No Wonder They Crucified Him

Study 1: GET OFF THE FENCE
Leader’s Guide — Participant’s Guide

Study 2: COMPLETE THE CIRCLE OF GRACE AND WORKS
Leader’s Guide — Participant’s Guide

Study 3: PATROL YOUR PLEASURES
Leader’s Guide — Participant’s Guide

Study 4: CHECK YOUR BAGS
Leader’s Guide — Participant’s Guide

Study 5: COME DIE WITH ME
Leader’s Guide — Participant’s Guide

Study 6: FOLLOW ME
Leader’s Guide — Participant’s Guide
Of all the people admired in the world today, Jesus of Nazareth continually ranks at the top of the list. Even those who don’t call themselves Christians regard Jesus as one of the wisest teachers and most loving leaders the world has ever known. He is still making the covers of magazines and being talked about in coffee shops with a popularity like no other person who has walked this earth.

So why did his contemporaries kill him?

Scripture: Matthew 12:22–32

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Get Off the Fence

Leader’s Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

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So why did his contemporaries kill him? What was it about what he said or did that was so provoking and upsetting that religious and secular leaders alike wanted to see him dead? What was it about Jesus that could make the crowds that once followed him finally turn upon him—demanding his blood and cheering his pain? If Jesus was simply the gentle genius some portray him to be, how could this have happened?

There’s only one explanation: Jesus was much more than meek and mild. He was more than a poetic philosopher. Jesus was the Light of Heaven hitting a darkened earth like a meteor blast. He made claims and demands that left people undone. He named realities that others sought to bury. He broke barriers and battered bastions no one else had the nerve to assault. He called for the utter dismantling of the way things were and the new creation of something so much better. Jesus was not politically correct. He was not religiously pious. He was not socially tame. Jesus was a dangerous man because he was, and is, the God who is dangerously good.

Do you and I know this Jesus, and does it show? Or has our concept of Jesus become so domesticated that he no longer really disturbs us, no longer really disrupts us, no longer really disciples us into the new life of the Kingdom of God?

For example, what do we do with the Jesus who says: “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24) or “Every kingdom … and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.” What do we do with the Jesus who declares: “He who is not [actively] with me is [actually] against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” In short, what do you do with the Jesus who says: Get off the fence!

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Daniel Meyer says, “Jesus was not politically correct. He was not religiously pious. He was not socially tame.” What do you think he means by this?
**Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching Point One: We have to buck life in a fence-walking world.**

Read Matthew 12:22–32.

It is hard to face a Jesus like that. We live in a “fence-walking world.” Ours is a world that has grown comfortable with partial commitments, hedged bets, and associate memberships. We want to feel part of the game, but we also like the safety of the stands. We like to crow about the heroism and victories of war and politics when it’s going well for our side, but distance ourselves from taking responsibility for the bad plays and losses. We want good friendships and marriages, but we avoid facing the problems and sin that keep them from being great relationships. We want our kids to be spiritually vital but also on the traveling sports team on Sundays. We want a sane, healthy life, but also one packed with all the possessions and pace of “success.”

A man named Homer finally worked up the courage to propose marriage to the girl of his dreams. Dropping to one knee, he looked his beloved in the eye and said: “Sue, I know I’m not wealthy like Tom. I recognize that I’m not handsome like Tom. I may not be as well educated as Tom. But I love you, Sue.” The woman, obviously moved, responded sincerely: “Why, I love you too, Homer. But tell me a little more about Tom!”

We do this fence-walking with God, too. It isn’t that we’re not interested in God. We’re just wary of full investment. In the words of Wilbur Rees: “I would like to buy $3 worth of God, please—not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don’t want enough of him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant worker. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of a womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I’d like to buy just $3 worth of God, please.”

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1 *$3 Worth of God*, Judson press (1971)
But God is not interested in these partial investments and divided loyalties that produce such poor fruit. A religious leader can build quite a following by pretending otherwise. He can suggest that God is mainly interested in some fine-tuning of our personalities—that he’s content so long as we’re spending time and money on him on Sundays, even if we’re dallying with Tom the rest of the week. Gordon MacDonald explains why:

When the crowd got too large, [Jesus] would inevitably sharpen the blade of his teaching. He would make it clearer that there was a dramatic cost to discipleship. It was almost as if he were saying the size of this crowd suggests that you haven’t heard me plainly enough or some of you wouldn't be here; so let me give it to you another way. And when he finished restating his message, many would then leave because they finally understood that no one can remain in the presence of Christ and be merely a very nice person.

[Q] What does Jesus mean when he says that those who are not with him are against him (Matthew 12:30)? What does it mean to be with him?

[Q] What do you think is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31–32)?

**Leader’s Note:** Feel free to look up the many commentaries on this at [www.christianitytoday.com/bible/features/commentaries.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/bible/features/commentaries.html).

[Q] How does Matthew 12:22–32 demonstrate that Jesus is repelled by fence walkers?

[Q] In what ways have you just wanted “$3 worth of God”?

[Q] Explain how Jesus might want you off the fence in each of the following areas of your life:

- Relationships
- Job
- Finances
- Habits

**Teaching Point Two: Ground yourself on God’s side of the fence through spiritual disciplines.**

Jesus said such crazy-sounding things at times. Read what he said to the Christians at Laodicea in Revelation 3:15.

Jesus described life with God in terms of leaving parents, getting out of safe boats, dropping nets, selling possessions, and denying self. In these statements, he is not saying there’s something intrinsically wrong with those things. Jesus isn’t against family or safety or possessions or self. He is simply questioning whether we’re going to define and pursue these values in the world’s way or the kingdom’s way. He asks: Where are you putting your feet
down? Who and what do you really love? What’s the ground you’re planting in? What sort of fruit is it producing? Are you still trying to walk the fence?

Lent is the season when followers, or would-be followers, of Jesus have traditionally screwed up the courage to look down at their feet and examine the line they’ve been walking, the investments they’ve been making, and the loyalties they’ve been dividing in order to start walking in a different way. Will you do that with me? Historically, Christians have taken hold of a spiritual discipline or two to aid them in this process. The spiritual disciplines are simply means of grounding ourselves on God’s side of the fence.

Adele Calhoun suggests in her Spiritual Disciplines Handbook that we practice Examen, a simple exercise to help us better discern God’s hand and voice. You might try that practice, or one of nearly 60 others described there. And if you do, you will find at least three blessings proceeding from that side of the fence.

For one thing, the spiritual disciplines lead us into a greater integrity—a greater integration between what we say we believe and want and what we actually feel and do. To use Jesus’ metaphor, they help you to see where the house of your life has gotten divided against itself, or where it’s gotten shifted off of rock-solid foundations. Through the disciplines, God will start to improve the alignment.

Second, as God uses the disciplines to further transform our character and conduct, we will develop a greater influence on our society. To be ruthlessly blunt, the world has plenty of people just like us today. It has millions of fragmented people running under their own power, driven by their anxiety, fear, or anger. If the church is going to truly be the kind of influential salt and light that Jesus calls it to be, then it will do so because there are disciples who have taken deliberate steps to get off the fence and ground their lives more deeply in God.

Finally, you’ll find that the ultimate fruit of the spiritual disciplines is greater joy. Discipline is not usually a word we associate with joy. But ask an Olympian standing on the medal platform how she spells “The Path to Joy” and she will say “D-I-S-C-I-P-L-I-N-E.” Ask Jesus, says the writer to the Hebrews, why he disciplined himself in the face of temptation or endured the pain of the cross, and he will answer: It was for the joy of living with integrity to my mission. It was for the joy of exerting an eternal influence on people.

Read Hebrews 12:1–2.

[Q] What kind of sin tangles you up in your race?

[Q] In what practical ways can we “fix our eyes on Jesus”?
Get Off the Fence

Leader’s Guide

[Q] What was the joy set before Jesus that motivated him to endure the cross?

[Q] Which of the following spiritual disciplines would you most like to implement? Try to pick just one.

- Regular prayer
- Regular reading, study, or memorization of Scripture
- Fasting
- Tithing
- Other

How could you begin to make that practice part of your life?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: To help us think about spiritual disciplines.

Activity: Using a whiteboard or poster board, brainstorm all the spiritual disciplines you know of. After you have written these down, ask the group if they have successfully practiced any of these disciplines, and if so, how they helped their spiritual life. Then ask if they have tried any of these disciplines and failed at them. If so, why do they think they failed? What might they do differently to make these disciplines work for them?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

To paraphrase Jesus: I have taught and modeled for you everything I have, that your life might have complete integrity in your relationship to yourself, to others, and to God (Matthew 7:24–27). I have come and called and given my life for you, that through you I might have complete influence here, there, and to the ends of the earth. I have said and done all that I have so that my joy might be in you, and your joy might be complete (John 15:11). But if you want all this, you cannot remain as you are. You cannot keep walking divided as you do. You must get off the fence and ground yourself in God.

