GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION
How can you know for sure you will spend an eternity in heaven with God?
Here’s what the Bible says.

GOD’S POWER
“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16) God is the power, source, and reward in salvation. Because we are powerless in our sin, God steps in to rescue us.

OUR PROBLEM
“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) Sin means missing the mark and falling short of perfection. Because of our imperfection, we cannot stand before a holy God.

OUR PUNISHMENT
“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) Sin separates us from God and sentences us to death.

GOD’S PROVISION
“But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Though we deserve eternal death, God has made a way for us to be rescued through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

WE RESPOND
“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9) To confess Jesus as Lord means we agree with God about our sin and need for salvation. We must repent and trust only in the work of Jesus to save us.

Explain that receiving Christ is the beginning. Urge the adult to follow in believer's baptism, unite with a local church body, and be faithful in Bible study, worship, and daily time with God.
SESSION 1
JESUS IS HOLY


TODAY’S POINT: Jesus is holy and that changes everything!

THEME VERSE: Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths. Psalm 25:4

BONUS VERSE: Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Acts 2:21

BIBLE BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Holiness is a word that can be used to describe the very nature of God. When Isaiah saw the Lord enthroned in heaven, he heard the angels cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth” (Isaiah 6:3). Isaiah’s response was to say, “Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah encountered the holiness of God. Isaiah concluded that he was in the presence of Someone who was vastly different from himself. When God reveals Himself to us, we too will conclude that He is holy and we are not.

To be holy means to be separate and unique. God is holy in that His character is entirely unique and separate from what He created. God is also holy in that He is separated from the sin of this world. We live in a world that is scarred with sin. All we need to do is turn on the evening news to find this to be true. We are all also prone to sin. A child doesn’t need to be taught to bend the truth; this comes naturally. Because of sin the relationship between God and humans is broken.

Jesus is holy in that He is God’s unique and only begotten Son. When He was here on earth, He encountered sin in others but He never sinned. He was separated from it. He saw the effects of sin within the everyday lives of people He encountered, but He did not embrace sin itself.

The Bible teaches that holiness is something that we are called to pursue. Peter told the scattered and persecuted church, “as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15). Peter affirmed the holiness of God and called the church to the same holiness.

Isaiah encountered the holiness of God enthroned in glory. His response was to bow in worship. Peter encountered Jesus, God in the flesh. He too responded in worship. Today’s study is one in which we see the holiness of Jesus, and we too will have the opportunity to respond in worship to the One who is holy.
One of the all-time favorite hymns of the faith is “I Surrender All.” It was written by Judson Van DeVenter (1885–1939). The first verse is: “All to Jesus I surrender / All to Him I freely give / I will ever love and trust Him / In His presence daily live.” It would be wise for all of us to stop and think about these words prior to singing them out of memory. What exactly does it mean to surrender? If we discover the answer to this question, are we truly willing to surrender all?

On one of Peter’s first encounters with Jesus and His holiness, Peter surrendered some of his time and possessions. Peter had been fishing throughout the night and was cleaning his nets. Jesus was teaching the crowds about the kingdom of God. He needed a place to teach from as the people were crowding around Him. Jesus climbed into Peter’s boat and asked him to push away from the shoreline. Peter could have provided an excuse that he was too busy or too tired. Instead of doing this, he surrendered his time as well as the use of his boat.

The chorus of Van DeVenter’s song is: “I surrender all / I surrender all / All to thee my blessed Savior / I surrender all.” Peter embodied this on a small scale even before he had a chance to see the scope of Jesus’ character. May we be as courageous to surrender today.

Have you ever had someone come in to your place of work and begin to tell you how you need to do things? If yes, you probably rolled your eyes and thought, “What does this person know?” Then, when you knew he was not looking, you may have actually tried his suggestion and discovered that it was extremely helpful.

Peter and his coworkers had been fishing all night and had not caught a single fish. Jesus showed up, asked to use their boat and was teaching the masses. At the end of His time of teaching, Jesus told Peter to move into deep water and put the nets down for a catch. We do not have any indications that Jesus was back on dry land, so He was probably still in the boat.

