

Prepared to Answer



Summer Cross-Generational Bible Study 2017

Lamb of God Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio

Adapted from "Prepared to Answer," a bible study by John Paustian
Based on *Prepared to Answer* and *More Prepared to Answer*, by Mark Paustian

Lesson One: The Lost Son and the Waiting Father: Why Stories? (Part 1)

The Power of Stories

Do you like listening to stories? Why or why not?

Do you like telling stories? Why or why not?

Share your favorite bible story. What makes it your favorite?

Passing on the Faith through Stories

Read Psalm 78:1-8 (p. 579). What does Asaph, the psalm writer, promise to do for current and future generations?

Looking at the rest of the psalm, how does he do what he promised?

With those at your table, list as many reasons as you can why using bible stories is a good way to share your faith with others (unbelievers, children, "seasoned" Christians) in 2017. Then choose what you think are the two most compelling reasons.

Read John 20:31 (p. 1075). What does John say is the purpose for all of the stories that he recorded about Jesus' life?

Read John 5:39 (p. 1055). About whom does Jesus say the Old Testament testifies? Explain why it is important to remember the purpose of the Bible, whenever we teach and apply Bible stories.

Answering Objections through Stories

Read Luke 15:1-3 (p. 1035). What “objection” did some of the people have to Jesus and his ministry?

How did Jesus answer that objection? Why didn't he just answer their objection directly? What lesson can we learn from this?

Hearing Objections and Telling Stories

Listening

An expression of love—hear their story

Avoid arguments

Learn background to their objections

What is their attitude?

Concern, Confusion, Criticism, Smokescreen, Proud heart or crushed heart

Telling

Use highlighting or underlining to identify for yourself the key story elements, or put together a bulleted list of details and events.

Apply your sanctified imagination to the story.

Transitions

To the Story (the biblical narrative)

From the Story to THE Story (Law and Gospel)

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Lesson Two: The Lost Son and the Waiting Father: Why Stories? (Part 2)

Retell the Story: Luke 15:1-3,11-32

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ Then Jesus told them this parable:

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate

with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

³¹ “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”

Transition to THE Story

Example:

How do we know that the Father in heaven really thinks this way, that this is something more than a touching story? There was another son, one who came out to us from the house we had left. He came and entered our place under the law because he did not want anything to stand between us and the Father.

Galatians 4:4,5 ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Reviewing the Story

Explore Key Concepts

Living definitions

Telling this story can be a way to share a proper understanding of some very important concepts and to define them as the Bible defines them. In the initial telling of this story, it is good to try to avoid using these terms, especially if you are dealing with a non-Christian.

SIN

The *personal* nature of sin

1. When the younger son demanded his inheritance and left home, what was he saying to and about his father?
2. Describe how you would have felt, if you were his father?
3. What does this teach us about the nature of sin?

The *destructive* nature of sin

4. What problems did the younger son experience because of his rejection of his father?
5. What does this teach us about sin's effects on us?

If we reject the Lord, we have not just insulted him ("I don't think you can do your job"); we've put ourselves in an impossible situation, trying to replace the irreplaceable, trying to find in ourselves or other things the blessings that only God can provide. A God of love has to condemn sin, not just because it dishonors him, but also because it damages us.

GUILT

It's important to recognize that we use the word *guilt* in two different but related ways:

GUILT: a liability to punishment as a result of sin

guilt: the feeling or awareness of that liability

6. When did the younger brother in the story have GUILT? When did he have guilt?
7. What can take away guilt? What can take away GUILT?
8. Which of these should be our priority in dealing with guilt?

REPENTANCE

"Making faces in the mirror of God's law"

Mom catches you in the act, clobbering your annoying little brother. "Tell your brother you're sorry!" "I'm sorry!" you say, but you're still smiling (you finally got him back). You hear it again, only louder, "Tell your brother you're sorry!" How many tries this time before you get it right?

Imagine a child coming away from an experience like that with a commitment to practice making faces in a mirror, learning to look sad for the next time his mom catches him in the act. That way, when his mom tells him to tell his brother he's sorry, he can "sound sorry and look sorry" on the first try.

9. "He came to his senses" (v. 17). With what does true repentance begin?

The point of proclaiming the law is not to encourage us to try to look different or feel different but to see ourselves as God sees us. If we think that sorrow over our sin is our job to do, that only shows we haven't seen ourselves as we really are.