It is easy to be like the Pharisees. I am so used to walking high and mighty on my familiar fence, and so sure that change is mostly what others need, that it is far too easy to do the one unforgivable thing—regard the Spirit of God, still trying to reach me, as evil. Call the Light darkness. And—so jaded by preaching, so smug in my niceness, so stuck in my religion—I think, **How do we get rid of this man?**
No Wonder They Crucified Him

Get Off the Fence
Leader’s Guide

How about you? Would you get down off your fence? Or would you think: No wonder they crucified him?

Edward Sandford Martin—American editor, critic, essayist, and poet (1856-1939)—wrote:

Within my earthly temple there’s a crowd.
There’s one of us that’s humble; one that’s proud.
There’s one that’s broken-hearted for his sins,
And one who, unrepentant, sits and grins.
There’s one who loves his neighbor as himself;
And one who cares for naught but fame and self:
From much corroding care would I be free
If once I could determine which is me.

Action Point: Practice Examen¹ this week:

1. Recall that you are in the presence of God. As you quiet yourself, become aware that God is present within you, in the creation that surrounds you, in your body, in those around you. The Spirit of God, sent by Christ, will remind you that you are gifted to help bring creation to its fullness. Ask the Holy Spirit to let you look on all you see with love.

2. Spend a moment looking over your day with gratitude for this day’s gifts. Be concrete and let special moments or pleasures spring to mind. Recall the smell of your morning coffee, the taste of something good that you ate, the laugh of a child, the fragrance of a flower, the smile brought forth by a kind word, a lesson that you learned. Take stock of what you received and what you gave. Give thanks to God for favors received. Also look at your permanent gifts that allow your participation in this day. Recall your particular strengths in times of difficulty, your ability to hope in times of weakness, your sense of humor and your life of faith, your intelligence and health, your family and friends. God the Father gives you these to draw you into the fullness of life. As you move through the details of your day, give thanks to God for his presence in the big and the small things of your life.

3. Ask God to send you his Holy Spirit to help you look at your actions and attitudes with honesty and patience. “When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit inspires you to see with growing freedom the development of your life story. The Spirit gives a freedom to look upon yourself without condemnation and without complacency and thus be open to growth. Ask that you will learn and grow as you reflect, thus deepening your knowledge of self and your relationship with God.

¹ Adapted from http://norprov.org/spirituality/ignatianprayer.htm
4. Review your day. This is the longest of the steps. Recall the events of your day; explore the context of your actions. Search for the internal movements of your heart and your interaction with what was before you. Ask what you were involved in and who you were with, and review your hopes and hesitations. Many situations will show that your heart was divided—waverering between helping and disregarding, scoffing and encouraging, listening and ignoring, rebuking and forgiving, speaking and silence, neglecting and thanking. Remember, this is not a time to dwell on your shortcomings; rather, it is a gentle look with the Lord at how you have responded to God’s gifts. It is an opportunity for growth of self and deepening your relationship with God.

Notice where you acted freely—picking a particular course of action from the possibilities you saw. See where you were swept along without freedom. What reactions helped or hindered you? See where Christ entered your decisions and where you might have paused to receive his influence. “Test yourselves,” St. Paul urges, “to see whether you are living in faith; examine yourselves. Perhaps you yourselves do not realize that Christ Jesus is in you” (2 Corinthians 13:5). His influence comes through his people, the Body of Christ. His influence comes through Scripture, the Word of God.

Now, as you pray, Christ’s spirit will help you know his presence and concern. As you daily and prayerfully explore the mystery of yourself in the midst of your actions, you will grow more familiar with your own spirit and become more aware of the promptings of God’s Spirit within you. Allow God to speak, challenge, encourage, and teach you. Thus you will come to know that Christ is with you. Christ will continually invite you to love your neighbor as yourself and strengthen you to do this.

5. The final step is a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus. Here you speak with Jesus about your day. You share your thoughts on your actions, attitudes, feelings, and interactions. Perhaps during this time you may feel led to seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude. Having reviewed this day of your life, look upon yourself with compassion and see your need for God. Try to realize God’s manifestations of concern for you. Express sorrow for sin, the obscuring darkness that surrounds us all, and especially ask forgiveness for the times you resisted God’s light today. Give thanks for grace, the enlightening presence of God, and especially praise God for the times you responded in ways that allowed you to better see God’s life. Resolve with Jesus to move forward in action where appropriate. You might like to finish your time with the Lord’s Prayer.

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
Get Off the Fence

Jesus won’t accept neutrality.

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Jesus was much more than meek and mild. He was more than a poetic philosopher. Jesus was the Light of Heaven hitting a darkened earth like a meteor blast. He made claims and demands that left people undone. He named realities that others sought to bury. He broke barriers and battered bastions no one else had the nerve to assault. He called for the utter dismantling of the way things were and the new creation of something so much better. Jesus was not politically correct. He was not religiously pious. He was not socially tame. Jesus was a dangerous man because he was and is the God who is dangerously good.

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[Q] Which of the following spiritual disciplines would you most like to implement? Try to pick just one.

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—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
As Christians, we know that we get to spend eternity in heaven, not because we’re such great people, but because Jesus is. Yet, what does that mean as we respond to the remarkable grace God has shown us in Christ? What does that demand of us? What should that make us want to be and do?


Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.**

In his book *Bono in Conversation*, author Michka Assayas recounts a remarkable discussion he had with the lead singer and songwriter of the megastar rock group U2. While Bono is frequently criticized by some Christians for his salty language and liberal social views, it remains a fact that U2 began as a Christian fellowship and still plumbs biblical themes in many of their chart-busting songs.

Mr. Assayas, who is not a follower of Christ himself, began by asking the rock star, “Don’t you think appalling things happen when people become too religious?” Bono acknowledged that there were certainly risks there, but then countered by saying something fascinating: “It’s a mind-blowing concept [to me] that the God who created the Universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people… but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between grace and karma.”

Assayas wanted to know what he meant by that last line, and Bono answered, “At the center of all religions is the idea of karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics—in physical laws—every action is met by an equal or an opposite one… And yet, along comes this idea called grace to upend all that… Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I’ve done a lot of stupid stuff. I’d be in big trouble if karma was going to finally be my judge.” Bono added: “It doesn’t excuse my mistakes, but I’m holding out for grace, because I know who I am, and I hope I don’t have to depend on my own religiosity… Christ took on the sins of the world so that what we put out did not come back to us, so that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. It’s not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven.”

It’s God’s grace. It’s that amazing grace.

**Discussion Questions:**

- [Q] What do you see as the difference between karma and grace?
- [Q] Does grace mean that there are no consequences to our actions? Explain.
Teaching Point One: Jesus gets all the credit.

Is there any more precious and distinctive belief held by Christians than this truth described in the gospel and by Bono? It is simply impossible to hold an accurate understanding of the utterly holy character of God, as the Bible describes him, and think for a single moment: When I meet God face-to-face one day, I think he is going to be really impressed by my character. I reckon he’ll take a gander at all my moral merit badges—my church attendance, my charitable gifts, my community service and voting record, and say, “Wow, this guy is really going to improve the quality of fellowship here in heaven; let’s definitely advance him to the next round.”

How many of you have ever watched a tone-deaf contestant come before the judges on American Idol—all impressed by his own costume and performance—only to hear the evaluation of an actual singing star? It’s not pretty, is it? That scenario, however, barely hints at what would happen to someone who came smugly before the judgment seat of God. God is a being who lives eternally at such a perfectly pure and holy pitch that the performance of even our best moral rock stars looks like a polyester lounge act in comparison. The Bible tells us that God is a being whose goodness burns so brilliantly hot and clean that, unfiltered by grace, it would instantly incinerate anything stained in the slightest by sin—no matter how nice the outside looked.

This was a hard concept for some of the religious people in Jesus’ time. The Pharisees, for example, saw themselves as serious contenders on the Israelite Idol show. They were costumed in pristine robes, untainted by close contact with the people they called “sinners.” They spent hours and years do-re-me-ing their way up and down the scales of ritual purity and religious observance. They were convinced God would be seriously impressed by their performance. And then the Great Rock and Star of Eternity himself came crashing down to earth and gonged their act. No wonder they crucified him.

We know better now, don’t we? We understand with Bono that we’re not rocks or stars in the most important sense. We know with the apostle Peter that we are people made of shifting sand. Read Mark 14:72.

We know with the prophet Isaiah that we are people of unclean lips. Read Isaiah 6:5.

We know with St. Paul that we fall far short of the glory of God. Read Romans 3:23.