Peter offered a few words of objection, but did what Jesus told him to do. It appears there was little to no delay between Jesus’ command and Peter’s obedience. This was an open act of submission. Sure, Peter may have thought he knew better, hence his initial response. But, Peter did not let his so-called knowledge stop him from living in obedience. Peter responded in humble submission. Peter’s submission led to greater things and began a journey filled with multiple twists and turns. Our submission to the One who is holy has the possibility of leading us on a similar journey that we will never forget or regret.
SINCE JESUS IS HOLY, I WILL WORSHIP (LUKE 5:6-11)
Worship means giving honor, reverence, and praise to God. It occurs when we have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and acknowledge who He is. He changes us as a result. Peter had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Then, Jesus told him to go to the deep water and lower his nets. As Peter responded in submissive obedience, Jesus displayed His holiness in allowing Peter to catch so many fish that he needed help to get them in the boat. The catch was so great that the nets began to break and the boats began to sink. This could not have occurred apart from the power of God. At this point Peter fell to his knees, acknowledged his own sin, and showed honor and reverence to Jesus.

Peter did not worship the fish he had caught. He did not worship his own fishing skills. Instead, he worshiped Jesus. We in today’s world can be prone to worship our jobs, our status, our families, or a host of other things. None of these things deserve our worship because none of these things are holy. Only Jesus deserves our worship because only Jesus is holy.

SINCE JESUS IS HOLY, I WILL FOLLOW (MATTHEW 4:18-20)
Matthew also provides an account of Jesus and His encounter with several of His disciples. Jesus’ disciples were an eclectic group of regular men. When Jesus approached them He would say, “Follow Me.” Jesus was not inviting Peter and Andrew to an event or a single outing. Instead, the invitation was to an extended journey. The Bible indicates that Peter and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed Jesus.

Peter and Andrew knew that Jesus was unique from all of the other teachers of the law. Peter saw Jesus’ holiness in comparison with Peter’s sinfulness. Their response to Jesus’ holiness was to leave everything and follow Jesus. They were not following a set of teachings or a new way of thinking. Jesus called Peter and Andrew to a journey of understanding Him and His holiness. He is still calling men and women, boys and girls to this same journey today.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION
• When we come to understand that Jesus is holy, we cannot help but reach the conclusion that we are not holy. We see this being lived out in Isaiah 6 as well as today’s study. Have you come to the realization that Jesus is holy and you are not? When was the first time you realized that? How did it affect your life? If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, take a moment to share with someone the difference this decision has made and continues to make in your everyday life.

• All four passages we have studied show Jesus as holy and Peter responding in some form of obedience. Peter surrendered, submitted, worshiped, and followed. How does Jesus want you to respond in obedience today? Take some time to pray and journal about this question. Conclude your study time by praying for those participating in Adult VBS. Ask the Father to give each of you the faith and courage needed to walk in obedience.
SESSION 2

JESUS IS TRUSTWORTHY

BIBLE STORY: Peter Walked to Jesus on the Water (Matthew 14:22-33)

TODAY’S POINT: Jesus is trustworthy even when I doubt.

THEME VERSE: Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths. Psalm 25:4

BONUS VERSE: Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

BIBLE BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

What does it take to earn someone’s trust? A simple answer to this question can be consistency. We trust an old friend because he has consistently been faithful to his word. We trust our boss because she has consistently shown up on time, given her best, and always fought for the best interests of people she leads. We trust our earthly parents because they have consistently been there for us and provided for our needs.

If consistency is a key to trustworthiness, then we can trust Jesus as He is the model of consistency. Today’s Bible study will reveal this truth. We will learn that during His earthly ministry, Jesus was consistent when no one else was around. He was also consistent when it seemed like everything was falling apart. Because of this truth, we need not live in fear of our circumstances. Finally, we will see that Jesus is trustworthy to save us. When we cry out to Him, He is faithful to be with us.

