

# THE CRUX

Exploring a Relationship with  
Jesus Christ and His Church



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# THE CRUX

## Exploring a Relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church

**By Kevin Cotter**

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# THE CRUX



## INTRODUCTION

In the early 1950s, a 16-year-old Argentinian boy had a day off from school. He planned to do what most teenagers would do with a day off: meet up with his girlfriend and classmates to have a good time. On his way to meet up with his friends, he passed by his local parish and felt compelled to go inside.

As he walked inside of the church, he saw a priest that he'd never seen before and felt like he needed to go to confession. Later he would say, "I felt like someone grabbed me from inside and took me to the confessional." During this time in the sacrament of reconciliation, this teenage boy had a profound experience with God's mercy. Instead of meeting up with his friends, he spent the rest of his day in the church contemplating his experience. It was such a defining moment for him that he was convinced he was called to be a priest.

That day was September 21, the feast of St. Matthew. For the rest of his life, he would remember that moment and compare himself to St. Matthew, who was called to conversion. When he became a priest and later a bishop, he'd return to that same confessional and reverence it. When he became a cardinal and took trips to Rome, he'd go to a particular chapel with a painting of St. Matthew's conversion and contemplate his life. Then, when he became Pope Francis, he made the conversion of St. Matthew part of his papal motto.

An encounter with God can change everything. How can you help someone have a life-changing encounter? One of the simplest ways is by sharing the kerygma, the basic message of the Gospel, and inviting someone to make a decision about Jesus Christ and the Church.

In “The Crux,” our goal is to help your participants have a life-changing encounter. The title of this study comes from the Latin word *crux*, which means “cross.” The study itself follows the example of St. Paul: to “preach Christ crucified” so that others may come to know the love that God has for us (1 Cor 1:23).

The word “crux” today also refers to a place of decision or a turning point. The Christian missionary Jim Elliot once said, “Lord, make me a crisis man. Let me not be a mile-post on a single road, but make me a fork that men must turn one way or another in facing Christ in me.” We want this study to be an experience where the participants can gaze upon the cross of Christ and come to a decision about Him in their own lives.

Over the course of this study, you will present the Gospel to your group. Then, the climax of your time together will be for you to meet with each member of your study individually and discuss how they can dedicate or rededicate their life to Jesus Christ and His Church.

## **Objections**

You may have some fears or objections about sharing the Gospel. Let’s tackle a few of these:

*Is this the best way? Or, is this the Catholic way?*

Sharing the Gospel is as old as the Church. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the Apostles at Pentecost, Peter stood up and proclaimed the Gospel to the crowd. Scripture says, “three thousand people

## Introduction

were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41). This tradition of sharing the basic message of the faith has been part of Catholic tradition throughout the centuries. In fact, one of the most popular presentations of the Gospel — the Bridge, used by both Protestants and Catholics — actually comes from St. Catherine of Siena’s mystical revelation in the 1300s. (We will share more about this illustration in Chapter 3 of this study.)

Some people may find the idea of a Gospel presentation difficult because they are familiar with Protestants who insist that only a prayer of acceptance is needed for salvation. Catholics don’t believe this — but at the same time, the proclamation of the Gospel may be more important now than ever. So many Catholics have received the sacraments of the Church but do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. A relationship with Jesus and accepting Him into one’s life makes the practice of the faith come alive. As Pope St. John Paul II put it, “It is necessary to awaken again in believers a full relationship with Christ. Only from a personal relationship with Jesus can an effective evangelization develop” (Speech to Bishops of Southern Germany, 4 Dec. 1992).

*Will people receive this message?*

Deep down, everyone is made for relationship with Jesus Christ; He is the One that every person on this earth is looking for. In addition to that, simply sharing the Gospel produces fruit, even when we can’t see it. Raniero Cantalamessa, the preacher to the papal household to three different popes, says this:

*“We must proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior, helping people to grasp what it means to have Jesus as their Savior — not in a theoretical way, but that every day they have a Savior, someone who will lift them from their*

*fatigue of the day, of their sin, and their mistakes, and who renews them. He saves us. When you proclaim this living, crucified and risen Jesus, something always happens.”*

We don't know how people will respond. We don't know what they will say. But we owe it to others to share the Gospel with them. Something always happens when we do.

*Will I be able to present the Gospel?*

Don't worry. This study is designed to guide you through each and every step of the process. It will take some work and some prayer, but you can do this. In fact, you were made for this! All Christians are entrusted with sharing the Gospel. If there's ever a time to learn, the time is now. Remember of the words of Jesus, often echoed by Pope St. John Paul II: "Be not afraid!" Like St. Paul, we must not be "ashamed of the Gospel" (Rom 1:16).

If you have any other concerns or fears about sharing the Gospel, be sure to talk with a FOCUS missionary or another leader who can help.

## **Format**

The Gospel presentation we will use has five steps that you will see throughout this Bible study:

1. Made for relationship
2. That relationship is broken
3. Jesus is the answer
4. Invitation
5. Life in the Church

## Introduction

Let's see how these five steps will be used in the various chapters of this study:

Chapter 1 will cover the first two steps of the Gospel:	We are made for relationship This relationship is broken
Chapter 2 will begin to cover the third step:	Jesus is the Answer (Part 1) Who is Jesus?
Chapter 3 will complete the third step:	Jesus is the Answer (Part 2) Why did Jesus die?
Chapter 4 will cover the fourth step:	Invitation
Chapter 5 will cover the fifth step:	Life in the Church

### 4 Key Tips for Leading This Study

So, how do you lead this study? Here are four key tips to get you started:

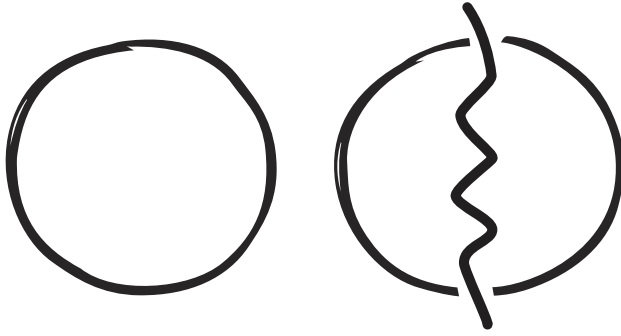
- 1. Have fun!** This study is designed to be completed over the course of 5 – 6 weeks. That being said, it can be helpful to give your group a chance to “gel” before diving into the study. Building good relationships is essential. Consider spending a few weeks getting to know your group, explaining Bible study and having some fun before you dive into “The Crux.” Consider using a couple chapters from FOCUS’ “Ignite” series ([focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org)) for the first couple weeks. Once your group is established, ask if they will commit to attending for the next 5 – 6 weeks.
- 2. Prepare effectively.** First, **please don’t show the videos to your group!** These videos are for your preparation only. Take time every week to pray for your group, watch the video, read the chapter and prepare questions. This time of preparation is critical for success. Don’t just wing it. As the leader, you will need a Bible and sometimes a copy of the Catechism. Participants will only need a Bible. You can lead the study from your device using the FOCUSEquip App or you may print the study from [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org).



- 3. Know your group.** Every Bible study includes participants with varying levels of knowledge and experience. It is your job as the leader to make the content fit your group. If your group is not accustomed to Bible study or is even skeptical of Christianity, you may need to spend more time building relationships and presenting the basics in a clear and convincing manner. If your group has a strong knowledge of the faith, it is still important to cover these topics. We can all go deeper. Supplementary resources are suggested throughout the study to assist those at different levels.
  
- 4. Need more help?** If you need more guidance on how to lead a Bible study, please visit [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org) for our “How-to Lead a Bible Study” resources. It also helps to get feedback from an experienced leader. Ask your discipler or another leader to attend your study and give you feedback on how to lead more effectively. For a recap of the vision, skills, preparation and investment necessary for leading a transformative Bible study, see the Bible study blueprint on [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org).

If you have any questions or comments about this Bible study, please email us at [focusequip@focus.org](mailto:focusequip@focus.org).





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## Chapter 1

# Made for Relationship and This Relationship Is Broken

Genesis 2:15 – 17; 3:1 – 7

**UNDERSTANDING**

Pages 10 - 15

**DISCUSSION**

Pages 16 - 22

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Genesis 2:15 – 17; 3:1 – 7*

## Goal

The goal of this chapter is to go through the first two points of the Gospel presentation: that we are made for relationship and that this relationship was broken through sin.

## Context

*Reading Genesis*

We are going to explore the first two steps of the Gospel through Genesis' account of Adam and Eve and their Original Sin.

