans—and kept the extra money for themselves. That is how Zacchaeus got rich.

Verse 3:

- Zacchaeus is seeking Jesus. He has obviously heard about Jesus and is curious about Him.

Verse 4:

- Sycamore-Fig Trees are sturdy trees, approximately 30-40 feet high with short, thick trunks and spreading branches capable of holding a grown person.

Read verses 5-7 and discuss the following points:**Verse 5:**

- Note that Jesus knows where Zacchaeus is and even knows his name even though they've never met before.
- "Must stay" indicates the Divine necessity of Jesus' action. That is, God's plan of salvation comes by way of the abiding presence of Jesus. Jesus shares a meal with Zacchaeus and perhaps also spends the night in his home. This would violate the strict table fellowship laws of the Pharisees who would not eat with "sinners," thereby making Jesus "unclean." "By eating in Zacchaeus' home, Jesus would have become the equivalent of Zacchaeus—a sinner and an outcast"⁴ in the eyes of the Pharisees.

Read verses 7-10 and discuss the following points:**Verse 7:**

- The people are shocked because Jesus is breaking the established religious rules of the day.

Verse 8:

- Zacchaeus' short speech probably happens at the end of the meal, after having spent time in Jesus' presence and listening to His message.
- By calling Jesus "Lord" here, Zacchaeus is proclaiming that Jesus is his God and Savior. That is, he recognizes Jesus' true identity.
- "Four times the amount" is a generous repayment, the high end of restitution which was required by the law at that time for repayment in cases of theft. Zacchaeus' offer of this abundant repayment flows out of the gratitude for the forgiveness of his sins extended to him by Jesus.

⁴ Arthur A. Just, *Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 720.

Verse 9:

- Salvation has come to Zacchaeus because he repents of his sin and trusts in Jesus as his Savior from sin. Jesus declares that Zacchaeus is now part of God's family by faith in Christ. Jesus replaces Zacchaeus' status as an outcast to a true son of God--one who believes in "The Son of God."

Verse 10:

- Note that this passage begins with Zacchaeus seeking Jesus and ends with Jesus telling us that He is the one seeking us!
- Zacchaeus had been "lost" because he had been putting money before God (he had broken the 1st commandment).

Digging Deeper:

1. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and was curious about Him. What have you heard about Jesus? What do you know about Him? How can you satisfy your curiosity about Him? Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior as Zacchaeus did?

You can satisfy your curiosity about Jesus by reading the Bible on your own, attending Bible study, attending worship service where you hear the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ preached, and by asking questions you have about Jesus to your pastor or Bible study leader.

2. In verse 5 Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name, and He knows your name too and is seeking and calling you! (Ref. John 10:11 and 10:2-4). How can we hear Jesus' voice today?

Jesus speaks to us today in His Word, the Bible. We hear His message of salvation in Him when pastors preach the Word.

3. In verse 5 Jesus says he must "stay"/ "abide"/ "remain" with Zacchaeus. How does Jesus abide with us today?

Jesus abides with us in His Word. In our Baptism Jesus joins Himself to us by giving us the gift of His Holy Spirit to dwell in us (see John 14:15-20, John 17: 25-26, and Acts 2:38). Jesus also comes to us in the Lord's Supper, where He is present in the bread and wine (see Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus unites Himself with us when we partake of His very body and blood in the Lord's Supper, which is often called Holy Communion. "Communion" means "union with." Thus, Jesus is with us in the Divine Service.

4. How is the muttering of the people in verse 7 like the muttering thought of the Pharisee in Luke 7:39 (In Lesson Three: Jesus Anointed By A Sinful Woman)?

The people, like the Pharisee, find it unbelievable that Jesus, the Messiah, would associate with “sinners.”

Have people looked down on you because of your past deeds and incarceration? How does the fact that Jesus seeks you, wants to associate with you, and desires to be in a relationship with you despite your misdeeds make you feel?

