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THE GOD WHO IS BIBLE STUDY

The heart behind this series was to provide an avenue for staff and students to “take the Winter Conference home with them”—to continue growing in their knowledge of who God is and, hopefully, in their intimacy with Him.

Each lesson focuses on a specific facet of God by studying one passage of Scripture. The lessons really dig into the Word, but the leader’s guides are thorough enough so that a student can teach the material.

Although the lessons can be used for individual study, they were designed to be used in a discussion group format. The group leader has the group read the passage together, then guides them through the discussion questions. At the end of the lesson is a list of passages for further study that the student can look at later as well as “questions for personal reflection”.

The leader will need to prepare ahead of time, but the group members do not have to. You have the freedom to change the order of the material, but you will want to be careful. The lessons were put in this order with a view toward balance.

Order of Lessons:

Lesson 1 – Introduction

Lesson 2 – God Is Love

Lesson 3 – Holy, Holy, Holy

Lesson 4 – Gracious and Merciful Father

Lesson 5 – Jesus, Our Substitute on the Cross

Lesson 6 – The Father Who Disciplines

Lesson 7 – Jesus, The Humble Servant

Lesson 8 – The God Beyond Compare

Lesson 9 – The God of All Comfort

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Introductory Lesson

Acts 17:16-34

Background

The book of Acts was written by a physician named Luke, probably around 60-62 AD. Acts is an historical narrative, or story, that picks up where the Gospel of Luke leaves off, and traces the rise and spread of the early Christian church. In Acts 17 we see a snapshot of the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul had been a Jew who was so devout in his faith that he actually persecuted and killed Christians. But one day Jesus, who had already lived on earth, been crucified and resurrected, appeared to Paul in person while Paul was walking down the road (see Acts 9). The encounter was so powerful that Paul became not only a Christian, but also the greatest Christian missionary who has ever lived. Luke was a close friend of Paul's who often traveled on his missionary trips with him. The events of Acts 17 take place in Athens, Greece, the intellectual capital of the world at the time.

Read Acts 17:16-34

In this passage, Paul stands up in the meeting of the Areopagus and makes known the "unknown god". What facts does he emphasize about God in vv. 24-27?

v.24 God created the whole world

v.24 He is the Lord, or Ruler, of Heaven and Earth

v.25 He doesn't need anything we, as humans, can give Him

v.25 He is the source of all life

v.26 He determined exactly when and where every person would live

v.27 God desires people to seek Him

v.27 He is not far from us

***Ask the members of your group which of these is most meaningful to them and why.*

Notice how many times Paul uses words like "all", "every" and "everything". What do you think is the significance of this?

How does God make Himself known today?

The key answer here that we want to get across is "from His word, the Bible"—but he does also make Himself known through nature, and expresses Himself through the lives of Spirit-filled Christians

Paul's statements certainly challenged the Athenians' view of God. (Some further background: the Epicureans' main goal in life was seeking pleasure, and the Stoics emphasized rational thought and self-sufficiency.) How does the Bible, particularly the above passage, challenge today's misconceptions about God?

The whole issue of creationism—People think they run their own lives and don't have to answer to anyone—Many think that God doesn't really care about the day in/day out of our lives—He seems distant—Humanistic thought (that man is the highest being)—etc.

In vv. 29-31, Paul was obviously concerned that people would not worship idols, but instead worship the one true God, "the God who is". Today in America, we wouldn't usually form idols out of "gold or silver or stone" (v.29), but we can still worship other people or things above God. What are some of the things we "idolize" above God?

The God Who Is

Introductory Lesson

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Introductory Lesson— page 2

Acts 17:16-34

Paul explains that God doesn't want people to worship idols, but instead "He commands all people to repent" (v. 30). What does the word "repent" mean?

Who is "the man" that Paul writes about in v. 31?

How does it make you feel that one day God will "judge the world with justice" (v.31)? When God judges you, will you be declared "guilty" or "innocent"?

We learn from other passages in the Bible (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 9:26-28) that Jesus is not only the man who will justly judge us as "guilty", but He will also serve our sentence (of death) in our place if we will only trust in Him. How does that make you feel?

Passages For Further Study:

Job 38-41
Colossians 1:13-23
John 1:1-5
Hebrews 9:26-28
Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-8

Questions For Personal Reflection:

1. Reread Acts 17:32-34. When you hear about the resurrection of Jesus, are you:
 - 1) One who sneers?
 - 2) One who wants to hear more on the subject?
 - 3) One who believes and follows?
 - 4)
2. Are you trusting in yourself to be declared "innocent" when God judges you, or are you trusting in Jesus Christ to be your substitute?
3. What do you need to repent of? Is there sin in your life you need to turn from?
4. Do you know God well enough that if the "leading philosophers" of our day—say, your professors--asked you to explain Him, you could?
5. What can you do this week to get to know "the God who is" better?
6. Go back this week and look at Acts 17:24-27 and reflect on "the God who is".

"There is a God we want, and there is a God who is—and they are not the same God.

The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is."

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Introductory Lesson— page 2

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Some dictionary definitions: "to feel regretful for past conduct", "to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life", "to change one's mind"

It's the idea that where we once thought that WE were right, we now see that GOD was right and we were wrong.

Who is "the man" that Paul writes about in v. 31?

