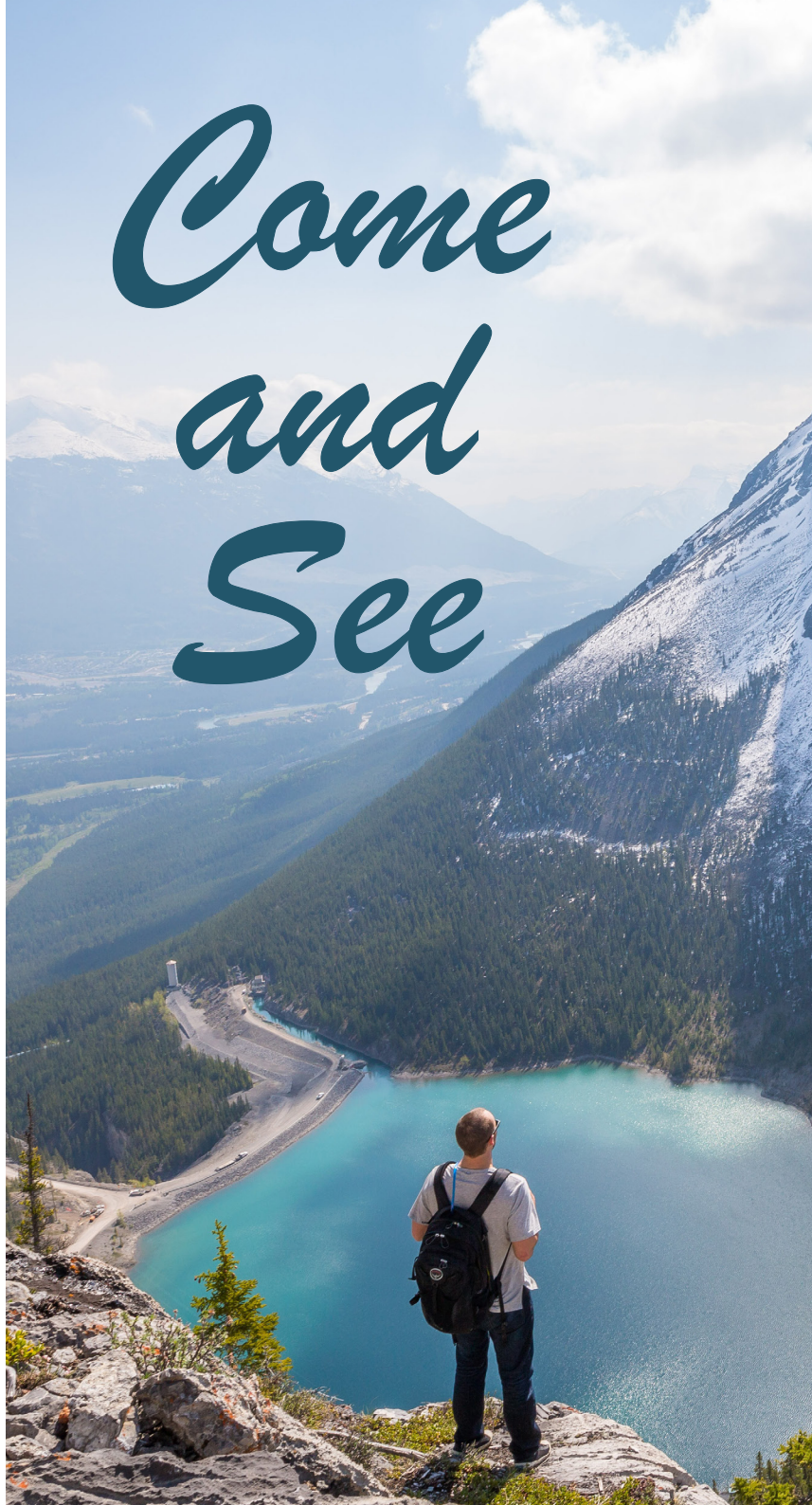


Teaching Notes for Leaders Exploring Life and Faith

# *Come and See*







# Contents

Introduction	4 - 5
SESSION 1: INSPIRED	
- Jesus the Way	6 - 9
SESSION 2: HOW SHALL WE LIVE?	
- Jesus the Teacher	10 - 13
SESSION 3: WELLBEING	
- Jesus the Healer	14 - 17
SESSION 4: RESCUE	
- Jesus means Saviour	18 - 22
SESSION 5: LIFE	
- Jesus, Risen Lord	24 - 28
SESSION 6: PRESENCE	
- Life Giving Spirit	30 - 34

## **Come and See (CAS)**

First of all, thank you for taking on the leadership of this group. It may be just you, or you might be sharing this task with others. Whichever is the case, we want to begin with some encouraging words.

You can do this! It may seem daunting, but you can. You are a follower of Christ, filled with His Spirit, with a story to tell. You have your own unique personality and gifts to bring, and the confidence of those who asked you to be involved. What is more, this booklet holds all the information you will need to facilitate the course, trusting God to do his work in the lives of all involved.

### **So what is it CAS about?**

Come and See tells the story of Jesus and invites people to meet him: as a leader, teacher, healer, saviour, death-defying Lord and ever present God. Each week focuses on one of these themes, taking the group into Jesus' story and giving folk plenty of room to listen, learn and make their responses. The approach is open and interactive - there are no long talks and there is plenty of room for discussion. Our aim is to give people room to journey.