5. A. We are all “lost” like Zacchaeus was because of sin. What have you put first in Your life in place of God?

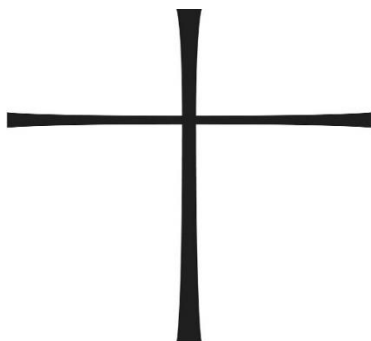
B. The Good News is that if we repent of our sins and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, we are forgiven/saved just like Zacchaeus. If you are truly sorry for your sins and desire forgiveness in Christ, your Bible Study leader can guide you and announce to you forgiveness now. Offer this confession to the Lord: "I confess that I have sinned. Some of these sins I know - the thoughts and words and deeds of which I am ashamed; but some of my sins are known only to You, God. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, forgive me of them all." To such a heartfelt confession, your leader will announce, "By the mercy of God you are redeemed by Jesus Christ, and in Him you are forgiven. You are at peace with God and live to serve Him."

Close with the prayer requests of those in your group.



Lesson Five: Jesus Speaks with the Woman Who was Caught in Adultery

John 8:1-11



Happy are those whose
transgression
is forgiven,
whose sin
is covered.

PSALM 32:1, NRSV

Opening Prayer: Merciful Father, out of your great love for us You instruct us how to live in a right relationship with you and others in Your Holy Word, especially in the Ten Commandments. Thank you for forgiving us through Your Son Jesus Christ when we go astray. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, keep us from giving in to temptation and strengthen our trust in You in all circumstances. In Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.

Read John 8:1-11 out loud verse by verse, explaining the following points as you read.

Verse 1:

- Look up the location of the Mt. of Olives on the map entitled "Jesus' Ministry" in the back of the Bible. The Mt. of Olives was one of Jesus' favorite places to pray. He often went there by Himself to pray in the early morning hours.

Verse 2:

- The mention of dawn here may have some symbolic meaning, since John uses the theme of light and dark throughout his Gospel. Perhaps it underscores the fact that Jesus, who is the Light of the World (ref. John 8:12), shines forth the extent of the grace and mercy of God the Father to the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees who are in spiritual darkness despite their expertise in the Law. That is, salvation by grace through

faith in Christ apart from keeping the works of the Law perfectly is the beginning of something new, like the beginning (dawn) of a new day.

Verse 3:

- It's unclear how long the woman has been under the custody of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. It seems as though they knew this woman's reputation beforehand and had laid in wait for her—to nab her in the early morning hours after a night of illicit sex. Her accusers could have held her in private custody while they sorted the issue out with Jesus, so the fact that they drag her into the courts of the temple shows their intention to humiliate her in public.
- It is interesting to note that only the woman is brought before Jesus. Adultery requires the participation of two people, and Jewish law required the death of both the man and the woman involved in adultery. It appears that the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees have let the man escape.

Verse 4:

- “Caught in the act”—Jewish law required eyewitnesses, so it was important for the Jewish leaders to catch her in the act rather than to just accuse her based on hearsay or questionable circumstances.

Verse 5:

- Explain that to “stone” someone means to throw rocks at them until they die.

Verse 6:

- The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees were trying to find some way to accuse Jesus openly, to trap Him in His words so that they could charge Him and get rid of Him. If Jesus had said not to stone her, then He would contradict God's Law. And if Jesus had said to go ahead and stone her, He would have been in contradiction with Roman law which would not allow the Jews to administer the death penalty for crimes (the Roman government had control of the area at that time). It was a catch 22 situation.
- We don't know what Jesus was writing in the sand, and it is not important or else it would have been recorded here. What is important is that Jesus is drawing attention away from the woman to what He is doing. How kind of Jesus to redirect the burning, accusing eyes of everyone from the woman to His own action.

Read verses 7-11 and then discuss the following points:

Verse 7:

- Note that Jesus does not bother to answer their question even though they pestered Him.
- Jesus causes the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees to reflect on their own sin.