CHRIST IS TRUSTWORTHY IN PRAYER (MATTHEW 14:22-23)

The context of today’s study is that Jesus had just fed five thousand men as well as women and children. As the crowds dispersed, He made the disciples get in a boat and go to the other side of the sea. Jesus had just completed a long day of ministry. He knew that it was important for Him to connect with the Father in prayer.

Jesus’ prayer life was not limited to this one example. Luke tells us that Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray and spent all night in prayer to God. When daylight came, he summoned his disciples, and he chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles” (Luke 6:12-13). Jesus also spent part of the night in prayer when He was betrayed. He went with His disciples “to a place called Gethsemane, and he told the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray’” (Matthew 26:36). Spending time in prayer was not an afterthought for Jesus. Instead, He knew it was important and He made it a regular part of His life.

What should our lives look like as a result of studying Jesus’ prayer life? Jesus knew that connecting with the Father in prayer was vital, and we can see this in His choice to pray consistently. It would be wise for us to model our prayer lives after His and make praying a regular part of our journey with the Father.
CHRIST IS TRUSTWORTHY IN THE STORM (MATTHEW 14:24-27)

Jesus’ trustworthiness does not stop with Him being faithful to pray. He is also trustworthy when we find ourselves in the midst of a storm. Matthew indicated that the ship was battered by the waves. Mark’s account of this story tells us that the disciples were straining at the oars (Mark 6:48). The word straining reveals a consistent and ongoing struggle against a strong force.

Have you ever experienced anything like this before? No, you may not have feared for your life while battling a great storm at sea. But, you could have found yourself in the midst of a difficult, even insurmountable circumstance that was no fault of your own and you were not sure how everything was going to turn out. After all, the disciples were caught in the storm because Jesus told them to go ahead of Him and they obeyed. If you have experienced this, then you can relate to what the disciples were going through in that moment.

Jesus revealed His trustworthiness to the disciples in the midst of the chaos by literally walking out on the sea to them. Jesus showed His power over the world He created. We can trust this power. We can also trust His presence. Mark’s account indicates that Jesus saw them in the midst of the struggle while He was still on land (Mark 6:47-48). As Jesus witnessed everything taking place, He responded by walking out to the disciples. He did not leave them alone in the storm nor abandon them.

The Bible indicates that the disciples were terrified when they saw Jesus walking toward them. This describes a feeling of extreme fear. This was not a mild feeling of helplessness. In this moment, Jesus once again proved His trustworthiness by identifying who He is and telling them to stop being afraid.

The words “It is I” in verse 27 literally mean “I am.” Theologians believe Jesus was intentionally echoing the Old Testament. He was saying “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Jesus identified Himself as Yahweh. He is God the Son.

Jesus also said, “Have courage!” and “Don't be afraid!” (Matthew 14:27). The command to not be afraid any longer was not because the disciples’ circumstances had changed, but rather because the One who is trustworthy had arrived.

We too have most likely found ourselves in difficult circumstances. The proverbial storms of life have engulfed us and we are unsure of how everything is going to turn out. We might have even wondered where God is in the midst of the storm. We, like the disciples, have focused on the negative circumstances and have not noticed that Jesus has come to us. We fear our circumstances, and He is calling out telling us not to be afraid any more.

God will not always change our circumstances when we cry out to Him. These circumstances are a result of living in a world that is broken by sin. We will not always obtain our desired outcome. But the promise of Scripture and what we see in this passage is that Jesus will always be with us as we travel through difficult times. For this reason, we do not need to be afraid.
CHRIST IS TRUSTWORTHY TO SAVE US (MATTHEW 14:28-33)

The final example of Jesus’ trustworthiness in this passage is that He will reach out to save us when we cry out to Him. Peter spoke to Jesus while the storm was still raging. He followed Jesus’ command to come out to Him on the water. But, Peter quickly became distracted by his surrounding circumstances and began to sink. At this moment, “he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’” (Matthew 14:30). Peter knew that his physical circumstances were dire and he cried out to the One who could rescue him from the storm.