The course was designed with seekers in mind, so does not assume any prior knowledge of Jesus. Yet it is not 'light weight' in its content. Each session focuses on a key passage from the New Testament and aims to engage people deeply in the week's theme. We have found that followers of Jesus, new and well travelled, have much to gain from the course. The interaction is key, with group members learning from each other's ideas and experiences.

### **So how does it work in practice?**

Here are the key ingredients of the course.

- A welcome activity
- A leader input - which may be read or given in your own words, or played from the video resources
- A Bible passage with some prompts for discussion
- A life-story (testimony) from a group member or invited guest

- A short leader input applying the story
- A time of reflection (without talking), while music plays
- A thought to take away (printed)

## **Group Discussion**

A key aspect of the course is the opportunity to get into conversation. If the group is up to 8 people, it will probably work well to stay together for discussion times. However, if the group is bigger, then we suggest you break down into smaller groups – between 4 and 7 people works well to get conversations going and ensuring everyone is involved.

## **Team work and preparation**

If you are leading CAS with others - it would be good to meet as a team a few weeks before the course starts to pray and prepare together. It may be that one of you leads all the sessions, or you take it turns. Some may feel happier leading a break-out discussion rather than facilitate an evening - or simply be present to help the conversation. There are also some practical things to think about - including venue, timings, publicity, equipment and refreshments.

## **Video Materials**

The Come & See Course is supported by six videos which are freely available on the Bookham Baptist YouTube channel (select the CAS playlist). Each video includes all the session ingredients (see above). So, as a facilitator you may find it helpful to watch the relevant video through before the session. Then you could either run the whole video in the session, pausing for discussion, or select the parts of it that are helpful in your leading of the group. Do whatever feels right and feel free to make changes from session to session.

## **Other Resources**

You might like to think about some other supporting resources for group members – perhaps kept in a box you bring to the group. This might include a good short summary of the Christian Faith, such as 'Why Jesus' by Nicky Gumbel, available from the Alpha website, and perhaps some longer books that go into more depth. If you are working as a team, think about this together – you may find you all have something helpful on your book shelves to help build a resource box.

**May the Lord bless you and empower you gloriously!**



# Session 1



## **Session 1: INSPIRED - Jesus the Way**

### **Welcome & Way In**

Invite the group members to introduce themselves in turn. They might share a little about their family and their work, plus something they really enjoy doing. Ask everyone to share what has brought them along to the course.

THEN...

Ask the group to think of one or two people who have had a major (positive) influence on their lives. Ask: What was it/is it about them that most impressed you or helped you.

OR

Ask people to share their ideas and impressions of Jesus. It might be a good idea to write these on a large sheet of paper as they are spoken.

### **Introduction to CAS**

Over the next six weeks we are going to hear a story. It is the story of an unlikely hero, a travelling teacher, followed by fishermen, tax-collectors, beggars and prostitutes. A remarkable man who perplexed and infuriated the religious people of his day, yet amazed the ordinary folk with his authority, and delighted them with his stories. Here is a story of passion and suspense, of hatred and murder, of life and death, and of the power of love. And it begins with the hopes and dreams of a nation - a people looking for a hero...

### **Setting the Scene**

This can be read out or given from memory, or in your own words - or using the video.

I would like you to picture in your mind a desert (pause). Usually such a landscape would be empty, except for a few hardy travellers. But lately, this dry and arid land has been well trodden - hundreds of people making their way from civilization into the wilderness. What draws them there? Follow them, to the banks of the Jordan River,

winding its way through this thirsty land. There stands a man, dressed in camels skins; a wild looking man, with fire in his eyes. He is calling out to the people: 'It's time to put things right! Get ready for the One who is coming!' There is great excitement in the air. Could it be that at long last the hopes of their nation will be fulfilled - after all these years? Will God send his Messiah now - a mighty leader to conquer their enemies? "Make yourselves ready!" implores the wild man, and one by one, these people step down into the water. Confessing their sins, each one is plunged into the river in the strong arms of the wild-man.

Now imagine another scene: a vast lake that stretches out in front of you for miles and miles. The surface is still but for gentle ripples catching the sunlight. These sweet waters are teeming with fish, the livelihood of many who come from the settlements and small towns around their shores. This is Lake Galilee. Near to you are fishermen, weatherworn men, hard at work. Two of them are mending nets - Peter and Andrew - they are talking about the wild man in the desert. They are wondering at his words: could the Messiah be coming? And will Israel be set free from its captivity? They can't wonder for too long, there is work to do. Along the shore a little are James and John, brothers, just bringing in their boat. There is little to show for their hard work today, but still the taxes will have to be paid.

Along the shore a little further is Levi. Now Levi has a different occupation. He sits each day in his little booth, collecting taxes for the Romans. 'Traitor! How do you sleep at night!' He is used to the taunts, or so he tells himself. A man has to make a living. Yet he lives with a troubled conscience, as he sees the faces of his countrymen in the queues before him and as he takes their hard-earned money for the purse of those who have invaded their land and taken away their freedom.

## The Story

*Mark 1: 1-20 and 2: 13-17*

Having set the scene, tell the group that we are going to hear how the story of Jesus begins in one of the four biographies of Jesus. It is known as Mark's Gospel (Gospel means 'Good News'). Encourage the group to listen and notice what strikes them/interests them. The passages could be read by one person or several, or by the whole group reading round.

