



CONNECT BOOKLET

CR  SSINGS
CROSS OVER FROM DEATH TO LIFE

Connect Day 1 *Jesus Is The Eternal I Am*

Review

Say: Tonight, we heard the story about Moses meeting God in the burning bush.

Ask: What did you learn from this passage about who God is?

Answer: [Answers will vary] Look for a student to mention God's surprising name: "I am who I am." Once they do, transition to the next question.

Ask: God's name is indeed surprising. What do we learn about God from his name?

Answers: [Guide students to the following answers]

- God is self-sufficient – God has life in himself and is not dependent on anything or any person outside of himself.
- God is eternal – God is the Creator who has always been there at all times and in all places. He always has been, and perhaps more importantly, he always will be.
- God keeps promises – the name "I Am" sounds like the name Yahweh, which God gave Abraham when he made promises to bless Abraham. As the name that represents God's great promises, it is a name that reminds all who hear it of God's story and God's reputation. God's story is one of salvation, mercy, redemption, and love. God's reputation is that he is a faithful promise keeper.

Ask: Why do you think God reveals himself as fire?

Answer: Fire represents the life that is in God but it also represents God's holiness. Moses had to take off his sandals to approach God. If any of us approach the presence God in a way that is not pleasing and respectful to God, God might judge us with his holy fire. We should not approach God while holding on to unrepentant sin, or with a lack of fearful reverence, or a heart attitude that accuses God of not being good.

A Study about Jesus "I Am" Statements

Say: During our afternoon Connect time this week, we are going to look at eight of Jesus' so-called "I Am" statements in the gospel of John. John traveled and ministered with Jesus, which makes him a reliable witness to Jesus' actual words and actions. John wrote his Gospel to help introduce people to Jesus so that they would believe in him and follow him. Turn with me to John 20:30.

The Purpose of John's Gospel

Ask: Who will read John 20:30-31 out loud for me.

John 20:30-31: "30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Ask: Why did John write this book?

Answer: To help others believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God.

Say: The word "Christ" means "anointed one." God promised throughout the history of Israel that he would send a great King to lead them and deliver them from slavery. By calling Jesus "the Christ," John is saying that Jesus is God's promised King. Notice that John also calls Jesus "the Son of God." Just as all sons share their Dad's nature, so John is claiming that Jesus shares God's nature. Jesus is more than a great king. He is God himself.

Ask: What does it mean to have "life in his name"?

Answer: Just as God's name is a name of promise, so Jesus' name is a name of promise. His name points to his identity, "Who is Jesus?" If we believe in his name, we believe in his identity. In other words, we believe that he is the promised king and God himself in human flesh. To have life in the name of Jesus means that we have salvation, or eternal life, through the person

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and work of Jesus. It is Jesus' identity, his name, as both God and man that enables him to give us eternal life.

Say: Turn with me to John 8. We are going to look at two other names of Jesus to help us understand who he is.

Jesus is the Light of the World

Ask: Who will read John 8:12?

John 8:12, *"12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*

Say: In chapter 7 of John's Gospel, we read how Jesus had gone to the Feast of Tabernacles and began speaking to the crowds in the Temple. The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated God's faithfulness to Israel during their wilderness wanderings, which occurred immediately after their Exodus from Egypt. The Exodus narrative records that God's presence accompanied Israel during the wilderness wanderings. God revealed himself in a pillar-shaped cloud during the day and as a pillar-shaped fire at night. In order to remember and celebrate God's display of his presence, the nation built four columns with four bowls of oil on top in the Temple complex. They lit the bowls on fire every night, which created a display so bright that it was visible from many miles away. It is with these four pillars burning in the background that Jesus proclaimed "I am the light of the world." Jesus was claiming to be God himself.

Ask: Can anyone think of other verses or Bible stories that describe God as light? Break up into groups of 2-3. I will assign each group a passage to discuss. Discuss what that passage teaches about God. Then, we will come back together and discuss as a group.

Answers: [\[Passages with answers are below\]](#)

Genesis 1:3 reports, *"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."* Light was God's first creation. As God, Jesus is the giver of light to all mankind.

Ex 13:21-22 tells, *"21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."* By saying "I am the Light" at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus was claiming to have been the one present in the pillar of cloud and fire during Israel's wilderness wanderings. Jesus was claiming to be Israel's God who delivered them from Egyptian slavery!

Psalms 119:105 says, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* The voice of God and instruction of God is likened to light on a dark path. Jesus is the one who shows the world the way to live life and know God.

Psalms 27:1, *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"* When God delivered Israel through the Red Sea, he lit the way for his people and darkened the path for Egypt. Jesus is the God who saved Israel and offers the same deliverance to all mankind.

John 1:3-9, *"3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."*

Explain: Earlier in his gospel, John equated Jesus' light with life. When Jesus calls himself light,

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he is offering to give life to everyone and to defeat the darkness of sin that is inside every person.

John 12:35-36, 46-47, “35 So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’ When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. 46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. 47 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.” Jesus compares obedience to God to walking in the light. Jesus came to give light and to take men away from the darkness. This means that Jesus does more than save us. Jesus gives us new hearts and wills filled with the light of God’s truth and the light of God’s ways. Jesus enables us to obey God and to walk with God as Jesus does.

1 John 1:5-7, “5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” John says directly that “God is light.” Interesting, he also says God has “no darkness,” meaning he has no sin and no deceit. God is righteous and true as light is pure and reliable. Notice also that John calls us all in verse 7 to “walk in the light” as Jesus does. For John, following Jesus is like walking in the light of righteousness and avoiding the darkness of sin.