10. Put yourself in the story. What thoughts would you be wrestling with as you imagine walking back into your childhood home? (Remember, you had left home after telling your father you didn't want to have anything to do with him; you just wanted his stuff.)

11. What did the young man plan to say to his father when he got home? How does this show that he still underestimated his father's love?

GRACE

To define grace as "undeserved love" may not be precise enough. A kindness shown to you from a complete stranger may be undeserved. Grace is a love that comes to us as the *opposite* of what we have deserved.

12. List specific ways that what the younger son received when he returned home was the opposite of what he deserved.

The thrill of grace

13. What had the Father been doing while his son was away?

14. What status did the father give to his wasteful son?

15. Consider the difference between a son and a slave. How long does a master keep a slave around or an employer an employee? How long is a son part of the family?

16. What effect does this conditional love have on a slave/servant? What is the difference for a son?

(THE Story connection: “. . . that we might receive adoption to sonship.” (Galatians 4:5)

The offense of grace

17. How did the older son look at life in his father’s house?

18. What did he think of his father’s forgiveness?

19. How did the father express his persistent love for his self-righteous older son?

Conclusion

Who needs to hear this story? (In what situations would you share it? In response to what questions or objections?)

Can you think of another way to transition to THE Story (Jesus, the Cross, and our Forgiveness)?

Related References

Passages where Jesus talks to or about his Father

- **John 17:25,26** ²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”
- **Luke 23:34** “Father, forgive them . . .”
- **Luke 23:46** “Father, into your hands . . .”
- **Matthew 11:25** “I praise you, Father, . . .”

Siegbert Becker, “A Broken and Contrite Heart.” Online Essay File, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

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Lesson Three: The Visit of the Magi: What Kind of God Demands Worship? (*Prepared to Answer*, p. 45-50)

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: Matthew 2:1-12

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Transition to THE Story

Example: It might seem strange to imagine anyone traveling such a distance only to bow down and worship a seemingly helpless infant. When all is said and done, we find ourselves worshipping Jesus for something even stranger. Can I tell you about our ultimate reason to praise Jesus?

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

Praise and Worship

1. Look at each of the following stories, in which people were praising Jesus. For each story answer these questions:
 - a. Who is praising Jesus?
 - b. Why are they praising him?
 - c. How are they praising him?

Passage	Who?	Why?	How?
Luke 7:11-17			
Luke 7:36-39,44-47			
Luke 17:11-19			
Luke 19:28-40			
Matthew 15:29-31			
Matthew 28:1-10			

2. Did any of those people need to be told to worship Jesus? Why or why not?

The “Good News of the Kingdom” and Our Worship

Jesus said, “*I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.*” (Luke 4:43). The “good news of the kingdom” says more than just that “God is in charge!” That can easily turn the gospel into a new law: you need to let God be in charge! While Reformed theology centers on the idea that God is sovereign, Lutheran theology centers on the idea that God is love. The “good news of the kingdom” tells us not just that God is in charge but what kind of God is in charge and how he uses his power.

Colossians 1:12-14 ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 10:45 ⁴⁵ “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

3. List ways in which Jesus used his power as King. Compare that with how earthly kings use their power.
4. **Read Luke 7:1-10.** In this account, we see two men “in charge.” Who are the two men? Which man appears to have more power and authority? Which man has more power and authority?
5. Jesus commended that centurion’s faith. When scared disciples in a boat in the middle of a storm woke Jesus, afraid that they were going to drown, Jesus rebuked them for their “little faith.” Explain this statement: Faith is seeing Jesus as he really is.
6. What did the wise men see with their eyes in Bethlehem? But what did they see when they looked at Jesus that prompted them to worship him?

7. **Read Luke 23:33-43.** What was that dying thief on the cross looking at when he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”? What did he see that prompted his request of Jesus?

The Cost of Worship

8. Put yourself in the sandals of the wise men. List some of the “costs” the wise men were willing to “pay” to worship Jesus.
9. What “costs” are involved in our worship of Jesus? What interferes with your willingness to pay those “costs”? (Why *must* unbelievers be unwilling to pay the “costs” of worship?)
10. We are willing to pay costs for things we perceive as valuable or important. How does seeing Jesus as he really is address our willingness to pay the “costs” of worship?