We know that we get to spend eternity in heaven not because we’re such great singers, but because Jesus is—because in the finals of the great contest with sin and death on Calvary, Jesus chose to enwrap us in the most remarkable song. Even as the crowd spat at him across the
judgment table, Jesus sang: Don't make them pay for their tone deafness, Father. Let me pay instead. Let me pay the price here and now. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[Q] Why do our efforts at holiness fail to impress God?

[Q] Does that mean that ritual purity and religious observance are worthless? Why or why not? What kind of balance do we need to find?

[Q] In what ways do we fall into Pharisee-like attempts to win favor with God?

Teaching Point Two: There is a condition on God’s grace.

In a sense, you and I are like barroom brawlers suddenly given the chance to become roadies or backup musicians for the ultimate Star. Suddenly, we find ourselves offered a free pass into the great concert that roars with such splendor and majesty in the massive hall of the kingdom of God. If we have accepted that pass, we are eager to use every instrument we can lay our hands on to play the Master’s song. If we have accepted that pass, we are raising our hands and throwing our arms around everyone we can reach. If we have accepted the pass that Jesus freely offers, we are singing beneath our breath, wherever we go: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.”

But here’s the part that could get a man killed. Here’s the part that is so disturbing, so upsetting to some hearers that it made plenty of people want to see Jesus dead: There is a condition on God’s grace. Please listen carefully here because it is going to run hard up against the way many of us have come to view things. God’s love is unconditional. God’s willingness to meet us where we are today, to redeem and bless us, is unconditional. We don’t merit it. We don’t earn it. It is freely given to us, because love is what God is and does.

But grace is something different. On one level, grace is like being offered a pass into the great concert, even though we aren’t perfect singers ourselves. But in its fullest sense, grace is life in and at the concert. Have you ever heard the expression “a state of grace”? In this sense, it is appropriate to speak of the idea of “conditional grace.” We don’t merit grace by our actions, but grace itself is a condition into which we must enter to have its benefits.

Bob Geelhoed and Vickie Bare suggest that “grace is like being offered a heart transplant free of charge. Until we accept the heart, however, and allow the surgeon to cut us and implant the new heart into us—until we undergo that operation, the heart can’t pump its life-giving blood through our body. The reality is that we don’t just need a ticket to heaven; we need a heart transplant now. Our problem is that severe. And the free gift is that radical.”
Dallas Willard says that, for years, Christians have tended to live with a truncated, withered understanding of this crucial biblical concept. We’ve tended to see it as all about getting a ticket to heaven when we die. That’s important, Dallas says; you certainly want to attend to that. But grace in the sense Jesus taught it is so much more. It’s more than having God scan the barcode on the back of our Jesus ticket.

Grace isn’t just the way into the kingdom of God someday; it is the truth and way and life of that kingdom we start walking in today. Grace is God acting supernaturally in us. It is God joining us to his concert, moving us to his music, giving us a song to sing and instruments to play with one another. Grace isn’t a stub we hold. It is a circle we participate in. It is life on the kingdom side of the fence.

[Q] How can there be a condition on God’s grace if his love is limitless?

[Q] What does Daniel Meyer mean when he says “grace is life in and at the concert”?

[Q] In what practical ways should our lives reflect that we are living life on the kingdom side of the fence?

[Q] How can we practice spiritual disciplines without them becoming a way to earn God’s favor, instead of a way to know God? What’s the difference?

Teaching Point Three: We can complete the circle.


What Jesus is saying in this passage is that grace always moves in a circle. If you really know that you’ve been freed by God from judgment and condemnation, you will not judge and condemn others. If you’ve truly accepted the huge forgiveness God has offered you, you are going to forgive others their sins against you. If you’re genuinely conscious of all you’ve been given by God, then you are going to be a generous giver.

Of course, we are not perfect in these things. We’re not the Rock Star. We don’t sing the song or play the instruments exactly like Jesus does. But if we are not at least stirred by the music to the point that we’re starting to pursue reconciliation in our relationships, starting to forgive the people who have hurt or failed us, starting to turn away from the criticizing, condemning way of the world and moving more and more to Christ’s amazing grace song, then we haven’t entered the circle. We haven’t gone in to the kingdom concert. We’re still sitting on the other side of the fence. As the great reformer John Calvin put it, “While it is true that we are saved not by works but by faith alone, the faith that saves is never alone.”
This is why Jesus said to the Pharisees, and by extension to you and me: Don’t you folks understand that the love of God is always aimed at completing the circle of grace? Why do you stop it up? Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,” when you fail to see the plank in your own eye? Do you honestly expect God’s grace, when you won’t extend it to others? Repent, I tell you, or by the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Gong.

[Q] Give an example of when you have ignored the plank in your own eye in your effort to get a speck out of someone else’s.

[Q] How does this passage help explain why grace is conditional?

[Q] Why does grace motivate our works and not the other way around?

[Q] In which of the following do you most need Christ’s help?

• Pursue reconciliation in a relationship
• Forgive someone who has hurt or failed you
• Turn away from the criticizing, condemning way of the world
• Other

Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** To help us understand the difference between works to earn God’s favor and works out of gratitude for God’s grace.

**Activity:** Read the following case studies and ask the group to discuss how each person could be acting either to earn God’s favor or out of joy for God’s grace in his or her life. Discuss what might help that person to determine their motivation.

• Cheryl volunteers at the local homeless shelter.
• Johann spends two hours a day in prayer.
• Rachel has memorized all of the Epistles.
• Bradley fasts once a week.
Part 3  Apply Your Findings

What do you do with a message and Messiah like that? You think: *I have got to walk further into this concert. I’ve got to examine my circles. I have got to change the way I’ve been doing some of my relationships, root myself more in some kingdom disciplines, and let the song and its Singer move through me more and more.*

**Action Point:** Which of the following do you most need Christ to transform in you? Share your answer with the group and ask them to pray for you.

- Help with my relationships
- Develop spiritual disciplines
- Let Christ transform my bad habits
- Other

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
Sometimes Jesus sets conditions on grace.

As Christians, we know that we get to spend eternity in heaven, not because we’re such great people, but because Jesus is. Yet, what does that mean as we respond to the remarkable grace God has shown us in Christ? What does that demand of us? What should that make us want to be and do?


No Wonder They Crucified Him

Complete the Circle of Grace and Works

Participant’s Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

In his book *Bono in Conversation*, author Michka Assayas recounts a remarkable discussion he had with the lead singer and songwriter of the megastar rock group U2. While Bono is frequently criticized by some Christians for his salty language and liberal social views, it remains a fact that U2 began as a Christian fellowship and still plumbs biblical themes in many of their chart-busting songs.

Mr. Assayas, who is not a follower of Christ himself, began by asking the rock star, “Don’t you think appalling things happen when people become too religious?” Bono acknowledged that there were certainly risks there, but then countered by saying something fascinating: “It’s a mind-blowing concept [to me] that the God who created the Universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people… but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between grace and karma.”

Assayas wanted to know what he meant by that last line, and Bono answered, “At the center of all religions is the idea of karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics—in physical laws—every action is met by an equal or an opposite one… And yet, along comes this idea called grace to upend all that… Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I’ve done a lot of stupid stuff. I’d be in big trouble if karma was going to finally be my judge.” Bono added: “It doesn’t excuse my mistakes, but I’m holding out for grace, because I know who I am, and I hope I don’t have to depend on my own religiosity… Christ took on the sins of the world so that what we put out did not come back to us, so that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. It’s not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven.”

It’s God’s grace. It’s that amazing grace.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus gets all the credit.

Teaching Point Two: There is a condition on God’s grace.

Teaching Point Three: We can complete the circle.
[Q] In which of the following do you most need Christ’s help?

- Pursue reconciliation in a relationship
- Forgive someone who has hurt or failed you
- Turn away from the criticizing, condemning way of the world
- Other

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

What do you do with a message and Messiah like that? You think: I have got to walk further into this concert. I’ve got to examine my circles. I have got to change the way I’ve been doing some of my relationships, root myself more in some kingdom disciplines, and let the song and its Singer move through me more and more.

Action Point: Which of the following do you most need Christ to transform in you? Share your answer with the group and ask them to pray for you.

- Help with my relationships
- Develop spiritual disciplines
- Let Christ transform my bad habits
- Other

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
What does Jesus think of fun?

When asked to give an adjective that describes Jesus of Nazareth, what comes to mind? How many of you instantly thought of the word fun? Not too many, I imagine, and that’s too bad. There is simply no way to closely read the gospels, or human nature, and not conclude that Jesus Christ lived with a spirit of joy, humor, and warmth that caused others to genuinely enjoy themselves. But as humans, we have skewed this idea in every way.

Scripture: Matthew 5:27–30

Part 1 Identify the Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.*

Have you ever known children to throng around someone who wasn’t fun? Yet the Bible mentions that Jesus welcomed kids. Have you ever known a bunch of men who’d voluntarily leave their jobs and families to go road tripping with somebody who was miserable to be around? Yet that is precisely what fishermen like Peter, government workers like Matthew, and political activists like Judas were willing to do for the chance to be with Jesus. Women like Mary and Martha kept the light on in their home, just hoping Jesus might drop by. Burned-out businessmen like Zaccheus climbed trees in hope of meeting him.