Optional Game: Blindfold Clap

Choose a student to blindfold (or they can simply close their eyes). Have other students form a course for the student to follow. Students can simply spread out and the blindfolded student can journey from one student to the next. Tell the group: “Help the blindfolded student get to their destination by clapping when they go the right direction.” Have all the students start clapping and the blindfolded student start walking. Students should only use clapping to indicate that the student is going the right direction. You can also use cones, put students in two lines that zig-zags, or create a custom obstacle course. Allow multiple students to have the opportunity to be blindfolded. At the end of the game, discuss:

- What made this game difficult?
- What made this game easy?
- How does this game help you appreciate the fact that Jesus is light?
- How does Jesus provide us clear guidance in life? (Students should cite direct commands by Jesus, such as those from the Sermon on the Mount)

Say: After Jesus calls himself the light of the world, a debate between him and the religious leaders of the Jews follows. They understand what Jesus is saying but they refuse to believe in him. At the end of the debate, Jesus makes an even direct claim to his identity as God. Look down at John 8:56.

Jesus Is the “I Am” from the Burning Bush

Ask: Who will read John 8:56-59 out loud?

John 8:56-69, “56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ John 8:57 So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ 58 Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Ask: How does Jesus claim to be God in his statement here?

Answer: By claiming he existed before Abraham and by calling himself, “I am.” This is the same

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name that God revealed to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3:14.

Ask: Why do the Jews pick up stones in order to kill Jesus?

Answer: Because Jewish law required that anyone who blasphemed God or was a false prophet should be stoned to death. The religious leaders fully understood that Jesus was claiming to be God, but they refused to believe him.

Ask: How did Jesus prove himself to be God incarnate?

- By his many miracles, which were called “signs” because they pointed to his identity as God (John 2:11, 23; 4:54; 6:14; 7:31; 20:30).
- By the belief and testimony of many of his followers (John 1:29-34; Matt 14:33; 16:16; John 11:27).
- God’s voice confirmed his divine identity at his baptism (Matthew 3:17)
- Jesus shone like bright light at his transfiguration, which was the glory of God (Matthew 17:4)
- God’s voice confirmed his divine identity at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:5)
- Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the ultimate proof that he is God himself (John 20:27-28)

Say: The sum total of Jesus’ proclamation is this: I am God and have come to guide you to safety, reveal the truth to you, and defeat the darkness of evil.

Jesus Gives His Light to Those Who Believe

Ask: How does Jesus’ calling himself “light” give you hope and reason to follow him?

Answer:

- Jesus is a perfect revelation of God, which means I can know exactly what God is like (Heb 1:1).
- Jesus provides a well-lit path to a life that pleases God. By obeying Jesus and doing as he did, I know I can lead a life that pleases God (2 Cor 4:4-6).
- Jesus shines the light of his glory on my dark heart, giving me confidence that God’s light can defeat the darkness of my sin (1 John 1:5-7; 1 John 4:4; Rom 13:12; 1 Pet 2:9). Regardless of how deep and dark my sin is, Jesus’ light assures and reminds me that his grace is greater than my sin. (Rom 5:20)
- Jesus’ word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. By knowing God’s Word as revealed in the Bible, I can trust that I am hearing directly from Jesus.

Prayer Activity: Open to a blank page in your Bible Study Booklet. Spend 3 minutes writing a prayer to God, thanking him for his light and how his light saves you, helps you, guides you, and defeats the darkness that is in you.

Connect Day 2 *Jesus Is The Righteous I Am*

Who Do You Trust?

Ask: Who can tell a brief story of a time when their life was in danger or they were in a crisis?

[Note who students trusted to help them in these crises]

Ask: Why did you call or reach out to the people you did in your story?

Say: When we are in trouble, our actions reveal who we trust. We are going to call someone who is reliable, faithful, and who we know cares about us. If we had time to hear everyone's story, we might be surprised by who everyone called. A recent survey of teenagers revealed that in times of confusion or crisis, their parents were twenty-fifth on the list of people to whom they would turn for help.

Ask: What do you think the top choices were in this survey?

Answer: [Let students make a few guesses] Music and personal friends. While musicians often put into words what we feel and experience, very few of them would be considered wise and trustworthy. Our friends certainly care for us but have not lived life enough to truly learn how the world works. In John 10, Jesus is teaching his people Israel that they can fully trust him when they need help. He compares himself to a faithful shepherd, a reliable sheep pen, and to a sheep itself. He says of himself, "I am the good shepherd."

Ask: Who will read John 10:11 for us?

John 10:11, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

Shepherding Background

Say: Before we look deeper into John 10, you may think, "Who cares about sheep?" You have to understand that caring for sheep was a well-known occupation in Jesus' day. Just as many of us have likely worked somewhere like Chick-Fil-A or a grocery store or a retail store, so most of Jesus' audience would have been shepherds or be close friends with shepherd. We are tempted to think of Shepherds as Little Bo Peep, which is wrong. Shepherding was a dangerous, exhausting, severe, and lonely job. Shepherds were the tough guys. They were the U.S. Marines of their day.

When you read stories of the Bible, you'll notice that many of them happen in or near a desert. The entire eastern side of Israel is a desert that extends to the east for hundreds and even thousands of miles. From October to March, the frequent rains turn the desert into a place lush with vegetation. As a result, shepherds frequently took their flocks out into the desert to find new grazing grounds, watering holes, and safe places. Yet, the desert was still treacherous. Predators like lions, bears, and wolves were everywhere. Robbers wanting to steal sheep were abundant. In addition to hungry animals and dangerous thieves, their desert was filled with rocky cliffs and drop-offs. It was no safe place for sheep. For this reason, faithful shepherds knew how to avoid the dangerous places and find the safe places with grass and water. Shepherds also carried a long staff that they would use to beat back robbers and wild animals or to fetch back a sheep fallen into a ravine or off a ledge.