The book of Genesis is about beginnings: the beginning of the world, the beginning of humankind and the beginning of our relationship with God. Genesis is a beautifully written account of this beginning, but oftentimes it can be misunderstood or used to accomplish something it wasn't originally written to do.

Before we read this ancient text, we need to learn more about it and its context. The context of a Scripture passage is vital in understanding

it. The phrase, “There is a man in the room with a gun” can be taken quite differently depending on the context. If we were talking about a police officer, there would be no need for alarm; if we were talking about a man who escaped from prison, that would be a different story.

In Scripture, the context can refer to the historical context of the passage (for example, the time period, geographical location or culture) or the passages of Scripture that come before and after it. For the book of Genesis, context and background are critical. It is easy to turn the early chapters into a debate about history or science. While these are important issues, we should shift our focus elsewhere for the time being. The author is not trying to tell us exactly how God created the world but to help us understand the Divine Creator, the world in which we live and our own role in that world. The genre of writing is also important to consider: While the author is reporting historical events, he is doing so in mostly an allegorical way. We don't need to believe that the world was created in seven literal days or that the devil was an actual serpent.

### *Made for Relationship*

For this particular passage, it is important to see that, in the beginning, man was made for a relationship with God. Man is made in the image and likeness of God, meaning we are His sons and daughters (Genesis 1:26). God Himself walks in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8) and provides everything they need. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way: “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man” (CCC 1).

God's command to Adam and Eve also reveals something about our relationship with Him: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:16 – 17). If God is a loving Father who wants a relationship with mankind, why does He place the tree in the garden that can cause them such harm? Ultimately, because it allows us to have free choice. Humans aren't created to be robots or slaves. We are created with free will, which allows us to freely choose to love others, including God. But is this choice really worth it? Think of all the pain and suffering caused by sin.

An analogy can be helpful here. What if you had a button that would make your perfect potential spouse appear? They would have all the qualities you'd want in a relationship, and they would be required to be with you for the rest of your lives. Would you push the button? I think most people would say "yes." But would this really be a great relationship if the other person didn't freely choose you?

What if there was another person who wasn't as perfect, but who made the *choice* to be with you? They wouldn't stay with you out of some obligation they were required to fulfill; rather, it was something they sacrificed for and freely embraced. Would you prefer that relationship, even if that person had some faults? Hopefully, you would. There is something about being chosen and about freedom that makes real love possible. This is why choice is so important, why it was worth all the trouble — because God wanted a real, loving relationship with us.

## Climax

### *At the Heart of Temptation*

This is the classic part of the story. In Genesis 3:1 – 7, the serpent enters into the garden and offers the woman a fruit; the woman eats it, and the rest is history. You might ask, “So, they ate some fruit; what’s the big deal?” Let’s rewind. The serpent begins by misquoting God in verse one: he says that God told them they cannot eat from any tree (in Genesis 2:16, God just said not to eat from one tree). Eve responds by exaggerating God’s command: She says they cannot touch it lest they die (God said they could not eat, nothing about touching). Finally, the serpent tells Eve that they will not die if they eat the fruit, directly contradicting God’s command.

What is going on in the story? It is not about the fruit; it is about God’s identity. God is a loving father to Adam and Eve. The serpent, however, paints the picture of a God who is a liar and an arbitrary rule-giver.

When Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they buy into the serpent’s lie. Their act involves more than the breaking of a rule; they break their relationship with God. In the end, this was the purpose of the tree. God could not know if Adam and Eve truly loved Him unless they had the choice to disobey Him.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* beautifully describes the dynamics of this first sin and how it still affects us today: “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness” (CCC 397).

## Application

### *A Broken Relationship*

The deep meaning behind the punishments that fall upon Adam and Eve as a result of this Original Sin is too lengthy for a full explanation here. However, the Catechism gives a short summation:

*“The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul’s spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject ‘to its bondage to decay.’ Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will ‘return to the ground,’ for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history” (CCC 400).*

Chaos now reigns between God and man, between man and others, between man and creation and within each one of us. We all now suffer both physical and spiritual death.

As we consider the world around us and reflect on our own lives, we have an innate sense of the truth depicted in the Catechism. If we read a newspaper or think about our own lives and those around us, we know that something is wrong. Prince Charles of England once said, “For all the advances of science, there remains deep in the soul a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living.”

The early chapters of Genesis provide a narrative that explains this problem: Adam sinned, and the consequences of this sin echo to this day — in our world, in our relationships and in us. At the same time, the problem reveals our original purpose: to be in a relationship with



God. This passage in Genesis spurs us on to find the solution and our true purpose in life.

*To Be Continued*

As Genesis 3:15 notes, this chaos and battle with the devil will continue for the entire existence of the human race. It is so severe that it affects our very nature; this nature is passed down from Adam and Eve to us today (for more, see Rom 5:12 – 17). For instance, how do we view God? Is He a merely a lawgiver, or is He a father? If we follow Him, do we think we will be slaves or sons and daughters? Do we experience the brokenness of Genesis in our own lives? Do we experience the tendency to be selfish in ourselves and others? The power of this story is that it continues to resonate in our lives today.

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Genesis 2:15 – 17; 3:1 – 7*

## Notes to the Leader

- *Reminder of the goal of this chapter:* The goal of this week's chapter is to go through the first two points of the Gospel presentation: that we are made for a relationship and that this relationship was broken through sin.
- *Instructions for this chapter:* Be sure to help the group get to know one another and yourself before you dive into the content. If your group is still forming or if this is the very first meeting, we recommend using one or two of FOCUS' "Ignite" studies before you dive into "The Crucifixion."

## Opener

**1. For the purposes of this question, let's assume there is a God. If you could ask Him any one question, what would it be?**

## Context

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

This Bible study is about understanding what it means to have a relationship with Jesus and His Church. Today, we are going to study the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis. *Genesis* means “beginnings.” For Jews and Christians alike, Genesis is the beginning of the story of humankind. While we often want to have Genesis answer our questions about science or history, it’s important to read Genesis as it is to discover what its author intended to tell us.

### **2. To start, I want you to think for a moment and answer this question just to yourself: Why do you think God created the world?**

*Give your group a few moments to think.*

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*In response to why God created the world, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man” (CCC 1).*

*God didn’t have to create man — and yet, He does so that man can share in what He has. Because of this, God wants a relationship with us and seeks to draw near to us.*

### **3. How does the way the Catechism described why God created the world compare to why you thought God created the world?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**4. The heart of our story today is how Adam and Eve sinned — but before we get there, we need to see what God asked them to do. In Genesis 2:16 – 17, it says, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” So, God gave Adam and Eve the ability to eat from all of the trees except for one. If God is a loving Father who wants a relationship with mankind, why does He place the tree in the garden that can cause them such harm?**

*Answer: This is a thought-provoking question. Probably the easiest answer is that the tree gives Adam and Eve a choice, and choice is the heart of a relationship. God didn't create robots or people to be slaves; He created us to be children who love Him. There has to be a choice involved in loving someone. The tree gives Adam and Eve this choice.*

*An analogy can be helpful here. What if you had a button that would make your perfect potential spouse appear? They would have all the qualities you'd want in a relationship, and they would be required to be with you for the rest of your lives. Would you push the button? I think most people would say “yes.” But would this really be a great relationship if the other person didn't freely choose you?*

*What if there was another person who wasn't as perfect but who made the choice to be with you? They wouldn't stay with you out of some obligation they were required to fulfill; rather, it was something they sacrificed for and freely embraced. Would you prefer that relationship, even if that person had some faults? Hopefully, you would. There is something about being chosen and about freedom that makes real love possible. This is why choice is so important, why it was worth all the trouble — because God wanted a real, loving relationship with us.*

## **Climax**

**Read Genesis 3:1 – 7.**

### **5. How does the serpent's statement contrast with God's command to Adam and Eve?**

*Answer: The serpent misquotes God as saying, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden" (Gen 2:16). God only said they couldn't eat from one tree in the garden.*

### **6. Now let's look at Eve. How does her statement contrast with God's command?**

*Answer: Eve exaggerates God's commandment, saying they can't even touch the fruit. God never said this in Genesis 2:16 – 17.*

### **7. What do their statements reveal about how they view God?**

*Answer: They believe God is a rule-giver who is trying to keep something from them rather than a Father who loves them.*

### **8. Why do you think Adam and Eve disobey God?**

*Allow the group to discuss. Ultimately, Adam and Eve fail to trust in God. In speaking about Adam and Eve, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness" (CCC 397).*

## Application

**9. A lack of trust in God was the reason for Adam and Eve's sin, and for our sins today. Can you relate to Adam and Eve in the story, and if so, in what ways?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**10. In the next few verses of Genesis, it goes on to describe the consequences of this first sin. If we read a newspaper or think about our lives and the lives of those around us, we know that something is wrong. Prince Charles of England once said, "For all the advances of science, there remains deep in the soul a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living." Do you have a sense that there is something wrong or broken in our world? If so, where do you see this brokenness?**

*Allow the group to discuss. Following Adam and Eve's sin, the book of Genesis illustrates that chaos now reigns between God and man, between man and others, between man and creation and within each one of us. We all now suffer both physical and spiritual death.*

## Summary

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*This week, we learned how we were created for a relationship with God but that this relationship was broken through sin. Next week, we are going to look at Christianity's answer to this problem of sin.*

## **Challenge**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*Each week, we will have a small challenge for our group. If we are going to be in a study together, we need to get to know one another more. This week's challenge is to find a time outside of Bible study to get together to do something fun.*

[Note to leader: Either have a plan of what to do beforehand or ask your group what they think.]