People found the teaching of Jesus “fun” to listen to. He regaled people with marvelous images of camels grunting to get themselves through needle eyes, and old women scavenging under tables looking for lost coins.

Christ’s teaching was filled with humor, satire, and irony; his vision of God and his kingdom was jammed with joy. Jesus described God as an amazing dad who’s willing to forgive unbelievably stupid acts by his kids, and even by criminals, when they come to their senses. Jesus pictured the kingdom of God as a place where people’s tears were dried and replaced by singing, where there was rejoicing over people being found or coming home, and where banquet tables were overflowing and more and more chairs kept being hauled out of the closet so that anyone who was willing to accept his invitation would be sure to find a place.

The first miracle Jesus ever did was to change water into wine so a wedding party could go on. One of the last things he did for his disciples was to host a final Passover feast, tell his friends how eagerly he’d desired to share that meal with them, and then speak of his hope that they might know his joy.

You can say a lot about Jesus. You can call him the sacrificing Savior who gave his life to save the world. You can call him the greatest teacher who ever lived. You can regard him as the most brilliant ethicist this world has ever known. You can name him Son of God and God in human flesh. And you’d be right on every count.

But there’s one thing you can’t say. If you know what ordinary people are drawn to, and what the gospels say about Jesus, you can’t conclude that Jesus was some kind of killjoy, some kind of red-faced prude, some sort of sponsor for a pinch-lipped, Church-Lady religion.

It’s important to remember this because it helps us understand why he so bugged the Pharisees, some of the most conservative religionists of his day. They looked at this life-affirming, joy-producing, freedom-celebrating aspect of Jesus’ nature and said: That just can’t be God speaking.
They looked at the way Jesus embraced ordinary, imperfect people and thought: That just can’t be God acting.

They listened to Christ’s critique of their way of life and the radical claims he made about himself, and they said: We’ve just got to get rid of this guy.

**Discussion Questions:**

[Q] What do you think of the idea of Jesus being fun? Do you think that’s true? Why or why not?

[Q] Daniel Meyer says that “Christ’s teaching was filled with humor, satire, and irony” and gives some examples. Can you think of some other examples?

[Q] Why do Christ’s followers often become such killjoys?

[Q] How might fun and holiness go together? When might they part ways?

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**Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching Point One: Sometimes Jesus is not much fun.**

It’s important to understand that Jesus is fun even when he doesn’t sound like any fun. There are times when he says things that, frankly, smash up against our sense of freedom and fulfillment. There are moments when Jesus looks us right in the eye and says: You’ve got to learn to patrol your pleasures. Read Matthew 5:27–30.

This word he speaks to us in Matthew 5 is one of those times. Generally we’re okay with this commandment at its start. Most couples going over their wedding vows do not say, “Um, we were hoping we could leave a multiple partners option in there someplace.” When Jesus says: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’” a few of us wince because we know we’ve failed badly; but virtually all of us get, in principle, the importance of faithfulness to one partner.

It’s the sentence that follows that is so much harder to take. Jesus says, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Wow. Is Jesus really saying what it sounds like he is saying? Is he saying that even a little fantasizing is not okay? What could be wrong with a little derriere staring if we’re committed to
not touching? What’s so bad about looking at an explicit magazine or website image so long as we’re not actually breaking our commitment to our marriage?

Carry the idea out further, because it isn’t just sexual connections after which we lust, is it? Suppose we get the notion that we’re not supposed to be owned by things, and that we’re meant to be wise stewards of our resources. So, is there really a problem with a little lusting after the things we see in catalogs and shopping malls, so long as we don’t actually pull out the credit card? Suppose we honestly want to take better care of our bodies so that they’ll be healthy temples in which to continue God’s mission for us in life. Is there really any problem if we just browse the refrigerator or candy aisle? What could be wrong with this kind of innocent fun?

[Q] Why do you think Jesus gave us such a hard, and seemingly impossible, command (v. 28)? How does he expect us to carry it out? Give practical ideas.

[Q] How does such a command square with Jesus not being a killjoy?

[Q] Why does Jesus always focus on the heart rather than just our outward actions?

[Q] Which of the following lusts do you most need to discipline your mind against?

- Sex
- Finances
- Prestige
- Success
- Food
- Other

Teaching Point Two: There is a battle for the human heart.

To understand this passage, we must comprehend what the Bible says about how the battle for the human heart is won or lost. Dallas Willard points out that, so far as the Bible describes it, the human “heart” (or “will”) is the executive center of our lives. The writer of Proverbs says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” A spiritually healthy heart pumps out choices and conduct that influence all your external relationships and activities for the better. When your heart is healthy, you will be a better husband or wife, parent, friend, or coworker.

The Bible teaches that the health of our spiritual heart is influenced primarily through two arteries: our reason and our emotions. The Bible pictures the destruction of the human heart as coming from the invasion of ideas, images, and impulses that clog our reason and corrupt our emotions to the point where the health of our heart is severely compromised.

The preeminent example, of course, is the story of the Fall. Read Genesis 3:1–7.
First, the serpent attacks the artery of reason: You can’t really trust God. He’s making demands of you that are unreasonable. He just wants to keep everything for himself.

Then the serpent attacks the artery of Eve’s emotions. First, reason is compromised: “You can’t trust God.” Then the emotions are breached: “That forbidden fruit would sure taste good. It’s desirable.” And then the heart fails; the will falls. Genesis says that Eve “took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” Another poet put it this way: “‘Who’s there?’ I cried, ‘A little tiny sin.’ ‘Enter,’ I said. And all hell came in.”

[Q] Give an example of how Satan has attacked you through reason (you can’t really trust God—he’s making unreasonable demands).

[Q] Give an example of how Satan has attacked you through your emotions (you won’t be happy unless you have this forbidden thing).

[Q] How can we learn to recognize and combat such attacks?

[Q] In what way does “all hell come in” when we let in a “little tiny sin”?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: To help us recognize Satan’s attacks.

Activity: Explain how Satan might tempt the following people to sin through their reason and emotions.

- Janine has overspent her credit cards, but she would really like to get a nice gift for her friend’s wedding.
- Thomas has checked out a few X-rated websites, but he hasn’t actually entered them.
- Melody, who is working to help put her husband through seminary, is ashamed of her shabby furniture.
- Curt, who is married with three children, has been offered a promotion at work that will involve traveling most of the year.

Now explain how each of these people could resist the temptation to sin.

Teaching Point Three: Victory is won at the perimeter.

Many of us have tasted hell in places, and count as good friends people who’ve lived there. One person shares his insights, gained from years of struggling against the pull of pornography, the habit of lusting and fantasizing about other women, and finally the full-blown heart attack of adultery.
He says that the battle for the human heart, and all the health or horror that flows from it, must be waged at the perimeter of our lives. You can't retreat into the sanctuary of comparative righteousness, telling yourself: *At least I'm not like so-and-so, or, At least I haven't done such-and-such yet.* You've got to post guards at the perimeter of your life. You've got to patrol even what appear to be innocent pleasures.

This is exactly what Jesus is saying to us in Matthew 5. On the surface of it, Christ's words sound absolutely draconian: “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away… And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Jesus isn't advocating self-mutilation here. An early church father named Origen took Jesus' words at face value and literally castrated himself, only to discover that he still had challenges with lust. Origen came to realize that what Jesus really was saying is that if we are serious about having healthy hearts, then we have to be willing to take extreme, even drastic, measures to control what our eyes dwell upon and what our hands take hold of.

Few things so affect our reason and emotions as what our eyes fix upon and our hands touch. If your eyes and hands are working for God and you, they will keep potentially dangerous ideas and images from crawling their way so deep into your camp that they conquer your heart. If your eyes and hands are failing in that function, says Jesus—if those intended sentries are actually bringing the enemy in—what measures are you going to take to redeploy them?

Doug Weiss, one of the nation's leading experts on handling compulsion and addictions, suggests that people struggling in this area wear a rubber band around their wrist. When you find your eye or your hands straying in the direction of trouble, he advocates pulling back on the rubber band a good long distance and giving it a snap. One friend who uses that technique says: “Believe me, the pain that is produced by doing that makes me completely forget about the pleasures I was contemplating!”

The desert fathers of ancient Christianity called this technique the “mortification of the flesh.” It can certainly be taken too far, as Origen found out, but what are the measures that we will use to guard the reason and emotions that influence our hearts? Perhaps it means throwing out the catalogs and turning off the advertisements, so that our hearts aren't being invaded by desires for more things. Maybe it means not even turning on the television when we're away on business, because of the desires it will feed. Possibly we should turn off the morning radio programs because of the incredibly crass and cruel way people speak of others.