# Session 1

## Discussion

After reading the passages pause to allow people to stay with the words and images they have heard. Next, ask them to consider the questions on their sheets. You may need to split down into smaller groups for this.

- What has caught your interest in these stories?
- What do we learn about Jesus from them?
- What do you think it means to follow Jesus today?

## Applying the story to our lives

Share what follows – reading it out or from memory, or using the video resource.

Imagine what it involved for Peter and the others to follow Jesus. It meant leaving behind their livelihood. It meant living rough at times, eating, drinking, travelling and sleeping in the company of a small band of followers and Jesus. They would hear and see amazing things as Jesus told his stories to delighted crowds, healed sick people and confronted the religious leaders of the day. It would be, at turns, both exhilarating and terrifying. They would be challenged to the core – their whole lives turned upside down. And slowly they would come to know the purpose and meaning of their lives...

2000 years on, millions of people claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. What does this mean?

For most people it does not mean leaving behind our jobs and families – yet all who follow Jesus are called to a journey of the heart. It is a journey that challenges us to the core and opens to us the meaning of our lives.

*Jesus said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no-one comes to the Father, except through me (John 14: 6).*

These are incredible words. Jesus does not say, "I have come to show you the way," rather, "I am the Way..." In other words, follow me and you will discover the purpose and meaning of your life; you will discover the truth about God and about yourself; and you will live – really live – as you were intended to. The purpose of this course is to unpack what all this means.



## **Testimony (Life Story)**

Invite someone (pre-arranged) to give a short (5 minutes max) testimony (personal story) of what it means for him or her to follow Jesus. Alternatively, use the testimony provided on the video.

## **Reflection and Response**

Invite the group to take a few minutes to reflect (without talking), while some music is played. One suggestion is the song, 'Joy in the Journey' by Michael Card, which you can find on youtube or via a music provider (e.g., Spotify or Google Play). Point out the pages in the participants' booklet that give ideas to guide them (page 8-9), and encourage group members to focus on whatever is most helpful. There is also a reflection provided on the video, combining words, images and music.

## **Where from here?**

After the period of quiet/music, take a little time to show some resources available to group members. These might be a selection of books, CDs and DVDs that you have got together for this purpose. It would be good to have these in some kind of portable container that can be brought to each group session. Online resources might also be shared.

## **Reasons to Believe**

Towards the end of the session notes in the participant's booklet you will find part 1 of Reasons to Believe. Each week there will be another 'bite-size' piece of evidence for Christian belief (also given on the video). We have deliberately not majored on evidence in the course, as it is not always everyone's prime concern, and we wanted to emphasise encounter with Jesus. It might be a good idea to have some books in your resource box that set out the evidence for Christian faith in more detail.

## **Close**

## Session 2: HOW SHALL WE LIVE? - Jesus the Teacher

### Following On

You might start by giving people opportunity to share any thoughts arising from the last session, or from any resources they borrowed last week.

If time, use one of the following 'icebreakers':

Think of a memorable teacher? What was it about them that stood out (whether positive or negative)?

OR

From your own experiences of school or further education, what qualities make a good teacher?

### Setting the Scene – Mustard Seed & Yeast

Read the following or share in your own words or play from the video.

Close your eyes. It is a hot day. You are among a large crowd of people, sitting on the grass. There are men, women and children. You are listening to Jesus who is teaching the crowds:

*"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew, became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches. Again he asked, "What shall I compare the Kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough (Luke 13: 18-21).*

Now Jesus often spoke in parables – short stories that held a meaning. He rarely explained them, but left people to think about them. The two parables you have just heard are printed at the bottom of page 16 in your boklet. Have a look at them now. What do you think they mean?

Encourage the group to give suggestions. It may help to explain that the Kingdom of God is God's rule (or reign) of justice and peace. Here is an interpretation of the parables that you could read, or put in your own

words, or play from the video, after the group has discussed the parables:

The Kingdom of God (God's rule/reign of justice and peace) - may start in small, hidden ways, but like the seed, these grow into something great, or like the yeast bring transformation. The seed could be one heart committed to God, or one act of great courage or compassion. Just think of Mother Teresa dragging one dying beggar off the streets to care for him - from that seed grew a huge ministry on the streets of Calcutta.

Jesus also told stories of harvests and great banquets which point to the end of the age when all will be judged and the Kingdom of God will be fully established - yet he called his disciples to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God NOW. What does this mean in practice?

Let's look at some more of Jesus' teaching to help answer this:

### **Story: Luke 6: 27-42**

You might like to get the group to read round. It's always a good idea to give people an opportunity to give their immediate response to a passage - begin with what strikes them. After this, the following questions may help discussion.

**Love your enemies...do good to those who curse you...  
do not judge... forgive...**

How much of this do we see today? Can you think of some examples? Can we really live this way? What might get in the way?

Look at the two parables in the Reflection pages, entitled 'Two men went to pray...' and 'Foundations'.

How do these help us respond to Jesus' teaching? How might you sum up the meaning/message of each story? Which one do you find the most challenging, and why?

### **Testimony (Life Story)**

As for last week, arrange for someone to share a brief testimony. This could be about a time when they were challenged by Jesus' teaching and how to work it out in the day to day, or perhaps about repentance. As for session one, there is a testimony included on the video which you can use.