God's Word plainly tells us that we are all sinners. Look up the following Bible passages:

- Romans 3:23 **According to this verse, all people sin. We fall short of the perfection, the holiness God requires. Only God is perfect and Holy.**
- 1 John 1:8-10 **The truth is that we sin. The Good News is that if we repent of/confess our sins, God forgives us through the atoning sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on the cross paid for all our sins once and for all.**
- John 8:7 also reminds us that there is no ranking of condemning sin with God. Let's review Matthew 5:21-22 and 5:27-28 which speak to this point. **These verses make it clear that all sin (including sinful thoughts) is deadly-- any sin separates us from God.**

Verse 11:

- Jesus forgives the sin of the woman. Read John 3:17-18 to see the parallel.
- Note that Jesus neither ignores nor condones the woman's sinful behavior. He admonishes her to stop her sinful ways. Read the following Bible passages which speak of how Christians are no longer slaves to sin; they no longer lead lives dominated by sin:
- Romans 6:1-4 and 6:11-14
- 1 John 3:6 and 3:9-10

These four passages remind us that in our Baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who works in us, making us more Christ-like in our thoughts and deeds. Thus, Baptized Christians do not lead lives characterized by unrepentant sin. However, because our sinful nature remains in us till the day we die, we still wrestle with the temptation to sin daily. We are to daily drown those sinful desires and call upon God to help us lead God-pleasing lives by the power of His Holy Spirit. The comfort of our Baptismal identity is that when we do sin, we confess our sin to God and rest in the assured promise that we stand in a state of forgiveness with Him because of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf.

- We know that as Christians we are simultaneously saint and sinner, and we wrestle with temptation and our sinful flesh throughout our lifetime on earth. Let's look at how the Apostle Paul describes this struggle in Romans 7:14-25. **The struggle is real and difficult!**

- Let's look at the comfort we Christians have in the midst of our struggle against sin described in Romans 8:1. **God does not sentence us to hell for our sins because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.**
- Let's continue to read Romans 8:2-13 to understand more about life in the Spirit.
- Let's read 1 Corinthians 10:13. How is this a comfort to us when we are experiencing temptation?

Important note: Emphasize that God tempts no one. We are led astray by our own sinful desires and by the tempting of the devil. It is comforting to know that God promises He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what He knows we can handle. By the power of His Holy Spirit, God helps us to resist temptation. What a comfort to know that we are not alone-- God is on our side, He is helping us in our fight!

Digging Deeper:

1. Do you think the woman caught in adultery continued to lead her sinful life after meeting Jesus? Why or why not?

Answers may vary. It seems unlikely that the woman would continue to commit adultery since Jesus literally saved her from being stoned to death and offered her complete forgiveness. Plus, He also gave her the specific instructions to leave that way of life. More than likely, the woman left that way of life behind her out of her gratefulness to and love for her Savior.

2. Why do you think the older men left first in verse 9?

Perhaps because they are wiser, recognizing that they have sinned much during their lifetime. Their conscience accused them of the truth of their sinfulness.

3. Have you ever encountered anyone who sees your sin as greater than their own? How can we as Christians handle such a situation?

Today's lesson has taught us that when others are quick to point out our sin, we draw their attention to Jesus and what Jesus has done for us on the cross!

4. Be assured that God grants forgiveness of your sins through faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Let's read:

- Acts 13:38 **Forgiveness is yours through Jesus Christ.**
 - Ephesians 1:3-8 **God abundantly gives us His underserved love: the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus' death on the cross. In our Baptism into Christ, God claims us as His children, giving us the privilege of being in a close, loving relationship with Him now and forever.**
5. As a follower of Christ, you cannot return to the life you were leading before you landed in jail. How can you remove yourself from the temptation to sin once you are back on the outside? Discuss your plan of action with your group.
 6. We don't know what sort of support network of family and friends the adulterous woman in this Bible passage had. What sort of support do you have once you are released? How can the church be a support for you and your family?
 7. In John 8:11, Jesus sends the woman on her way. As we are going on our way, The Lord God promises to always be with those who believe in His Son Jesus Christ to be their Savior. Let's look at some verses that may be particularly comforting to you upon your release:
 - Psalm 27:10 **This verse promises that God will always receive us with repentant hearts.**
 - Deuteronomy 31:8 **This verse promises that God will never leave us. He is with us.**
 - John 14:15-18 **In these verses, Jesus promises the gift of His Holy Spirit which dwells in us when we come to faith. Thus, we are not orphans, we are not alone—the Triune God joins Himself to us upon coming to faith.**

Finish the lesson with the prayer requests of those in your group.