### **Additional Resources:**

*Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Book of Genesis* by Dr. Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch

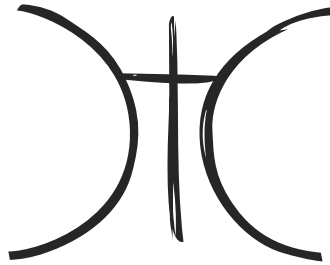
*Chance or purpose? Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith* by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn

*New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* by Fr. Robert Spitzer

*The Catholic Church and Science* by Benjamin Wiker







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## Chapter 2

# Jesus Is the Answer Part 1: Who Is Jesus?

Mark 8:27 – 29

**UNDERSTANDING**

Pages 24 - 29

**DISCUSSION**

Page 30 - 36

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Mark 8:27 – 29*

## Goal

Last week, we looked at the first two points of the Gospel: that we are made for relationship and that this relationship is broken by sin. This week, we are going to begin to look at our third Gospel presentation point, that Jesus is the answer to the brokenness in this world. Today, our goal is to explore the question: Who is Jesus?

## Context

*Who Do You Say that I Am?*

Who is Jesus? The answer to this question is highly contested. Some claim He was a fraud. Some claim He was only a prophet. Some claim He never existed. Some claim He was God. This controversy about Jesus is nothing new. During His lifetime, people often debated and discussed His identity.

In Mark Chapter 8, the writer describes a conversation between Jesus and His disciples about who He is:

*"And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do men say that I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets.' And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" (Mk 8:27 - 29).*

Many people answer this question by saying Jesus was a good moral teacher, but not God. They will admit that He was very influential in His day and that He possessed incredible wisdom — but as with other great teachers, people can choose to use His wisdom or ignore it. Perhaps the best source of information for who Jesus is would be Jesus Himself. Let's see who He claims to be.

### *Jesus' Divinity and Solution*

Throughout Scripture, Jesus makes claims about His identity. Here are just a few examples:

- First, in John 10:30, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." Afterwards, His audience picks up stones to throw at Him. They readily give their reasoning: "It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God."
- Second, Jesus claims to be not just one path to God, but *the* path: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6).
- Third, we talked last week about the brokenness in our world, in our relationships and in our own lives. Rather than simply pointing to God as the solution to our problems, Jesus points to Himself: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn 6:35).

## Climax

If Jesus claimed to be God and declared that He was the answer to our problems and isn't, this definitely disqualifies Him as a great moral teacher. C.S. Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia and a professor at Oxford, once said:

*"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Christ]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."*

What C.S. Lewis points to is called the trilemma. Jesus was either Lord, Liar (devil of hell) or Lunatic (madman). Simply being a great moral teacher isn't an option. Let's look at the claims that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic.

### *Jesus Was a Liar*

If He is a liar, then we have to ask ourselves, why would He lie? In his book *Made for More*, Curtis Martin states, "Liars lie in the pursuit of some gain. What does Jesus gain as a result of His claims? Earthly power? When they try to crown him, he runs away. Status? He only wins the fleeting admiration of a small crown of seemingly unimportant people...When He is on trial for His life and is challenged point-blank to answer whether He is indeed the Christ, the Son of God, he does not hedge or fib...No liar bent on earthly gain would do this."

Jesus has opportunities to be named king by His people (Jn 6:15) or escape His death (Mt 26:47 - 56) — and yet, He doesn't do either. Rather than attempting to get something out of His audience, He continually gives of Himself.

### *Jesus Was a Lunatic*

If Jesus wasn't a liar, maybe he was a lunatic. I mean, if someone claims to be God, but isn't, maybe He is crazy. Curtis Martin speaks to this point as well: "The trouble is that He is radically unlike any other lunatic who has ever claimed to be God. Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 - 7. Does that sound like the manifesto of a psychotic to you?"

There's a reason why people believe Jesus is a great moral teacher: It's because He possessed and shared incredible wisdom for our lives. This is something a lunatic could not do on the scale Jesus did. Even some of His enemies said this about Him: "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men" (Mt 22:16).

### *Jesus Was a Legend*

Finally, some might say Jesus didn't claim to be God, but His followers made up this claim after His death. Over time, the story was exaggerated or changed, and Jesus became something in myth that He never was in real life.

When we look at this claim that Jesus was simply a legend, we have to try to understand why someone would make these claims. Peter Kreeft is a distinguished professor of philosophy at Boston College

and has been studying Jesus and the Christian faith on an academic level for more than 50 years. He notes what Christians had to gain if they did exaggerate claims about Jesus: "Here is what they got out of their hoax. Their friends and families scorned them. Their social standing, possessions, and political privileges were stolen from them by both Jews and Romans. They were persecuted, imprisoned, whipped, tortured, exiled, crucified, eaten by lions, and cut to pieces by gladiators" (*Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics*).

Whether they were leaders in the Church or new believers, Christians were persecuted for the first 300 years of Christianity. One early leader was St. Ignatius of Antioch. He was a bishop and disciple of St. John the Evangelist, the author of the Gospel of John. Toward the end of his life, St. Ignatius was taken to Rome to be killed in the Colosseum. As he traveled to Rome, he wrote seven letters that we still have today. He is just one of the many Christians who died for the faith during the first 300 years of the Church. Why would so many people die for a lie?

### **Application**

The application for this chapter could be very intense. As your group explores the topic of Jesus, we don't want to force this issue too early. We want them to continue to explore the person of Jesus and the ramifications of His message throughout the study. This chapter is mostly designed to get that discussion going rather than to move people to an action point.

If members of your group still have questions, you can point them to the books *A Case for Jesus* by Brant Pitre or *Made for More* by Curtis Martin. These books will address topics like the trilemma in greater detail, the historical reliability of the New Testament and an argument for the resurrection.

If your group thinks the idea that Jesus is Lord is pretty obvious, you can use this quote from Jesus: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’” (Mt 7:21 – 23).

It’s one thing to claim Jesus as Lord; it is another thing to live it out. How do we claim Jesus is Lord in our relationships (dating, friendships, roommates, etc.)? How do we claim Jesus is Lord regarding our fears about the future? How do we claim Jesus is Lord in what we listen to or watch?

You might consider using this analogy to help your group: When we have guests over to our houses, we normally clean up the rooms people will see — but we often will hide certain rooms that are messy. In fact, we might have certain drawers or spots that we definitely wouldn’t want anyone to see, so we make sure no one can get inside of these places. The same is true with Jesus and His Lordship in our life. Some people invite Jesus into their lives, but in a restricted way. They want Him to come into certain places in their lives, but in other places they shut Him out. At times, certain areas of their lives are so messy that they don’t want Him to see them, either out of fear or pride. The ultimate goal of the Christian life is to allow Jesus to be Lord over our entire lives, not just certain parts of it.

On one hand, don’t assume that everyone in your group will claim Jesus as Lord. On the other hand, be prepared to challenge people to not just think that Jesus is Lord, but to live like it.

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Mark 8:27 – 29*

## Notes to the Leader

- *Reminder of the goal for this chapter:* The goal of this week's chapter is to begin to look at our third Gospel presentation point: that Jesus is the answer to the brokenness in this world. Today, our goal is to consider the question: Who is Jesus?
- *Instructions for this chapter:* This chapter is mostly designed to get a discussion going rather than move people to an action point. Do everything you can to ask good questions and understand your participants' perspectives rather than answering their objections.