Jesus Is the Good Shepherd

Ask: How does the shepherding background help us understand what Jesus means when he calls himself the good shepherd?

Answer: [Let student's offer different thoughts. Lead them to the following] When Jesus says he is the good shepherd, we might understand him to be saying, "I am the noble shepherd" or "I am the trustworthy" shepherd or "I am the skilled shepherd." Jesus knows how to lead his

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sheep to water and pasture. "Sheep" is a metaphor for God's people, for those of us who have trusted Jesus. Jesus knows how to fight back hungry animals and snatching thieves. He leads his sheep on a path that is stable and not dangerous. He will not let them fall off a cliff or let their foot slip. Jesus also stays with his sheep through long nights and severe storms. He speaks to them. He sings to them. Because he is always with them, they know his voice. Because he is a caring shepherd, he is willing to sacrifice his time, energy, sleep, food, and even his life, for his sheep. Because he is a skilled shepherd, he is trustworthy.

Ask: Who will read John 10:1-5 for me?

John 10:1-5, "1 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Say: During Jesus' time, shepherds also maintained sheep pens where they could take their sheep to protect them. Often, a shepherd would drive the sheep from behind toward the door while someone stood at the gate holding it open. The gatekeeper knew the shepherd personally and trusted him.

Ask: Who is the thief and robber and who is the gatekeeper?

Answer: The thief and robber are false shepherds who will lead sheep astray. Satan is the ultimate false shepherd who lies and deceives God's people, leading them astray. But, the world is filled with many more false shepherds. The gatekeeper is God himself. God lets Jesus in to care for his people, his sheep. God trusts Jesus completely.

Ask: How do the sheep know who to follow?

Answer: They know their shepherd's voice. Because shepherd's spent so much time caring for them in the wilderness of the desert, they came to know their shepherd's voice intimately. Many of you have a dog at home. The dog knows who her master is and knows who is not her master. When the one who feeds her speaks, she comes running. Sheep are no different!

Optional Activity: Shepherding Exercise

Break students into 3-4 groups. Assign a "shepherd" to each group and make sure everyone in the group knows who their shepherd is. Once your groups are setup, have everyone close their eyes except the shepherds. Have your shepherds separate 75-150 feet away in different directions. On your instruction, tell the shepherds to all start singing or chanting. Instruct your group to go to their shepherd. The first shepherd to collect all his/her sheep into their general vicinity wins the game. If indoors, you can have the "sheep" point to their "shepherd."

Say: There is a story about a town in Israel that did not pay its taxes in the 1980s. As a result, an official collected all the sheep in the town and penned them up. A widowed woman later approached the official, begging for him sheep back and explaining that her husband was dead and her 25 sheep were her only means of survival. The official humorously replied that it was impossible to give her sheep back because he could not separate the animals. She then asked him, "If I can separate the sheep myself, would you let me take them?" The official agreed. A soldier opened the gate and the woman's son produced a small reed flute on which he played a simple tune over and over. Slowly, sheep's heads began to pop up all across the pen. The young boy then began walking home slowly, continuing to play his flute. Sure enough, all twenty-five sheep followed him out of the pen and back home. The sheep knew the song. They knew their

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shepherd's voice.¹

Application

Ask: How do you learn Jesus' voice?

Answer: You learn his voice by reading, meditating on, memorizing, and obeying his word. As you learn and obey the Bible, you will be able to recognize the will of God and the ways of God more and more. You will learn to trust and obey Jesus as the good shepherd. You'll know your Shepherd's voice.

Ask: How does the gospel story prove to us that Jesus is our good shepherd?

Answer: He says in verse 11 that he "lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus proved his care and love for his sheep by sacrificing his life for us. 1 Corinthians 5:7 says that Jesus is "our Passover lamb." He was the fitting sacrifice who could make the blood payment to God that we could not. As we learned in Exodus 12, God is the righteous I am. It is the God-man's righteousness, Jesus' goodness, that saves us. Just as the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed to protect Israel from the angel of death, so Jesus has sacrificed his life and shed his blood in order to protect us from God's judgment. As Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Ask: How does Jesus' lesson teach us to decide who to trust and who not to trust?

Answer: We want to trust and follow leaders who trust and follow Jesus. The best shepherds learn from Jesus who is the true and only good shepherd. This means they speak caring words, sacrifice their time and energy to care for others, and have lived life enough to know the paths of wisdom and the paths that are dangerous.

Ask: If we likened the world to the dangers of the desert, what would you say are the main dangers? In other words, what are the most common lies that the world promotes and that goes against God's truth?

Answer:

- 1) *"God is distant and does not care"* – the world tells you that God is not there and does not care about you. However, the Bible tells you that God has been pursuing his people for thousands of years. He delivered his people from Egypt. He then delivered them from countless enemies. He eventually came himself and died for his people. The stories and the story of the Bible prove that God cares and that God is a faithful shepherd.
- 2) *"You can live your life how you want"* – The Bible tells us that God has designed us and the world to live in a certain way. If we live by his design and his rules, we will have his blessing and we will have satisfaction. If we don't live by his design and his rules, then we face more brokenness
- 3) *"Take care of yourself first"* – Jesus provides a different vision of life. Jesus says that we look to the needs and cares of others first. The two great commandments are to "Love God" and "Love others." God made us to exist in relationship and those relationships involve laying down our lives for others. If we are made for this, then is it not what will most satisfy us?
- 4) *"Money, a future career, or excelling at academics or sports will make you happy"* – If we live for money and eventually a career, then we are finding our comfort, security, and pleasure in what money and a career brings. Money brings security in this world and opportunity to enjoy the good's and pleasures of this world. A career can tempt us to work for other's praise or to prove to others that we are better. While pursuing a career to earn money and provide for ourselves is a good thing that we should do, we

¹ Adapted from Gary M. Burge, *John: NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2000), 302.