We can see Jesus’ trustworthiness in the way He immediately reached out His hand and caught hold of Peter. There is no delay between Peter crying out for help and Jesus reaching out His hand.

How many of us have felt like Peter before? We have taken steps of faith and yet fear has gripped us again. If you are in this situation, know that all you need to do is cry out to Jesus. He wants to offer you the same opportunity He offered Peter. He may not change the circumstances, but He will walk with you through them. He is standing right there next to you. Reach out and take His hand.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

• When has Jesus proven Himself to be trustworthy to you specifically? Was He trustworthy throughout a struggle with a wayward child? Was He trustworthy when the diagnosis was not what you were expecting or hoping? His trustworthiness does not mean that it all ended the way you hoped that it would. He proved trustworthy in that He walked with you every step of the way. If you are willing, share this with your group as you teach so that they can hear a current example of His trustworthiness.

• Peter knew that he was in trouble, so he cried out to Jesus, “Save me!” What circumstances or situations would hinder us from crying out to Jesus to save us in the midst of our storms? Make a list. Then, find specific passages from God’s Word that reveal the truth in these situations. Look for the trustworthiness of Jesus and verses that urge you to cry out to Him, even when you feel like you can’t. Do not look at this only from the standpoint of the lost crying out for salvation. Those who know Jesus also experience storms and need to cry out to Him as well.
BIBLE BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Jesus forgives our sins. We may have heard a parent or grandparent voice this. We might have heard it in Sunday School. Do we fully understand the implication of this truth? In order to truly understand, it is vital to understand what the word sin means.

A biblical definition of the word sin is “to miss the mark.” Someone playing the game of horseshoes has a mark he is aiming at. He wants to hit a ringer (when the horseshoe lands hooked or ringed around the post) every time. The ringer is a predetermined standard that he is seeking to accomplish. The fact is, a ringer is not very common.

While life is not a game of horseshoes, we do have a set standard. God has called us to be holy because He is holy (1 Peter 1:16). We learned what holiness is in Session 1 and we also know that we all fall short of God’s perfect standard (Romans 3:23). Since we all fall short of God’s holy and perfect standard, we are all in need of forgiveness.

Today’s study shows Jesus forgiving Peter’s future, present, and past sins. Jesus knew that Peter was going to sin even before Peter sinned. He provided warning and offered forgiveness throughout the entire process. Even though Peter did not heed the warning, Jesus was still willing to forgive and offer restoration.

SESSION 3
JESUS IS FORGIVING


TODAY’S POINT: Jesus is forgiving even when I sin.

THEME VERSE: Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths.
Psalm 25:4

BONUS VERSE: In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
Colossians 1:14
JESUS FORGIVES FUTURE SINS (LUKE 22:31-34)

Jesus had just shared the first Lord’s Supper with His disciples. Jesus communicated with His disciples what was soon to take place. Peter, in his typical bold style, told Jesus that he would always be faithful to Jesus even if it meant death. Jesus told Peter, “the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:34).

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, deny can mean “to refuse to admit or acknowledge something” or in this case someone. Jesus said Peter would deny Him not just once, but repeatedly. Peter’s sin would be to such an extent that he would repetitively deny any knowledge of Jesus.

The forgiveness that is easily seen throughout this study is already evident in this passage. Jesus could have denied Peter. He could have become frustrated or yelled. Jesus knew that Peter was going to sin and He would have been justified to tell Peter to leave. But, He didn’t. Instead, Jesus offered a warning and a promise for future restoration.

Have you ever looked back at a situation in which you missed the mark and clearly seen the warnings that were all around you? When we realize how easily we ignore God’s warnings and walk into sin anyway, we feel frustrated and disillusioned. We also feel accepted because we know that God was offering forgiveness even before we sinned (Romans 5:8). He did this with Peter and He is still faithful to us when we miss His perfect mark.