## Applying the Story to Our Lives

Make the following input. You could read it as it stands or put the thoughts in your own words, or use the video.

Jesus calls his followers to an adventure: a radical lifestyle, swimming against the tide. Love your enemies, bless those who curse you. It is a daring and vulnerable way to live. It is the life of the Kingdom that Jesus brings and will one day be fully established. No judging or condemning others, rather, forgiving and giving with generosity of heart. Can we live this way? Really? If we are honest, all of us fall way short. All of us know what it is to nurture a grievance against someone; all of us have spoken unkindly behind someone's back; all of us have looked down on others. None can boast our hearts are pure. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says that anyone who hates his brother murders him in his heart (5: 22); and that anyone who looks lustfully at his neighbour's wife has committed adultery in his heart (5: 28)! None of us is without guilt. Yet that, in itself, is a vital realisation. The teaching of Jesus is like a search-light on our hearts, revealing what is there. This is not to make us despair of ourselves, but to help us see our need for help. We are humbled and so able to come to God for forgiveness and the help we need to live this life of love.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus begins his teaching with the words, Blessed are the poor in spirit (5: 3). This means blessed are those who know their need...

## **Reflection and Response**

Invite the group to reflect while you play some appropriate music. One suggestion is the Michael Card song: 'The things we leave behind' on the poiëma album. You can find it on YouTube or on any of the music providers (e.g. Spotify, Google). As usual, the participant booklet contains some prayer prompts, alongside the key readings for the session (page 15). There is also a reflection provided on the video, combining words, images and music.

## **Reasons to Believe**

Refer group members to this section in their booklets as a closing item, or fit in at an earlier stage if you prefer.

## **Close**



# Session 3

## Session 3: WELLBEING - Jesus the Healer

### Getting Started

Give opportunity for people to raise anything that came out of last time or from one of the resources they have been using...

OR

Broken hearts  
Broken families  
Broken...

See how many more you can think of as a group...

OR

Ask the group, 'Who believes in miracles?' Encourage them to share any experience or stories of the miraculous that they know. This could be something that happened to them, a friend, or something they saw on TV or read in a book.

### Recap/Introduction

Last time we thought about Jesus as a teacher. Jesus teaches us about the Kingdom of God, which is God's promise of a world of justice, love and peace.

This Kingdom will come one day in all its fullness, but also begins now in Jesus and in all who follow him. Jesus teaches us what it means to live the life of this Kingdom: loving our enemies, forgiving those who harm us, and so on. Powerful stuff, yet Jesus comes with more than words; the Kingdom is also made known through acts of compassion and healing...

*Read Luke 4: 38-44*

We are thinking this week about Jesus as a healer. There are many stories in the gospels of Jesus healing the sick by his word and by his touch. These are signs of the Kingdom, revealing God's desire and purpose to bring healing to a broken world.

The passage that we have just read tells us that Jesus healed the sick and that demons came out of many

people. Jesus not only brings healing to broken bodies and souls, he also sets people free from the grip of evil.

Today the church continues to pray for deliverance from evil when it seems that evil has a hold in someone's life. This is an important aspect of Christian healing that points to the reality of evil beyond our own hearts – an enemy actively pitted against us, seeking to imprison and destroy our souls. Jesus comes to oppose the works of darkness and bring freedom to those held captive. We will look more at this next week.

## Setting the Scene

Now we are going to take a close look at one of the healing stories in the gospels.

Imagine this: a crowded house, people literally crammed in, and somewhere in the midst of this scene is Jesus. People have come to hear him speak of the Kingdom; many have come hoping to be touched and healed as they have heard that this teacher can do miracles. Religious leaders from far and wide have come today to hear what Jesus has to say and what he will do. In the middle of it all something surprising happens. Bits of ceiling start falling on the heads of the people. All eyes slowly turn upwards. A great hole is appearing above them. There is dust everywhere and for a moment no-one can see the ragged bundle being lowered slowly but steadily through the roof down to where Jesus is standing...

To find out what is going on here, we will need to read the story from Luke's Gospel:

## Reading

Luke 5: 17-26

## Group Discussion

As always, there is no requirement to get through all the questions. Question 1 is the most important, allowing the group to share their thoughts, impressions, questions, etc. Allow the discussion to go where it will, encouraging people to share experiences of prayer and healing.

Share your thoughts/reactions to this story, including any questions it provokes.

# Session 3

Why do you think Jesus speaks of forgiveness to a paralysed man?

Why are the Pharisees and teachers of the law offended at this?

Does Jesus heal today? Share experiences.

What does the story teach us about Jesus? What is your response?

## Testimony (Life Story)

Invite someone ahead of time to give a testimony of healing at this point in the evening (or use the video testimony).

## Applying the story to Our Lives

This story we read earlier is interesting because Jesus looks beyond the man's crippled body to deeper matters. The man is troubled by guilt, so needs healing within himself; he needs to experience forgiveness. There is the suggestion that his physical condition mirrors his inward state and that the two are connected. Today we acknowledge psycho-somatic illnesses (physical symptoms of states of mind) and this may be an example of this.\* Jesus healing ministry is to the whole person: to body, mind and spirit. If we understand our 'spirit' as that part of us that relates to God, then this is our deepest level, to which Jesus ministers when he tells the man his sins are forgiven. To be put right with God is our most vital need, and, as the story suggests, can allow healing to flow to mind and body.