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should not believe that it will make us happy. It is easy to base our identity on our academic performance, and the praise we get from parents or friends from excelling in good grades. Similarly, excelling at sports can also become an idol. We begin to define our lives around these things—things which promise so much, and yet deliver so little. Only following Jesus and listening to his voice will bring us God’s favor and satisfy us. Further, the Bible teaches us that this life is not all that we have. We are living now for the next life: eternity. There is a real sense in which we are to sacrifice pleasure and even happiness in this life to ensure we have eternal life and its ultimate satisfaction.

- 5) *“Sex is for anyone and at any time, and viewing sex in private on a screen isn’t a big deal”* – God designed sex to be between a man and a woman who live in the covenant of marriage together. Sex is designed as an expression of love, union, and intimacy. This means that pornography is outside of the will of God, and regardless of what our culture tells us, it is a big deal. It objectifies people made in the image of God, it is outside of God’s good boundaries for sex, it deadens our minds and our spiritual life and leaves us addicted, and it never, ever, satisfies. It always leaves us longing for more—a longing only God himself will satisfy. While it is pleasurable, the culture tells us that sex is not about self-giving but about getting pleasure. While that sounds good, we have to realize that when it is about what we want or need, then we are using the other person for our pleasure. That is the exact opposite of the love, care, and concern that Jesus exemplifies for us.

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The Death of Jesus' Beloved Friend Lazarus

Today, we are going to spend time in John 11. John 11:1-16 reports that Jesus' friend Lazarus had passed away. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. In other parts of the gospel stories, we learn that Jesus was very close with these three siblings. They lived in Bethany, which is just a mile and a half from Jerusalem. It is likely that Jesus regularly stayed with them and we know that he dined with them on several occasions (cf. Luke 10:30-37; John 12:1-8). These siblings were like family to Jesus. According to John 11:3, the sisters wrote to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." As a result, Jesus returned to Bethany two days later, traveling south from Galilee.

Making It Personal

Ask: Do you have people in your life who aren't your blood relatives but are like family? How might you feel if one of them passed away?

John 11:17-27

Ask: Who will read John 11:17-27 for me?

John 11:17-27, "17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' 23 Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' 24 Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' 25 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' 27 She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'"

Ask: What details of this story indicate that it is a true, historical, and real story? Why does this matter?

Answer: Historical details include: Mary and Martha are known from other gospel stories; Lazarus had been in the tomb four days; Bethany was two miles off; others had come to console the sisters; Mary went to meet him ahead of time; there is a real conversation that happens. All of these little details point to the fact that Lazarus really died, Jesus really visited Lazarus' sisters, and as we will read soon, Jesus really raised Lazarus from the dead. Before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, Jesus explains to Martha the meaning behind his act. Jesus wants all to understand that he is, in his person, the resurrection and the life. This is different from him saying, "I offer resurrection and life." Instead, notice he says, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Ask: What is the benefit of Jesus' saying, "I am the resurrection and life" instead of, "I can give resurrection and life."

Answer: Jesus gently reminds Martha that her faith and hope are not focused merely on a far off resurrection day. Martha's hope is focused on the presence of Jesus in her life and her relationship to Jesus. Jesus is teaching Martha, Mary, and all of us, that he offers more than a future salvation. He offers hope and life in the present, today. Jesus is our hope for *this* life. He is also our hope for life beyond the grave. As one Christian writer put it: "If Jesus is life, then those who believe in him will enjoy the confidence and power over death known by him." This does not mean that Jesus' followers will not die. Instead, it means that Jesus' followers have confidence of life beyond the grave. Death will not be the final word. It will be a great moment of transition from this present burdened life to the unburdened fullness of eternal life. As we continue in the story, think about whether you believe in the hope of resurrection? Do you think

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Jesus will raise you from the dead on the last day? Do you think Jesus' offers you his resurrection power and eternal life today?

Optional Activity: Bandana Blitz

Give each player a colored bandana or other clothing item (sock, t-shirt, masking tape, shoe strings). There should be two colors/types for each team. Players should tuck the bandana into the back of their collar so that the bandana hangs down their back. Appoint a leader for each team who stands on opposite sides of the playing area. During the game, have students run around trying to capture each other's bandana. If someone loses their bandana, then they have been captured by the other team. The player who has lost their bandana must stop running. The thief must escort that player to their leader as a captive. Players who are escorting other players cannot be captured while walking. Scoring Options: First team to capture all players wins OR set a time limit and score points based on a players age. The team with the most points wins.

Discuss the Game:

- What happened when someone took your bandana? They became your captive or prisoner. They had control over you until you were set free.
- How does death hold us captive? How does Jesus set us free? (cf. John 8:35-36).

Ask: Let's read about Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. Who will read John 11:38-46 for us?

John 11:38-46: "33 *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. 34 And he said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'* 35 *Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'* 37 *But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?'* 38 *Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.'* *Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.'* 40 *Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?'* 41 *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.'* 43 *When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.'* 44 *The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'* 45 *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, 46 but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done."*

Say: In verse 33, it tells us that Jesus was "deeply moved." The words mean "indignant," which means that Jesus grew angry when he saw the situation. Jesus was greatly troubled. He then moves from anger to great grief when he approaches Lazarus' tomb.

Ask: What do we learn about death from Jesus? How does Jesus teach us to respond?

Answer: Jesus exhibits three strong reactions: he is indignant, greatly troubled, and he weeps due to his grief.