## Opener

**1. For those who are single: If you like someone and want to get to know them better, what do you do to learn more about them? (Or for those in a relationship/married: If you want to learn more about an acquaintance, what do you do?)**

[Note to leader: Most people will mention social media, but dig a bit deeper. People can (and do) fabricate their identity on social media. What else can someone do to get to know someone? For instance, you could talk to their friends or have a conversation with them and see what they say about themselves.]

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

Last week, we looked at two points: that we are made for a relationship with God and that this relationship is broken by sin. Over the next two chapters, we are going to begin to look at the claim that Jesus is the answer to this brokenness. Today, our goal is to answer the question: Who is Jesus? Just like other people we seek to learn about, we have to look at the facts and evidence surrounding the person of Jesus.

## Context

**Read Mark 8:27 – 29.**

**2. During Jesus' lifetime, people had all sorts of theories about His identity. What are some ideas people have today about who Jesus is?**

*Allow the group to discuss. A common answer today is that Jesus was simply a good moral teacher, but not actually God.*

**3. When it comes to Jesus' identity, we should probably start with what Jesus said about Himself. Let's look at three short passages: John 10:30, John 14:6 and John 6:35. Could I have three volunteers to read one of these passages?**

**4. So, after hearing Jesus' own words, can someone describe some of the things Jesus says about Himself?**

*Answer: Jesus makes the claim that He is divine (Jn 10:30); that He is the way, the truth and the life as opposed to one of many ways (Jn 14:6); and that He is the one who can heal our brokenness.*

**5. Given opinions about who people think Jesus is and in the context of other world religions, why are these statements so controversial?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

## **Climax**

**6. C.S. Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia and a professor at Oxford, once said, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Christ]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse." What do you think of this quote? If what**

## **Jesus claims about Himself is not true, could He be a good moral teacher?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*Some things to keep in mind for this discussion:*

- 1. This quote from C.S. Lewis has often been called the trilemma. It proposes that Jesus is either Lord, Liar (devil of hell) or Lunatic.*
- 2. If Jesus is a liar, we have to ask the question, why would Jesus lie? What does He gain as a result of His claims? He ultimately dies for these lies.*
- 3. If Jesus is a lunatic, we have to explain how He is capable of so much great wisdom. Teachings like the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) don't sound like they come from a madman.*
- 4. If Jesus is a legend (something His believers made up), see the question below.*

**7. Some might say Jesus didn't claim to be God, but His followers made up this claim after His death. Over time, the story was exaggerated or changed, and Jesus became something in myth that He never was in real life. When we look at this claim — that Jesus was simply a legend — we have to try to understand why someone would make these claims.**

**Peter Kreeft is a distinguished professor of philosophy at Boston College and has been studying Jesus and the Christian faith on an academic level for more than 50 years. He notes what Christians had to gain if they did exaggerate claims about Jesus: "Here is what they got out of their hoax. Their friends and families scorned them. Their social standing, possessions, and political privileges were stolen from them by both Jews and Romans. They were persecuted, imprisoned, whipped, tortured, exiled, crucified, eaten by lions, and cut to pieces by gladiators."**

**What do you think about the idea that Jesus is a myth or a legend?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*For a specific example of an early Christian who died for the faith: One early leader was St. Ignatius of Antioch. He was a bishop and disciple of St. John the Evangelist, author of the Gospel of John. Toward the end of his life, St. Ignatius was taken to Rome to be killed in the Colosseum. As he traveled to Rome, he wrote seven letters that we still have today. He is just one of the many Christians who died for the faith during the first 300 years of the Church. Why would so many people die for a lie?*

*For more on this topic, see The Case for Jesus by Brant Pitre.*

**Application**

**8. This week, we looked at the identity of Jesus. He claims to be God and the solution to the brokenness we read about in the first chapter. We saw that there are only 3 – 4 options with Jesus. He is either Lord, Liar, Lunatic or Legend. Regardless of whether you believe in Jesus, how would your life change if you lived with 100% confidence that He was Lord?**

[Note to Leader: Depending on where you group is, you can use this quote: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Mt 7:21 – 23).]

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*You might consider using this analogy to help your group: When we have guests over to our houses, we normally clean up the rooms people will see — but we often will hide certain rooms that are messy. In fact, we might have certain drawers or spots that we definitely wouldn't want anyone to see, so we make sure no one can get inside of these places. The same is true with Jesus and His Lordship in our life. Some people invite Jesus into their lives, but in a restricted way. They want Him to come into certain places in their lives, but in other places they shut Him out. At times, certain areas of their lives are so messy that they don't want Him to see them, either out of fear or pride. The ultimate goal of the Christian life is to allow Jesus to be Lord over our entire lives, not just certain parts of it.*

## **Summary**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

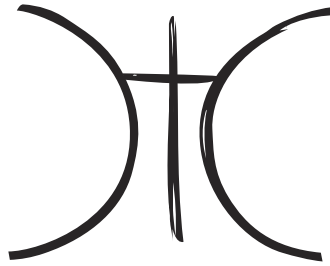
*After looking at Jesus' identity this week, we will continue to look at whether or not Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin and brokenness. Next time, we will discuss the question: Why did Jesus die?*

## **Challenge**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*Throughout the week, take some time to think about how certain decisions you make would change if you fully believed that Jesus was Lord.*





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## Chapter 3

# Jesus Is the Answer Part 2: Why Did Jesus Die?

Ephesians 2:1 – 10

**UNDERSTANDING**

Pages 38 - 43

**DISCUSSION**

Pages 44 - 52

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Ephesians 2:1 – 10*

## Goal

The goal of this chapter is to continue to look at the third step of the Gospel — that Jesus is the answer — by examining the question: Why did Jesus die?

## Context

Imagine you are John the Apostle and it's the original Good Friday. You are standing with Jesus' mother, Mary, at the foot of the cross, and looking at your friend, who is experiencing immense pain and suffering. At some point in time, we have to think that John would have asked, "Why does Jesus have to die? Aren't there other ways God could save the world? How does the death of an innocent man change anything?"

Like John, we might have this question as well. Today, we are going to look at some answers from St. Paul. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision, which resulted in Paul's radical conversion. Paul spent the rest of his life traveling around the known



world telling people about Jesus.

During this time, Paul spent several years in the city of Ephesus ministering to the Church and to others nearby (Acts 19:1 – 10; 20:31). After his departure, other religious teachers caused confusion among the Ephesians on how salvation works. In this passage, Paul seeks to set the record straight and remind the Ephesians how they received their salvation.

### *God's perspective*

Paul shows us what humankind looks like from God's perspective. We cannot know how great the solution is until we realize how bad the problem truly is. Paul spends the first three verses in this passage outlining the state of man without God.

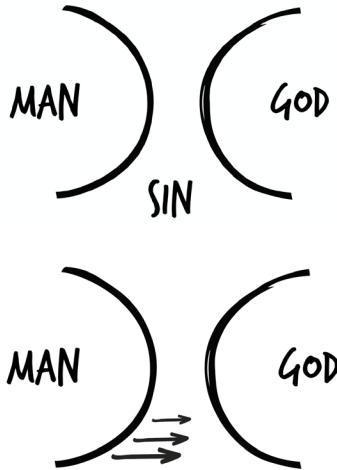
Here are some details about the key phrases in this passage:

- *"The course of this world"* (Eph 2: 2): When Scripture speaks of "the world," it uses it in several different ways. In this passage, "the world" means a non-spiritual way of thinking; in other words, how we would act without God.
- *"Passions of our flesh...desires of our mind"* (Eph 2:3): Paul's description makes sense if we look back at the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin — Original Sin — on humanity. After the fall, humans now have a natural tendency to commit sin; our passions and desires rule us, even when we know what is right. We need grace to overcome this tendency (for more, see CCC 403, 405).
- *"Children of wrath"* (Eph 2:3): This is a bleak picture of our state without God. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death." Justice refers to giving someone what is owed them. Because of

## Understanding / Jesus Is the Answer, Part 2: Why Did Jesus Die?

our sin, we deserve wrath and death. We are in need of something more than justice. We need mercy, a free gift from God that we don't deserve.

St. Catherine's Bridge Illustration can be helpful to explain our current state without God's mercy. On one side is God and heaven, and on the other side is humanity here on Earth. The separation caused by sin creates an infinite chasm between God and man. Because we're finite human beings, nothing we do on our own (represented by the arrows) can bridge that infinite gap.



### Climax

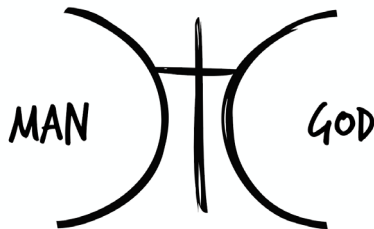
In Ephesians 2:1 – 3, Paul tells us what God's judgment looks like, in light of what would be just. Verse four of Ephesians Chapter 2 begins with a "but": We are justly owed wrath, but God is merciful.