JESUS FORGIVES PRESENT SINS (LUKE 22:54-62)

As the night moved on, Jesus was betrayed and arrested. The night had grown long and His mock trial had begun. Peter followed at a distance in an effort to observe what was taking place. At this point other onlookers approached Peter and asked him if he knew Jesus.

This was the perfect time for Peter. In Luke 22:33 Peter said, “I’m ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” This was his time to shine. He could have loudly proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah, God’s Son. He had proclaimed this to Jesus and the other disciples when it was safe to do so (Matthew 16:16; Luke 9:20). Now was the time to say it yet again and fulfill his promise to Jesus. What did he do? Three times he emphatically stated that he did not even know Jesus. To make matters even worse, as the rooster crowed “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61). Peter was close enough to Jesus that they were able to make eye contact and he still denied even knowing Jesus.

Let’s take a quick journey together. How have you and I missed the mark today? We can answer this in our own hearts and minds. We may have lied today. We may have borrowed a few things from the office and have zero plans of returning them. We may have expressed our anger badly on the road today or shared some gossip with a friend about a fellow church member. No matter what the situation is, Jesus knew we were going to do this just like He knew what Peter was going to say. Not only this, Jesus, who is not limited to time or space, was close enough to see us as we were engaging in the sinful behavior.

While this is painful to realize, we can be encouraged by Jesus’ forgiveness.
If Jesus wanted to, He could have stopped the entire fake trial He was in and reprimanded Peter. He could have engaged in an “I told you so” moment. But, He didn’t do this. We don’t know what Jesus’ facial expression was when He made eye contact with Peter. He may have looked sad, knowing, or sympathetic. But we know from Romans 5:8 that Jesus died for our sins “while we were still sinners.” Jesus was in the process of going to the cross and offering forgiveness for Peter’s sin while Peter was committing it. Jesus died for the sins that we have committed today as well.

**JESUS FORGIVES PAST SINS** *(JOHN 18:15-18; 21:1-19)*

After Jesus had died and risen back to life, Peter had returned to his previous profession of fishing. Several disciples decided to go with him. John wrote that yet again the disciples had been fishing all night and had not caught a single fish. That had to be frustrating.

Jesus appeared on the shoreline, but they did not recognize Him. He asked if they had caught anything. I can hear them sigh as they had to admit no. “Cast the net on the right side of the boat ... and you’ll find some” was the reply from the man on the shoreline. They did, and John 21:6 continues, “They were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish.” It was then that they realized that it was Jesus.

Knowing that it was Jesus, Peter quickly jumped out of the boat and headed for shore. After time together over breakfast, the two of them began a conversation in which Christ asked Peter if Peter loved Jesus three times. Peter became “grieved” by the third time and said, “you know that I love you.” *(John 21:17)*

Jesus knew what Peter was going to say and do before Jesus was even arrested. Jesus was aware of Peter’s sins when Peter was denying Him. And Jesus was aware of Peter’s sins from the past and was offering forgiveness and restoration.

We serve a gracious Savior. He offers us the same forgiveness that He offered Peter. No matter where we may be in the process of understanding the forgiveness of Jesus, we can rest assured that He knows we have missed His mark. He is offering forgiveness.

**QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION:**

- Was the forgiveness found in Christ sufficient to forgive Peter of his sin? Was the forgiveness of Christ sufficient for the apostle Paul? Is the forgiveness found only in Christ sufficient to forgive the worst offender in today’s society? Is the forgiveness in Christ sufficient to forgive you? We know the answer to each question is yes. If that’s true, why is it sometimes so hard to forgive ourselves when we miss the mark? Take time to journal and pray over this question.

- Some people contend that focusing on forgiveness and grace too much could lead to us to make excuses for sinful behavior. Paul dealt with this when he asked the church at Rome, “Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” *(Romans 6:1-2)* How should people live when they truly understand and embrace the forgiveness found in Christ? Would this understanding lead to more sin or less sin in their lives? Journal and pray over this question. Discuss it with VBS participants as you lead this session.
BIBLE BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION
What was it like for a person when Jesus walked up to him and said, “Follow Me”? Something profound must have taken place around those simple words because men like Peter and John left everything behind to follow Jesus.