Jesus was indignant – this teaches us that Jesus views death as an enemy. Jesus is angered by the havoc, pain, and devastation that death has brought to Lazarus and to all who love him. Jesus came to defeat the curse and sting of death. In John's gospel, Lazarus' resurrection is his last miracle before he goes to the cross. It is as if his anger at this situation strengthened his resolve to deal a death blow to death itself through his death and resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 15:23 says that we will follow Jesus in his resurrection: "*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*"

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Explain: Jesus is greatly troubled – this is a more general reference meaning Jesus was greatly bothered. When we read that God cares about our sorrows, here is a story about Jesus that supports our belief in God’s present care. Jesus’ coming to comfort the sisters and raise Lazarus is a parable or example story that gives a picture of what he offers to do for everyone who believes in him.

Jesus wept – Consider this: Jesus as God knew that Lazarus was going to die. Jesus knew that he was going to raise him from the dead. Jesus knew that Lazarus’ eternal destination was secure. Yet, he still wept. This is worth considering. Does your understanding of Jesus and God include the idea that Jesus *really cares* for his people. He cares more deeply and feels the sting of death and knows the devastation of suffering more deeply than we ever can. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “sympathizes with our weaknesses” and Isaiah 53:4 says that he “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” on the cross.

Optional: Turn to 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 to read how Jesus overcomes death in our resurrection.

Ask: What other historical details that show this story is real do you notice? Why might they matter?

Answer: Lazarus was in a tomb with a stone door; Martha feared the tomb would smell badly; Lazarus has been in the tomb four days; Lazarus comes out bound in linen clothes as was the custom of the Jews. The fact that it was a cave with a stone door also points to its historical reality. The Jews often buried their dead in caves with stone doors, many of which you can visit even today in Israel. The fact that Lazarus has been in there four days is important because it tells us that Lazarus was dead. He was not asleep, in a coma, passed out, or just really sick. He was dead without no hope of life again. Jesus did not resuscitate Lazarus. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus is the Mighty I Am. He is the Lord, giver, and sustainer of life. This story is not about Lazarus. This story is about Jesus. It tells us who he is – God, and it tells us what he will do for those who believe in him – resurrect them from the dead and defeat death for them.

Ask: How does Jesus’ raise Lazarus and what does this tell us about Jesus?

Answer: Jesus raises Lazarus with his voice alone. This indicates Jesus authority, power, and identity as God. It is only God who can create life out of nothing, as God did in Genesis 1.

Ask: How does this story resemble Jesus’ resurrection and why might that matter?

Answer: You can read about Jesus resurrection in Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 15:21-16:8; Luke 24; and John 20:1-29. Some of the similarities include: Jesus was likewise buried in a tomb with a rolling stone; He was dead three days, similar to Lazarus’ four days; Jesus was wrapped in linens as Lazarus was. If we believe Jesus really raised Lazarus from the dead, then we can also believe that Jesus really raised from the dead as well, securing our salvation and accomplishing victory over sin and death.

Ask: How does this resemble Exodus 13-14?

Answer: Israel was trapped by Pharaoh’s army and was as good as dead. Their options were to fight to the death or to drown in the sea. Yet, God delivered them from death by parting the Red Sea and allowing them to walk through on dry ground. The same power that delivered Israel also delivered Lazarus to life, Jesus to life, and will deliver us to life. Jesus is the Mighty I Am.

Ask: What is the evidence that Jesus really rose from the dead?

Answer: If we read the gospel stories carefully, there is plenty of evidence in the story that Jesus really died. The Roman soldiers, who were professional executioners, said he was dead and speared him in the side just in case. He was carried to a tomb, wrapped in tight linen clothes that

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would have made it impossible to breathe, 75 pounds of spices were laid on him, and then the tomb was closed, sealed, and guarded by two Roman soldiers. The history tells us that Jesus' real body went into the tomb and that there is no way anyone pulled a magic trick. John reports in John 20:7 that when he saw Jesus' linen face cloth folded neatly on the burial bench, he reports that he "*saw and believed.*" You can read later in John about how Thomas doubted until he saw the resurrected Jesus. Jesus really rose from the dead, he really was God, he really secured our salvation, he really defeated death, and he really will raise all of us from the dead again.

Ask: Why does the resurrection matter? Assign passages to groups to discuss together. After a few minutes, come back together to discuss as a large group.

Answers:

Jesus' resurrection defeated death, secured our salvation, and guaranteed our eternal life
Romans 4:24-25: "24 [Righteousness] will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

Romans 5:10: "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

1 Cor 15:54-57, "54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 55 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Explain: The power and life that rose Jesus from the dead is the power and life God gives us to fight sin and live faithfully for him today.

Romans 6:3-4, "3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Ephesians 1:16-21, "16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."

Ask: What are some of your common struggles and how does Jesus' offering his resurrection power and abundant life to you today give you hope?

Answers: [Will vary]

- Jesus' resurrection gives us peace when we are confronted with suffering, sickness and death.
- Jesus' resurrection gives us confidence that God cares for us.
- Jesus' resurrection calls us to put hope in our eternal life after death, not in this life.
- Jesus' resurrection offers us power to obey God's commands and live faithfully for him.

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- Jesus' resurrection gives us confidence that we can have victory over sin. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we can have confidence that we are no longer slaves of our sin. We don't have to surrender or give in to our sinful habits or temptations. Jesus' resurrection assures we are forgiven and given the ability to fight and struggle anew each day.

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Ask: Who will read 14:1-4?

John 14:1-4: *“1 ‘Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.’”*

Say: Jesus reveals that he is going to the father’s house, which is heaven. He is going there to prepare rooms for his followers. Jesus is giving a picture of heaven. Heaven is not a giant house with rooms for everyone. Instead, it is a place where God and mankind can dwell together and be in relationship together. Heaven is not a paradise because it will have streets paved with gold. Heaven is a paradise because God is there. Jesus’ death will not end the disciples relationship with Jesus. They will continue to have intimacy with him and he will provide the way for this to happen.