God is not only merciful, He is "rich in mercy" — He goes beyond merely saving us from wrath by giving us eternal life. These facts alone would have been amazing, but God offers us so much more.

Paul explains earlier in the letter that God destined the Ephesians (and us) to be sons and daughters (Eph 1:5). God doesn't just save us; he brings us into a family.

Our culture often paints Christianity as a good way to be a nice person. At its root, Christianity is about realizing the fallen and broken state of our world and accepting a solution that raises us up beyond anything we could imagine. With the vision Paul paints here in his letter to the Ephesians, a decision in favor of Jesus Christ makes much more sense than a decision to simply be a nice person.

St. Catherine's Bridge Illustration can be helpful here as well. Jesus' death on the cross bridges the divide created by sin. Because Jesus is fully human, He can represent the human family and offer an act of love on our behalf. However, because He is fully divine, His act of love on the cross takes on infinite value. Thus, Jesus is able to bridge this infinite divide. His death gives us an opportunity to overcome sin, to live as His sons and daughters and to go to heaven.



As the Catechism states, "No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all" (CCC 615).

## **Application**

Faced with such immeasurable riches, it is natural to think, “What do I have to do to get this gift?” Paul’s surprising answer in Ephesians 2:8 – 10 is nothing. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s grace (Eph 2:8). God gives it freely while we are “dead in our trespasses” (Eph 2:1). There is nothing a dead person can do to restore himself back to life!

Sometimes it is hard for us to understand the free gift of salvation that Jesus offers through His death and resurrection. Here’s a story that might help.

Imagine you are the parent of a nine-year-old boy. During the summer, your son spends almost every day playing with the next door neighbor’s son. Your son’s friend eats dinner with your family and spends the night at your house; the boys are inseparable.

One day, your son’s friend comes to you and says, “Can I talk to you for a minute? It has been really fun to play with your son all summer. Thank you for letting me spend the night, eat dinner with your family, play games with you and everything.” You reply, “No problem. I’m glad you both have had a good summer.” The young boy looks at you and says, “I just have one question: Do you think that if I mowed your lawn for the rest of the summer, I could be your son?” Of course, you are honored by his request, but you reply, “Well, thank you, young man, but mowing my lawn wouldn’t make you my son.” “Well,” your son’s friend replies, “What if I mow your lawn, paint the house and do your dishes every night? Then can I be your son?”

As we all know, there is nothing your son’s friend could do to earn his way into your family. In fact, there is only one way he could be received into your family: through adoption. But the adoption would be a free gift on your part — a gift that your son’s friend could never expect, or even earn, by himself.

We have to remember that we can't save ourselves! Jesus is the one who provides our salvation. It is His gift that allows us to be His sons and daughters. At the same time, we need to accept His invitation and commit our lives to Him. We will explore this step more in our next chapter on the Prodigal Son.

For more on salvation, see the resources below.

### **Additional Resources**

*The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraphs 1987 – 2029

"Scriptural Apologetics" by FOCUS, Chapter Six Justification, [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org)

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Ephesians 2:1 – 10*

## Notes to the Leader

- *Reminder of the goal of this chapter:* The goal of this week's chapter is for your group to understand that Jesus died on the cross because of the love He has for us and because our sin separates us from Him. Your group will also begin to look at how to accept this grace.
- *Instructions for this chapter:* Be prepared to draw out St. Catherine's Bridge Illustration. This simple yet effective illustration allows people to easily understand God's invitation to us. There will be prompts below to show you what to draw and how to explain it.
- *Challenge check-in:* Last week, the challenge was to take some time to think about how certain decisions would change if you fully believed that Jesus was Lord. Consider asking your group how this challenge went for them.

## Opener

**1. Have you ever lost something? How did you feel after you lost it? Did it make you appreciate in a whole new way what you had possessed before? What was your reaction upon finding it again?**

## Context

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

Last week, we began to look at how Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin and brokenness in our lives. Today, we will look at the question: Why did Jesus die?

Imagine you are John the Apostle and it's the original Good Friday. You are standing with Jesus' mother, Mary, at the foot of the cross, and looking at your friend, who is experiencing immense pain and suffering. At some point in time, we have to think that John would have asked, "Why does Jesus have to die? Aren't there other ways God could save the world? How does the death of an innocent man change anything?"

Like John, we might have this question as well. Today, we are going to look at some answers from St. Paul. Early in his life, Paul was a Jewish official who persecuted Christians. His conversion to Christianity came through a miraculous vision from Jesus (Acts 9:1 – 19). After his conversion, Paul went to several towns in the Roman Empire preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to others. Later, Paul wrote letters to these communities who had accepted the good news. Today, we are going to read from one of these letters — in this case, Paul's letter to the people of Ephesus.

**Read Ephesians 2:1 – 3.**

**2. What phrases or words stuck out to you and why?**

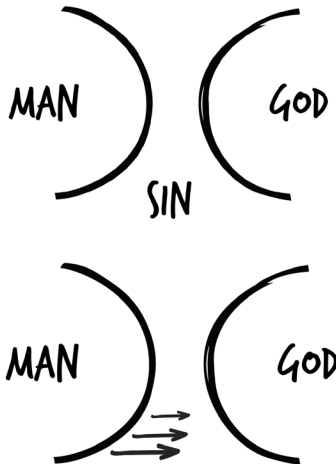
*Allow the group to discuss.*

**3. Why do you think Paul paints such a vivid picture of life without Christ?**

*Allow the group to discuss. Paul wants us to see who we would be without Christ so we can better understand what it means to have Christ. Specifically, Paul wants us to know that Jesus died for us because we were dead in sin. Jesus wants us to have new life.*

*(Share with your group.)*

*On a sheet of paper, write the words “God” and “heaven” on one side and “humanity” and “Earth” on the other. Write “sin” in the middle to show why there is a separation. The separation caused by sin creates an infinite chasm between God and man. Because we’re finite human beings, nothing we do on our own (represented by the arrows) can bridge that infinite gap.*





## Climax

**Read Ephesians 2:4 – 7.**

**4. In verses 1 – 3, Paul talks about how we justly deserved wrath because of our actions. In verse 4, he talks about God’s mercy. What’s the difference between justice and mercy?**

*Answer: Justice is what we are owed; mercy is a generosity that goes beyond what is just.*

**5. Why does God give us mercy instead of what we deserve?**

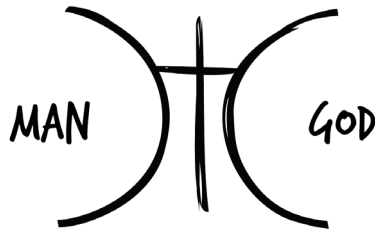
*Answer: Because God loves us. In fact, this is why Jesus came into the world. (Feel free to share John 3:16 or have someone in your group read it: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”)*

**6. How does God show us His mercy?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

*(Share with your group.)*

*Draw a cross between God and man that bridges the divide. Jesus’ death on the cross bridges the divide created by sin. Because Jesus is fully human, He can represent the human family and offer an act of love on our behalf. However, because He is fully divine, His act of love on the cross takes on infinite value. Thus, Jesus is able to bridge this infinite divide. His death gives us an opportunity to overcome sin and to go to heaven. (See CCC 615 for more).*



## Application

Read Ephesians 2:8 – 10.

### **7. The word “grace” is used in verse 8 and in other parts of this passage. What is grace?**

*Answer: Grace is a gift that is not earned. “Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life” (CCC 1996). Grace restores us to the relationship with God that we were made for.*

### **8. Sometimes it is hard for us to understand the concept of grace and what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross. Here’s a story that might help.**

Imagine you are the parent of a nine-year-old boy. During the summer, your son spends almost every day playing with the next door neighbor’s son. Your son’s friend eats dinner with your family and spends the night at your house; the boys are inseparable.

One day, your son’s friend comes to you and says, “Can I talk to you for a minute? It has been really fun to play with your son all summer. Thank you for letting me spend the night, eat dinner with your family, play games with you and everything.” You reply, “No problem. I’m glad

you both have had a good summer.” The young boy looks at you and says, “I just have one question: Do you think that if I mowed your lawn for the rest of the summer, I could be your son?” Of course, you are honored by his request, but you reply, “Well, thank you, young man, but mowing my lawn wouldn’t make you my son.” “Well,” your son’s friend replies, “What if I mow your lawn, paint the house and do your dishes every night? Then can I be your son?”