Jesus Christ

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The main point that we want to get across here is that God has to be totally JUST (and we're guilty sinners deserving punishment), and so it wouldn't be right for Him to just "let us off the hook". But because He is also totally LOVING, He sent His Son Jesus to serve our punishment for us. This way God doesn't have to be a wimp, but He can be loving at the same time.

***The end of this lesson has probably focused more on God's JUSTICE, but we want everyone one to know God is LOVE, too. Let everyone know that next week we'll be focusing in on God's LOVE.*

***Also explain to them that the passages in the right column and the questions below are for their own personal study to get to know God better (especially some of the aspects of Him we looked at today).*

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

God Is Love

1 John 4:7-21

Background

I John is a letter written by the Apostle John, who was a fisherman before he became one of Jesus' 12 disciples. He was actually Jesus' closest friend when He lived on earth, and is sometimes referred to in the Bible as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". We don't know exactly to whom John was writing this letter to, or much about them, except that they were Christians. It is also difficult to know exactly when John wrote the letter—although most scholars agree it was written in the second half of the first century AD. However, the truths of the letter are timeless, and applicable to all believers of all times. John also wrote the Gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, and the Book of Revelation.

Why do you think the topic of love dominates music, movies, books and magazines, and so many other aspects of our lives?

Love is a basic need all humans have—God created us that way!

Blaise Pascal, the famous French mathematician and philosopher, once said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum inside the heart of every man, that can only be filled by the person of Jesus Christ". What are some of the things we try to use to fill the "God-shaped" hole in our lives?

Read I John 4:7-21

In v.14, John writes that, "The Father has sent His Son to be the savior of the world". What is it that we need to be saved from?

Technically, the answer is that we need to be saved from God's wrath, which He rightfully should pour out on us because of our sin. But many people might answer "from our sins" or "from ourselves", which is on the right train of thought.

WORD STUDY: Love (or "**agape**" in the original Greek language):

This word appears 29 times in the above passage (words like "dear children" are actually "loved ones"). Agape "*expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects...It is an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself*". It is the key, defining word used to characterize God both in the Old and New Testament. It is contrasted with other Greek words for love, such as "phileo" (tender affection/brotherly love) and "eros" (sexual love). In summary, it is a complete, unconditional, pure, sacrificial love. (From Vine's Expository Dictionary)

What do vv.9-10 say is the way God "showed" or "proved" His love for us?

By sending His Son to die on the cross to save us (from God's wrath), and so that we might live

What does "atoning sacrifice" (or "propitiation") mean (v.10)?

The answer is "satisfaction".

***Ask them "What needs to be satisfied?" Answer: the sentence of punishment (God's wrath) for our sins*

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

God Is Love – page 2

1 John 4:7-21

Why does God love us?

Because that is who He is. He IS love—He would have to go against His very nature to NOT love us. The fact that He loves us has NOTHING to do with anything we have been or done, and EVERYTHING to do with who God is

Is there anything you can do to make God love you less than He does now? Is there anything you can do to make God love you more than He does now? How does that make you feel?

NO!! Again, God's love is totally dependent on His character, not on our actions

When is it hardest to believe that God loves you?

Possible responses might include 1) "When I fail or sin", or 2) "When I am going through a hard time"

We use the phrase, "Like father, like son" to describe the fact that children often resemble their parents. How does this principle relate to those who claim to be God's children (vv.7-8,11-12, 20-21)?

If God lives in us, He should be able to express His love through us to others. We should be loving in an agape way.

How does our love for each other make the invisible God visible?

God can, in a way, be "seen" through our tangible, loving actions toward others

If someone isn't loving, does that mean they're not a Christian?

No, not necessarily. What v.8 says is that if someone doesn't love, they don't know God—the solution is for that person to get to know God better—to have a greater revelation of God's love for them

In what ways, large or small, can we sacrificially love each other?

Questions for personal reflection

1. Pray the prayer from Ephesians 3:16-19 for your prayer partner for this week.
2. Is there someone whom you have a hard time loving? Pray and ask God to reveal His love more fully for you—and then see if this changes your feelings for the other person. Acknowledge to God that you don't have the ability, in your own power, to love them, and ask God to love them "through" you.
3. Go back, look at the passage again, and reflect on all the different aspects of God we looked. What part of God's character means the most to you? Meditate on that, and maybe even memorize one of the verses that talk about it.

"There is a God we want, and there is a God who is—and they are not the same God.

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Passages For Further Study:

Psalms 136

John 15:9-13

Romans 5:5-8;

8:31-39

I Corinthians 13

Ephesians 2:1-5

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The God Who Is

God Is Love

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John 15:9-13
Romans 5:5-8;
8:31-39
I Corinthians 13
Ephesians 2:1-5

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Holy, Holy, Holy

Isaiah 6:1-8

Background

The book of Isaiah is named after its author, Isaiah, a prophet to the Jewish people, in the time before and after 700 BC. During this period, Israel was in a time of great political struggle and spiritual decline. Isaiah's book has more prophetic references to the coming Savior, Jesus, than any other Old Testament book, and he is the prophet most quoted by Jesus in the New Testament. Fittingly, his name means, "Yahweh is salvation". We are not sure how Isaiah died, but tradition has it that he was sawed in two inside a hollow log for his faith. Chapter six tells of an experience

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

Now go back and see what we learn about God in each of the following verses:

v.1 -called "Lord" (what is a "lord"?)

-seated on a throne

-He is high and exalted

-the train of His robe fills the temple

Ask: "What kind of picture is this? If you had to pick one word to describe God from this verse, what would it be?"