If people are going to worship Jesus, it will be because God uses people like us to help them see him.

Conclusion

Who needs to hear this story? (In what situations would you share it? In response to what questions or objections?)

Related reference

1 Peter 2:2,3 ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

John 4:24 ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

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Lesson Four: The Birth of Jesus: Isn't this all a myth, not history?

(Prepared to Answer, p. 26-32)

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: Luke 2:1-20

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds

returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Transition to THE Story

When we call Jesus *Savior* and *Christ the Lord*, that reminds us that we have much more story to tell . . .

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

The Power of the Truth

1. Share a real news event or personal event that had a profound impact on your life. How did it affect you? How do you know that it was a real, historical event? How would the effect have been different, if the story were just a myth or legend?

A Real Problem

We all have parts of our personal history that we are glad to share (birthdays, graduations, accomplishments), but there are also things in our personal history that are just as true and factual that we'd rather people didn't know about. These things are evidence of a deeper truth that is undeniable.

Romans 5:12 Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

Genesis 8:21b every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

Romans 6:23a For the wages of sin is death.

2. What real problem affects all people?
3. What is the proof that this problem affects everyone?
4. Describe the practice of bloodletting. Would you trust it for your own medical problems? Why or why not?

5. Explain why it is important that the solution to our universal problem be based on real history and not mere myth or speculation.

What is God's response to our sad history? Is his answer to tell a story that is nothing more than a clever story to make me feel good?

A Real Solution

6. List details from Luke 2:1-20 that show that it is an historical account rather than a fictional myth or story.
7. Read the passage(s) assigned to your table, and identify words or phrases that give evidence that what is recorded is not myth but historical fact.
 - Luke 1:1-5
 - 1 John 1:1-4
 - 2 Peter 1:12-21

The Truth Matters

8. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.** What was Paul's gospel, the thing he passed on as of first importance?
9. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:14-22.** What difference would it make if the story of Jesus' resurrection was not true but merely legend or myth?
10. **Read Hebrews 2:14-17 and Galatians 4:4-5.** Why is it important that Luke 2 is history and not myth? In other words, why did Jesus have to become a real human being?

Make sure we don't just proclaim what Jesus saved us from and forget what he saved us for.

11. **Read Romans 6:3-11.** How is our story connected to Christ's story? What is the effect, if Christ's story is a myth instead of fact?

Other religions may have a story to tell, but ultimately they can be separated from that story. Christianity says, "Here's the great, good thing that has happened! This changes everything. Everything rests on this!" Other religions say, "Here's the information you need . . . Everything depends on your doing the right thing with what we teach."

A Story to Share

12. What was the angel's good news for the shepherds?

13. For what did the shepherds praise God?

14. **Read Acts 4:18-20.** How does the apostles' reaction to the Jewish leaders show that the stories they were sharing were historical truth and not myth or story?

Who needs to hear this story?

Related references

Luke 3:1-2 ¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

Esther 1:1-3 ¹ This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: ² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

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Lesson Five: The Faith of the Canaanite Woman: Isn't Christianity anti-woman? (*More Prepared to Answer*, p. 135-141)

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁷ "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Transition to THE Story

Even though Jesus didn't call women to the same role and position as he did the 12 disciples, why did women still follow to the cross? Why were they the first to the grave? They had never known a man like this. Those who criticize the Christian church for being out of step with society on gender must deal with Jesus first and his view toward women.

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

Great faith

1. Imagine that you are the Canaanite woman. Describe your thoughts and feelings in response to how Jesus treats you, when you come to him for help.

8. All Groups: Each table will be assigned one or more of the accounts found by the “Christ Groups.” In each story, what do you observe about Jesus’ interaction? What do you observe about how the woman/women reacted to Jesus? How does it compare with the how women were treated in the culture of the day?

Account	Observations

9. Not only did these interactions happen, but the Holy Spirit led the Gospel writers to record them in the Scriptures. How does this show that the church is not against women?

Biblical Headship

10. If someone is the head of an organization or corporation, what does that mean? What does that often imply?

This is what many imagine when they think of the husband being the “head” of his wife. They imagine a tyrannical husband seated at the head of the table, pounding his fist on the table when supper doesn’t appear at exactly 5:30 or the food is cold, and saying, “God made me the head of this house . . .” But such a husband couldn’t be much more wrong in understanding his role. Let’s see what “headship” looks like in the Bible.