*\*Please note that there is no suggestion in this story that all physical illnesses have an emotional/spiritual root.*

The issue of forgiveness is a big one in this passage. The Pharisees and teachers of the law are deeply offended by Jesus' words to the paralytic. How dare he forgive sins – only God has the right to do that! They were right. Jesus exercises a right that belongs only to God. We can of course forgive those who sin against us, but Jesus is here forgiving sins committed by this man against others! He claims to have the authority to do this and demonstrates

that authority by healing the man before their very eyes! Jesus is claiming to have God's own authority to forgive and to heal...

## Reflection

Provide some suitable music to give the group opportunity to reflect and pray, using the reflection section in their booklets (page 20-21). You might choose from the following:

- One of the Stars (instrumental on 'Solo' by Adrian Snell)
- With the Sun on her wings (same album, next track – you could let it run on)
- Only Jesus (from 'Lux Aeterna' by Dave Fitzgerald)
- The Gentle Healer (from 'The Life' by Michael Card)

As always, you can track these songs down on youtube or googleplay or spotify, etc. There is also a reflection provided on the video, combining words, images and music.

## Prayer for Healing

As an alternative or a follow on to the above reflection, you could offer prayer for healing. Ask if anyone would like to receive prayer and then let the Holy Spirit guide you! Try to include a little time to listen to God for those you pray for. You might find it helpful to use the prayer ideas in the Reflection pages. The prayer, 'Spirit of the Living God...' might be used to conclude praying for each person.

## Reasons to Believe

As usual, the participant's booklet contains a further installment of evidence for Christian belief. It is probably enough to simply draw peoples' attention to this as the meeting closes (not to disturb the flow of the reflection!)

## Close

# Session 4

## Session 4: RESCUE – Jesus means Saviour

### Getting Started

Ask the group members to think of a favourite story – not a bible story. It could be a book or a film, or a story remembered from childhood. Encourage them to name their stories and why they like them.

### Timeless Themes: the Hero, the Villain and the Beloved\*

Many of the most enduring stories – including fairy tales, popular classics like *Les Miserables* and modern screen epics such as *Star Wars*, have at their heart a struggle between good and evil – not always between ‘the good guys’ and the ‘bad guys,’ but often involving a struggle within the hero or heroine to choose what is right or noble. Then there are stories about romance and the adventure of love – think of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Love Story*. Sometimes the themes of adventure (good overcoming evil) and romance are brought together, with the hero risking all to save his beloved from the evil intentions of the enemy. These are timeless themes that appear again and again. Do we see them in the story we are following over these six weeks? It is easy to identify a hero, but who is the villain? And does this story have a beloved for whom the hero risks all? Keep these things in mind as we pick up the story of Jesus again.

\* I owe this observation to John Eldridge and Brent Curtiss in *The Sacred Romance*.

### Applying the Story...

First of all, let’s think back to the baptism of Jesus. Do you remember how the Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, and the voice from heaven proclaimed, ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’ From the start the gospel writers want us to know that Jesus is God’s Son, endowed with the Holy Spirit and sent by God



for a special purpose. Jesus is undoubtedly the hero of the story. Yet, before he even begins his mission, he is driven by the Spirit into the desert for forty days to be tempted by Satan (the Devil). Listen to what happened there:

*Read Matthew 4: 1-11 or Luke 4: 1-13*

Here we are introduced to the villain in the story: Satan, also known as the Devil.

He is the arch-enemy of God and all that is good. He tempts Jesus in three ways, each of them an attempt to get Jesus to misuse his status and power – by meeting his own needs, by an impressive stunt to get a quick following, or by selling out completely (bow down and worship the enemy of God). In each case, Jesus affirms his commitment to do things God's way and to worship only Him, quoting the Scriptures he had learned as a child. Finally the Devil leaves him, but it is not the last we will hear of him. Luke tells us that he leaves Jesus, 'until an opportune time.'

After this incident, Satan is a background figure and the story is mostly a human one. Yet the gospels assume that behind the scenes the enemy of God seeks to undermine and to destroy the one who has come to heal the sick and set free those who are in the grip of evil. When Jesus casts out demons he is directly opposing the destructive work of the enemy.

In a much later scene, just as Jesus sets his course for Jerusalem, the voice of the tempter comes again in an unexpected way. Jesus is talking to his disciples about the suffering that lies ahead of him, and how he will die and rise again. Peter, one of his disciples, takes Jesus aside to dissuade him from this line of talk, which leads Jesus to retort,

*'Out of my sight, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men' (Mark 8: 31-33).*

In the concern of one of his closest friends Jesus sees an attempt by the enemy to throw him off course. Jesus remains resolute – his mission involves suffering and death and he will embrace it, for this is God's will...

So to Jerusalem, where he will provoke such a reaction among the religious leaders of the temple that they will arrest him (with some inside help), take him to trial and execute him (with some help from Rome). These are the events that we turn to now: a terrifying story of fear, hatred and cruelty, which Jesus describes as the

*'...hour when darkness reigns' (Luke 22: 53).*

# Session 4



## Reading

*Luke 22: 39 – 23: 56*

This is a very long passage, yet necessary to the group discussion that follows. Instead of reading it you might choose to use the Jesus Video, which you can find on You-tube. Start at 1hr30mins where Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest, and play until Jesus' death on the cross (20 mins), or a little longer to include his burial (22 mins). Alternatively you might use the appropriate scenes from Jesus of Nazareth (Zefferelli), which would take longer, or The Miracle Maker (animated) or use an audio version of the readings from Luke's Gospel.