What are the measures you take to patrol the pleasures offered at the perimeter of your life? Maybe even more helpful, what are the ideas and images that you are replacing the destructive ones with? That's the function of the spiritual disciplines recommended in the first study of this series. The disciplines offer us a way to gainfully deploy our reason and emotions in a manner that builds the strength and health of our heart. Read Philippians 4:8–9.
Patrol Your Pleasures
Leader’s Guide

[Q] How can we do the things Paul mentions in these verses? What habits might we need to change in order to do that?

[Q] Explain what it means that the victory is won at the perimeter.
  • What perimeters need to be guarded in your life?

[Q] What spiritual disciplines might help you with this?

[Q] Have you been able to implement any of the spiritual disciplines mentioned in the first study? Why or why not?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Maybe we’re not really all that interested in peace. A titillated, adrenaline-rushed life feels better. Perhaps we’re not all that motivated to pursue a life that is noble, pure, lovely, or admirable. A life like everyone else’s is fine with us. The apostle James says: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). But maybe we’d just like forgiveness for our obsessions, not healing.

Then let’s just keep doing what we’ve been doing with our eyes and our hands. And while we’re at it, look at that guy Jesus over there. Can you believe his nerve in saying what he’s saying—telling us to patrol our pleasures? Let’s just crucify him.

**Action Point:** Do you just want forgiveness rather than healing for your obsessions? If so, ask the group to pray for you in this regard. If you truly want healing but don’t know how to get it, ask the group for prayer and support.

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
What does Jesus think of fun?

When asked to give an adjective that describes Jesus of Nazareth, what comes to mind? How many of you instantly thought of the word fun? Not too many, I imagine, and that’s too bad. There is simply no way to closely read the gospels, or human nature, and not conclude that Jesus Christ lived with a spirit of joy, humor, and warmth that caused others to genuinely enjoy themselves. But as humans, we have skewed this idea in every way.

Scripture: Matthew 5:27–30

Part 1 Identify the Issue

You can say a lot about Jesus. You can call him the sacrificing Savior who gave his life to save the world. You can call him the greatest teacher who ever lived. You can regard him as the most brilliant ethicist this world has ever known. You can name him Son of God and God in human flesh. And you’d be right on every count.

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They listened to Christ’s critique of their way of life and the radical claims he made about himself, and they said: We’ve just got to get rid of this guy.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Sometimes Jesus is not much fun.

[Q] Which of the following lusts do you most need to discipline your mind against?

- Sex
- Prestige
- Food
- Finances
- Success
- Other

Teaching Point Two: There is a battle for the human heart.

Teaching Point Three: Victory is won at the perimeter.
Maybe we’re not really all that interested in peace. A titillated, adrenaline-rushed life feels better. Perhaps we’re not all that motivated to pursue a life that is noble, pure, lovely, or admirable. A life like everyone else’s is fine with us. The apostle James says: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). But maybe we’d just like forgiveness for our obsessions, not healing.

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—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
Check Your Bags

What are you dragging around with you?

All of us carry loads that are often of our own making. Lent is a great time to look at those loads and see what needs to be repacked and what needs to be tossed.

Scripture: Matthew 19:16–30

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

In his best-selling book *Halftime*, Bob Buford tells a story that is reminiscent of the encounter we read about in Matthew 19:16–30. At age 44, Buford found himself at the apex of what the world defines as “success.” He had parlayed a modest cable television business into a fabulously profitable empire. He was driving a Jaguar, splitting his time between several luxurious homes, and able to travel anywhere he wanted, whenever he wanted. Like some who have climbed the summit of Mount Everest, however, Bob Buford found himself at the top of the world, wondering why he felt more aware of the wind and the cold than he was of the view.

“All my life, I had been great at developing strategic plans for business,” says Buford. “Now, I realized, I needed a plan for me. I spread out my jumbled dreams and desires, lists of perceived strengths and weakness … things to do and things to abandon. It was a quagmire of both complementary and conflicting ambitions… What should I do now? I wondered. Where should I invest my talents, time, and treasure? What are the values that give purpose to my life? What is the overarching vision that shapes me? Who am I? Where am I going?”

Amidst this blizzard of confusion, God brought into Buford’s life a revered management consultant named Mike Kami, a guy who’d directed the central planning of a stunning list of corporate giants. Kami was a self-proclaimed atheist, but God used him to sow into Bob Buford’s soul an explosively creative question: “What’s in the box?”

“What are you talking about?” Buford asked.

Kami went on to relate an experience he had consulting with a group of Coca-Cola executives. He’d asked those people the same question: “What’s in the box for you? What is the mainspring of your business, the driving force, the ruling consideration for you?” The executives deliberated for awhile and then gave their answer: “Great taste. That’s what’s in the box for us.”

From there, the Coca-Cola executives went on to conduct a vast array of taste tests. They came up with a new formula that tasted even better than the original one. They introduced “New Coke” a short while later and promptly blundered into one of the most famous product marketing gaffs in business history. Desperate now, the company called Mike Kami back in for another planning session. “You must have put the wrong word in the box,” Mike told them. “Let’s try again.”

For several hours, the executives talked among themselves. They realized that “pulling Coca-Cola from the market was akin to tampering with an American institution like motherhood or apple
No Wonder They Crucified Him

Check Your Bags

Leader’s Guide

pie.” They emerged from their discussion with something different to put in the box. It was the phrase, “American Tradition.” They retooled the formula, “Classic Coke” went back on the shelves, and Coca-Cola marched into a much brighter future.

Mike Kami let the story sink in. Then he said to Buford: “Bob, I’ve been listening to you for a couple of hours. You’ve told me a lot about your interests and passions. I’m going to tell you what’s in the box for you. I can tell that for you, it is either money or Jesus Christ. If you can tell me which it is, I can tell you the strategic implications of that choice. If you can’t tell me, you’re going to oscillate between those two values and be confused.” Buford said: “No one had ever put such a significant question to me so directly. After a few minutes (which seemed like hours), I said, ‘Well, if it has to be one or the other, I’ll put Jesus Christ in the box.’”

Years later, Buford said: “To put Christ in the box, I found, is actually a paradox. It is to break down the walls of the box and allow the power and grace of his life to invade every aspect of your own life. It follows the same wonderfully inverted logic as [Christ’s] ancient assertion that it is in giving that one receives, in our weakness we are made strong, and in dying we are born to richer life. I chose to make Christ my primary loyalty, and found that he did not insist upon exclusive attention. I still had loyalties to my wife, to work, to friends, and projects. Now Christ became the center of all that, but in a way that gave my life balance and wholeness.”

Discussion Questions:

[Q] What is in your box? How do you know?

[Q] Why can’t Christ share the box with anything or anyone else?

[Q] What did Buford mean when he said that to “put Christ in the box … is actually a paradox”?

[Q] How does putting Christ in the box give us balance and wholeness that we cannot find in any other way?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: We all need to ask: What’s in the box?

Read Matthew 19:16–30.

Another young man once stood atop the Mount Everest of success with a yearning much like Bob Buford’s. “What good thing must I do to get eternal life?” he asked the compelling Teacher from Galilee. Jesus replied by saying, in effect, to love God and follow his plan: “Do not murder,
do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” “All these [commandments] I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

In other words: I’m doing the right things. I’m managing about as well as I know how. So why don’t I feel like my life is significant? Why don’t I feel like my life is integrated? How do I get what I see in you, Jesus—that wholeness, grace, and goodness, that peace and power you teach about? What do I still lack?

Jesus answered: What you lack is the right thing in the box. If you want to be perfect, you’re going to have to take out what’s in there and put in something else. I recommend that you “go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

But the text says that, “When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth”—or it had him.

[Q] Why do you think Jesus started this conversation with keeping the commandments?

[Q] Do you feel as the young man did, that you are following all the rules and it’s still not working for you? Explain.

[Q] Why do you think Jesus asked the young man to sell everything and give to the poor?

* Would it have been enough to give everything he had to the poor if he hadn’t then followed Jesus? Why or why not?

[Q] Does this story make you uncomfortable in any way? If so, how? What does it mean for us?

**Teaching Point Two: Check your bags.**

What has you? What is the mainspring, the driving force, the ruling consideration in your life? What’s in the box? Is it money and possessions? Is it the belief that if you just have some more, life will be better? Is it approval? Do you think that if you could please everybody, you’d feel a lot better? Is it order and control? Are you one of those people who feel that if you can just get your life organized, if you can just get through the to-do list, empty out your inbox, things will be good? Is it knowledge you have in the box? You think: One of these days I’m going to know enough that it will all come together. Is it power? Are you someone who feels that if you can just get the upper hand, if you can just get out from under, then all will be well? What’s in the box for you? On some level, and on different days, we may think we have all those things in the box. Many
of us actually carry bags of boxes. We don’t often check those bags. Usually, we are moving so fast that all we do is drag them along, struggling to get them through the door with us. But in rare moments of quiet, especially during the season of Lent, we need to open them up and look inside. How humbling it is to realize how much our lives are ruled by what is in there.