Ephesians 5:22-30 ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body.

11. When Paul calls the husband the head, he is comparing the husband to the physical head of a human body (not the “head” of an organization). How does your head relate to your body? (Explain how it is not just about being in charge and issuing commands.)

12. How does Paul use Christ’s relationship with the Church to describe the ideal relationship between head and body (and between husband and wife)?

13. Agree or disagree, and defend your answer: Jesus is counter-cultural in his treatment of women.

Who needs to hear this story?

Related reference: Proverbs 31:10-31

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Lesson Six: Gethsemane: Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayers? (*Prepared to Answer*, p. 124-127)

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: Matthew 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. ⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Transition to THE Story

What do we really mean when we ask, "Why doesn't God answer my prayers?" What we mean is that of the three possible answers to our prayers—yes, not now, and no—God has said, "No!" And it hurts.

I'd like to tell you about what happened after the Father said no to Jesus' perfect prayer.

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

When God Says No

1. When God says no to prayers, list conclusions people might come to as to why God says no.

A Perfect Prayer

2. Jesus prayed, *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”* (v. 39) What made this the perfect prayer? What was the Father’s answer to this prayer?
3. **Read Romans 8:26.** What problem does this verse identify? How might we often respond to this problem? How does God want us to respond to this problem?

Identify the possession you treasure most. Now, imagine handing it to someone saying, “You do what you want with this.” We don’t like to let go that way, because we trust what we want. “My will be done” is much easier for us to pray than “Your will be done.”

4. **Read Genesis 3:4-6, Galatians 5:17, and Romans 8:6-7.** What fundamental problem exists with the human will?

God’s law confronts us with the fact that there is something fundamentally wrong with our will. In wanting to be independent from God, our sinful will is asking for death. We learn that lesson from experience when we get what we wanted, only to find out that what we wanted was not good.

5. **Read Ephesians 4:22-24 and Psalm 37:4.** What change must take place (and is taking place) in us to enable us to pray as Jesus prayed?
6. Martin Luther once said, “By faith man does what God wills; God in turn does what man wills” (LW 21, p. 351). What do you think he meant?

The Goodness of God's Will

Romans 8:28,31,32 ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ...³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

7. This is more than wishful thinking. This is not a conclusion Paul has drawn from experience. (I got scourged, but I healed. I was shipwrecked, but I made it to shore.) What convinced Paul that God is on our side and that he will always give us the very best answer?
8. Is there anything you could ask God in prayer that would cost him more than what he has already spent on you? So when God says no to our prayers, it is not because it would cost him too much. What must be the reason?

The Confidence Factor

Christian prayer is confident prayer. But where does such confidence come from? Let's compare it to a scavenger hunt, in which a youth leader sends out his teens in groups of two or three with a list of 15 items to collect from homes in the area around church. As they approach the first door, they don't know if anyone is home to hear their knocking. They don't know if that person will be willing to help or, beyond that, if they will be able to help. They really can't have any confidence or certainty. Here's another equation to describe the situation mathematically:

$$\begin{array}{rclcl} \text{Hear} & \times & \text{Willing} & \times & \text{Able} & & \text{Confidence Factor} \\ [0-10] & \times & [0-10] & \times & [0-10] & = & [0-1000] \end{array}$$

6. Under what circumstances will the result be zero, with no expectation of an answer?

Psalm 139:2,4 ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.... ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

Matthew 19:26 ²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Isaiah 59:1 ¹ Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

7. What does the Bible tell us about God's knowledge of even our unspoken thoughts? About his ability to answer?

Hear		Able		Confidence Factor
10	x	10	=	100

Isaiah 59:2-3 ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. ³ For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

9. What would make God unwilling to hear our prayers?

Hear		Willing		Able		Confidence Factor
10	x	0	x	10	=	0

Galatians 4:4-5 ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

10. What would it take to change that situation if we can't erase the zero that our rebellion has earned?

Psalms 50:15 ¹⁵ "and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

11. List reasons we have for being confident in our prayers.

Who needs to hear this story?