## Discussion

It is likely that some will have found the passage or portrayal upsetting or shocking – make sure there is opportunity to express this. Perhaps begin by asking how people feel after the reading/video. The following questions have been set to help people enter into the story rather than discuss abstract ideas about the meaning of the cross.

- Share your reactions to what you have seen/heard
- What human weaknesses are at play in the story of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion? Think of the various characters in the story to answer this.
- There is an old negro spiritual that asks 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' What do these words suggest about Jesus' death?
- As he hangs on the cross, Jesus prays, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.' How do you react to this? Was this a prayer only for those who violently took his life?

## Summing up and Challenge: The Rescue

Sum up the main points of the discussion, then make the following input:

Here is an ugly chapter in human history. Greed, envy, cowardice, cruelty, fear and the alarming madness that can possess a crowd when manipulated by the few. Here is a story that has been told again and again in human history: events that are well described by Jesus' words: when darkness reigns. This expression suggests that those involved are caught up in something beyond them – evil as a force seeking to destroy the good – yet each is a willing player, responsible still for his or her actions. The story is a human one that is revealing of the human heart. While we may never be caught up in such an atrocity, we recognise the weaknesses of the various characters in the story. All of us have at sometime acted out of fear – or not acted.

Martin Luther King said that all it takes for evil to reign is for good men to do nothing. Which of us has never played the coward, or acted to protect our own interests? Which of us has not known the pressure to be carried along by the crowd? These things are uncomfortably familiar. Most of the people caught up in the story of the crucifixion are not fiends, but ordinary people under pressure. The cross exposes us all. This story involves us – we cannot look on as casual observers.

Yet this is not to lead us to despair. Just at the point where the human condition is most horrifyingly illuminated, there is an unexpected ray of hope. Jesus prays from the cross: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Jesus is doing what he taught his disciples to do – loving his enemies, even as they leave him in agony to die. Here is love – for all who will see it, amidst the hatred, the mockery and the shame – here is love.

Take a look at the Meditation on the Cross in your booklet. This love is able to change hearts and lives. At the cross of Jesus we understand our plight; in the same place we catch a vision of the love that would transform us. At the cross we may confess our sin; at the cross we may know forgiveness and a love that can set us free. For Jesus death is not a meaningless tragedy – God is at work here. It will turn out that the hour of darkness is the hour of love's victory – the tables are turned (more on this next week).

The cross also speaks to a suffering world. Jesus suffers at the hands of men – as many others have. He has entered into the pain of living in a fallen world. The one who Christians worship has nail-prints in his hands. This may help us with the question, 'Where is God when it hurts?' – for we cannot think of a distant God in the light of the cross. He is there in our suffering, hurting too, never ceasing to love us. Even the darkest hour may turn out for good, for we are loved by an everlasting love...

We are loved, that is the message of the cross. If Christ is the hero and Satan the foe – we are the beloved. This does not make us innocent, far from it. We need to be rescued not only from the forces of evil, but also from what lies within us. Our hearts need to be rescued...



# Session 4

## **Testimony (Life Story)**

Ask someone to share what the cross of Jesus means for them - or view the video testimony.

## **Reflection: the Rescue of our Hearts**

Choose some appropriate music to play as the group takes time to reflect and pray. You might use 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?', track 6 on Columcille, by David Fitzgerald (look up on Youtube, spotify or google play, etc). It may be appropriate to offer prayer to those who would like this. There is also a reflection provided on the video, combining words, images and music.

## **Reasons to Believe**

This weeks 'evidence' fits well with the theme and might for some be part of their reflection on what the group has shared together.

## **Close**





## Session 5: LIFE! - Jesus, Risen LORD

### Ways in

Get people thinking and then talking about a big surprise/shock in their lives, or a national event that shocked and/or surprised people.

OR

Try as a group to come up with stories (books or films) that have a twist in the tale.

Comment that today we are concerned with the ultimate surprise/twist in the tale: the resurrection of Jesus...

### Thinking back to last time

Read the following as a recap, or put in your own words.

Jesus was flogged under a Roman whip - 39 lashes, a punishment that often brought a man to his death. He was then taken by Roman soldiers and made to carry his cross. Exhausted, he collapsed under its weight, and someone was pulled up out of the crowd to shoulder his burden. Then he was crucified: nailed by his hands and feet to the wood, which was then lifted up and jolted into the ground. It was one of the most cruel methods of execution ever invented. After six hours Jesus ended his life with a loud cry. Soldiers inspected his body and found him to be dead. One of them thrust a spear into his side, bringing forth a flow of water and blood. He was taken down and laid in a garden tomb. Some of the women who had followed Jesus watched where he was laid and decided to return after the Sabbath (in obedience to Jewish law). Guards were stationed by the tomb, at the request of the Jewish leaders - who were worried that the disciples might come and steal his body and then make some outrageous claim that Jesus had risen. Jesus' body lies in the cold tomb through Friday night and Saturday. As the sun rises on the Sunday, the women make their way to the tomb...

## Reading

*Luke 24: 1-12*

### Nonsense?

Talk through the following explanations of the empty tomb...