Ask: What do you think Jesus means when he says, “take you to myself”?

Answer: Jesus is saying that he will come get his followers, and take them to heaven to be with him. After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples watched him ascend into heaven.

Ask: Who will read Acts 1:9-11?

Acts 1:9, “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

Explain: Acts 1:9-11 tells of Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Other passages in the Bible tells us that he ascended into heaven in order to sit at the right hand of the Father (cf. Acts 2:33). In other words, he went into heaven to rule as King of the universe. Notice that the angels say that he will return the way that he went.

Ask: Who will read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17?

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17: “15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Ask: What will Jesus’ second coming be like?

Answer: There will be loud trumpets. There will be a great resurrection. Jesus will then gather up his people into the air to be with him again.

Say: If we were to read in Revelation, we’d learn that when Jesus comes and he sets up his kingdom, there will be a great judgment. Everyone, all who have died, will be resurrected and judged: those who believe will enter into eternal paradise with Jesus while those who do not believe will be cast into hell. The disciples do not understand all of these things, so Thomas asks for Jesus to tell him more.

Ask: Who will read verses 5-7?

Read John 14:5-6: “5 Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ 6 Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes

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to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. ”

Say: Thomas asks how to follow Jesus where he is going. Jesus’ answer in verse 6 is one of the most famous and clear expressions of the good news about Jesus.

Ask: What does it mean when Jesus calls himself “the way”?

Answer: Jesus says that access to the father only comes through him. He is the only one qualified and able to lead his followers to the father’s presence and to the place that Jesus is preparing. There aren’t multiple and alternative routes to get to Heaven. There’s one way: Jesus.

Ask: What does it mean Jesus calls himself “the truth”?

Answer: Jesus is the one who reveals God’s perfectly and acts as his representative. Because he has seen God (1:18), he makes God known fully and completely. He only says or does what God tells him to do (5:19; 8:29). Thus, Jesus is more than the one who reveals the truth. He is the truth. The truth about God is embodied in his person. This means that there is no other way to know God except by looking at and knowing Jesus.

Ask: What does it mean when Jesus calls himself “the life”?

Answer: As we learned yesterday, Jesus is the only way for eternal life. There is no path that will gain us eternal life. There is no good deed or knowledge or event that will lead us to eternal life. We can only find eternal life, both now and in the future, by believing in Jesus and having relationship with him.

Optional Activity: Joey Mantis’ Only Way

Read: The Situation – Joey Mantis is an imaginary, and somewhat strange, bug, These are his capabilities and limitations in the world:

1. His world is flat.
2. He can only jump (not crawl, fly, walk, roll, or otherwise move across or under the surface of his world).
3. He cannot turn around.
4. He can jump very large distances or very small distances, but not less than one inch per jump nor more than 500 feet per jump.
5. He can jump in only four perfectly true directions—north, south, east, and west. He cannot jump diagonally (e.g., southeast, northwest).
6. He likes to average 15 feet per jump on a good day.
7. There are no other mantis’, or other creatures, to help him.
8. Once he starts in any direction, he must jump four times in that same direction before he can switch to another direction.
9. Joey is totally dependent on his owner to provide his food source.

The Problem – Joey has been out jumping all over the place while getting some much-needed exercise. As a matter of fact, Joey has worked up a voracious appetite. Much to his pleasure, his owner appears and places a large pile of delectable food 3 feet, 7 inches directly west of him. Joey wants the food, and he wants it fast. As soon as Joey sees all this wonderful food, he stops dead in his tracks (he is facing north). After all his exercise he is very hungry, and even weak. Therefore, he wants to get to the food as quickly as he possibly can, minimizing especially the number of jumps he makes (it’s the starting of a jump—the spring required in his legs—that takes the most energy). After briefly surveying the situation, he realizes that *he cannot—at this*

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point—jump due west. Suddenly he exclaims, “I’ve got it. I’ll only have to jump four times to get to the food!”

Your Task – Accept the fact that Joey was a smart bug, and dead right in his conclusions. Why did Joey Mantis have to take precisely four jumps in order to reach the food with a minimum expenditure of energy? Describe the circumstances that Joey must have been in to reach this conclusion.

[Feel free to break students up into groups as small as two to solve the puzzle]

Hints to Give If Needed:

1. Joey does not necessarily have to face the direction he is jumping.
2. Joey could be at any stage of a series of jumps—he might have jumped 1, 2, or 3 times.

Solution: Joe appears to have just finished the first in a series of four jumps. He is facing north, but is jumping sideways, moving toward the east. Therefore, he must continue to make three more sideways jumps to the east, and then one large sideways jump back to the west to reach the food.

Discussion:

1. How did the rules create confusion?
2. What helped you as individuals or teams to see the answer?
3. How does this illustrate that Jesus is the only way?

Optional Activity 2: Dog, Chicken, and Rice

One of the group members is allotted the role of a FARMER. Others will be the DOG, RICE, or CHICKEN. The rest team acts as villagers. You can split into multiple teams if you wish!

Objective: The farmer has to return home along with its 3 purchases (Dog, Rice and Chicken) by crossing a river in a boat.

Rules:

He can carry only one item with him on the boat.

He cannot leave the dog alone with the chicken because the dog will eat the chicken.

He cannot leave the chicken alone with the bag of grain because the chicken will eat the bag of grain.

The villagers can help him in arriving at the solution, which is really simple if the group thinks creatively and together.

Problem: How does he get all three of his purchases back home safely?