As we all know, there is nothing your son’s friend could do to earn his way into your family. In fact, there is only one way he could be received into your family: through adoption. But the adoption would be a free gift on your part — a gift that your son’s friend could never expect, or even earn, by himself.

**9. What do you think of the story? Does this help you understand the concept of grace?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**10. With all of this in mind, could someone sum up why Jesus died for us?**

*Allow the group to discuss. Jesus died for us because our sin caused an infinite divide between us and God, something we cannot bridge ourselves. Out of love for us, Jesus died on the cross. Because Jesus is fully human, He can represent the human family and offer an act of love on our behalf. However, because He is fully divine, His act of love on the cross takes on infinite value. Thus, Jesus is able to bridge this infinite divide. His death gives us an opportunity to overcome sin and to go to heaven. (See CCC 615 for more.)*

## **Summary**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*This week, we looked at the question: Why did Jesus die for us? We saw that Jesus died for us because sin separated us from God and because He loves us. We also learned about the concept of grace. Next week, we will continue this journey by looking at what it looks like to accept an invitation into a relationship with Jesus and His Church.*

## **Challenge**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*Find moments, big or small, to give grace to others in your life, whether it be to a friend, a family member or a stranger. Also, note times when others gave you grace.*

## **Additional Resources**

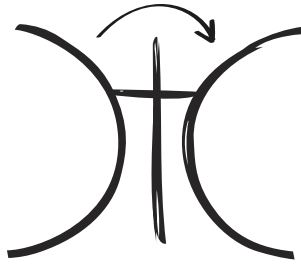
*The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1987 – 2029

“Scriptural Apologetics” by FOCUS, Chapter Six Justification, [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org)







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## Chapter 4

# Invitation

Luke 15:11 - 32

**UNDERSTANDING**

Pages 54 - 59

**DISCUSSION**

Pages 60 - 66

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Luke 15:11 – 32*

## Goal

The goal of this chapter is to present the fourth step of the Gospel: an invitation into a relationship with Jesus and His Church.

## Context

Last week, we looked at why Jesus died on the cross. Because of Jesus' death, we now have an opportunity to go to heaven through a relationship with Him. This week, we will look at what this invitation is and how we can respond through the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11 – 32. The Prodigal Son is a classic story and probably the most famous of Jesus' parables. While many know the general premise of the story, few understand the key details that make it so remarkable.



## *Premise*

The story begins in Luke 15:11 – 16 with a son asking his father for his inheritance. This appears to be a simple request, but in Jesus' time, to ask for your father's inheritance before his death would have been a profound insult. The son is, in effect, saying to his father, "I wish you were dead."

Despite this, the father surprisingly gives the inheritance to the son. The son not only takes the inheritance, but then he quickly squanders it on loose living — that is, on sexual immorality and prostitution in a foreign land (Luke 15:30). Notice that, while 2,000 years may have passed, sin doesn't look all that different today than it did back then. Rebellion, partying and sex have been temptations for people throughout history.

Penniless and far from home, the son hires himself out as a laborer. Notice the spiral of sin: Before, he was a son; now, he is a mere servant. At first, the son's rebellion was all about fun and excitement. Now, he is enslaved by his current situation — so much so that he must serve pigs, animals that repulsed the ancient Jewish people. He has officially hit rock bottom.

## *Repentance*

The younger son starts to repent of his decision to leave home. Notice the stages of repentance that he experiences in Luke 15:17 – 24:

1. He realizes what is going on: "He came to himself" (Lk 15:17). The first step of repentance is realizing your mistakes and the consequences of your actions. He no longer ignores his mistakes and is willing to examine his life anew.

2. He recognizes where he could be: “How many of my father’s hands...” (Lk 15:17). The son contrasts his current situation with what his life could be. He remembers his life in the father’s house and what it was like to be a son. He’s willing to repent because he knows it’s better to be a servant in his father’s house than a slave in a foreign country.

## **Climax**

Now let us examine what the father — the true hero of this story — does:

1. The father sees his son at a distance (Lk 15:20). He has been waiting for the son to return, actively watching for him. This wasn’t just to see if the son would return, but to protect him. In Jesus’ day, it was common for someone like the prodigal son to be punished upon his return home. The village would perform a *kezazah* ceremony to banish the son from the village forever. The father in the story runs not only out of a desire to see his son, but to make sure no one gets to him first to perform this ceremony.

2. The father runs to him (Lk 15:20). How often do you see old men run? This act would have been even more undignified in the culture at the time.

3. The father embraces him (Lk 15:20). Think about this: The father loves the son even before the son has made any confession whatsoever. The father loves the son for who he is, not what he’s done.

4. The father celebrates (Lk 15:22 – 24). The robe, the shoes, the ring and the fattened calf: These are all signs that the son is back in the family. The father tells everyone, “My son was dead and is alive again.”

## *The Older Son*

In Luke 15:25 – 32, the story turns to our last main character: the older son. Just as with the father and the younger son, the details surrounding this character are essential. Be sure to watch the father in this scene as well.

1. The older son refuses to join the party (Lk 15:28). He protests his father's ability to forgive and does not recognize his brother as being back in the family (Lk 15:30). The older son tells his father, "This son of yours."

2. Despite living in the father's house and being obedient, the older son doesn't truly live like a son either. The son views his relationships with the father like a servant expecting to be paid for his services: "These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (Lk 15:29). The father reminds the son who he is by calling him "son" and then telling him that "all I have is yours" (Lk 15:31).

## **Application**

This story can come alive for your Bible study members as they identify the character or characters that they can relate in the story. As we relate to these characters, we can begin to further understand our relationship to God and how He views us. How does He react to sin and forgiveness? Does the picture of God in the parable match the picture we have of God in our hearts and minds?

As we understand who we are and what our relationship is to God, it's important for us to know what steps we can take next. No matter which son you identify with, the younger son's confession to his

father gives a great model of repentance. He not only thinks about repentance, but he acts on it. He asks his father for forgiveness and changes his life by leaving the situation he is in.

This is a great moment to invite your group to confession (assuming they are baptized Catholics). In confession, we can truly experience the mercy of Jesus. As Pope Francis has said, “Everyone say ‘when was the last time I went to confession?’ And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests, Jesus receives you, he receives you with so much love. Be courageous and go to Confession!” (General Audience, 19 Feb. 2014).

Confession is essential because we can't have reconciliation with God without reconciliation with the Church. As the Catechism states, “Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God” (CCC 1445).

Finally, schedule a time with each member of your study this week to review the Gospel presentation and ask them where they think they are now and where they want to be. If you have any questions about how to present the Gospel to others, ask your discipler or a FOCUS missionary for help. Also, see the additional resources below.

### **Additional Resources**

For non-Catholics wondering about the necessity of the Church, see “Scriptural Apologetics” Chapter 2: The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy.

For more on how to make a good confession, see this Short Guide to Confession: <http://stjosemaria.org/short-guide-for-confession/>

[Note to leader: These resources are to help you share the Gospel with your group.]

The Ultimate Relationship Booklet: <https://store.cco.ca/products/the-ultimate-relationship>

FOCUS' "How to Evangelize" series and Gospel Invitation article: <https://focusoncampus.org/content/how-to-evangelize-individual-chapters>

DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Luke 15:11 – 32*

## Notes to the Leader

- *Reminder of the goal of this chapter:* The goal of this week's chapter is to present the fourth step of the Gospel: an invitation into a relationship with Jesus and His Church.
- *Instructions for this chapter:* After this study, you'll want to meet with each member of your study one on one to share the Gospel and allow them to respond. Take a look at your schedule over the next two weeks and be ready to offer some times when you are available to meet or be prepared to organically make invitations throughout the next week.
- *Challenge check-in:* Last week, the challenge was to find moments, big or small, to give grace to others in our lives, whether it be to a friend, a family member or a stranger. Also, note times when others gave you grace. Consider asking your group how this challenge went.