Answer: a king!

v.2 -seraphs flying around above Him

***seraphs are a type of angel—their name literally means "burning ones"

v.3-4 -seraphs sing to each other about Him

-He is holy! (the repetition of the word 3 times denotes the supremacy & completeness of His holiness)

-He is Almighty (Hebrew "El Shaddai"—the mightiest God)

-the whole earth is full of His glory

WORD STUDY: Holy (or "qados" in the original Hebrew language):

The word "holy" means "separated", and is used here (and in many other places in Scripture) to signify the complete "separateness" or "otherness" of God—there is no one like Him. He is absolute in His purity, majesty, and glory. Webster's Dictionary defines holy as, "exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness".

Being in the presence of God made Isaiah very aware of his own sinfulness, as well as the sins of his country. How does God make us aware of our sin today?

It is the same process: by revealing Himself, we automatically see how we come up short! He reveals Himself through the Holy Spirit, who lives inside each believer, through the Bible, through His holy presence in other Godly believers, and through prayer.

What kinds of things dull our spiritual senses and harden our hearts so that we become comfortable with or complacent about sin?

Lack of time in the Word; too much time "taking in the world" through TV, music, reading; not being around other godly Christians who challenge us; comparing ourselves to others instead of to God; pride, etc.

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Holy, Holy, Holy —page 2

Isaiah 6:1-8

Notice that Isaiah doesn't make any excuses for his sin—he just confesses it. What Does God do in response (v.5-7)?

He cleanses his sin by having a seraph put a coal on his lips. A burning coal was a part of the Old Testament temple sacrifices. Isaiah would have recognized this as a symbol of the full ritual of cleansing from sin.

How does God “take our guilt away” and “atone” for our sin today?

****Have them recall last week's study, where we discussed that Jesus was the “atoning sacrifice” who cleansed us once and for all. We are cleansed from our sins when we trust that Jesus has paid for them.*

What is the next thing God does after He cleanses Isaiah's sin?

He asks for volunteers to “go”. What He was looking for exactly is explained further in chapter 6.

What was Isaiah's response (v.8)?

He is so excited! He wants to go!

Notice again that there are no excuses or delays in Isaiah's response. What aspect of God do you think Isaiah had seen that caused him to respond so quickly and absolutely to God call?

The complete rule, majesty, and authority of God the King—and the total honor it is to serve Him

****End by asking, “How many of you want to be used by God?” Assuming that most or all of them want to, point out what we've learned from this passage that will make them prepared to be used. First we have to know God—to see Him as He really is: holy, holy, holy. Next we have to be cleansed from all sin. Then we have to be willing to go wherever God sends us, right when He calls us. That's how we can experience the incredible fulfillment of being used by God!*

Questions for personal reflection

1. How does God's holiness affect your life?
2. What can you do this week to become more aware of God's holiness?
3. Where, or to whom, is God asking you to go to now? Is there a friend or family member you need to tell about Jesus? What ministry is He calling you to this semester? This summer? After you graduate? Are you willing to say, “Here am I, send me!”?

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Psalm 40
Psalm 99
Revelation 4-5

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v.1

v.2

v.3-4

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Gracious and Merciful Father

Ephesians 2:1-10

Background

Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church located in the city of Ephesus. We learned previously that Paul was a devout Jew until God converted him into the greatest Christian missionary in all of time. Paul helped establish the church in Ephesus while he was on one of his missionary trips. Ephesus was a leading city in the Roman Empire, and is located in present day Turkey. Paul writes this letter while he is in another city serving a prison sentence for sharing the gospel, in or around the year 60 AD. Many scholars also believe that Ephesians was a "cyclical letter", sent on to other churches in the area for their instruction.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

What things were true of us before we became Christians (vv.1-3)?

v.1 *We were dead (spiritually) in our sins*

v.2 *We followed the world and Satan (he's who "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" is)*

v.3 *We gratified the cravings of our flesh—we had no other choice than to live out of selfishness*

v.3 *Because of who we were (sinners) in our very make-up, we were deserving of God's wrath*

***In summary, we were dead, ruled by Satan, slaves to our sinful nature, and God's wrath was upon us—we were in a very bad way!*

After outlining how gross *we* were in vv.1-3, Paul begins v.4 with the contrast, "But God..."

What three aspects of God's character do we learn about in v.4?

He has great love for us, is rich in mercy, and is full of grace. Explain that we looked closely at "love" two weeks ago, so this week we'll be looking at "mercy" and "grace".

WORD STUDIES: Mercy ("eleos") and Grace ("charis" in the original Greek)

The words "mercy" and "grace" are similar—they reflect two flip sides of God's expression of love toward us. Mercy may be best explained as *not* getting something we *do* deserve (punishment), while grace is *getting* something that we *don't* deserve (eternal life). Webster's defines mercy as "compassion shown to an offender or one in distress; a compassion that does away with punishment even when justice demands it". The root word for grace is the same root for the word "gift"—something given that is not earned. Webster's says it is "unmerited divine assistance given to man".

So now, after receiving God's mercy and grace to become Christians, what things are true of us (v.5-6)?

v.5 *We are alive (spiritually)*

v.5 *We are saved (ask them "From what?" The answer is "From God's wrath"—see v. 3)*

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Gracious and Merciful Father – page 2

Ephesians 2:1-10

v.6 *We have been raised up, or resurrected, with Christ*

v.6 *We are actually seated (present tense) with Christ in heaven*

In vv.4-9, Paul describes how we got from Point A (dead in our sins) to Point B (alive in Christ). Read these verses to determine:

1) What was God's part?