Answer:

1. Farmer takes the CHICKEN across first and leaves the DOG with the RICE.
2. The farmer then takes the RICE across, picks up the chicken, and brings it back to the starting side.
3. The farmer then takes the DOG across and leaves it with the RICE.
4. The farmer then returns for the CHICKEN and brings it across safely.

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Discussion:

1. How did the rules create confusion?
2. What helped you as individuals or teams to see the answer?
3. How does this illustrate that Jesus is the only way?

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Say: The disciples continue to struggle in their understanding. Who will read John 14:8-11?

John 14:8-11: “8 Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ 9 Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”

Say: Philip concentrates on Jesus’ words in verse 7, where Jesus plainly tells the disciples that seeing Jesus is equivalent to seeing God. Yet, Philip still does not understand. Philip has forgotten that no one has seen God (John 1:18). Humans are not capable of seeing God directly. Even Moses was not able to see God. He only saw a glimpse of God’s glory. When the nation of Israel heard God speak from Mount Sinai, they shrunk away in terror. Yet, verse 10 is the great news. Jesus says, “The Father is in me! When you look at me and talk to me, you are looking at the Father and talking to the Father. When you see me perform miracles, it is the Father who is working in me and through me. I Am. I Am the Holy one of Israel, the righteous judge of Egypt and mighty deliverer of Israel.

Ask: Based on Jesus’ teachings in this passage, how do we find God?

Answer: We find God through Jesus. Jesus is much more than a spiritual guide, ambassador, or religious teacher. He is where God is found and God is found in no other person, place, or thing.

Say: Jesus is teaching that he is the exclusive, or only, way to God. There is no other way.

Ask: What does Jesus’ teaching mean for other religions?

Answer: It means that they cannot provide a way to know God, access God, or to have eternal life. It means that all who do not follow Jesus, even if they are really good or religious people, are not saved and are facing judgment if they do not repent and believe.

Ask: Do you think God is fair to allow only one way to knowing him and eternal life?

Answer: [Allow students to grapple with this question, then give reply] Romans 3:23 teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Worse, Romans 1:18-20 teaches that all men are “without excuse” because God has made his eternal power and divine nature clearly known in the creation. As we learned yesterday in Large Group, God is not obliged to save anyone. But the good news is that he does! 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Ask: Do you think other religions offer some good truth?

Answer: No. Jesus says that “No one has known the father but me.” The only place to find the truth about God is through his Word and in the person of Jesus, who is the word of God.

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Stand-out Christians

Ask: Who are some of the most dedicated Christians you know? What makes their Christian life stand out?

Answer: [Hopefully students will provide a litany of answers. You should tell of one person – whether in your life or from church history] Did anyone notice that we all notice different things. Some of us admire believers who know a lot about the Bible. Others of us admire believers who love others well. Yet others of us admire believers who have joy and talk about Jesus regularly. Finally, some of us admire those who have a testimony that is really unique and special.

Ask: Which one of these believers most looks like a disciple?

Answer: All of them! They all show fruit of belonging to Jesus and following Jesus.

Say: Let's open to John 15 and look at how Jesus describes disciples who are faithful to him.

Ask: Who will read John 15:1 for us?

Disciples Know Life

John 15:1: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."*

Say: This is Jesus' eighth and final "I am" statement in the gospel of John.

Ask: Why would Jesus calling himself the "true vine" been shocking or offensive to an Israelite?

Answer: Every Israelite saw themselves as part of the true vine of Israel. The Old Testament had likened Israel to a vine that God loved (Cf. Isa 5:1-8). Israel gloried in having access to God through his promises to Abraham and Israel. Now, Jesus is saying that he is Israel and thus is the one with access to the promises.

Ask: How is Jesus like a vine?

Answer: He has said over and over again that life is found "in him." A vine is what brings life to flowers and provides support to branches. The vein is a flower or fruit's life support. In the same way, Jesus is our life support. True disciples of Jesus know that life is found in Jesus and nowhere else.

Ask: Who will read verses 2-3?

Disciples Give Life to Others

John 15:2-3: *"2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."*

Ask: Who is "he that prunes" and "he that takes away"? What do these expressions mean?

Answer: "He" is the Father, who is called the vinedresser in verse 1. He is the one who takes care of the vine. Pruning means that the Father cuts back branches so that they bear more fruit. Just as you might trim old flowers off a branch, so the Father "trims" his disciples. "Takes away" means he pulls them away from the vine.

Ask: What is Jesus saying true disciples must have?

Answer: They must have fruit. Look at verses 12-13 to see what that fruit is: *"12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."* Loving others as Jesus loved others is the fruit that all disciples of Jesus bear.

Ask: How does Jesus define love in verses 12-13?

Answer: He defines it as self-sacrificial love.

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Ask: Who will read John 15:4-6?

Disciples Find Life in Jesus

John 15:4-6: 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Ask: According to verses 4-6, what else does Jesus say is true of his disciples? Explain.

Answer: They abide in him. The word “abide” means “remain.” Jesus is teaching that his disciples have a continual, intimate connection with him day to day.

Ask: How is abiding simply “believing in Jesus” and how is it something different?

Answer: We know that “belief in Jesus for salvation” is the most basic Christian heart attitude. However, belief also carries the idea of reliance, trust, support, hope, and connection. Abiding is more than a mental acknowledgment, or “belief,” in Jesus. Abiding is a daily connection with Jesus.

Ask: How can we daily abide with Jesus?

Answer: Spiritual disciplines; active obedience to Jesus; active rest and trust in his various promises.

Ask: Who will read John 15:7-8?

Disciples Live Like Jesus

John 15:7-8: “7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

Ask: Is Jesus actually promising that he will grant any wish that we have? Why or why not?