## Opener

**1. Have you ever had to apologize to someone? How did you feel about it beforehand? What were your feelings afterwards?**

## Context

**Read Luke 15:11 – 32.**

**2. At the beginning of the story, what happens between the father and the son?**

*Answer: The son asks his father for his inheritance before his father is dead. In a sense, he is saying to his dad, "I wish you were dead."*

**3. Why do you think the son asks for the inheritance, and why do you think the father gives it to him, even though he does not have to do so?**

*Answer: The son wants to use the money to live a life of sin. Notice that, while 2,000 years may have passed, sin doesn't look all that different today than it did back then. Rebellion, partying and sex have been temptations for people throughout history. A normal response at this time would be for the father to hit his son. But the father loves the son enough not to force the son to have a relationship with him. Instead, he lets him choose what he wants.*

**4. In one or two words, how would you summarize the scene when the younger son is living in a foreign land during the famine?**

*Answer: The younger son has hit rock bottom. To understand just how bad things got, the son longs to eat what the pigs eat, and because of a law against eating pork, the Jews traditionally despised pigs. Spiritually, the son*

*is in even worse circumstances. Later the father remarks, “for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found” (Lk 15:32). This means that spiritually the son was dead.*

**5. In verses 13 – 16, what goes through the son’s mind that convinces him to return?**

*Answer: He remembers his life in the father’s house and what it was like to be a son. He remembers that relationship. He’s willing to repent because he knows it’s better to be a servant in his father’s house than a slave in a foreign country.*

**Climax**

**6. In verse 20, it says, “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.” What do you think this says about the father?**

*Answer: The father sees his son at a distance (Lk 15:20). He has been waiting for the son to return, actively watching for him. This wasn’t just to see if the son would return, but to protect him. In Jesus’ day, it was common for someone like the prodigal son to be punished upon his return home. The village would perform a kezazah ceremony to banish the son from the village forever. The father in the story runs not only out of a desire to see his son, but to make sure no one gets to him first to perform this ceremony.*

**7. In verses 25 – 32, we get the older son’s reaction. How would you feel if your younger brother received this kind of welcome after spending his inheritance on prostitutes?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*



**8. What does the older son's reaction and language say about how he views his relationship with his father?**

*Answer: Despite living in the father's house and being obedient, he doesn't live like a son either. The son views his relationship with the father like a servant expecting to be paid for his services: "These many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (Lk 15:29). The father reminds the son who he is by calling him "son" and telling him that "all I have is yours" (Lk 15:31).*

**Application**

**9. Who do you most identify with most in this story and why?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**10. If God is the father in the story, what does this say about who He is?**

*Answer: Just like the beginning of the story, God gives us free will to choose what we do with our lives. Also, rather than waiting in judgment of us, God is waiting with compassion to forgive us. He wants to forgive us if we would only ask, and He is willing to run to us and embrace us.*

**11. Do you view God in this way when you've sinned?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**12. No matter which son you identify with, the younger son's confession to his father gives a great model of repentance. What are some of the things the younger son does? How can we live out some of these steps today?**

*Answer: He not only thinks about repentance, but he acts on it. He asks his father for forgiveness and changes his life by leaving the situation that he is in. One of the most concrete ways for baptized Catholics to repent and receive God's mercy is through the sacrament of reconciliation. As Pope Francis has said, "Everyone say 'when was the last time I went to confession?' And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests, Jesus receives you, he receives you with so much love. Be courageous and go to Confession!" (General Audience, 19 Feb. 2014). Confession is essential because we can't have reconciliation with God without reconciliation with the Church. As the Catechism states, "Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God" (CCC 1445).*

## **Summary**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*As we've seen during this study, Jesus not only provides us salvation through His death on the cross, but He also invites us to receive this gift by changing our lives. Next week, we will look at how to live out this life.*

## Challenge

The challenge this week is to present the Gospel with each person in your group individually. Note that this challenge is primarily for you as the leader. If you want to offer an additional challenge to your group, consider the challenge below.

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*The challenge for this week is to take at least 10 minutes to read and pray with the story of the Prodigal Son on your own outside of Bible study. Think about where you are and where God is calling you to be.*

## Additional Resources

For non-Catholics wondering about the necessity of the Church, see “Scriptural Apologetics” Chapter 2: The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy.

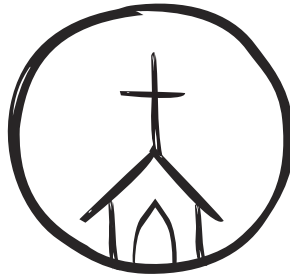
For more on how to make a good confession, see this Short Guide to Confession: <http://stjosemaria.org/short-guide-for-confession/>

[Note to leader: These resources are to help you share the Gospel with your group.]

The Ultimate Relationship Booklet: <https://store.cco.ca/products/the-ultimate-relationship>

FOCUS’ “How to Evangelize” series and Gospel Invitation article: <https://focusoncampus.org/content/how-to-evangelize-individual-chapters>





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## Chapter 5

# Life in the Church

Acts 2:37 - 42

**UNDERSTANDING**

Pages 68 - 75

**DISCUSSION**

Pages 76 - 83

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Acts 2:37 – 42*

## Goal

The goal of this chapter is to present the last step of the Gospel: living out a relationship with Jesus in the life of the Church.

## Context

### *Friendship*

Think of your best friend. What is it that makes your relationship with him or her so meaningful? The answer to this question likely includes several things: spending time together, sacrificing for each other and sharing important parts of your lives. These are the requirements of real friendship, and these same things apply to our relationship with God as well.

Last week, we looked at the story of the Prodigal Son and how we are invited back into relationship with God. This week, we are going to look more specifically at how to live in a relationship with Jesus in the Church. It isn't enough to simply begin a relationship with Jesus. Accepting Jesus' invitation and repenting are great first steps

— but like any good friendship, so much more is required for the relationship to really develop.

One of the best friendships in the Gospels is Jesus' relationship with St. Peter. Peter is one of the three Apostles who are closest to Jesus during His ministry, and he is the one appointed as the head of the Church. Despite all this, Peter betrays Jesus during His most important hour: His passion and death. Peter denies Jesus. He runs away. He goes into hiding. But in Acts 2, we see a huge change in Peter's life. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, Peter stands before thousands of people in Jerusalem and tells them about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What happened? Where did Peter get this sudden courage and apostolic zeal? By encountering Jesus after His resurrection and receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter's life has been completely changed — so much so that he not only repents himself, but calls others to "Repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). St. Peter and the early Christians model for us what conversion looks like.

The word for conversion in Greek literally means "to turn and walk in another direction." This doesn't mean we have to be perfect before we can become Christians, but it does mean that we resolve to change our lives and allow Christ to help us overcome our sins so that we can live in a relationship with Him.

## **Climax**

### *Encounter*

Acts 2:42 describes how St. Peter and these new members of the early Church lived out their relationship with Jesus: "...they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking

of bread and the prayers.” This passage is like a road map for the Christian life, highlighting four essential habits we need if we want our relationship with Jesus to continue to thrive, deepen and grow: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread (an early Christian term for the Eucharist) and prayer. Of all the things the Bible could have listed, it underscores these four as the crucial practices of a disciple.

Why are these four elements so critical for a relationship with Jesus? The simplest answer may be that these are the places where we encounter Him. To be a Christian is to follow a person — to be where Jesus is, to talk with Him and to love Him.

Pope Francis himself invites all Christians to this moment of encounter every day:

*“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’” (Evangelii Gaudium para. 3).*

We can’t go back in time and watch Jesus walk the earth, but we can encounter Him personally today through prayer, the sacraments, His teachings and fellowship with other committed disciples. And when we encounter Jesus and make Him the center of our lives, He “rubs off on us,” so to speak, and we become more like Him.

If we love someone, we will want to know more about them. By studying the Apostles’ teaching, we learn more about Jesus and come to love Him more. Christian fellowship allows us to see God in others. Because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we remind each other that we have a relationship with our Father in heaven. The Eucharist is Jesus Himself, and when we receive Him in Holy



Communion, we are united with Him in a way that is deeper than any other relationship we may have. Finally, every good relationship requires communication; in prayer, we share our hearts with God, and we get to listen to His loving words.

## **Application**

### *Life in the Church*

Let's get practical here. Once you know these four key practices of a disciple, how do you actually live them out?

### *The Apostles' Teaching*

Being a Christian requires thinking differently about the world. Scripture states, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). The world often tells us the opposite of the Gospel: that God doesn't exist; that we are just fine and don't need to be healed of our brokenness; that the Church really doesn't matter. Jesus knew this would be the case, and that's why He provides us with clear teaching. We aren't left to our own devices to figure it all out. In the Church, we are given the teaching of the Apostles so that we know how to follow Jesus more closely.

The best place to start developing our understanding is reading the Bible, or sacred Scripture. Practically speaking, we should take a little time each day to develop our understanding of the faith. Even a few paragraphs a day from Scripture, the Catechism (a compilation of the Church's teaching) or some other book can be a great help in learning more about the faith.

### *Fellowship*

Friends can make a huge difference in our lives. Scripture tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17). Let’s be honest: It’s hard to be a Christian by yourself. We know we need good friends. They go a long way in helping us embrace a committed Christian life.