Related references

Is God listening and aware of our needs? Psalm 193:1-4,7-12

Is God able to help? Psalm 115:3; Psalm 124:8; Psalm 135:5-6

Is God is willing to help? Ephesians 3:12; 1 John 3:1; Romans 8:15

Prepared to Answer

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Lesson Seven: Peter Disowns Jesus: What if I want to feel good about myself? (*Prepared to Answer*, p. 150-155)

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: Luke 22:54-62

⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

⁵⁷ But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰ Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Transition to THE Story

Sometimes it helps to have a good cry. Sometimes it just gives one a stuffy nose. As bad as Peter felt to realize he had denied even knowing Jesus, the morning that followed would not make things any better. He didn't realize it right away, but the best answer to how he felt about himself would come from what happened to Jesus next.

My confession is this: Nothing less than the death of God's Son can fix what is wrong with me. That's why I need to tell you the rest of the story.

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

Searching for Self-Esteem

1. In searching for self-esteem, many people focus on the good things they have done and the talents and abilities they have. If Peter had done that, what good things could he have said about himself?

Honest Self-Assessment

2. What promises had Peter boldly made to Jesus? (See Matthew 26:33,35; Luke 22:33) What did Jesus predict that Peter would do? (See Luke 22:34; Matthew 26:34)
3. What did Jesus do, as soon as Peter denied him the third time? What did Peter do? Describe the thoughts and feelings Peter must have experienced in those moments.

Reminders of Guilt

Peter just wanted to be nearby and to warm himself by that charcoal fire. But a servant girl changed everything. Was it a 60-second exchange? An uncomfortable few minutes? How long did Peter's words hang in the air? Was this a story the servant girl would even bother to retell or remember in later years? But for Peter this was different. Was this something he would ever be able to forget?

4. What sights, sounds, smells, and words might remind Peter of his guilt long after the fact?

Read Psalm 32:3-5.

5. When David tried to ignore or cover up his guilt, how did it affect him?
6. Describe the change that took place in David's life when he stopped covering up and started opening up before the Lord about his sin.

Another charcoal fire

Read John 21:9-17.

7. Of what would Jesus' questions remind Peter?
8. How are the commands that Jesus gave to Peter in this conversation both surprising and comforting?

Unintended but inevitable consequences

9. **Read Jeremiah 2:5.** What happens when we rely on something worthless?

Read 1 Peter 1:17-19.

10. When Martin Luther borrowed from these verses for his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, he spoke of our being redeemed from sin, death and the devil. What does Peter describe us as being freed from?
11. Our worth is not in who we are or what we have done. Those things are empty and worthless. Where do Peter's words lead us to find our worth?

The Power of Repentance and Forgiveness

Read 1 Peter and 2 Peter this week, remembering specifically these incidents from Peter's life. How does it affect your understanding of Peter's words?

12. **Read 1 John 1:5 – 2:2.** How does denying or ignoring our sin affect our relationship with God? How does recognizing it and confessing it lead us to true peace, hope, and self-worth?

Who needs to hear this story?

Related references: 1 Peter 2:4-10; Psalm 32; Psalm 51

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Lesson Eight: Jesus Before Pilate: What is Truth? (*Prepared to Answer*, p. 156-162)

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: John 18:28-40

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Transition to THE Story

Isn't there something different going on when people refuse to acknowledge something as truth? The Roman governor Pontius Pilate is an example of someone trying to avoid something inflexible, the truth. We can tell he knows that it's there by all the energy he spends trying to dance around it. He wants to dismiss it as irrelevant. What good is truth in such a complex situation!

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

A Vivid Dream or Something Real

In trying to understand the person who says there is no such thing as the truth, I think it can be helpful to think about a time when a dream you had was so vivid that you later wondered if it had really happened. However, after concluding it was just a dream, you find yourself wondering if what you see when you're awake is any more real than the stuff of your dreams. Many people have latched on to the opposite conclusion. They treat what they see with their eyes open like it is just a very vivid dream. In that dream world they want to say, "What's true is what's true to you."

That presents us with a challenge, the challenge of conveying the truth to someone who treats you as a voice in a dream. After all, how much authority would you give to a voice in a vivid dream, trying to tell you the way things really are?

Claiming to Have the Truth

1. Evaluate: "No one can claim to know the truth."

2. What are the two great truths of Scripture, the two main doctrines that are rooted in God's unchangeable character?

The Truth of God's Law

3. **Read Romans 2:14-15 and John 3:19.** Evaluate: "No one can claim to know the truth of God's law."