He makes us alive

He raises us up with Christ

He shows us grace

He expresses kindness

>>>*All of this is "a gift of God!"*

2) What was our part?

Trusting in Jesus to forgive our sins by **faith** (v.8)

In vv. 8-9, Paul states that we are not saved by our works, but in v.10 he says we were created to do good works. How do you explain this?

Good works do NOT earn us salvation (even in part!), but good works are always a RESULT of salvation (see the book of James). We aren't saved BY works, but FOR works. It's not FAITH + WORKS = SALVATION, but FAITH = SALVATION + WORKS.

In v.10, Paul says that "we are God's workmanship". The Greek work for "workmanship" is "poema", where we get the English word for "poem". How does it make you feel that you are "God's poem"—an original creation, unlike any other?

Passages For Further Study:

Ephesians 1:3-14

2 Timothy 1:8-11

Titus 2:11 - 3:8

1 Peter 1:3-5

Matthew 18:8-11

Questions for personal reflection

1. Paul says in v.9 that because salvation is totally a gift from Him, not based on anything we do, there shouldn't be any boasting. What *should* our response be?
2. What do you think are some of the good works God has "prepared in advance" for you to do?
3. Reflect on all the ways God has been gracious to you. Then pray and ask God to bring to mind someone you can "grace" today.
4. Luke 6:36 says, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful". Who do you need to show mercy to? How does realizing how merciful God has been to you allow you to be merciful to others?

"There is a God we want, and there is a God who is—and they are not the same God.

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Meeting The God Who Is

Gracious And Merciful Father

Ephesians 2:1-10

Background Information:

Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church located in the city of Ephesus. We learned previously that Paul was a devout Jew until God converted him into the greatest Christian missionary in all of time. Paul helped establish the church in Ephesus while he was on one of his missionary trips. Ephesus was a leading city in the Roman Empire, and is located in present day Turkey. Paul writes this letter while he is in another city serving a prison sentence for sharing the gospel, in or around the year 60 AD. Many scholars also believe that Ephesians was a "cyclical letter", sent on to other churches in the area for their instruction.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

What things were true of us before we became Christians (vv.1-3)?

v.1

v.2

v.3

v.3

After outlining how gross *we* were in vv.1-3, Paul begins v.4 with the contrast, "*But God...*" What three aspects of God's character do we learn about in v.4?

WORD STUDIES: **Mercy** ("eleos") and **Grace** ("charis" in the original Greek)

The words "mercy" and "grace" are similar—they reflect two flip sides of God's expression of love toward us. Mercy may be best explained as *not* getting something we *do* deserve (punishment), while grace is *getting* something that we *don't* deserve (eternal life). Webster's defines mercy as "compassion shown to an offender or one in distress; a compassion that does away with punishment even when justice demands it". The root word for grace is the same root for the word "gift"—something given that is not earned. Webster's says it is "unmerited divine assistance given to man".

So now, after receiving God's mercy and grace to become Christians, what things are true of us (v.5-6)?

v.5

v.5

v.6

v.6

In vv. 4-9, Paul describes how we got from Point A (dead in our sins) to Point B (alive in Christ). Read these verses to determine:

1) What was God's part?

1) What was our part?

In vv. 8-9, Paul states that we are not saved by our works, but in v.10 he says we were created to do good works. How do you explain this?

In v.10, Paul says that "we are God's workmanship". The Greek work for "workmanship" is "poema", where we get the English word for "poem". How does it make you feel that you are "God's poem"—an original creation, unlike any other?

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Jesus, Our Substitute on the Cross

John 19:1-30

Background

In this passage from John's gospel, we will be looking at the final hours of Jesus' earthly life. He has already said good-bye to His disciples, been betrayed by Judas, captured by the Roman guard, and spent all night being attacked in illegal judicial proceedings. His friends have abandoned him. He has been beaten. He is, no doubt, worn out. But now the day has broken, and the only thing left before Him is the cross. The Apostle John gives us an intimate look into the events surrounding the greatest sacrifice ever made.

Read John 19:1-30

Contrast Pilate with Jesus in this passage. Who seems more under control? Who seems to be truly in charge? Why do you think this is?

Although Pilate is technically in charge, he is the one in a tizzy, while Jesus is full of calm. Pilate thinks he has power and authority, but Jesus knows that all authority ultimately belongs to God. This is what allows Jesus to remain so calm and in control—He knows His Father well, and is able to entrust (literally) His life to Him

The title Pilate puts over Jesus' head on the cross (vv.19-20) were meant to be sarcastic. How does it become ironic instead?

Pilate sarcastically had the title "King of the Jews" on a sign on Jesus' cross. The irony is that Jesus really WAS the King of the Jews—and the King of the whole world for that matter!

While on the cross, Jesus is recorded saying seven different things. Three of these sayings are recorded in John's gospel. First, in vv.26-27, Jesus says to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to "the disciple whom He loved" He said, "Here is your mother." What did he mean by this? What does this show you about Jesus? [Bonus question: Do you remember who "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is?]

What He means is that He wants John (the author of this gospel, and "the disciple whom Jesus loved"—His best friend) to take care of His mother after He is gone. Jesus held His mother in high honor,, and even as He is being cruelly killed, He is not thinking of Himself, but of another.