Lesson Six: Jesus Teaches Martha and Mary What is Better

Luke 10:38-42



Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, even though you are God Almighty, You come as a servant to us, feeding us with Your Holy Word and Sacrament. By the power of Your Holy Spirit create in us a yearning to be in Your presence in Your Word so that we may be refreshed to go out and serve others in Your Name joyfully. Amen.

Before reading the text, look up the village of Bethany on the map entitled “Jesus Ministry” so that the students can see where Martha and Mary lived.

Read Luke 10:38-42 out loud and then discuss the following:

Note: Usually it was the men who invited Jesus into their homes, such as Peter, Simon the Pharisee, Zacchaeus, etc. Women were allowed to learn in the synagogue but it was very unusual for a rabbi (teacher) to come to a woman’s home to teach her. So Jesus is really honoring these two sisters.

1. Who do you think is older, Martha or Mary? Why?

Since Martha is mentioned first and Luke notes that it is her home which she opened up to Jesus, then one assumes that Martha is older. Furthermore, she takes the lead in making preparations, which gives her an air of authority that comes with age.

2. List at least two things you learn about Martha from this passage and two things you learn about Mary from this passage.

Martha is a hard worker who takes her work seriously. She pays attention to detail. In today's society she might be labeled as "A Type A Personality." Perhaps she was also a bit of a complainer, a whiner. At any rate, she is bold to involve Jesus in her complaint.

Note that Mary does not speak a word in this passage, yet from these few verses we gather that she wanted to learn from Jesus. She was a good listener who was very focused on the speaker--perhaps so much so that she could block out all other distractions.

3. Which woman do you relate to more? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary.

4. What sort of preparations do you think Martha is making?

Perhaps there was some cleaning to be done, but the majority of work was probably meal preparation. Remember there were no modern conveniences such prepackaged food or microwave ovens! Meals took time and effort to prepare.

5. Why do you think Martha involves Jesus? Why doesn't she just ask Mary to help her directly?

She probably thought Jesus would take her side! Perhaps she really wanted to lay the guilt trip on Mary and knew the best way to do that was by trying to shame her in front of Jesus into helping.

6. What do you think is "the one thing needful?"

"The one thing needful" is the Word of God. Being in Jesus' presence and receiving His teaching is the most important thing.

7. Jesus tells Martha that what Mary is doing is better. This implies that Martha's service is basically good, but Mary's type of service is better. We typically don't think of listening as serving, but actually Martha and Mary are both showing two kinds of hospitality to Jesus. Martha is receiving Jesus as a guest into her home and serving Him; and Mary is receiving the Word of God. Make time each day this week to receive Jesus as a guest by being in His Word.

Encourage the inmates to spend time with Jesus in God's Word during the week through personal devotions, Bible study, and worship services in the jail.

8. The key point here is whether one is first to serve the Lord or first be served by Him.⁵ Instead of trying to serve Jesus first, Mary allows Jesus to serve her first with the gift of His Word. Let's read **Matthew 20:25-28** to better understand Jesus' purpose in coming to earth.

The whole purpose for Jesus coming to earth and taking on human flesh was so that He could serve all mankind by dying on the cross to pay for our sins and rising from the dead so that we can be reconciled to God now and into eternity. Jesus is the true servant leader!

9. People rarely take the time to truly listen to another person, especially another person's troubles. Read **Galatians 6:2**. Is there someone you can think of in your cell block to whom you can give the gift of listening this week?