4. Based on the gospel accounts assigned to your table, how was it evident that Pilate knew he was doing something terribly wrong?

- Matthew 27:11-26

Luke 23:1-7,13-25

- Mark 15:2-15

John 18:28-19:16

To think about: To deny responsibility to the truth of law, to deny that sin offends God and deserves punishment (the personal nature of sin) does not remove the visible evidence of the destructive nature of sin. You can say that a sin is really okay, but that doesn't stop it from hurting the sinner and those around him.

The Truth of the Gospel

5. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:4-6.** Evaluate this statement: "No one can claim to know the truth of God's gospel."

6. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-21.** How does the unbeliever view the gospel? List factors that make them view it that way.

The devil wants to convince us that there is no such thing as spiritual sight. Read the following synopsis of "The Country of the Blind" by H.G. Wells [from Wikipedia]. Then discuss questions 7-8 with those at your table:

While attempting to summit Parascotopetl's unconquered crest, a fictitious mountain in Ecuador, a mountaineer named Nunez slips and falls down the far side of the mountain. At the end of his descent, down a snowy slope in the mountain's shadow, he finds a valley, cut off from the rest of the world on all sides by steep precipices. Unbeknownst to Nunez, he has discovered the fabled Country of the Blind.

The valley had been a haven for settlers fleeing the tyranny of Spanish rulers until an earthquake reshaped the surrounding mountains and cut it off forever from future explorers. The isolated community prospered over the years despite a disease that struck them early on, rendering all newborns blind. As the blindness slowly spread over the generations, their remaining senses sharpened, and by the time the last sighted villager had died, the community had fully adapted to life without sight.

Nunez descends into the valley and finds an unusual village with windowless houses and a network of paths, all bordered by curbs. Upon discovering that everyone is blind, Nunez begins reciting to himself the refrain, "In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king." He realizes that he can teach and rule them. But the villagers have no concept of sight and do not understand his attempts to explain this fifth sense to them. Frustrated, Nunez becomes angry but they calm him, and he reluctantly submits to their way of life because returning to the outside world is impossible.

Nunez is assigned to work for a villager named Yacob, and becomes attracted to Yacob's youngest daughter, Medina-saroté. Nunez and Medina-saroté soon fall in love with each other, and having won her confidence, Nunez slowly starts trying to explain sight to her. Medina-saroté, however, simply dismisses it as his imagination. When Nunez asks for her hand in marriage, he is turned down by the village elders on account of his "unstable" obsession with "sight." The village doctor suggests that Nunez's eyes be removed, claiming that they are diseased and are affecting his brain. Nunez reluctantly consents to the operation because of his love for Medina-saroté. But at sunrise on the day set for the operation, when all the villagers are still asleep, Nunez, the failed King of the Blind, sets off for the mountains (without provisions or equipment), hoping to find a passage to the outside world and escape the valley.

In the original story, he escapes the valley but becomes trapped in the mountains, which ultimately leads to his death. In the revised and expanded 1939 version of the story, Nunez sees from a distance that there is about to be a rock slide. He attempts to warn the villagers, but again they scoff at his "imagined" sight. He takes Medina-saroté and manages to flee the valley during the slide.

7. Describe what it would be like to be spiritually blind and to have someone with spiritual sight come to you to try to explain what they see.

8. Describe what it would be like (what it is like) to have spiritual sight and be surrounded by those who are spiritually blind.

9. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:7-10a.** Why is it important to remember the only way that those who are spiritually blind can “see” the message of the gospel?

10. **Read John 8:31-32.** Jesus describes the difference the gospel makes. Put that difference into your own words.

Who needs to hear this story?

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Lesson Nine: The Crucifixion: Where is God when I'm hurting? *(Prepared to Answer, p. 130-135)*

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: Matthew 27:32-40

³² As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. ³³ They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). ³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. ³⁵ When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. ³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁸ Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

Transition to THE Story

We're already at THE Story. But it is not the end of the story. It's just the beginning of the story of eternal life. The story of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead tells us about the glory he will share with us.

We tell the story of the cross most often as God's answer to our guilt, but it is also a valuable story to tell for those dark times when it seems to us that God is absent and powerless and failing in his saving purpose.

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

Who's in charge here?

1. If we could interview people who saw those three crosses outside Jerusalem that day and ask them, "Who is in charge here?" what answer would we expect from . . .

