

Exactly What We Need

Small Group Study based on "My Son, My Savior"

This three-session study is intended for small group Bible studies, especially those led by a spiritually mature, though not necessarily theologically-trained, Christian. It is designed to evoke heartfelt discussion in a safe environment where participants are assured of God's forgiveness for past failures. The interaction also evokes meaningful encouragement to strive to live for God out of grateful love for the love he first showed us through his Son.

The goals of the three sessions are:

- To help each of us see, as Mary came to see, that Jesus is exactly what we need.
- To help us treasure that truth, even if we have known it for many years.
- To give us encouragement for helping others also see that Jesus is exactly what they need.
- To share ideas for sharing Jesus with others.

Session 1 - Jesus Fills Our Biggest Need

Introduction: Watch the movie

Watch entire movie (unless all participants have recently viewed it)

Discussion

My need for Jesus

1. List reasons Mary may have been tempted to believe she did not need a savior from sin.

2. Read Luke 1:46-47. Although a full understanding took time, Mary acknowledged her need for a savior before Christ was born. Recall scenes from the movie that portrayed Mary's growing understanding of her need and how Jesus met it.

3. Each of us, even longtime Christians, can be tempted to overlook our need for a savior. These verses contain God's answer to some of these temptations. For each verse, try to identify a way Satan tries to get you to rationalize or minimize your sin and need for a savior. Then explain God's answer.

- Psalm 51:5
- Ephesians 2:1
- James 2:10

4. Though we fall short of God's perfect standards, Jesus gives us the good news that he has met those standards for us and forgives our failures. When we confess our sins (either regularly in worship services or privately to a person we've offended), describe the impact on our hearts and minds by the assurance that our sins are forgiven? How will that impact affect the way we conduct our life?

Other's need for a Savior

5. So many in our world ignore or reject their need for a savior. Compare the rejection by Jesus' critics in his day depicted in the movie with the rejection of Jesus' by critics in our day. List similarities and differences.

6. Brainstorm ways you might be able to lead someone you know with limited knowledge of Jesus to at least consider his claims to be their Savior. Share your ideas.

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus:

Thank you for being Mary's son, my brother, and the world's Savior. Help us to trust and treasure this knowledge always. May your love for us move us to look for opportunities to share you with others and give us courage to speak or act when those opportunities arise. Amen.

(At each session, individuals in the group may pray for the opportunity to share Jesus with specific individuals in their lives, or offer those names to the leader beforehand for the leader to include in the prayer.)

Session 2 - We Need Jesus to be God and Man

Introduction

During the events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood, Mary encounters her initial struggles to understand the full implications of the fact that her son is also God's Son. He is God and man in one person. In this session, we will turn to God's Word to help us understand the blessings we have because Jesus is both God and man. Then we will seek ways to share this Jesus with others.

Watch first half of movie (through scene of 12-year Jesus at the Temple)

Discussion

Jesus is God

1. Most of Jesus' demonstrations of his power as God come later in his life. Yet even as a 12-year old, Jesus would not let Mary and Joseph think that he was just their human son. Try to recall at least three pieces of evidence from the events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood that indicated to Mary and Joseph that Jesus was indeed God.

2. For each reference below list the blessings that you have because Jesus is God and describe the encouragement you receive as a result.

- Ephesians 1:18-23

- Colossians 2:9-12

- Hebrews 4:14-16

3. Perhaps many people you know do not acknowledge that Jesus is God. List some of the substitutes for Jesus that people worship in their lives (as their "gods") and give reasons people choose these "gods."

4. For the various false gods in #3 above, give at least one reason that Jesus is a better true God.

Jesus is man

5. The story of Jesus' birth is powerful evidence of his humanity. He is indeed "Emmanuel", God with us. Read Philippians 2:5-8. Explain how Jesus' willingness to submit humbly to his Father's plan gives us motivation to submit to God's will for our lives.

6. For each reference below identify blessings we have because Jesus was willing to become one of us and describe the encouragement you receive as a result.

- Matthew 4:2; 8:24; John 11:35; John 19:28

- Galatians 4:4-7

- Hebrews 4:14-15

Sharing Jesus

7. Using your responses to #2 and #4 above, take a few minutes to privately formulate a positive response to someone who says: "I don't understand why Jesus is such a big deal to you. I seem to be doing just fine without him." After a few minutes, share your answers.