This was a drastic choice. But from the very start, Jesus did things to show that He could be trusted as a leader. From providing a giant catch of fish to stopping a storm, Jesus showed that He is God the Son. He taught about the kingdom of God with a wisdom that astonished people. He gave His life to provide redemption for our sins.

When others began to walk away from Jesus during His ministry, He asked the disciples what their choice would be.

“So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘You don’t want to go away too, do you?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’” (John 6:67-69)

No wonder that, when circumstances began to look difficult, Peter and John were still among those following Jesus. Today’s Bible study will show that they understood Jesus to be worth following no matter the circumstances.

JESUS IS WORTH FOLLOWING IN OUR EVERYDAY SCHEDULE (ACTS 3:1-10)
What does your everyday schedule look like? You may be in the work force and interact with coworkers throughout the day. You may be a student with classmates and roommates around you. You may be retired with a schedule busy with grandchildren or volunteering in the community. No matter which category you find yourself in, Jesus is worth following in your everyday activities and interactions.

Peter and John seemed to be going about their regular routines. They were on the way to the temple to pray when they encountered a man in need. He could not walk and so he could also not work or earn money. He sat outside the temple and begged from the people passing by.
Verse 4 indicates that Peter and John looked straight at this man. They were aware of his presence and did not intend to walk by. Are we aware of the needs of those around us? Are we willing to look straight at someone and invite that person to look at us? It can be a coworker in the cubical next to us or it can be the person who stocks the shelves at our local grocery store. Peter and John offered the man more than money. They offered him Jesus.

The end result of this exchange was that the man’s need was met in a way he didn’t expect and others were filled with awe at what had taken place. Peter and John were ordinary men who were following Jesus. They chose to follow Him as they went about their everyday activities. Jesus was worth following then and He is worth following now. Let’s commit to asking God to show us the needs of others around us. Let’s ask Him to use us to testify to His goodness.

JESUS IS WORTH FOLLOWING BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS (ACTS 3:11-26)

As a crowd began to gather, Peter used this opportunity to proclaim the gospel message. As he did, he used several key phrases to show that Jesus is worth following. First, Peter said that Jesus is the “Holy and Righteous One” (Acts 3:14). We learned in Session 1 about Jesus’ holiness. Here we learn that He is also righteous. To be righteous means to be morally right or free from sin. As God the Son, Jesus always does what is right. He lived a sinless life. The fact that Peter used the word “One” indicates that Jesus was the only person to ever fully achieve this righteousness. This character trait makes Him worth following.

A second key phrase Peter used was stating that Jesus is the "source of life" (verse 15). Other translations use the word “Author,” “Prince,” and “Originator.” We learn from this phrase that Jesus is the One who creates life. We all desire to live our lives to the fullest extent. Jesus is trustworthy in leading us to a full and abundant life and therefore He is worth following.

Peter’s message also indicated that Jesus fulfilled what was taught about the Messiah in the Old Testament. The prophets had predicted that the Messiah would come as a servant and suffer a horrible death. This prediction was fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus.

Some people secure financial planners who help them steward the resources God has given them. They trust these financial planners with not only their current dollars, but also with their future dollars. They listen to the counsel of these planners and respond accordingly. Jesus wants to offer us much more than a stable retirement. He is offering us eternal life because He is the Righteous One, source of life, and has fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. He is trustworthy, and we can follow Him.
JESUS IS WORTH FOLLOWING EVEN WHEN IT IS NOT POPULAR (ACTS 4:1-12)

Some were praising God for the miracle of healing at the temple that afternoon and others were not. The priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted Peter and John concerning what had taken place. They were annoyed at them for teaching in Jesus’ name and proclaiming His resurrection from the dead. This, however, did not stop Peter and John from continuing to proclaim the name of Christ. Instead, it emboldened them to follow Him all the more.

Following Jesus can be costly, but it is worth it. Peter and John paid a cost and continued to proclaim the truth even in this circumstance. Some disciples have paid a much greater cost: that of their lives. Modern day examples include Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) and Jim Elliot (1927-1956). Elliot is known for his quote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Both Bonhoeffer and Elliot gave their lives for Jesus because they too knew that He is worth following.

JESUS IS WORTH FOLLOWING EVEN WHEN WE ARE TOLD NOT TO (ACTS 4:13-24)

The religious leaders found themselves in a difficult setting. They had heard from Peter and John and acknowledged that the two had been with Jesus. They saw firsthand the man who had been unable to walk for more than 40 years of his life and could now walk and leap. They now had a decision to make. Should they punish Peter and John for their actions and message? Their response was to reprimand the two and tell them to stop teaching in Jesus’ name. Peter and John responded with, “we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Many of us have grown accustomed to an “invitation” at the end of a church service. The pastor has concluded his message and he invites the congregation to respond. When we see someone respond, we celebrate with that person and feel encouraged by her decision. Have you ever stopped to consider the cost to the one making the decision? Some may be coming from a different faith background and are risking much for making a public decision to follow Jesus. Others may become estranged from family or friends because of their decision. Those making this type of decision do so because they know, like Peter and John, that Jesus is worth following even when others are telling them they should not or are not allowed to do so.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

• Peter and John testified that Jesus was worth following because He is the Holy and Righteous One. List as many characteristics of Jesus as you can think of. Spend some time worshiping Jesus because He is all those things and more.

• Do you know someone who has not decided to follow Jesus? Maybe it’s a someone in your VBS group or maybe a friend or family member. Spend time praying for unbelievers who are on your heart.
SESSION 5
JESUS IS FOR EVERYONE

BIBLE STORY: Peter Told Cornelius about Jesus (Acts 10)
TODAY’S POINT: Jesus is for everyone, including me.
THEME VERSE: Make your ways known to me, LORD; teach me your paths. 
Psalm 25:4
BONUS VERSE: All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins. Acts 10:43

BIBLE BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION
Have you ever traveled to another country for work or for a mission trip? Did you go to church while you were there? Did you experience the thrill of realizing that the people in this church may speak a different language, dress differently, or have different cultural customs, but they still worship the same Jesus that you do? They have experienced His wondrous grace and forgiveness. They sing beautiful praises to His name.

It’s easy for anyone to get his focus stuck in the place he lives. But the passage we will study today has an important truth for us to embrace. Our language, skin color, customs, or location have no bearing on the love Jesus shows us. Jesus does not have favorites. Jesus is truly for everyone.

Today’s passage teaches this truth as Peter takes the gospel message to a Gentile audience. The message that Peter preached was no different from the message he and John preached to the Jewish temple goers and religious leaders in the passages from Session 4. He could preach this message because God miraculously showed him that Jesus is truly for everyone.

JESUS IS FOR PEOPLE LIKE CORNELIUS (ACTS 10:1-8)
The first person we meet in today’s study is Cornelius. The Bible says that he was a centurion in the Italian Regiment. This means that he was a military man in charge of approximately one hundred soldiers. He was a leader who worked for Rome in Caesarea, which was a Jewish region. The Jews did not want the Romans in their land. Because of this, they would not have enjoyed Cornelius’ company at social gatherings. What’s more, the cleanliness standards of the Jews barred a Jew from associating with Gentiles.

Even though this was the case, Cornelius was a devout man who feared God and performed many charitable deeds for the Jewish people.

One day, about three in the afternoon, Cornelius saw a vision of an angel of God. This was a shocking experience for Cornelius and he responded in awe at what he was seeing. The angel of the Lord commanded Cornelius to send men to Joppa and find a man named Simon Peter. Cornelius’ response was one of immediate obedience.