**Perhaps Jesus was not dead after all, but fainted on the cross. The cool of the tomb and the spices revived him.**

This is a weak explanation if ever there was one. The soldiers who checked the body of Jesus were trained to know when the job was done. In any case, how does a man who has been flogged within an inch of his life, and then crucified, push aside a stone weighing one and a half tonnes and then overwhelm a guard?

**Another explanation might be that the body was stolen by Jesus' disciples (just as the Jewish leaders had feared).**

This is more plausible, but again doesn't really add up when we think about the facts. Firstly, we have to remember that the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus had sent the disciples running. They were terrified. Luke tells us later that, when Jesus appeared to them, they were hidden away, with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews. It is hard to imagine this frightened and bewildered band of men rising to such an act of daring. It would have required not only courage, but also a readiness to deliberately deceive people - stealing the body and then spreading the lie that Jesus had risen, just as he said he would. Having spent three years with the one who claimed to be the TRUTH and called his followers to holy lives - would they, could they, tell such a whoppa?

**The third explanation is the one given by the angels to the frightened women: Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while still with you in Galilee: "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."**

The women rush back to tell the men, who do not believe a word of it (their words seemed like nonsense), except Peter who runs to the tomb. He goes away wondering...

It will take more than an empty tomb to convince the disciples that Jesus is risen. Let's read on in Luke's account:

## Reading

*Encountering the Risen Jesus: Luke 24: 13-53*

It might be a good idea to ask people to imagine themselves in the story as they hear it - as one of the women or one of the disciples.

## Discussion

The following questions are meant to encourage an imaginative involvement in the story.

1. As always, take some time to share your immediate response/questions.
2. What mixture of reactions/emotions do we see in the characters of the story to meeting Jesus?
3. Imagine what it was like for the women and the disciples seeing Jesus alive again. How do you think you would have reacted/felt? What might you have said or done?
4. Do you find yourself convinced by what you have heard, or do questions remain?

## Reasons to Believe?

Due to the subject in hand, more attention has been given this week to 'Reasons to Believe'. The final input picks up the theme of evidence but ends with the meaning of the resurrection, which is the most vital thing to get across. The four points given under, 'What does it all mean?' are included in the participant's booklets, so you might like to refer to these pages as you speak.

*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Corinthians 15: 14)*

These are the words of Paul, one of the earliest Christian missionaries. The Christian faith is founded on the resurrection of Jesus, so what reasons do we have to believe it?

1. An empty tomb
2. Jesus' appearances to his disciples.

Luke makes it clear that these were not ghostly appearances - Jesus invites the disciples to touch his wounds, and he eats in front of them. Paul says that more than 500 people saw the risen Jesus, many of whom were still alive as he was writing (1 Corinthians 15: 3-7). If it had been only one or two, we might conclude that they were 'seeing things,' but there are too many witnesses at different times and places to make such a claim. And if these people simply made it up, this would make for an enormous web of deceit.

3. There is one other bit of evidence, perhaps the most convincing of all... The change in the disciples!  
They go from frightened, demoralized, men and women, hidden away behind locked doors, to a vibrant, joyful community, boldly proclaiming that Jesus has risen from the dead. Read the extract from Peter's speech in Acts 2: 22-24 (you could also say a little about Peter's own story as told by John: three denials, three times asked if he loved Jesus). This community, the Church, spreads like wild-fire across the Roman World. Millions of people claim to know him today. How do we explain this? Only the resurrection explains it.

This brings us to the personal testimonies of those who call themselves followers of Jesus today. At the heart of the Christian faith is an encounter with the risen, living LORD. Not just knowledge, or rules to live by - NO, being a Christian is about a relationship in which we open our hearts and lives to Jesus...

Sometimes knowledge comes later - people experience God drawing them and know that they need to make a response from the heart, and later go on to learn what its all about.

You could include the evening's testimony here.

### **Testimony (Life Story)**

Ask someone to share a testimony of how Jesus' resurrection has made a difference to their life - or view the video testimony.

### **Reflection**

Use as appropriate to the group. Choose some music that joyfully celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. There is also a reflection provided on the video, combining words, images and music.

## What does it all mean?

1. The Resurrection shows God the Father's acceptance of the offering of the Son. A perfect sacrifice of love, for the forgiveness of our sins.
2. It is also the turning of the tables on the forces of evil - now defeated, for the one they tried to destroy is risen and ascended into heaven (see the last few verses of Luke). The Bible says, His name is above all other names - which means that he is the highest authority in the Universe (God's own authority). One day every knee will bow to him and every tongue confess that He is LORD.
3. We are given his authority and the power to live the life he calls us to. Power to live - for those who die to self, experience the power of Christ's resurrection in their lives (much more on this next week). You could quote Philippians 3: 10 here, included in the participant's booklet.
4. We have a hope for the future: This life is not all there is. Jesus is raised from the dead and we, who trust and follow him, will be raised too. Our future is revealed - life beyond this life; life after death. The Christian community holds this hope - we too shall be raised!

Close





# Session 6

## Session 6: PRESENCE - Life Giving Spirit

### Way in

Encourage the group members to talk about gifts they have received that were:

1. precious
2. unusual
3. unexpected.

### A Promised Gift

After his resurrection, Jesus gave some clear instructions to his disciples:

*"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1: 4-5).*

You may remember how the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his Baptism, empowering him for his mission (see Luke 3:21 & 4:14). The disciples are promised the same – the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ:

*"...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1: 8)*

In this session we are going to focus on the gift of the Spirit.

### Reading

*Acts 2: 1-16, 22-24, 36-47*

It is probably most effective to split this between three readers. The missing passages are the words of the prophets, which are not needed to tell the essential story.

## Group Discussion

1. Share your reactions to this story – including any questions it provokes
2. Read the following passages together (in participant's Guide). Give some time after each one to capture what is being taught about the work/role of the Spirit (What does he do in our lives?)

### The Work of the Holy Spirit

Sum up the discussion and then make an input along the following lines:

Christians worship God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three in one - a perfect unity. The Spirit is perhaps the most difficult to grasp. He is the presence of God in our lives - making Jesus known to us.

This is experienced in a number of ways:

1. To those who have put their faith in Jesus, the Spirit brings a deep assurance that we belong to God:

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8: 15-16)*

'Abba' was the word that Jesus used to talk to God. It means something like, 'daddy', an intimate, though respectful way of addressing a father. This is given to us, not just as a word, but as a cry from our heart. The Holy Spirit tells us on the inside that we belong to and that we are loved by God. This is making what Jesus achieved for us on the cross a reality in our hearts.

2. The Spirit works in our lives to make us like Jesus...

*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... (Galatians 5: 22-23)*

We need to remember that fruit has to grow. Similarly, these qualities take time to develop in us. It is the work of the Spirit with which we need to cooperate.

A few verses later in the passage there are words about crucifying the sinful nature in order to keep in step with the Spirit. We must learn to die to old attitudes and behaviour and follow the lead of the Spirit in our lives.

3. The Spirit gives gifts...

# Session 6

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... and he gives them to each one, just as he determines (1 Cor. 11: 4 - 11).*

The New Testament has various lists of gifts given by the Spirit to the church. The point is always made that these should work together for the good of the whole body (the church). The Spirit is ever at work to bring UNITY among Christians.

There is much more that could be said about the work of the Spirit in our lives - He is active in drawing us to Christ in the first place, He helps us to pray (Romans 8: 26) and understand the Bible (Ephesians 1: 17-18). In fact the whole of the Christian life is lived in the Spirit (enabled by him).

## **How then do we receive the Spirit?**

To help answer this, we will look at two passages:

*Read Acts 2: 38-39*

The Spirit is given to all who repent and believe in Christ (a commitment marked by Baptism).

*Read Luke 11: 1-13*

Jesus tells his disciples to Ask, Seek and Knock, and encourages them that God is more than willing to give the gift of his Spirit to those who do.

Putting these ideas together: the Holy Spirit is a gift given to every Christian, and we are encouraged to seek Him and receive Him into our lives. Paul encourages us to 'be filled with the Spirit,' which has the meaning of an ongoing openness to the life giving Spirit of God.

When a person becomes a Christian, it is helpful for others to 'lay hands' upon them and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill them. This can be a very emotional experience, or not. It might be that the person speaks in tongues - either there and then, or later. There are no rules. It is simply important for those who come to follow Christ to seek and welcome the Holy Spirit into their lives.

## Life Stories

Ask one or two, ahead of time, to share their experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. A variety of experiences would be helpful. As usual, the video includes a testimony

## Reflection

On page 38-39 in the participant's guide there is an Act of Commitment. This has two purposes:

1. To give group members the opportunity to think about where they have got to. The prayers recall the themes of the course and set out clearly what it means to trust in Christ.
2. To provide a simple framework for group members to make their commitment to Christ and receive prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

You might give your group time to read it through, and then ask them to say where they have got to in their journey. If some, or all, are ready to make their commitment and/or receive prayer to be filled with the Spirit, then go for it. Do this in the context of the whole group, asking those who are making their commitment to speak out all the words, with the rest of the group joining in the words that are highlighted. The words in italics indicate moments to pause, read scripture or for prayer and laying on of hands.

## Additional Notes on 'Speaking in Tongues'

This may well come up on its own. If not, use your judgement as to whether you include this.

In the story of Pentecost those who receive the Spirit speak in 'tongues', or languages they had not learned. On other occasions in Acts, when the disciples pray for others to receive the Spirit, this usually happens (Acts 8: 14-17, Acts 9: 17-19, Acts 10: 44-46, Acts 19: 1-6).

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul writes about this gift of the Spirit.

It is obvious from what he says that many of the people of the church 'speak in tongues,' and are getting rather carried away with it. Paul writes to tell them not to overdo it, or become boastful about it. He suggests that it is best done in personal prayer, as it does little to help people understand about God, unless someone interprets. From what Paul



# Session 6

writes in 1 Corinthians 14, we can gather that speaking in tongues is a form of prayer, in which our spirit prays, though we do not understand it (v14), that it strengthens/ builds up the pray-er (v 4), and that Paul often did it (v 18).

Is it a gift for today? Certainly. Though not compulsory! Those who speak in tongues find that it strengthens them and sometimes helps them to pray when it is difficult to find words to express deep feelings. Some use this gift when praying for others.

## How do we receive this gift?

- Remember what Jesus said about God and good gifts?
- Ask!
- Begin! (It won't happen unless you start to do it - this is not something that is beyond your control). If a few words come, use them and see what happens...
- It is probably best to ask a Christian who prays in tongues to pray with you.

Close





# *Come and See*

Written by Stephen Elmes  
updated 2024