Next Jesus says, "I am thirsty." Why does He say this (v.28)?

To fulfill the prophecy of Scripture

The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies concerning the life of Jesus, all written hundreds of years before His birth. There are over 30 just about His death! (For two other prophecies about Jesus' death that are fulfilled in John 19, read vv. 23-24 and 31-37.) Why are the prophecies (and their fulfillment) important? What do they say about God?

They reveal the complete and absolute sovereignty of God—He has complete control over the events of man—nothing can happen without Him willing it to—He knows the future perfectly—nothing can thwart His plans—He keeps all of His promises

Speaking of the Old Testament, the death of Christ took place during the time of the Jewish, Old Testament Feast of the Passover. What is the significance of this? Lastly, Jesus said, "It is finished." (v.30) What was finished? Why did He say that?

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Jesus, Our Substitute – page 2

John 19:1-30

Make sure to read Exodus 11-12 as background. The essence is that this festival commemorated the time when, as the Angel of Death struck dead the first-born of all the Egyptians, any Jews (they were living in Egypt) who had sacrificed a lamb and sprinkled its blood on the door would be saved from death. This was meant to be a foreshadowing of Christ: Jesus' shed blood on the cross saves us from death (due to us because of our sins)—He is the ultimate Passover Lamb

Lastly, Jesus said, "It is finished." (v.30) What was finished? Why did He say that?

See John 17:4--He had finished doing the will of God. Specifically, paying the penalty for the sins of mankind. The Greek phrase ("tetelestai") might also be translated "paid in full". In that day, when someone paid off a debt, they might receive a receipt that had "tetelestai" stamped across the top to show they were now free of that debt. Jesus has paid our debt (of death) in full.

What exactly was Jesus accused of and found guilty of? (v.7)

Claiming to be the Son of God. Again, the irony is that He WAS the Son of God. He was guilty!

The religious leaders of the day had been following Jesus around the clock for months, trying to catch Him in the act of a sin, and trying to trip Him up with tricky questions. After all that time, this "sin" was the only thing they could find Jesus guilty of. If someone followed you around 24 hours a day for a couple of years, what kind of things would you be found guilty of?" (Think about this quietly for a while—you don't have to answer out loud!)

Why was it important that a sinless man die on the cross, and not just anybody?

We needed a perfect substitute for our lives. Now, when we appear before God when we die, He will actually see Christ in our place. Because He has already died, we no longer have to. Only perfection can be in God's presence. The only way we can be in God's presence is if we are "hidden" inside Christ. This concept was also foreshadowed in the O.T. sacrificial system (see Leviticus 1-5 & 16).

How does it affect you emotionally that Jesus died on the cross in your place?

Questions for personal reflection

1. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul writes this: "God made Him who had not sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God...Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." How does this passage affect you?

2. Take time to thank God for the gift of His Son, who was killed for you.

Passages For Further Study:

Matthew 27

Mark 15

Luke 23

(For a great study, examine all seven of Jesus' sayings on the cross!)

Colossians 2:13-15

Hebrews 9:15-28;

10:5-14

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The God Who Is

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Jesus, Our Substitute – page 2

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

The Father Who Disciplines

Hebrews 12:5-11

Background

Not much is known about the background of the letter to the Hebrews. The author was writing to a body of Christian believers, most of whom were (probably) from a Jewish (Hebrew) background (thus the name). The letter is rich with explanation about the relationship between the Old Testament (or "covenant" that God had made with the Jewish people) and the New Testament. Although an exact date isn't known, Hebrews was certainly written sometime during the first century AD, perhaps near 68-69 AD.

The passage we'll be looking at today talks a lot about discipline. What exactly *is* discipline?
Dictionary definitions: "training that corrects, molds, or perfects the moral character" or "to chasten, instruct, educate, or train a child with words, or with "calamities" (i.e. spanking, grounding)

Give an example of when and how a father might discipline a child. Why does the father do this?

There are many good examples. Maybe a father who raps a child's hand that has been placed on a stove burner (done to protect the child from burn later), or a father who gives his child a "time out" when the child has gone out in the street (again done to protect the child from the dangers of passing cars)

Read Hebrews 12:5-11

This passage explains that God is a Father, and we are His children. What is God's discipline? What does it look like? How does He chasten us with words? With calamities?

God's discipline can take many forms. It might just look like Him allowing us to face the natural consequences of our sin (getting caught cheating on a test and receiving a failing grade; an unwanted pregnancy or an s.t.d. from sex outside marriage). Or He might remove something from our lives that we are worshipping before Him (money, a relationship). Or perhaps we don't achieve, or are removed from, a position of leadership because of our moral failure. Most of these are examples of how He might discipline us with "calamities". He disciplines us with words either directly by His Word, or through the words of other believers, most commonly those in authority over us. (For instance, maybe we would just receive a sharp rebuke for our actions or lack of character).

Most of the time we think of discipline in a negative light--we'd really rather our lives be free from hardship and difficulty. But how do v.7-8 challenge this attitude?

These verses are a beautiful and encouraging reminder of what is a universal parenting rule: A father doesn't take the time and energy (or have the right) to correct just anybody, but only those he loves: his children. God's discipline is proof of His love for us, and His intimate involvement in our lives

Why does God discipline us (v.10)?

For our own good! It has got to be hard on Him, just like it is for an earthly father, but He loves us too much to not discipline us

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

The Father Who Disciplines – page 2

Hebrews 12:5-11

How is sharing in God's holiness our good?

It causes us to honor and please Him. We fulfill God's role for our life. When we are brought into line with God's holiness, we share greater intimacy with Him and are able to know Him better experientially. What a great privilege and honor to actually "share in His holiness"—is there anything greater?

The word "endure" (v.7) means to "stand under". What are some ways we try to "get out from under" the hardship of discipline? What happens when we do this?

We often try to dodge, or get out of, the consequences of our actions. We blame someone else. Or we don't receive rebuke from others—we rationalize by saying that it is THEIR issue or problem, not ours. The problem with doing this is that we don't receive the benefit of the discipline, and we are at some point going to have to learn this lesson all over again! Yuck!

What happens when we *do* submit to God and His discipline (v.9)?

We live! We are able to enjoy the abundant LIFE that God intended for us because we are in line with God and His purposes

What else does v.11 say is produced in those who are trained by God's discipline? How will our lives be better *later* if we endure His discipline *now*?

Righteousness and peace—who doesn't want those things?

In v.11 the author of Hebrews borrows words from the worlds of agriculture ("produces a harvest") and sports (the Greek word for "train" is the same word we get "gymnasium" from—it is usually used to describe athletic training). What lessons about the costs *and* the benefits of discipline can we learn from these two worlds?

A farmer definitely understands the concept of "delayed gratification"—that hard work (sowing seed) now will produce a wonderful crop later (reaping a harvest). It requires wisdom to remember that the benefits of the hardship are worth it.

An athlete also understands this concept. He has a coach who puts him through painful training, but it is worth it on "game" or "race day"—when the hardship pays off and he goes home with a prize of victory.

Are all the hard things that happen to us a part of God's discipline?

No. Some hard things that happen to us are a result of other people's sin (like abuse), or simply a result of living in a sin-cursed world in general. Some things, like diseases, are tricky: they might be a consequence of our own sin (again, an s.t.d. from fooling around, your liver giving out from alcoholism) but they might just be a result of living in this world. Discerning what is God's discipline and what isn't takes prayer, and possibly input from older, godly Christians.

Questions for personal reflection

In v.5, the author of Hebrews gives two instructions: 1) Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and 2) Do not lose heart when He disciplines you.

1. Is there any discipline from God that you are making light of? What do you need to do to take it more seriously?
2. Are you discouraged about the discipline from God you're enduring right now? How can this passage give you hope and encouragement? Maybe read through the passage again, inserting your particular situation whenever you see the word "hardship" or "discipline".

Passages For Further Study:

The whole book of Proverbs!
(See 1:7; 3:11-12; 6:23; 10:17; 15:5,32)
Romans 5:1-5
James 1:2-4
1 Peter 1:3-9

The God Who Is

The Father Who Disciplines

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How is sharing in God’s holiness our good?

The word “endure” (v.7) means to “stand under”. What are some ways we try to “get out from under” the hardship of discipline? What happens when we do this?

What happens when we *do* submit to God and His discipline (v.9)?

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Jesus, The Humble Servant

Philippians 2:5-11

Background

Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church located in the city of Philippi (located in present day Greece). Paul had founded the church on one of his missionary trips, and had remained very close with its members. At this time (61 AD), Paul is in prison for sharing his faith. The church of Philippi has sent Paul an awesome care package, hand delivered by one of its leaders, and now Paul is writing a thank-you note back to them. The passage we are looking at today is one of the most important passages in all of the New Testament!

Read Philippians 2:5-11

Paul writes in v.6 that Jesus, in his very nature, or make-up, *was* God. He could have always lived like a God, but He didn't. What did He do instead (vv.7-8)?

v.7 *Made Himself nothing*

v.7 *Traded His "God" nature for the nature of a servant*

v.8 *Humbled Himself—to the point of death on a cross*

Let's look at each of these more in depth. The exact translation of v.7, where Paul writes that Jesus "made Himself nothing" is Jesus "emptied Himself". What is the significance of this?
Although Jesus never ceased having all the attributes of God, while He lived on earth He choose to live like a human. He voluntarily "emptied" Himself of his rights, and waived His prerogative to act divinely.

What is the significance in Jesus taking on "the very nature of a servant" (v.7)?

Not only did Jesus veil His divine glory and become human (so that he was "made in the likeness of men"), but he became a low form of human! He could have come as a king, a powerful person, but He chose just the opposite!

WORD STUDY: Servant (or "doulos" in the original Greek language)

From the root meaning "in bondage", this word came to mean "one who gives himself up for the will of another". The "doulos" was the lowest form of servant, and is perhaps better translated "slave". Although a "doulos" slave originally gave himself up for service voluntarily, once he was under contract to his master, his obedience was complete, absolute, and binding.

What is the significance in the fact that Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (v.8)?

Again, Jesus, even though He was God, submitted Himself to the authority of the Father to the full extent! He went the farthest He could go—to death. And a gruesome, painful death at that.

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

Jesus, The Humble Servant – page 2

Philippians 2:5-11

WORD STUDY: Humble (or “**tapinoo**” in the Greek)

This word literally means “low-lying” and may be translated “made low” or “humiliated”. It is *not* the idea of acting like a wimpy doormat, or thinking “I’m a worm”, but of placing the needs and desires of others before yours. It has been said that “humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is simply not thinking of yourself at all”. Perhaps the best example of how Jesus humbled Himself was that He not only “lowered” Himself from His throne in heaven to live on earth, but then He also allowed Himself to be crucified. Crucifixion was the most humiliating form of death at the time—reserved only for non-citizens and the worst criminals.

The word “Himself” appears twice in these two verses (7-8). What is the significance of this word?

It emphasized the fact that Jesus did all of this voluntarily. The Father didn't force Him to do all of these things—He did them Himself.

Why did Jesus do these things?

His primary motive was obedience to the Father. (His secondary motive was His love for humanity.)

How was Jesus able to do these things?

His knowledge of the Father enabled Him to have complete trust in Him. He always remembered what was eternally important. See John 13:3-4. He knew who the Father was, knew who He was, and He understood the brevity and importance of His life on earth.

What did the Father do in response (vv.9-11)?

He exalted Jesus to the highest place—gave Him the highest name—and one day EVERYONE will bow down before Him and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord

This passage begins by stating “our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (v.5). How can we empty ourselves? Take on the nature of a slave? Lower ourselves?

Personal Application

1. Although Jesus had every “right” to live like God, He laid aside his “rights” for the sake of obedience to the Father and His love for humanity. What are “rights” you feel like you have, that you may need to lay aside in order to obey God and love others?

2. Think through how you can practically serve each of the following people this week: your roommate; a classmate; a cafeteria worker; someone who works in your dorm or apartment office; someone who works in the Student Center.

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The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is.”

Passages For Further Study:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Mark 10:35-45
John 12:23-33; 13:1-17
2 Corinthians 8:9
Hebrews 2:9-18

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v.7

v.7

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The God Who Is

Jesus, The Humble Servant – page 2

Philippians 2:5-11

WORD STUDY: Humble (or “**tapinoo**” in the Greek)

This word literally means “low-lying” and may be translated “made low” or “humiliated”. It is *not* the idea of acting like a wimpy doormat, or thinking “I’m a worm”, but of placing the needs and desires of others before yours. It has been said that “humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is simply not thinking of yourself at all”. Perhaps the best example of how Jesus humbled Himself was that He not only “lowered” Himself from His throne in heaven to live on earth, but then He also allowed Himself to be crucified. Crucifixion was the most humiliating form of death at the time—reserved only for non-citizens and the worst criminals.

The word “Himself” appears twice in these two verses (7-8). What is the significance of this word?

Why did Jesus do these things?

How was Jesus able to do these things?

What did the Father do in response (vv.9-11)?

This passage begins by stating “our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (v.5). How can we empty ourselves? Take on the nature of a slave? Lower ourselves?

Personal Application

1. Although Jesus had every “right” to live like God, He laid aside his “rights” for the sake of obedience to the Father and His love for humanity. What are “rights” you feel like you have, that you may need to lay aside in order to obey God and love others?

2. Think through how you can practically serve each of the following people this week: your roommate; a classmate; a cafeteria worker; someone who works in your dorm or apartment office; someone who works in the Student Center.

Passages For Further Study:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Mark 10:35-45
John 12:23-33; 13:1-17
2 Corinthians 8:9
Hebrews 2:9-18

“There is a God we want, and there is a God who is—and they are not the same God.

The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is.”

The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

The God Beyond Compare

Isaiah 40:12-31

Background

Again we will be looking at a passage written by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is one of the greatest prophets of God in the Old Testament. The book bearing his name was written to God's people (the Israelites) near 700 BC. The book of Isaiah is divided into two major sections (chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66). Where the first section warns Israel of impending doom if they do not repent of their sins, the second section was written to console Israel in a time of (future) trials. The passage we'll be looking at kicks off the consolation section. Even though the specific application to the Israelites is in the past, you'll easily see how this passage, with its grand view of God, can renew us and give us perspective in troubling times today.

Read Isaiah 40:12-28 quietly to yourself.

Write down what you learn about who God is from each group of verses.

(After they have had some time to work on their own, have them share their answers, and ask them the correlating questions.)

v.12 *Big – creator of earth and heavens – can hold earth in hands*

Ask: How can this verse help us with perspective when our problems seem to overwhelm us?

vv.13-14 *Wise – All-knowing – Omniscient*

Ask: Have you ever felt like you needed to enlighten the Lord or “show Him the right way”?

vv.15-17 *Big (again) – More powerful than the nations*

vv.18-20 *He is beyond compare (esp. to idols)*

Ask: A.W. Tozer wrote that “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.” When or why do we think unworthy thoughts about God?

vv.21-22 *King – rules above the earth and heavens*

vv.23-24 *More powerful than rulers and kings*

Ask: In vv.15-17 and now in vv.21-22, we learn that God is more powerful than nations and the rulers of them. What comfort can we find in this?

vv.25-26 *Creator – without equal – power and strength – knows all*

v.28 *Everlasting – creator – beyond time – doesn't run out of energy - wise*

Why do you think God challenges us to compare Him to counselors, nations, idols, princes and rulers?

So we can see that He is so much bigger than any of them. Therefore we can trust Him completely because He is all-wise, all-powerful, and He loves us. Even when it seems like others are in control, they are really under God's control.

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

The God Beyond Compare— page 2

Isaiah 40:12-31

Do you ever feel like v.27? How does the rest of this passage answer how you feel?

Now read vv.29-31. (Aloud as a group)

What does it mean to hope in the Lord?