A Roman soldier

A member of the Sanhedrin

A pilgrim passing by

A disciple of Jesus

2. Whose name would not be on that list?
3. In the eyes of those who mocked him, what would Jesus have to do to look like a savior?
4. **Read Isaiah 53:4-6.** Why did God allow Jesus to suffer as he did?

Hide-and-peek with God

If you were going to play hide-and-peek with the members of this Bible class, before you closed your eyes and started counting, wouldn't you want to take a quick look at the colors and patterns of their clothing and make note of anything that would help you spot them?

5. **Read Isaiah 45:15-19.** God is a God who hides himself. List some characteristics of God that would help you identify where he is present. Then, alongside each item in that list, add its opposite.
6. In view of the story we are examining this morning, what do you observe about the list of "opposites"?

7. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:8-16.** If God is so thoroughly hidden in the last place we would look for him – weak and dying on a criminal’s cross – how could anyone find him there?

The perspective of the cross

Read Luke 23:32-43.

8. It appears that only two people present on Good Friday understood what was really going on. One was Jesus. Who was the other?
9. As he hung on the cross, Jesus was establishing a kingdom that will stand forever. It did not look like he was in a position to accomplish anything or give anything. Yet what did he give to that criminal?

Hidden identity

9. **Read Isaiah 53:2-3 and Philippians 2:5-8.** Why didn’t the world recognize Jesus as the Son of God?
10. **Read 1 John 3:1-3.** Why doesn’t the world recognize us as children of God?
11. Explain this statement: If we don’t see God when we are suffering, it may be because we are looking for the wrong kind of God.

Who needs to hear this story?

You Try It

Prepared to Answer



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Lesson Ten: Jesus Appears to Thomas: Why Can't I Just Believe What I See?

Tell a Story

Transition to the Story

Retell the Story: John 20:24-31

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Transition to THE Story

Why can't I just believe what I see? Did you know that one of Jesus' disciples struggled with just that question? Can I tell you how Jesus dealt with him? And the lesson John learned from this experience?

Reviewing the Story

Exploring Key Concepts

Doubts

1. Compare Thomas with the other disciples. What did it take to convince them that Jesus was alive? (cf. John 20:6-9, 19-20)

2. **Read John 20:31.** What did John say was his purpose for writing his Gospel?

3. John 20:25 can be translated:

So the other disciples *kept telling* him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe!" (Holmen Christian Standard Bible, HCSB)

Imagine the conversations John (and the other disciples) must have had with Thomas during that week between Jesus' visits. How would those conversations have revealed the challenge they would face in their future witnessing?

Ink vs. the Real Thing

4. **Read John 20:30.** Page through John's gospel and list miracles that John recorded.

5. John was an eyewitness to these miraculous signs, who was now putting them down in writing. C.S. Lewis wrote about the difference between seeing and experiencing God and reading about theology. Read his quote, and then summarize his point:

"If a man has once looked at the Atlantic [Ocean] from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of coloured paper. But here comes the point. The map is admittedly only coloured paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the

beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.” (*Mere Christianity*, chapter 23)

6. What effect do each of the following passages have on our witnessing to others?

- 1 Corinthians 2:14

- 2 Corinthians 5:7

- Luke 16:19-31

- Romans 1:16

- Isaiah 55:11

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

7. While Jesus was out of sight through that week, outwardly the world would have looked the same to John as it did to Thomas. But in their minds and hearts, they would have seen the world very differently. Complete the table below to describe how each saw the world.

	When Thomas looked at the world, he saw a world . . .	When John looked at the world, he saw a world . . .
where sin...		
where death...		
where Satan...		
where Jesus...		

8. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-12.** Describe ways in which we are blessed in believing without seeing.

We have the Word that brings that blessing to others.

Who needs to hear this story?

Related references: Hebrews 11; 1 Kings 18:9-18; John 6:68; Isaiah 55:10-11; Luke 16:19-31

You Try It

For Further Reflection

Some Christians have tried to find a compromise position that would be more acceptable to modern man than the resurrection of the body. They suggest that, even if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, what's important is that he lives in our hearts. They suggest that our bodies may not physically rise, but that our spirit/soul will live on.

- a. Identify the reasoning behind such suggestions.
- b. **Read John 1:3.** What is the flaw in such logic?
- c. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23.** What is the fatal danger in such claims?