The ancient desert fathers of the Christian tradition believed that at the bottom of everyone’s box or bag is one of three things. For some people it is anxiety: a roiling worry that I’m not perfect enough, not loved enough, or not competent enough. For other people it is fear: a sense that everything’s going to fall apart; my whole life is threatened if I don’t protect myself in some way. Still others have anger at the bottom of their box: a simmering resentment that things are not as they should be and that I’m not being treated as I ought to be. When you check it carefully, what’s at the bottom of your bag or box? How is it shaping your life?

Read Matthew 7:13–14.

A lot of people want an eternal quality of life. But they are like camels laden with bags and boxes, filled with stuff that won’t fit through the gate—especially the gate to the kingdom of God, which is as small and narrow as the eye of a needle. The Bible says that “when the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”’

[Q] How can the loads we carry keep us from fitting through the gate?

[Q] Which of the following three things may be driving your choice of what is in your box?

- Anxiety (I’m not perfect, loved, or competent enough)
- Fear (Everything is going to fall apart if I don’t protect myself)
- Anger (I’m not treated as I ought to be)

[Q] If you had trouble answering earlier what was in your box, do these suggestions help?

Discuss your answer.

- Family
- Career
- Home
- Ministry
- Order & control
- Finances
- Success
- Self-preservation
- Approval
- Knowledge
Check Your Bags

Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** To help us recognize what may be keeping Christ out of the box.

**Activity:** Explain what may be keeping Christ out of the box for each of the following people. Then identify whether anxiety, fear, or anger might be driving that.

- Steven wants to be president of the company before he reaches 30.
- Claire will not let her children play with other children.
- Clyde spends 90 hours a week in his role as pastor of his church.
- Paula completely redecorates her house every three years.
- Ben is now working on his fifth degree. He has yet to hold a full-time job.
- Joan lives in isolation. She goes to church once a week, but that is the only contact she has with anyone.

**Teaching Point Three: Put Christ in the box.**

Jesus comes to you and me this Lent to do what only God makes possible. He comes to change the formula in our box and, in doing so, to change the shape of our lives. Only this transformation can enable us to actually walk through the gate and into the life we want. If, like Bob Buford and so many others before and since him, we want Christ, then we must allow Jesus himself to replace what is in our box.

Maybe it is anxiety for you. Imagine Jesus lifting it up, taking it out, and setting it aside. Then he steps in and takes its place: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled … trust in God and also in me.”

Perhaps it is fear that runs your life. Picture Jesus scooping it all out today and replacing it with his presence. As he says some 17 times in the New Testament, Jesus says to you now: “Do not be afraid … Have no fear,” for “I am with you always.”

Or maybe anger is in your bag. Imagine the nail-pierced hands of Jesus taking out that feeling, looking in your eyes, and saying: I am filling your heart right now and giving you the power to love your enemies, to forgive those who know not what they do, and to forgive as you have been forgiven.

Jesus can take the place of all the destructive anguish that lives inside our hearts. He can replace anxiety with faith, fear with hope, and anger with love. As he becomes the primary reality in our box, it will alter the way we use our money. It will change the level to which we seek human
approval instead of God’s. It will transform the manner in which we react when we can’t have order and control. It will convert the purposes to which we put our knowledge and the way we use our power.

We will not only check inside our bags more regularly, we will check some of those bags altogether. We’ll leave them at the gate. We’ll long to travel lighter and freer. Read Hebrews 12:1–2.

[Q] What race are these verses talking about?
[Q] What do you need to “throw off” that is hindering your race?
[Q] What does it mean to “fix our eyes on Jesus”? How do we do that in our everyday lives?
[Q] How does he become the “author and perfecter” of our faith?
[Q] What joy is set before him (and us) that makes us want to run this race?

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Bob Buford discovered the wonder of that eternal quality of life—that classic life for which every one of us has been made. How about you? Will you let Jesus take the place of what haunts and harries you? Will you practice the spiritual disciplines that enable him to keep that replacement process going and growing?

Or will you and I do what the Pharisees did? Jesus looked at them and said: I know you believe that you’ve reached the summit of success. I know you feel that it is mostly others who need changing. But woe to you … you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of everything unclean. I have seen inside your box. I tell you, check your bags. Change your formula. Repent!

And, presented with that chance for new life, they just sealed their boxes even tighter, held their bags even closer, and said—as we also are free to say to the invitation of Jesus: No, I think we’d rather just crucify you.

**Action Point:** Set aside time this week to examine what is in your box and ask Christ to give you the courage to empty it out and start over if you need to.

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
### No Wonder They Crucified Him

**Check Your Bags**

*Participant’s Guide*

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**Participant’s Guide**

### Check Your Bags

**What are you dragging around with you?**

All of us carry loads that are often of our own making. Lent is a great time to look at those loads and see what needs to be repacked and what needs to be tossed.

**Scripture:** Matthew 19:16–30

**Based On:** “No Wonder They Crucified Him,” sermon series by Daniel Meyer, PreachingToday.com.

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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Bob Buford said: “To put Christ in the box, I found, is actually a paradox. It is to break down the walls of the box and allow the power and grace of his life to invade every aspect of your own life. It follows the same wonderfully inverted logic as [Christ’s] ancient assertion that it is in giving that one receives, in our weakness we are made strong, and in dying we are born to richer life. I chose to make Christ my primary loyalty, and found that he did not insist upon exclusive attention. I still had loyalties to my wife, to work, to friends, and projects. Now Christ became the center of all that, but in a way that gave my life balance and wholeness.”

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: We all need to ask: What’s in the box?

Teaching Point Two: Check your bags.

[Q] Which of the following three things may be driving your choice of what is in your box?

- Anxiety (I’m not perfect, loved, or competent enough)
- Fear (Everything is going to fall apart if I don’t protect myself)
- Anger (I’m not treated as I ought to be)

[Q] If you had trouble answering earlier what was in your box, do these suggestions help? Discuss your answer.

- Family
- Career
- Home
- Ministry
- Order & control
- Finances
- Success
- Self-preservation
- Approval
- Knowledge

Teaching Point Three: Put Christ in the box.
Bob Buford discovered the wonder of that eternal quality of life—that classic life for which every one of us has been made. How about you? Will you let Jesus take the place of what haunts and harasses you? Will you practice the spiritual disciplines that enable him to keep that replacement process going and growing?

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Sometimes Jesus is really scary.

Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

There are few words Jesus ever spoke that are scarier.

Scripture: Matthew 16:21–28

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.


When Jesus explained toward the end of his three years of public ministry that he would have to suffer, die, and be raised to life, Peter rebuked him: “Never, Lord! … This shall never happen to you!”

What Jesus said in the face of this apparent devotion forces us to define discipleship. Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

There are few words Jesus ever spoke that are scarier. That’s particularly true when you contrast them with some of his other invitations. When Jesus says, “Come dine with me,” most of us are pleased to accept. When Christ says, “Come do life with me”—experience the difference my companionship makes—many of us are naturally intrigued. When Jesus says, “Come dance with me”—come experience my joy—it seems like a good deal to follow him.

But when he says, “Come die with me”—come take up a cross with me, come experience my death—there is something in almost all of us that cries out with the apostle Peter, “Never, Lord!” And this is only natural. From the cradle on, we are taught that the goal of life is to preserve it. From the moment we’re first strapped into our child safety seats to the day we are lying in a hospital room with tubes in our bodies, the continual message is: Preserve, protect, sustain, secure!

It is not simply the maintenance of life, but its continual maximization that we are taught in America today. From early on, we absorb the message that the quality of one’s life is directly related to the quantity of life—the enhancements we have been able to secure. Our lives come to be defined by the titles and trophies we’ve amassed, the pleasures and privileges we enjoy, and the knowledge and things we’ve acquired.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Why do you think Jesus reacted so strongly to Peter’s words?

[Q] What do you think it means to take up your cross?

[Q] How can we lose our life for Jesus? Does that just mean physical death? Explain.
[Q] In what ways are we in danger of gaining the world but forfeiting our souls?

[Q] What reward is there in giving up our lives for Christ?

Part 2  Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus calls us to die.

Jesus tells us that we have defined life too superficially, too selfishly, too stupidly. He looks right into our eyes, as he did the Pharisees’, and tells us that we’re barely touching life as God intended it. He tells us to get off the fence we’ve been walking between the world’s way and the kingdom’s way. He challenges us to complete the circle of grace, and not just demand it for ourselves because we’ve got a ticket. He calls us to patrol the pleasures we’ve allowed to invade our perimeter and conquer our hearts. He tells us to check our bags for the anxiety, fear, and anger we’ve been carrying so long that we don’t see how burdened and blocked we still are. Jesus demands that we give outrageous grace to those who wish us harm and seek to take our land.