We show the love of Christ to our neighbor when we take time to truly listen to their cares and concerns, pray for them, and assist them in any possible way to help lighten their load.

10. In verse 40, "distracted" in the original language is "dragged around." It's as if Martha has a great weight upon her.

- What are some things that distract you away from the Word of God? What types of simple changes can you make to make God a priority in your daily life?

Answers will vary. Suggest that inmates simply set 10-15 minutes aside each day to study God's Word and pray, and encourage that practice to become a routine which they will continue to practice upon their release.

- Let's read **Matthew 11:28-30**. What does Jesus say to us here?
Jesus says that He provides true rest for our souls. Jesus has done the hard work for us: dying on the cross to remove our sins and rising from the dead so that we too may rise again. We receive and rest in His promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Him. What comfort and peace we receive in resting in Jesus' faithful promises of forgiveness and eternal life!

11. What is worship in church all about? How does God serve us in our worship in church?

The main purpose in attending church is so that **God Himself can serve us with His gifts** there. God serves us by nourishing and refreshing us with His Word and with His very

⁵ Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 459.

body and blood in the Lord's Supper. His Word and Sacrament are "the one thing needful" in church. They provide the rest for our souls that we crave because in His Word and Sacrament we receive His good gifts: His promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Him. While we certainly offer our thanks and praise to God in response to His gifts, the focus in worship is not on what we are doing, but rather on what God is doing for us. What a great God we have whose primary concern is in serving us!

12. Martha cries out, "Lord, don't you *care*. . ." Let's look at some passages in the Bible that remind us that God does indeed care for each and every one of us:

- 1 Peter 5:7 Point out that this passage uses the word "all." No worry or concern is too small to take to the Lord. He cares even about the "small stuff" in our lives.
- Nahum 1:7 God invites us to trust Him in times of trouble.
- John 3:16-17 God cares for us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to save us from sin, death, and the devil. He loves you so much that He paid the ultimate price for you so that He would never be separated from you!
- Romans 5:8 This passage sums up God's "Amazing Grace!"
- 2 Peter 3:9 God demonstrates patience with us because He loves us so much that He does not want anyone to be eternally separated from Him in hell; rather, He wants us to turn to Him for forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

13. Let's also read **Psalm 103** together. According to this Psalm, what are 5 ways that God shows His love for us?

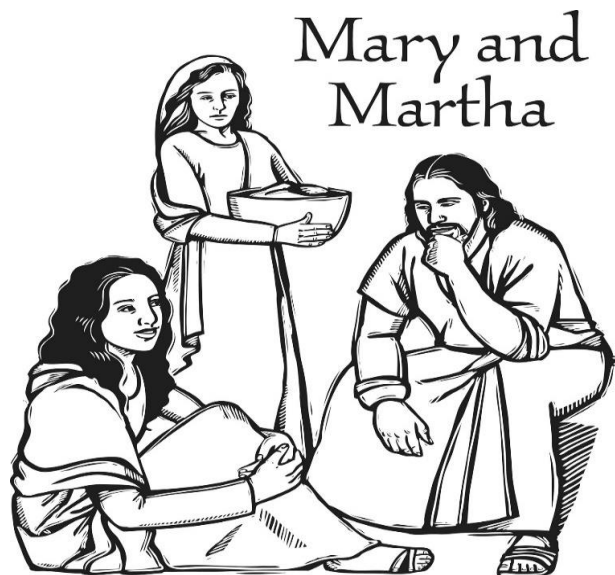
From the first five verses of this Psalm we learn that God forgives all our sins, heals all our diseases, rescues us from hell, bestows love and compassion on us, and satisfies our desires so that we are strengthened and renewed. All of this is true through Jesus Christ! Jesus is the cure for our sin-sick condition. He died to forgive all our sin, thereby rescuing us from eternal death and hell. In our Baptism, we become co-heirs with Christ—sons and daughters of the King who crowns us with His righteousness. Being joined to Christ in Baptism, we become the adopted children of God who bestows all that He is and has upon us. In Baptism we receive what we long for: a restored relationship with God the Father who forgives us all our sin and takes up residence in us

by the power of His Holy Spirit who grants abundant life in Him now and forever. This is our comfort and the rest for our souls.