Are our current friends helping us become the people we are supposed to be? Scripture says, “Bad company ruins good morals” (1 Cor 15:33). This doesn’t mean we abandon our non-Christian friends, but it does mean that we need to be prudent regarding how we spend our time with others. Besides, if we really care about people, we will help them follow Christ. But we can’t do that if we are falling into sin when we are with them. Be sure to help the people in your group have Christian fellowship that will build them up rather than lead them astray.

### *Breaking of Bread*

The “breaking of the bread” is an early Christian term for the Eucharist. These first Christians had a sacramental life: “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC 1131). Our sacramental life begins with baptism. If someone in your group has not been baptized, encourage them to talk to your pastor for next steps (the same is true if they haven’t been confirmed).

While there are seven sacraments, Confession and the Eucharist are usually the ones we receive most frequently, so let’s discuss those specifically.

Eucharist: Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is the closest we can be to Him on this earth. “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life’” (CCC 1324). It is Jesus Himself, in the form of bread and wine. If we have a relationship with Jesus, Mass is where we will want to be. If your participants are not going to Mass on Sunday, inviting them to attend with you and explaining the meaning behind the Mass is a great way to help them start building this habit.

Confession: When we have sinned and feel the weight of our brokenness, we have the sacrament of confession. This sacrament can be difficult sometimes. It can be intimidating to share our sins with a priest. But anyone who receives this sacrament regularly can tell you how confession has transformed their life. We need to be forgiven: Deep down, we know that is true — but we are often hesitant to admit it. Confession is a freeing experience where we encounter God’s mercy and receive grace to help us overcome our sins.

### *Prayer*

The biggest advice we can give someone about prayer is this: *Start*. There is so much that can be said about prayer, but you don’t want to overwhelm your group. Give your participants a few basic tips to get started, and once they understand the basics, the best thing you can do is hold them accountable to taking time each day to talk with Jesus.

Usually 15 – 20 minutes a day is a great place to start. It isn’t enough to simply talk to God here and there for a minute or two throughout the day. How well would any of our other relationships develop if we only took a few minutes here and there to talk? And what if you were the only one doing the talking? This is not how real relationships develop.

Help those in your group dedicate a specific time each day to having a conversation with Jesus in prayer. And, if possible, go with them. You may need to change your schedule, but holding them accountable to prayer can make a huge difference.

### **Summary**

These four practices are essential to living out our relationship with Jesus in the life of the Church. You don't have to cover all of these practices in this study, but you do want to introduce them to your group. You will have additional opportunities later on to help your group understand and live these four practices of a disciple.

### **Additional Resources**

Apostles' Teaching: *Catechism of the Catholic Church; Catholic Christianity* by Peter Kreeft

Fellowship: *True Friendship* by John Cuddeback

Breaking of Bread: *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass* by Dr. Edward Sri

Prayer: *Time for God* by Fr. Jacques Philippe; *Meditation and Contemplation* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher

Find other good resources at [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org), [catholic.com](http://catholic.com) and [lighthousecatholicmedia.org](http://lighthousecatholicmedia.org).

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DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Acts 2:37 – 42*

## Notes to the Leader

- *Reminder to the leader of the goal for this chapter:* The goal of this week's chapter is to present the last step of the Gospel, living out a relationship with Jesus in the life of the Church.
- *How to lead this chapter:* This chapter can be led in a few different ways depending on the needs of your group. If the members of your group are already committed Christians, you can dive into each of the four practices of a disciple and help your group commit to those things. If your group is not yet fully committed to Christ, help them see how these practices are not just things that you have to do if you choose to be a Christian, but rather amazing blessings that those in the Church get to experience. Hopefully, this will increase their desire to come to know Jesus themselves. Be sure to check out the resources at the end of this chapter for more information about each of the four areas.
- *Challenge check-in:* Last week, the challenge was to pray with the passage of the Prodigal Son outside of study. Discuss how this went for your group.
- *Next steps:* After completing "The Crux," we recommend using FOCUS' "Story of Salvation" Bible study as the next resource for your group. At the end of this week's study, be prepared to discuss or share with your group what you will be studying next.

## Opener

### 1. How do you become good friends with someone?

#### Context

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

Last week, we looked at the story of the Prodigal Son and how we are invited back into relationship with God. This week, we are going to look more specifically at how to live out a relationship with Jesus in the Church. It isn't enough to simply begin a relationship with Jesus. Accepting Jesus' invitation and repenting are great first steps — but like any good friendship, so much more is required for the relationship to develop. Let's look at Acts Chapter 2 to learn how we live out a relationship with Jesus in the Church.

#### Read Acts 2:37 – 42.

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

One of the best friendships in the Gospels is Jesus' relationship with St. Peter. Peter is one of the three Apostles who are closest to Jesus during His ministry, and he is the one appointed as the head of the Church. Despite all this, Peter betrays Jesus during His most important hour: His passion and death. Peter denies Jesus. He runs away. He goes into hiding. But in Acts 2, we see a huge change in Peter's life. 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, Peter stands before thousands of people in Jerusalem and tells them about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**2. Knowing that Peter denied Jesus during His hour of greatest need and now seeing his transformation in Acts 2, do you believe that this type of change is possible in your life?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**3. The people then ask Peter, "What shall we do?" and Peter answers, "Repent, and be baptized." Why are these steps necessary if we want to have a relationship with Jesus?**

*Allow the group to discuss. Repentance or conversion is essential for following Him. The word for conversion in Greek literally means "to turn and walk in another direction." Also, baptism provides the grace that removes sin, unites us with God and makes us members of His family, the Church.*

### **Climax**

**4. This passage ends with a description of the Christian community, emphasizing four key practices of a disciple in the early Church: the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of the bread and prayer. Considering everything Scripture could have listed, why do you think these four are specifically mentioned?**

*Answer: There are many reasons; however, in each of these things, Christians encounter Jesus. Pope Francis himself invites all Christians to this moment of encounter every day: "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord'" (Evangeliium Gaudium para. 3).*



## **5. How do these four habits deepen our friendship with Jesus?**

*Allow the group to discuss. If we love someone, we will want to know more about them. By studying the Apostles' teaching, we learn more about Jesus and come to love Him more. Christian fellowship allows us to see God in others. Because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we remind each other that we have a relationship with our Father in heaven. The Eucharist is Jesus Himself, and when we receive Him in Holy Communion, we are united with Him in a way that is deeper than any other relationship we may have. Finally, every good relationship requires communication; in prayer, we share our hearts with God and we get to listen to His loving words.*

## **Application**

[Note to the leader: You may want to focus on only one or two areas for application in questions 6 – 9 instead of all four. Try to determine what is most important for your group.]

## **6. “Teaching of the Apostles”: Why is it important to know what the Church teaches? What do you need to do to grow in your understanding of the faith?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

## **7. “Fellowship”: Why is having good friends important, and what happens when we don't have friendships that build us up? What changes might you need to make with respect to how you spend time with friends?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**8. “The Breaking of Bread”: Why is Sunday Mass important? How can you grow in this area?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**9. “Prayer”: Why do we need to pray? What prevents us from praying?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**10. We are now at the end of this study. What was the most impactful thing you learned?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**Summary**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*This week, we studied the last step of the Gospel: living out a relationship with Christ in the Church. We highlighted the need for to grow in our relationship with Christ and the four key practices of a disciple.*

**Challenge**

*(Share aloud with your group.)*

*Pick one of the four practices and commit to growing in that area as a group. This could include many things like reading a book together, going to Mass together, meeting for prayer once a week or spending more time together to grow in fellowship.*

## **Next Steps**

Discuss or share with your group what you will be studying next in Bible study. (As a reminder, we recommend FOCUS' "Story of Salvation" Bible study.)

## **Additional Resources**

Apostles' Teaching: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; *Catholic Christianity* by Peter Kreeft

Fellowship: *True Friendship* by John Cuddeback

Breaking of Bread: *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass* by Dr. Edward Sri

Prayer: *Time for God* by Fr. Jacques Philippe; *Meditation and Contemplation* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher

Find other good resources at [focusequip.org](http://focusequip.org), [catholic.com](http://catholic.com) and [lighthousecatholicmedia.org](http://lighthousecatholicmedia.org).





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## **FOCUS Equip**

'FOCUS Equip' is based on Ephesians 4:12 "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ." These materials seek to equip you for lifelong Catholic mission. We would love to hear your feedback at: [focusequip@focus.org](mailto:focusequip@focus.org)



# THE CRUX