At this point, many Jews believed that salvation was only for them. (See Romans 3:29.) This passage shows that not to be the case. Cornelius’ encounter with the angel of the Lord shows that God chose to reach out to Gentiles and not just Jews. This was true then and it is true today.
**JESUS IS FOR PEOPLE LIKE PETER** *(ACTS 10:9-21)*

Our story shifts and we are reintroduced to Peter. This is the same Peter who walked on water, who was restored by Jesus after denying Him three times, and who later boldly proclaimed the gospel message to a Jewish audience. He also had a vision from the Lord.

In Peter’s vision, the Lord invited him to eat things that were considered ceremonially unclean. Peter emphatically replied, “No, Lord!” God used this vision to communicate the truth that the gospel message is for both Jews and Gentiles. He told Peter, “What God has made clean, do not call impure” *(Acts 10:15)*.

We would all most likely agree that Peter’s resumé for following Jesus through the twists and turns of life was rather extensive. This vision, however, shows the fact that Jesus was not done with Peter yet. Peter still had growing to do, and he still had work to do.

If you are like Peter and have an extensive history with Jesus, you need to understand that Jesus is for you. If you are more like Cornelius and are new to the faith, Jesus is still for you. No matter who you resemble more, you can rest assured that Jesus is for you.

**JESUS IS FOR PEOPLE LIKE OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY** *(ACTS 10:22-33)*

As the story continues, we find the gospel message being preached to Cornelius’ friends and family members. Jesus is for our friends and family too.

Peter traveled to Joppa with those Cornelius sent because the Holy Spirit told Peter to do so. Peter obeyed God’s calling. When Peter arrived, Cornelius had called together his relatives and close friends. They were waiting for Peter.

Peter asked Cornelius why he sent for Peter. When he heard what the angel told Cornelius, things clicked for Peter. He said, “Now I truly understand that God doesn’t show favoritism” *(Acts 10:34)*.

This must have been a shocking experience for Peter. He had been taught that it was “forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner” *(Acts 10:28)*. God’s calling, however, showed that God does not show favorites, and Peter was striving to be obedient to God’s calling.

Have you ever thought about the diversity of people who live around you? Some of your neighbors might be retired while others are still working. Some neighbors may have grown up in a different part of the world and others may be fifth generation locals. Some may do things very differently from you. What does it look like to see your neighborhood as your mission field? Cornelius knew there was a message his friends needed to hear, so he invited them to hear it. Not only can we look at our neighborhoods this way, we can also see our own families in this manner. Cornelius came to understand that the gospel message was for everyone, and he wanted to ensure that his family and friends had the chance to hear it.
JESUS IS FOR YOU AND ME (ACTS 10:34-48)

The story now culminates in Peter taking the opportunity to share the gospel message. One of his early statements was, “Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). A lord is someone who is in charge. And Jesus is in charge of all—not just one group of people. Jesus Christ is in charge of everything. Nothing happens apart from His knowledge.

As Peter shared the truth of the gospel, Cornelius’ friends and family members became believers and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Is the group attending your Vacation Bible School pretty similar or extremely diverse? Even if you have similarities, you will still have differences because each person is unique. We come from diverse backgrounds, diverse zip codes, diverse church experiences, and diverse age groups. No matter the background, we have not been excluded from hearing the good news of Jesus. Many responded in obedience when they heard Peter’s message. May the same be said of the people who are hearing this message today.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

• Cornelius took steps to gather his relatives and friends for them to hear the gospel message. What would it look like for you to begin to see your neighborhood as more than a place to live but also a place to share the gospel message? What does it look like to be highly intentional in making sure that your family members are regularly exposed to the gospel message?

• As Cornelius, Peter, and all those who heard the gospel came to understand that Jesus was for them, they responded in obedience. Cornelius sent for Peter. Peter proclaimed the gospel. Those in the audience responded to the gospel and were baptized. Which person in this story do you most identify with, and how does Jesus want you to respond now that you better understand that Jesus is for you?
FOLLOWING JESUS
CHANGES EVERYTHING