14. How does God demonstrate His great love for us according to **1 John 3:1**?

He abundantly pours out His love on us through Jesus Christ, making us His dear children in Baptism. See the answer above in #13.

Finish the lesson with the prayer requests of those in your group.



Lesson Seven: Jesus is the Good Shepherd

John: 10:1-18

“I am the **good shepherd**. The **good shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 10:11



Opening Prayer: Loving Father, You have created us and claim us as Your own in Holy Baptism. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd who laid down His life on the cross for us. Forgive us when we, like lost sheep, go astray. By the power of Your Holy Spirit help us to hear Your voice and follow You so that we may have abundant life now and in eternity with You. Amen.

Before reading the passage from John 10:1-18, share some background information on shepherd imagery:

- Shepherding was a common occupation in the ancient Middle East, so the people of Jesus' day could identify with the imagery Jesus is using here. Grass and water are scarce in most of the Middle East, so a shepherd helps guide his sheep along the best path to good grazing ground and to refreshing water. Besides providing direction/guidance towards nourishment, the Shepherd also helps provide a place for the sheep to rest while he watches over them. He keeps them safe from predators. If a sheep wanders off, the shepherd will retrieve it and bring it back safely into the flock.

- The imagery of God as the shepherd of His people is a common theme throughout the Bible. Refer to Psalm 23 and 80:1 as examples. So by using this image for Himself, Jesus is underscoring one of the central ideas in this chapter and in the entire Gospel of John: Jesus is one with God the Father. That is, Jesus is one in essence or nature with God the Father. They are not the same person; rather, Jesus is revealing His identity as the second person of the Holy Trinity (One God in three persons). See John 10:30.
- In the ancient Middle East, the word “shepherd” was often used as a term for kings. Thus, by referring to Himself as The Good Shepherd in John 10, Jesus is revealing His true identity as The King, the Messiah/Savior. Refer to Luke 23:3 and John 18:37 where Jesus directly states that He is The King.

Read John 10:1-18 out loud verse by verse, explaining the following points as you read.

Verse 1:

- The audience here is the same as in the previous chapter. There, Jesus is speaking to His disciples, the blind man whom He just healed, the Pharisees, and other Jews who happen to be there. Jesus has just declared the Pharisees to be spiritually blind because they do not recognize Him as the Messiah/Savior of the world. So in chapter 10 Jesus continues to reveal His identity as our Savior.
- A sheep pen in those days was open air with walls and one entrance. The walls kept the sheep safe within the pen.
- Only the shepherd who is the rightful owner of the sheep would be allowed access through the gate by the gatekeeper.

Verse 2:

- The watchman was in charge of several different flocks of sheep in the same pen during the night.

Verse 3:

- Sheep recognize the sound of their own master’s voice and only respond to his voice, his commands.
- Notice that “own sheep” is a possessive. We belong to God who claims us as His own children in Baptism where we are marked with His name. Refer to Ephesians 1:13-14 and 1 Peter 2:9 for more on our being God’s possession.
- The shepherd knows the individual sheep and calls for them by name. How comforting that Jesus knows us personally and knows our name!

Verse 4:

- The shepherd guides his sheep by going first ahead of them (he does not drive them from behind). He shows the way by leading, and the sheep follow him because they

recognize the sound of his voice and trust him. What a comfort to know that Jesus is guiding us!

- It's important to note that the sheep do not follow the shepherd because they *see* him, but because they *hear* him. "Sheep are not only dependent creatures; singularly unintelligent, prone to wandering and unable to find their way to a shepherd even when it is in sight."⁶ This reinforces the notion that people are drawn to Christ by hearing His Word. That is, we cannot recognize who Jesus is or follow Him on our own--He calls us to Himself with His Word. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to create faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior. Refer to 1 Corinthians 12:3.