If we are truly hearing him, then we rightly recognize that the coming of Jesus requires not only his death, but our own. If we are going to follow Jesus through the gate of the kingdom—if we are to be born anew into this life of God—then the way we’ve been taught to define life, the way we’ve naturally come at life, the life or self we’ve become, has to die. It has to be lost. It has to be named and nailed and annihilated. And that will be painful and hard. It will demand something of the profound humility and courageous perseverance we see in Jesus as he carries his cross.

It will mean periods of terrible thirsting for the substances that used to slake our thirst. It will mean times when we’ll feel utterly forsaken by God. It will put us in a place of temporary vulnerability before the soldiers and mocking crowds of this world. It will mean cleaving to our spiritual family the way Mary and John were called to by Christ at the cross. It will require a daily commitment of our Spirit into the Father’s hands. It means a trusting obedience until God’s work in and through us is completed and we can say: “It is finished.”

George MacDonald, the great Scottish preacher, wrote:

Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves; not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live, but live as he lives—by dying as he died, who died to himself that he might live unto God. If we do not die to ourselves, we cannot live to God, and he that does not live to God is dead.
During Holy Week, we are accustomed to focusing on the death that followed Palm Sunday. But if we stop there, we miss much of the meaning of Good Friday and the Easter beyond. It is equally crucial that we remember the death that Christ called for, a price entirely worth paying. It is the path to communion with God himself. It is the road to eternal peace and prosperity. It is the only way to gain an unshakable faith, an unconquerable hope, and a life-changing love more precious than anything the crowds chase after. But this is what Jesus makes clear: This life doesn't come from simply wearing a cross; it comes from bearing a cross.

[Q] In what ways have you been wearing a cross but not bearing a cross?

[Q] How have you defined life too superficially or selfishly?

[Q] For which of the following do you most need to trust God in order to die to self?

- The agony I will feel in giving up bad habits
- That God is good when I don’t feel his presence or understand what he’s doing
- Humility to depend on my spiritual family
- That God can work in and through me to change me and the world around me

Teaching Point Two: We have to want Jesus more than self.

No wonder they crucified him. No wonder even some of Jesus’ would-be disciples said: Never, Lord. I don’t like this path you’re talking about.

People still want to crucify Christ instead of die to self. There are times when it would be easier to rewrite the story of Jesus and make him someone who would never really insist on such difficult choices. We would like Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code Jesus—someone who would never do something so radical as to deny himself the pleasure of sex, who got married to Mary Magdalene and had a child, and whose real gospel was about touching the divine through physical pleasures and fertility.

If I view the church of Jesus in the Da Vinci Code way—as just a collection of corrupt or misguided people—if I can simply caricature spiritual disciplines as some sort of sick, twisted masochism … it is freeing, in a way. I can take the parts of the biblical Jesus that I like—the ones that reinforce my lifestyle, that leave me feeling spiritual without much cost. I can go on with life as I have. I can keep the self I have.

But I don’t want that self. I want a better self.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–17.
No Wonder They Crucified Him

Come Die with Me
Leader’s Guide

[Q] What compels us to want Jesus more than our old selves (v. 14)?

[Q] According to verse 15, why did Jesus die?

[Q] How do we quit viewing people from a worldly point of view (v. 16)?

[Q] If we are a new creation in Christ, why do we fall into old habits?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: To help us take steps to become new people in Christ.

Activity: Recording their answers on a whiteboard or poster board, ask the group to name ways that people become stuck in their faith. When your list is complete, ask them how a person could move beyond each situation.

Teaching Point Three: Hate your life in this world to keep it for eternal life.

Arland D. Williams Jr. illustrates the kind of life Jesus demands of us.

If you’ve spent much time in the Washington D.C. area, you may know that there is a bridge named after Williams that crosses the Potomac River. On January 13th, 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 iced up upon takeoff and crashed into those frigid waters moments later. Many watched on the news the struggle to rescue the small number of survivors who treaded water for their life. Among the survivors was Arland Williams.

As the Washington Post tells it: “Five different times, a helicopter dropped a rope to save Williams. Five times, Williams passed the rope to other passengers in worse shape than he was. When the rope was extended to Williams the sixth time, he could not take hold and succumbed to the frigid waters. His heroism was not rash. Aware that his own strength was fading, [Williams] deliberately handed hope to someone else.” Again and again and again and again and again and again, in the most difficult circumstances, Arland Williams made the choice to die to self.

There is a bridge to new life that stands at a place where someone else once made some deliberate choices. “No one takes my life from me,” Jesus said to Peter and the other disciples shortly before walking to the cross. “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Read John 12:23–26.

[Q] Jesus’ death produced many seeds. How can our death to self do the same?

[Q] What does it mean to hate my life? Does that mean I need to find ways to be miserable? If not, what does it mean?

[Q] How will the Father honor the one who serves Christ?
Part 3 Apply Your Findings

When he might have elected to do otherwise, Jesus chose to take up his cross and pay the ultimate price for human sin, that you and I might be forgiven and live forever with God. Jesus chose to pass to you and me the rope of salvation. If you have never taken hold of it before, grab hold of that rope today. Let Christ pull you to safety. Let him wrap you in the blanket of his family.

But once you’ve done that, don’t stop there. Don’t let the cross be merely a symbol of the life Jesus had, or that you’ll have in heaven. Let it be a signpost to the life Christ calls you to in this world. Cross over the bridge and into the life of the kingdom of God. You know the way into that city, don’t you? It’s the way marked out by Jesus, and by every soul in every home and church and workplace and town who keeps making the difficult choice, the disciple’s choice.

“If [you] would come after me,” said Jesus, “[you] must deny [your]self and take up [your] cross and follow me.” Sometimes, this call and cross causes us to tremble. But it’s the tremble of new life.

**Action Point:** What is keeping you from taking up your cross? Share with the group and spend time praying for each other.

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon
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Scripture: Matthew 16:21–28

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Part 2  Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus calls us to die.

[Q] For which of the following do you most need to trust God in order to die to self?

• The agony I will feel in giving up bad habits
• That God is good when I don’t feel his presence or understand what he’s doing
• Humility to depend on my spiritual family
• That God can work in and through me to change me and the world around me

Teaching Point Two: We have to want Jesus more than self.

Teaching Point Three: Hate your life in this world to keep it for eternal life.
Part 3 Apply Your Findings

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Jesus invites us to breakfast and beyond.

Jesus conquered death and rose from the dead! It’s the most joyous news ever announced. After his resurrection, he stayed around to have breakfast with his most faithful followers. Through his encounter with them, we find encouragement and challenge.

Scripture: John 21:1–25

No Wonder They Crucified Him

Follow Me
Leader’s Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

Imagine the mystery and delight of not just hearing, but seeing the story of Jesus for the first time, almost as an eyewitness.

That’s what happened to a tribe in the jungles of East Asia when missionaries showed them the Jesus film. Not only had these people never heard of Jesus, they had never seen a motion picture. Then, all at once, on one unforgettable evening, they saw it all—the gospel in their own language, visible and real.

Imagine again how it felt to see this good man Jesus, who healed the sick and was adored by children, held without trial and beaten by jeering soldiers. As they watched this, the people came unglued. They stood up and began to shout at the cruel men on the screen, demanding that this outrage stop.

When nothing happened, they attacked the missionary running the projector. Perhaps he was responsible for this injustice! He was forced to stop the film and explain that the story wasn’t over yet, that there was more. So they settled back onto the ground, holding their emotions in tenuous check.

Then came the crucifixion. Again, the people could not hold back. They began to weep and wail with such loud grief that once again the film had to be stopped. The missionary again tried to calm them, explaining that the story still wasn’t over, that there was more. So they composed themselves and sat down to see what happened next.

Then came the resurrection. Pandemonium broke out this time, but for a different reason. The gathering had spontaneously erupted into a party. The noise now was of jubilation, and it was deafening. The people were dancing and slapping each other on the back. Christ is risen, indeed!

Again the missionary had to shut off the projector. But this time he didn’t tell them to calm down and wait for what was next. All that was supposed to happen—in the story and in their lives—was happening. (Ben Patterson, “Resurrection and Pandemonium,” LeadershipJournal.net, 4-13-04)

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Has the Resurrection story become boring and routine to you? Why or why not?

[Q] How did the disciples change as a result of the Resurrection?
[Q] After the Resurrection, Christ appeared to many of his disciples. Tell us about any of those experiences you know of.

[Q] What difference has the Resurrection made in your life?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus invites us to breakfast.


Jesus said, “Come and have breakfast” (v. 12). He had conquered death and risen from the grave. He was planning to build a kingdom. But Jesus called the people through whom he’d alter history in the centuries ahead to come to breakfast.