8. Together with the others in your group strategize how you might interest a friend that has mistaken ideas about Jesus to watch "My Son, My Savior." Include as part of your strategy your plan for follow-up questions afterward to assess whether your friend has a better idea who Jesus really is.

9. 20th Century British author C.S.Lewis is known for challenging people to consider the claims of Jesus. According to Lewis, Jesus is either Lord (God and man and our Savior), or a liar, or a lunatic (a crazy person claiming to be God). Jesus does not allow us the option of thinking that he is just a good person or famous teacher. No other human prophet made or backs up claims (Matthew 26:62-65) as Jesus did. Describe witnessing situations where a discussion along these lines (Lord, liar or lunatic) may be fruitful (or not).

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for giving up your throne in heaven to become one us, yet without sin. Help us to take comfort in your personal knowledge and experience in struggling with our day-to-day challenges. Give us renewed trust in your strength as God and Lord to provide for our needs. Encourage us to find and seize the openings to sharing you as Lord. Amen.

Session 3 We Need Jesus to Live, Die and Rise

Introduction

The first thirty years of Jesus' life story is mostly unknown except for the few glimpses of events recorded by Matthew and Luke. But the gospels are full of events from his three ministry years, with special attention given the last week before his death and resurrection. Mary was witness to much of this, during which a sword "pierced her own soul." Yet, in spite of her pain, through her son's suffering God was carrying out his plan for eternal joy for all of us.

Watch second half of movie (starting: John the Baptist – Chapter 3 on DVD)

Christ's first purpose - obey perfectly in action

1. Last session we considered Jesus' willingness to submit to his heavenly Father's will (Philippians 2:5-8). Part of that plan was living as part of the human family that did not fully understand God's plan until after he completed it. Recall scenes from the movie where Mary or other family members struggled with what Jesus was doing (or not doing).

2. Identify how God's Word describes our impossible-to-meet need in the first two passages and how only Jesus meets this need in the second two.

- Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15-16

- Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21

3. Describe how Jesus' words and actions at the temple as a boy (viewed in the previous session) and at the wedding at Cana show his obedience to his earthly parents AND his obedience to his heavenly Father.

4. Part of Jesus' obedience involved pointing out the self-righteousness and hypocrisy of those who thought they did not need Jesus. In his culture this involved "violating" man-made Sabbath laws and showing love and giving aid to sinners and outcasts. Make two lists, one of the self-righteous people we may be called to oppose and a second list of the outcasts we may be called to embrace (without embracing their sin) in our culture.

Christ's second purpose - obey perfectly in inaction (passively)

5. John the Baptist pointed out to the people where the life of his cousin, Jesus, ultimately would lead. Yet he needed reassurance that Jesus was the Lamb of God. List doubts and concerns Mary may have had as opposition to her Son began to peak.

6. Find specific phrases from the following passages in Scripture that show that Jesus went to his excruciating death willingly of his own accord.

- Matthew 26:36-56 (especially 42, 53-54)
- Mark 10:42-45
- John 10:17-18

7. Jesus claimed gentleness, but not weakness (Matthew 21:5). He came as our king and promises to return (John 14:2,3). Explain the difference between gentleness (or meekness) and weakness, and the importance of this difference to those who place their trust in Jesus.

Sharing Jesus

8. Our sinful pride makes it difficult to admit we need a Savior. Take 90 seconds privately to formulate a possible response to someone who says to you: "I don't need or want help from some guy who died on a cross 2000 years ago. That's just a crutch for weak people." (Possible hint: Recall Jesus' power as God and his willingness to set that aside for us.) Share your answers.

9. Many people who reject belief in God the Father or his Son do so because they perceive God either causes evil in this world, or at least passively allows it to occur rather than prevent it. Put yourself in Mary's place and imagine the emotional pain she endured during her son's suffering and death. Consider also her final realization of God's plan after Jesus rose. After a minute, together as a group discuss what her perspective on God's use of evil might be. Then outline a response to the difficulties people have with God's responsibility for evil in the world. Base your ideas on the solution to all evil that God provided in his Son.

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for your perfect obedience in our place and giving us credit for your perfection. Thank you for being willing to endure the curse of God for the sin of the world so that we will never have to fear that curse. Help us to more fully understand your love for us so that we may better reflect that love to others, especially those in our lives who yet do not trust in all that you have done. Amen.