Verse 7 and 9:

- "I am the gate" means that Jesus is the one way unto salvation, eternal life. Refer to John 14:6.

Verse 8:

- "Thieves and robbers" may be referring to the Pharisees/Jewish leaders who are part of the audience here. Jesus is implying that they have not been good shepherds or caretakers of God's people, and have often led the people astray by focusing their teaching on works righteousness rather than on the need for God as our Savior from sin.

Verse 9:

- "Come in and go out" is a general Semitic expression for the course of life.⁷
- The pasture is where the sheep graze for food; therefore, Jesus is saying that in this life and the next He is the source of our spiritual nourishment. Refer to John 6:35.

Verse 10:

- Note that "May have life" is in the present tense. Christians have the present reality of an abundant/full life in Christ now as well as into eternity. Read Ephesians 2:5. In our Baptism, God washes away our sin in which we are dead, and He makes us spiritually alive by giving the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. We become "new creations"—we have a new life, a restored relationship with God the Father.
- This restored relationship with God the Father is "life to the full." In Him, we lack nothing (Psalm 23:1). We don't need to run off to other pastures seeking fulfillment. *How* we receive this abundant life is explained in the next verses (Jesus' death on the cross).

⁶ Leland Ryker, *Dictionary of Biblical imagery* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 782.

⁷ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 358.

Verse 11:

- The “good shepherd” cares for his sheep so much that he willingly dies for them—he sacrifices himself in their place. Jesus is speaking of His upcoming death on the cross for us.
- The hired hand does not own the sheep, so he does not have such an attachment to them as the shepherd does. He cares more about his wages and his own life than he does the sheep. He is selfish, but the Good Shepherd is selfless.

Verses 14-15:

- Note that Jesus repeats verse 11 to emphasize His identity as the Good Shepherd, our Savior.
- “When Jesus, as the good Shepherd, says here that he knows those who are his and that they know him, he represents in his own person that special relationship between God and his people as the people of his own possession. In short, in Jesus, God fulfills his promise that he himself will shepherd his people by appointing one shepherd over them (cf. vs. 16; Ezk. 34:15ff, 23ff), so that in Jesus the sheep of God’s flock will know God and hear God’s voice.”⁸
- Note that Jesus repeats verse 11 here to emphasize that the way the sheep obtain this relationship with God—this life to the full-- is via the cross.
- In verse 16 Jesus says that He has other sheep, meaning He has come not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles (anyone who is not Jewish).
- In verses 17-18, Jesus speaks of His crucifixion and His resurrection. Jesus has the authority and power to lay down His life and to come back to life in the flesh.

Digging Deeper

1. How can we hear the voice of our Good Shepherd Jesus calling us today?

God speaks to us through his Word, the Bible. The Holy Spirit works through God’s word to create faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3b) and to remind us of what Jesus says to us about life and salvation in His name (see John 14:25-26).

2. When we were children our parents often told us to not to talk to strangers. According to verse 5, what are God’s children to do when we encounter a stranger’s voice (someone telling us something different from what we know to be true in God’s Word)? Let’s see what St. Paul says about this in Galatians 1:6-9.

Verse 5 tells us to run away from those who are preaching a different Gospel from what Christ preaches. The Galatians passage warn us to be wary of those who pervert the Gospel by adding or detracting from God’s message of salvation in Christ alone. St. Paul

⁸ Ridderbos, 361.

warns that those who preach a message contrary to Christ will be thrown into hell for leading others astray.

3. Can you think of some modern day “thieves and robbers” who are trying to steal away, kill and destroy God’s children (sheep)? How might they be doing that?

These “thieves and robbers” include those who preach a universal salvation through different religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, etc. In addition, Mormons and Jehovah’s witnesses are not Christian church bodies, but sects which deny the Divinity of Christ and salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. We should also be wary of “Prosperity Gospel” preachers who twist the word of God to suit their idea of a theology of glory rather than the Biblical theology of the cross.

4. How do we “find pasture” in Christ? That is, how does He nourish us and enable us to rest in peace?

He nourishes us with His Word through which he refreshes us with the Good News of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Him. We have peace because Christ made peace between God and us by His death and resurrection.

He also creates new life in us in our Baptism where God adopts us as His children, and He continues to feed us, nourish us with His very body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. These sacraments are life giving, life sustaining.

5. In Christ we have our fulfillment (verse 10). In today’s culture, however, many people do not know Jesus and end up trying to find fulfillment (“life to the full”) in other various things or people. Can you think of some of them? What are some things you have tried in the past to “fill you up?”

Answers will vary. Some may say they sought fulfillment in money and material possessions. Some may say they turned to romantic relationships to find love and fulfillment. Others may say that they found comfort in drugs and alcohol. These may offer some temporary satisfaction, but none of these offer true, complete, and lasting fulfillment. Only Christ gives that!

6. Who are some of the “other sheep” that you can think of that need to hear Jesus’ voice? How can you help them hear Him? Refer to Romans 10:14-15.

Everyone needs to hear Jesus’ voice! According to the Romans passage, faith comes from hearing the Gospel proclaimed. You can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others by telling your story. Be sure to emphasize the hope, joy, and comfort you have

in Christ Jesus! You can also invite others to join you in Bible study and worship services.

7. How is it a comfort to know that Jesus has not only authority but also the power to resurrect from the dead?

It is comforting to know that He is all powerful and that all things are possible through Him. Christians have the comfort that because Christ lives, we also will live with Him after our physical death. At Christ's second coming, He will raise our body from the grave to be rejoined with our soul in heaven. These raised bodies will be new and glorious. Read John 6:39-40 and Philippians 3:21. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:12-28 for more about the resurrection).

8. Let's read Luke 15:1-7, where the imagery of Jesus the Good Shepherd is also beautifully pictured.
- A. Who is seeking whom in this parable? How is this a comfort to us when we have wandered off from God's path and gotten "lost?"

It is Christ, the Good Shepherd, who seeks us when we have wandered off. This is a huge comfort in knowing that He neither forgets about us nor ever gives up on us. He pursues us in love.

- B. What do you think it means when it says "He puts it (the lost sheep) on his shoulders and goes home?" (In other words, is the sheep capable of finding the Shepherd and going home on his own?)

Christ alone is the only way to the Father. We cannot come to Jesus or the Father on our own because our sinful natures are opposed to God and desire to turn from Him. Yet, out of His loving kindness, God persistently calls us with His Word through which His Holy Spirit creates faith in salvation in Christ. Indeed, it is God who does all the action for our salvation. Thanks be to such a good and gracious God!



Finish the lesson with the prayer requests of those in your group.

Jesus Help Me

Lord Jesus, help me,
I'm on the wrong path,
Lord Jesus, help me—
Save me from God's wrath.

Lord Jesus, help me,
For I am really weak,
Lord Jesus help me—
It's you I now seek.

Lord Jesus, help me,
I need your embrace,
Lord Jesus, help me—
It's sin that I face.

Lord Jesus, help me,
Wash away my sin,
Lord Jesus, help me—
Cleanse me from within.

Lord Jesus, help me,
It's You that I need,
Lord Jesus, help me—
On the cross you did bleed.

Lord Jesus, you did help me,
Now I walk in Your light.
Thank You, Lord Jesus—
You are the truth, way and life.

By: Deborah L. Tait, former jail inmate

Written during incarceration September 26, 2016; Used with permission.

Lonely Prison

I feel so broken,
I need a healing hand,
Hanging my head low—
Jesus, I can barely stand.

I'm stuck in this prison,
Feeling so far astray,
Lost in much confusion
It's here I have to stay.

I feel oh so lonely,
My heart has an ache
As I look up to You, Jesus,
Feeling as if it will break.

Jesus come to me now,
Only You can set me free,
I long for your presence
In Your loving grace I want to be.

Come sit with me Jesus,
Give me Your loving embrace,
I so need You now—
Fill my heart's empty space.

By: Deborah L. Tait, former jail inmate

Written during incarceration October 12, 2016; Used with permission.

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