Answer: No, he is not. The above verses assume that the disciple who is praying to him believes in him (knows that he is life), shares his life with others, and abides in him by finding life in him. As a result, disciples are in tune with what Jesus wants and desires. Notice in verse 8 that the assumed outcome of the prayer is “bearing much fruit.” Jesus is assuming that the prayers will be focused on loving and serving others. Jesus is assuming that his disciples will live like him. These are prayers Jesus is pleased to answer.

Ask: Based on verses 7-8, how might you advise someone to pray? What words should they use?

Answer: They should use Jesus’ words. But they should also use the Bible as a whole to pray. The Psalms are a great place to start.

Ask: How might praying the Bible help you abide with Jesus?

Answer: It will help shape my thoughts and heart attitudes after the Bible. Romans 12:2 teaches that we are transformed by “the renewal of your mind.” Prayer is a form of meditating on God’s Word, applying God’s truth and promises to my common struggles. Meditating and praying the Bible will also help me see my sin, confess it, hope in Jesus’ sacrifice for my sins, and turn to God and pursue his commandments.

Ask: Who will read John 15:9-11

Disciples Love Like Jesus

John 15:9-11: “9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s

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commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Ask: How would you define Jesus’ love?

Answer: He loved us by taking on human flesh. He loved us by dying on the cross. He continues to love us by making his presence available to us through the work of the Spirit (cf. John 14:25-26; Rom 5:5). “His steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 118:1) and nothing, in all of life or death, can separate believers from the love of Jesus (cf. Romans 8:38-39).

Ask: What does Jesus promise in verse 11?

Answer: Jesus promises to give joy to those who are his disciples. For those who are connected to the vine Jesus, they will experience great joy. Many of us think that following Jesus involves denying our pleasure and living a boring life of rules. This is not true! Jesus promises to give us relationship with himself, he promises to love us and care for us, and he promises to give us fruitful work, which we might call purpose.

Ask: How have you experienced joy in following Jesus? Or seen it in others?

Answer: [The leader should share a personal story about the joy of abiding with Jesus and the joy of serving others]

Further Material:

You can do the below Abide exercise at camp during your Connect time, during your Checkpoint time, or later on after camp.

Psalm 27 Abide Exercise

Say: I’m going to read Psalm 27 out loud to you. Before I read, I want you to think about or write down a common struggle or sin in your life. You can think about your thoughts, your emotions, and even your desires. [Give students 1-3 minutes]

Say: As I read Psalm 27, I want you to think about this question: “What is God’s reality?”

Instruct students to close their eyes. Read Psalm 27

Ask: How does God’s reality speak to your reality?

Say: I’m going to read Psalm 27 again to you. This time, look for God’s power, God’s presence, and God’s promises. Underline or circle these things.

Read Psalm 27 again. Have students follow along.

Say: What did you notice about God’s power, presence, and promises?

Say: I want you to now take 5-10 minutes to read through Psalm 27 on your own. Write out a prayer to God that responds to his power, presence, promises.

Allow them time to read and meditate.

Ask: How did God’s reality shape your reality? How did God bring you comfort, hope, instruction?

Group Abide Exercise *Psalm 23*

To Group Leader: The following questions are meant to serve as a journaling guide to your group. Throughout, there are opportunities for the group to share. The goal is to help your student's see how God's reality, promises, and care applies to their common sin and struggles.

Personal Exercise

1. **Define Your Reality:** What is my common sin, struggle, or concern? Helpful categories include but are not limited to: anger, confusion, difficulty, discontentment, escape, fantasy, fear, guilt, laziness, pride, selfishness, shame, sorrow, suffering, unbelief.

What is your common sin/struggle/concern:

What are my Thoughts?

What are my Emotions?

What are my Desires?

2. **Understand Your Reality:** How is this difficulty/concern/struggle/sin affecting me?

It affects by relationships by ...

It affects my faith by (use categories of doubt, despair, and distance) ...

It affects my bodily health and rhythms by ...

3. **Understand Evil and Sin:** How might the enemy's schemes be causing me to interpret reality wrongly? (The enemy includes all things evil: Satan, the broken world, and our sinful desires/actions)

How is evil deceiving me?

How is evil distracting me?

How is evil discouraging me?

How is evil dividing me?

How is evil making God seem distant?

4. **Your Reality:** Write a brief summary of your reality.

5. **Share Your Reality:** Break up into groups of 2-3. Each person take 3 mins to share their reality with the others. Then, spend 2 minutes asking follow-up questions to help the sharer clarify the root of their struggle/concern/sin.

Group Abide Exercise

Psalm 23

1. **Group Discussion:** How did sharing your concern/struggle/sin with others help bring clarity, comfort, conviction, and hope?
2. **Group Meditation:** Leader – Read Psalm 23 out loud. Participants – As you listen, mentally note instances of God’s power, presence, and promises.

Personal Exercise

3. **Look Up to See God’s Reality:** What does this passage reveal about God and his love for you? What truths stand out to you in the passage? Note the corresponding verse. (Ex. V.1 – God is *my* King). Particularly focus on how God’s power, presence, and promises speaks to your reality.

(As you process the final 3 questions, look back to the Psalm to help you answer)

4. **Reframe Your Reality to God’s Reality:** How is YOUR HEART struggling to respond to God and his word given your story and themes OR present reality?
5. **Abide & Rest To Live in God’s Reality:** How do God’s truths from this passage or lesson address your story and themes? How is God stirring your heart with his love and comfort, knowing that you are living in Christ?
6. **Follow and Heed God’s Invitation:** How is God calling you to trust and obey him right now? How is God calling you to love him and others as you live in Christ? After writing, spend time praying and asking God to help you. Use Psalm 145 as a model prayer.
7. **Discuss and Share:** (As a group or in gender-separated groups) How has God’s reality helped you gain clarity, comfort, conviction, and hope?