It means we are trusting in Him to be the solution to our problems; not our own giftedness, other people's kindness, government laws or leaders, etc. The word "hope" is defined as "a desire accompanied by expectation of fulfillment".

What are other things we sometimes put our hope in? How do they compare to God?

What is promised to those who do hope in the Lord?

Strength renewed – soar like eagles – not grow weary

Verse 31 might be better translated, "But those who hope in the Lord will exchange their strength for His." In light of this passage (learning about His mighty strength), how does that make you feel?

Passages For Further Study:

Genesis 1
Job 38-41
Psalm 2
Matthew 11:28-30

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Are you feeling tired and weary (v.30)? Ask God to help you determine if you are trying to live in your own strength, or if you need to exchange your strength for His!
2. What (or who) are you putting your hope in? How does it/do they compare to God? Do they promise you the same thing that God does in v.31?
3. Go back, look at the passage again, and reflect on all the different aspects of God we looked. What part of God's character means the most to you? Meditate on that, and maybe even memorize one of the verses that talk about it.

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v.12

vv.13-14

vv.15-17

vv.18-20

vv.21-22

vv.23-24

vv.25-26

v.28

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The God Beyond Compare— page 2

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

The God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

Background

2 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to the church located in the city of Corinth (in modern day Greece). Paul helped found the church while on one of his missionary trips, and ministered there for a year and a half. He was about to return to Corinth to visit them, and so writes to prepare them. 2 Corinthians is the most personal and intimate of all of Paul's letters—his great care and concern for the believers in Corinth is very evident.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-7.

God is described three different ways in v.3. What are they?

1) Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) Father of compassion, and 3) the God of all comfort

Today we are going to be focusing in on one of these descriptions: the God of all comfort. What does it mean to "comfort" somebody?

Some dictionary definitions: "consolation in time of trouble or worry" – "to give strength and hope to" – "to ease the grief of"

WORD STUDY: Comfort ("parakaleo" in the original Greek language)

This word literally means, "to be called alongside." It is the idea of someone being there with you, especially in times of need. In John 14-15, Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the Comforter ("paraklete"), or "the one who walks alongside." This was a new concept, for only in New Testament times has the Holy Spirit lived inside every believer, and so truly lives alongside us. In Hebrews 13:5 God said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." This promise has brought comfort to Christians for 2000 years now.

Sometimes the loneliness we feel from our suffering is the hardest part to cope with. How does it make you feel that God always "walks alongside" you?

In v.5, Paul writes "the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives." In what ways did Jesus have to suffer?

To name some of the ways: physical beatings and torturous death, being misunderstood by His family and friends, being betrayed by his friend (Judas), having lies told about Him, enduring an unjust trial, friends letting Him down (Garden of Gethsemane) and abandoning Him (the cross) in His time of need, being tempted by Satan himself, having religious leaders constantly attacking Him verbally and attempting to discredit His ministry, having to leave heaven to live in a sin-cursed world in general, bearing the wrath of God on the behalf of the sins of all humanity (even though He lived a perfect life)

What does it look like when Christ's sufferings flow over into our lives? How do we sometimes suffer like Christ did?

Will our suffering ever be too great for God to comfort us?

No! The construction of v.5 explains that even though our suffering might abound, God's comfort always abounds AT LEAST that much

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The God Who Is

Leader's Guide

The God of All Comfort – page 2

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

Is there any suffering that Jesus cannot relate to?

No. His suffering was on a much larger scale than ours will ever be. Although He may not have had an experience EXACTLY like ours, He has certainly suffered in the same way. Make sure and read Hebrews 4:14-16.

Jump down to v.9. What does Paul say is the purpose of suffering?

*So that we will rely on God, not ourselves. ***Ask: "What is the benefit of that?" The answer is that as we rely on God, that's how we experience Him in all His goodness, power, mercy, peace, grace, holiness, etc. The verses describes God as one who "raises the dead"—this speaks of His power over sin and death, the hope we have of eternity in heaven, etc.—relying on Him is how we experience these things*

Another way to translate v.7 might say "Just as we had fellowship in our sufferings, so also we have fellowship in our comfort." How does sharing hardships with others and giving comfort to others increase the depth and intimacy of our fellowship with them?

It allows us to see into each other's hearts. This is what allows us to move past the superficial. As we comfort others (through prayer, hugging, listening, or whatever) we can't help but grow closer to them. As we share with others and allow them to minister to us, a bond is formed.

Why is it sometimes hard to share our sufferings with others?

We get scared in thinking that if someone sees our sadness or weakness, then we will be rejected. This is a ploy of the Evil One to keep us isolated from each other and from experiencing God's comfort through other believers

After God has comforted us, what are we then free to do (v.4)?

Comfort others (with God's comfort)! We become a vessel of His comfort. God doesn't intend for us to hoard His blessings (like His comfort), but to pass them on to others!

****Additional note: the "Footprints" story might be appropriate to share at the end of this lesson.*

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Are you trying to carry a burden all by yourself? Pour your heart out to God and receive His comfort. Make sure and read the "Passages for further study".
2. Is there some kind of suffering in your life that you need to share with another Christian in order to be further comforted?
3. Is there someone you know who is suffering? Pray and ask God to show how you can be a comfort to them today.

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Passages For Further Study:

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John 14:16-15:27
Philippians 4:6-7
1 Peter 4:12-16

The God Who Is

The God of All Comfort

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