In many ways, it was nothing new for Jesus. Before his death and resurrection, he’d often described the kingdom of God as a banquet table. He’d laid out a meal for at least 5,000 people on one occasion. He annoyed the pinch-faced Pharisees with his penchant for partying it up with a questionable cast of characters. On the night before his death, he’d gathered his disciples around him and thrown one final feast—telling them that they should keep on getting together to eat and drink and share like this, and that when they did so, they should remember him, because he would be there in their midst.

There are several important messages in this for us. One of them is simply that God enjoys seeing people fed. God likes to feed people physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually—and he forms the Christian community for that purpose.

At the start, the Christian church was all about that. Read Acts 2:42–47 for a description of the original church.

[Q] Name the things in Acts 2:42–47 that the early believers practiced.
[Q] How often did they get together (v. 46)?
[Q] What does their behavior show about how they felt about Christ and each other?
[Q] What was the result of their behavior (v. 47)?
Follow Me
Leader’s Guide

[Q] Which of the following do you enjoy most? Which do you find difficult?

• Teaching (the Word of God, godly teachers)
• Fellowship with other believers
• Breaking of bread
• Prayer
• Selling possessions to meet needs

Teaching Point Two: Jesus gets to the core of our souls.

“Come and have breakfast,” Jesus said that morning. And Simon Peter, doubting Thomas, Nathanael, the two sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two others came. The Bible says that they’d been out all night fishing and had caught nothing.

And then those disciples had heard a voice in the darkness speaking to them from the shoreline. It told them to make a change. “Throw your net on the [other] side of the boat, and you will find [what you’re looking for].” For some reason—maybe desperation, maybe inspiration—they obeyed the voice, and bam! The net filled with so many fish that it nearly broke. Amazed by the grace they’d received, hungry for some genuine food after a very long night, those seven men came.

This is how it often is for people who come to Jesus. Some of us become aware that a mysterious voice has been guiding us on life’s seas—that it has led us to blessing—and now we simply want to get closer to the Source. Others of us come to the breakfast after a long night on our own. We’re not really sure who or what we’ll find, but we know we’re plenty hungry, and whatever’s cooking on this shoreline smells good. Still others of us are like the nameless people in the story. We’re just along for the ride, but that’s okay. At least now we’re here by the fire. We’re in position for what comes next, when suddenly we see that Jesus won’t just do brunch in the usual way. He will not be content with just leaving us fat and happy. He is determined to make us healthy in soul.


“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’” If you know the prior story of Peter, then you know this was a devastating question. Pardon the pun, but it was a “fillet of soul.” It laid Peter open like one of those fish on the grill, exposing the truth about him.
Peter's primary problem in life was his pride. It was never enough for Peter to be just one of the pack. He had to be better than other people, more valued and noticed. And so, on the night when Jesus revealed that he would soon be betrayed, Peter had spoken up: These guys might forsake you, Jesus, but I never will! I love you more than these guys do.

And then, to save his own skin, Peter had denied Jesus—not just once, but three times.

[Q] What is the question Jesus might ask at breakfast today that would cut to your very soul, exposing the particular emptiness you need to face?

**Leader’s Note:** To get the discussion going, you may want to pose these questions: Are you protecting your family so much that you aren’t reaching out to others? Are you keeping the vows you made? Do you want to know God and not just about God? Are you honoring your father and mother? Do you walk your talk? Can you stomach the truth?

Read Hebrews 4:12.

The Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ is also living and active. He dares to ask us the penetrating questions that cut to our very soul. No wonder they crucified him. And no wonder he wouldn't stay dead. For you see, God keeps coming back to ask us the questions that need to be answered—not to hurt us, but to heal us—as the rest of this story makes clear.

Three times—once to counterbalance each of the three times Peter denied him earlier—Jesus asked: “Peter, do you truly love me more than these” others do? What he really asked, and Peter answered, however, is only clear in the original Greek text, where we can see the word that each of them uses for “love.” The Greeks had a word for unconditional, unfailing, never-denying love—*agape*. It's the way God loves us. They also had a word for human affection, for the kind of well-intentioned love that may make bold claims one moment and fail bitterly the next—*fileo*.

The first time Jesus asked, he said: “Do you truly *agape* me, Peter?” The fisherman could have replied in his characteristic prideful way. But a humble honesty had begun to fill the once empty place at the core of Peter’s soul. “Yes, Lord, you know that I feel *fileo* for you.” Again Jesus tested him, “Simon, son of John, do you truly *agape* me?” “Yes, Lord, you know that I *fileo* you.”

But then Jesus does something amazing. He changes the formula in a stunning way. The third time, Jesus asks: “Do you have *fileo* for me, Peter?” And breathing, I believe, a sigh of relief at this grace, Peter quietly responds, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I have *fileo* for you.” Then Jesus replies by restoring once more the commission that will build the church to the ends of the earth. Jesus says: Then, Peter, as I have done with you, feed my sheep. Feed my people.

And Peter went on to do just that.
Follow Me

Leader’s Guide

[Q] How might you need reassurance from Christ for something you have failed him in?

Leader’s Note: Spend time encouraging each other of Christ’s forgiveness and restoration for all those who truly want it.

Optional Activity:

**Purpose:** To help us face our failures and receive Christ’s forgiveness and restoration.

**Activity:** Provide at least five minutes of silence for the group to reflect on any failures they need to confess. Then encourage them to ask Christ’s forgiveness and to ask him to begin to show them how to move ahead in the life and mission he has called them to.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

In Israel, a person can see the area where Jesus invited his disciples to breakfast. I stood there some years ago. It is an uncluttered shoreline, probably very much like it looked then. I arrived at the end of the day, near sunset. The waters of the Sea of Galilee were calm. I didn’t see a single fish or clue that a campfire had ever been there. *What evidence, I thought, is there here that these events ever transpired, or that Jesus still lives?*

It was about then that I heard a sound from a little stone chapel nestled back in a glade, the sound of people singing in Korean: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

**Action Point:** How do you respond to the question Christ asks you: Are you my disciple? Are you taking the steps needed to grow in my likeness, to fulfill my mission through you?

If your answer is like Peter’s, at least you are being honest. It’s okay to admit, “I’ve got a long way to go, Lord. I could use some help from others.” That’s a great new beginning. Christ will work with that, and we can help, for he still meets and feeds his imperfect people with such amazing grace.

“All blessed are those who hunger and thirst to get right with God and others. For they shall be filled.”

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Follow Me

Participant’s Guide

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Imagine the mystery and delight of not just hearing, but seeing the story of Jesus for the first time, almost as an eyewitness.

That's what happened to a tribe in the jungles of East Asia, when missionaries showed them the Jesus film. Not only had these people never heard of Jesus, they had never seen a motion picture. Then, all at once, on one unforgettable evening, they saw it all—the gospel in their own language, visible and real.

Imagine again how it felt to see this good man Jesus, who healed the sick and was adored by children, held without trial and beaten by jeering soldiers. As they watched this, the people came unglued. They stood up and began to shout at the cruel men on the screen, demanding that this outrage stop.

When nothing happened, they attacked the missionary running the projector. Perhaps he was responsible for this injustice! He was forced to stop the film and explain that the story wasn't over yet, that there was more. So they settled back onto the ground, holding their emotions in tenuous check.

Then came the crucifixion. Again, the people could not hold back. They began to weep and wail with such loud grief that once again the film had to be stopped. The missionary again tried to calm them, explaining that the story still wasn't over, that there was more. So they composed themselves and sat down to see what happened next.

Then came the resurrection. Pandemonium broke out this time, but for a different reason. The gathering had spontaneously erupted into a party. The noise now was of jubilation, and it was deafening. The people were dancing and slapping each other on the back. Christ is risen, indeed!

Again the missionary had to shut off the projector. But this time he didn't tell them to calm down and wait for what was next. All that was supposed to happen—in the story and in their lives—was happening. (Ben Patterson, “Resurrection and Pandemonium,” LeadershipJournal.net, 4-13-04)
Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus invites us to breakfast.

[Q] Which of the following do you enjoy most? Which do you find difficult?

- Teaching (the Word of God, godly teachers)
- Fellowship with other believers
- Breaking of bread
- Prayer
- Selling possessions to meet needs

Teaching Point Two: Jesus gets to the core of our souls.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

In Israel, a person can see the area where Jesus invited his disciples to breakfast. I stood there some years ago. It is an uncluttered shoreline, probably very much like it looked then. I arrived at the end of the day, near sunset. The waters of the Sea of Galilee were calm. I didn't see a single fish or clue that a campfire had ever been there. What evidence, I thought, is there here that these events ever transpired, or that Jesus still lives?

It was about then that I heard a sound from a little stone chapel nestled back in a glade, the sound of people singing in Korean: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon