



**AN ORIGINAL HOME GROUP STUDY**

**WEEK 1 3**

**WEEK 2 15**

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WEEK 5

# JESUS AS THE MASTER STORYTELLER



# LEADERS GUIDE

## Session 1: Jesus as the Master Storyteller

### SESSION GOALS

**Each session in this 5-week series is to be a building block. The goal is for every person to leave the Home Group discussion with a grasp on the main point and challenged to take action.**

**Main Point:** Jesus used parables to show us how stories resonate and relate to people. When we actively lean in and listen for the bigger message inside of Jesus's parables, then we find our own story inside it and discover more about the mysteries of God's Kingdom truths.

**Action Point:** Have you ever thought of your life as a story? If you know Jesus as your Savior, your story is your testimony. God wants you to use your story to connect with others to bring healing, hope and build the His Kingdom.

Take some time this week to write down the shaping and defining moments in your life (good and bad). Then connect the dots by thinking about how God worked in and between those landmark moments.

### WATCH

Show Session 1: Jesus as the Master Storyteller



## OPEN

**Leader:** What's your favorite story? It could be a book you read recently or years ago, a movie that resonates with you, or works on your heartstrings. Whatever it is, what makes you love that story?

Could it be that you find your own story inside the plotline? That can't happen unless you've bought in and connected to the bigger message inside of a story.

At the heart of it, a story is effective when it falls on a heart that's ready to receive it. Then it makes an impact when listeners lean in and take a step further to connect with the larger message and implications. Jesus knew this very well. In fact, he told a story, called a parable, about just that.

## READ

Read the "Parable of the Seeds" together as a group. It's recorded in Matthew 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:4-15. Read all three Gospel versions to see how they compare and contrast.

## DISCUSS

**Question:**

**What's the context of this parable? Gather information from scripture about when, where, and why Jesus is teaching this parable.**

**Answer:**

In the parable accounts in all three records, Jesus describes His true family saying, "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." In Matthew and Mark, this comes before the parable teaching from Jesus, and in Luke, it comes after.



In Luke, we see Jesus traveling through towns bringing “glad tidings of the Kingdom of God” with His twelve disciples before this parable teaching. There is also mention of women following Jesus, specifically, those that He had healed and cast out demons. This is an interesting reference because, in Jewish culture, women were not supposed to learn from rabbis. Jesus allowed women to follow Him, showing time and time again that all people are equal in the family of God.

We see that Jesus sat on a boat teaching this parable to a large crowd of people on the shore. At the end of each Gospel version, Jesus says, “He who has ears, let him hear!” This closing statement references a different and deeper type of listening that results in spiritual understanding. Jesus is telling us that if we honestly seek God’s will and way, we will have spiritual hearing, and these parables give us a new and life-changing perspective on God’s Kingdom.

Lastly, in each parable reference, we see that after Jesus has taught, His disciples and some followers ask him directly why He uses parables. Essentially, they’re asking Him why He isn’t just blatantly saying what He means. We see Jesus’s intriguing way of teaching and storytelling operates on two levels:

- Mainly, parables separated those that sincerely wanted truth and understanding to be spiritually fed because those who were receptive understood Jesus’s illustrations.
- Secondly, speaking parables prevented those looking for ways to entrap Jesus in His words and teaching to understand His message. Without hearing through spiritual ears, parables were merely confusing and meaningless stories.

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**Question:**

**What common knowledge is Jesus utilizing as the central theme in this parable, and why? With this in mind, what’s the bigger Kingdom truth Jesus**

**is sharing with those listening with spiritual ears?****Answer:**

In this parable, it is seeds and farming techniques. Here, we see a farmer scattering seeds. These seeds fell on all types of soil. Some seeds fell on rocky ground, some on thorn-infested dirt, and some seeds fell too far above the soil. None of these seeds came to fruition. They are rootless, choked out, or snatched up. But there was a portion of the seed that fell on good soil. Those seeds sunk deep into the ground and grew to produce lots of fruit.

At first glance, this parable seems like a simple explanation of happenstances or maybe a section from Agrarian Seeding Techniques 101. Some, or possibly most, of the people listening to Jesus's story were farmers. They understood the seeding process and the woes of crops remaining fruitless. His audience understood seeds, probably even better than we do. This shared understanding perked up some ears. Isn't that also how we connect with people best when we relate to them?

Farmers in that day had to scatter seeds by hand. They would walk through their fields with large bags of seed on their backs and liberally throw handfuls of seed onto the ground. Crops were not placed in neat and organized rows like more modern farming techniques because without modern-day machinery, no matter how skillful the farmer, many seeds would end up on bad ground and not produce a crop. Farmers would scatter lots of seeds so enough would fall on good and fertile soil to ensure a bountiful harvest.

Jesus brought a relatable concept to a group of people and made it about a more significant moral principle...then He let the seeds fall where they may.

Because here, in the preaching of this parable of the seeds, Jesus was the sower. He was scattering seeds. And they were falling on all types of soils (read: hearts).



That's how we go and make disciples for Christ – we share our story, our testimony. This parable encourages spiritual sowers to keep sharing, teaching, and preaching the Gospel and leading others to Christ. We need to keep sowing good seeds (the Gospel) on all types of ground (people) and trust God for the harvest (salvation).

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**Question:**

**Pastor Kenny explained in the video that the word parable means “to come alongside.” How does sharing your story do the same for those around you?**

**Answer:**

Relating to someone is a powerful tool in building connections and growing relationships, whether that means that you've been through similar life events or if you empathetically choose to aim for an understanding viewpoint.

This is another reason why Jesus came in the flesh to seek and save the lost. He chose to be Emmanuel, meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14). He could have done whatever was needed at a distance, but He chose to come close, to be like us, and to die to the flesh and in the flesh so He could be raised to life bringing ultimate salvation to the world. He chose to come alongside us.

So, when He asks us to go and make disciples and live a holy life surrendered to the Father...He's not asking us to do anything He hasn't already done Himself. He was tempted and troubled in the flesh in every way, just like us, but He overcame. Jesus's story drips with His love for us and desires to connect with us. It's a love story...and we all know those stories might just connect with us the deepest.

When we find common ground with those around us and ask God to use our story to minister to others, God can use our boldness and vulnerability to strengthen our faith and call others to His Kingdom. Our testimony is a Kingdom-building tool. We just have to be willing to use it.



## **OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

**Share a time when your story connected deeply with another person.**

- Were there walls up before?
- Did something about sharing your story break down barriers or create a bridge where there wasn't one before?
- How did that make you feel to make that connection? What was your listener's response to resonating with your story? Sometimes this shift is so evident that you can see the change in their body language or facial expressions towards you.
- How did your relationship look moving forward?



## BRINGING IT HOME

**Leader:** At times, our story may fall on hearts that aren't ready to hear it, but it also may fall on hearts that are ready to receive the message. That's how a story is deeply impactful and used to build God's Kingdom. That's why these simple yet God-ordained parables moved groves of people two thousand years ago and still do today.

We find our story in them, and God uses that to bring us to Himself.

Jesus told parables for everyone to hear, but they were really for the ones listening and leaning in. He used parables to illustrate something personal to us but also something bigger than ourselves. Then, He brought it into one teaching style, one message...one story.

But we only begin to call our story "our testimony" when there is a turning point in our lives. That turning point consists of two critical components: Jesus and hope. When we mix those ingredients into our messy story, it comes out as a testimony.

Jesus is where our hope is found, our potential is nurtured, and our story becomes a testimony.



## LIVE IT OUT

This week...

**Pray:** Pray for God to show you what He wants you to see through the teaching in His Word and how you can start using your story for His glory.

**Encourage:** Encourage someone this week by listening to them. We often like to talk and be heard, but this week actively look for a way to lean in and listen to others. You may discover a need you can meet for them or a way to come alongside them in a faith-building way for both of you.

**Talk:** Seek out a fellow Christian this week and ask them to tell you their story. Talk with them about how God has used the ups and downs and the good and bad to build a story that points back to Him.

**Journal:** Write out parts of your own story, especially highlighting defining moments in your life (good and bad). Then work to connect the dots to get a bigger picture of how God is working in your story.

**Worship:** Find a way to actively worship Jesus every day this week and express thankfulness for God's faithfulness in this season of your story.



## DIGGING DEEPER

If you have extra time, pick a parable to read together as a group. Below are a few parables, and the corresponding verses to help you get started:

- New Clothes and Wineskins (Matthew 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-38)
- Lamp on a Stand (Matthew 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-22, Luke 8:16)
- Wise and Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-27, Luke 6:47-49)
- Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19)
- Yeast (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21)
- Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:3-7)
- Future from a Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32-35, Mark 13:28-29, Luke 21:29-31)
- Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
- Three Servants and the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-27)
- Sheep and Goat (Matthew 25:31-46)

After you read, answer some or all these questions as a group:

1. What's the context? Scan and read some before and some after the parable. That way, you can gather information about **when, where, and why** Jesus is teaching this story.
2. If the parable is in more than one Gospel, what are some similarities and differences between the versions? Are there any different details or language that you notice?
3. What common knowledge is Jesus utilizing as the central theme in this parable? How do you think that resonated or related to people of that day? Can you think of any modern-day equivalent?
4. What message is Jesus trying to teach his listeners about on a personal level in this parable? What's the "bigger than yourself" idea that Jesus is teaching about God's Kingdom?



**WEEK 2**

# OUR HOME CHURCH STORY



# LEADERS GUIDE

## Session 2: Our Home Church Story

### SESSION GOALS

**Each session in this 5-week series is to be a building block. The goal is for every person to leave the Home Group discussion with a grasp on the main point and challenged to take action.**

**Main Point:** When we turn from sin and wholly commit our life to Christ, no matter how messy or messed up we may be, we are met with love from our Heavenly Father. When we realize that we have received grace this far-reaching, what other response do we have but to celebrate when others come to the Father? Our job is to rejoice with all of heaven when our brothers and sisters turn to Christ and to welcome them home.

**Action Point:** Is there anything that is keeping you from running to the Father? Mistakes, shame, a lifestyle? Are you harboring unforgiveness or resentment towards anyone? Are you happy when other people turn to Christ? Or does it make you feel jaded and question their motives? Think through these questions this week. Then pray and ask God to help you make it right in your heart and life.

### WATCH

Show Session 2: Our Home Church Story



## OPEN

**Leader:** Last week, we explored how Jesus used stories, called parables, to teach us something on an intimate and personal level but also to open our eyes to something bigger than ourselves, like God's character, God's ways, and God's kingdom.

So often, we must be reminded of the original heavenly template our Creator God crafted for us and in us. Jesus's parables clear our spiritual brain fog and give us an echo of what is true and a glimpse of what is to come. God's kingdom is coming...even amidst our less-than-perfect reality. We get hints and hues in our heart of a home on the horizon but not here in its fullness.

God designed us to dwell with Him, not die in a fallen world. God created us to commune with Him – separation was not in the blueprint. We are His workmanship created to walk with God, not walk away from Him. We were supposed to be part of God's Kingdom.

God's home was always meant to be our home.

Jesus came so that all that could be true again.

Today, we'll examine another one of Jesus's parables that gives us a clear vision of what it looks like to come to our Father God with all our mess and for Him still to welcome us home.

## READ

Read the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" together as a group.  
It is recorded in Luke 15:11-32.



## DISCUSS

**Question:**

**Take a glance at Luke 15 as a whole. What do you notice about the parables in this chapter?**

**Answer:**

All three parables in Luke 15 consist of Jesus telling about people, items, and animals of great worth that have been lost and the positive responses after they have been found.

In the lost sheep parable, it seems odd for a shepherd to leave the 99 sheep to find a single lost sheep. Isn't he risking the safety of others? The shepherd knew that the other sheep would be safe in the sheepfold together, but the death of the lost sheep was certain if he didn't go find it.

To better understand the parable of the lost coin, it's helpful to know that Palestinian women would receive 10 silver coins as a wedding gift. These coins held monetary value but they also held the sentimental value of a wedding ring. So losing even one would be a stressful situation and worth every minute of searching. Just as the woman rejoiced to find her lost coin, so do the angels in heaven when a single sinner turns from sin and turns to Christ as their Savior and Lord. God grieves over every lost person and He greatly rejoices when one of His children is found and brought into His Kingdom.

In the first two parables (the lost sheep and the lost coin), the seeker actively looked for things that could not be found on their own: a coin and a sheep. In the prodigal son parable, the father watched and waited. This story deals with a person who had lost his way and had a strong will of his own. But his father still hopefully waited and kept watch to greet his lost son with love – if he decided to return.



In this same way, God's love for us is constant, patient, welcoming, and never-changing. He searches for us and always allows us to return and respond, but he will not force us to come to Him. Like the good father in this story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses and come home. When we turn to God, even with our messy mistakes and imperfect life, we meet a Father who welcomes us with open arms of love and runs to us with overwhelming joy to celebrate our return...even when we are still a long way off.

In summary, the sheep was lost because of its foolish wandering, the coin was lost by no fault of its own, and the son was lost because of his selfishness. Luke 15 tells us that God's great love and grace always reaches out to find those lost in their sin and separated from the Father no matter how or why they got there in the first place. God finds each person of highest worth - He doesn't want to lose even one.

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**Question:**

**What are the different relationships on display in the parable of the prodigal son? What stands out to you about each relationship?**

**Answer:**

**The prodigal son-** The lost son in this parable was also the youngest son. His share of his father's estate would have been one-third and his older brother's share would have been two-thirds (Deuteronomy 21:17). In Jewish culture, the father's estate would have been divided and received at his death. By asking for his estate early, the younger son is essentially conveying the message that he wished for his father's death now so that he could have his part of the estate now. Of course, the younger son's initiation of the division on the estate is highly disrespectful and showed the son's arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of his family.

**The father-** In this parable, we also see a father with unwavering and uncondi-



tional love for his child. This father figure is the most unique of them all in the story, while our human nature can help us guess the trajectory of the two sons in this story, the father keeps surprising us. What the younger son did in this story would have been enough to write him off for the family forever but this was not what the father did. Instead, the father watchfully waited for his wayward son. There was a celebration from the father when his lost son returned not condemnation. Our heavenly Father does the same.

**The older brother-** The older son in this story isn't talked about as notoriously as the other two characters, although he may be the most relatable of them all. The older son in this parable stayed with his father and did his duty as the eldest. When the younger son returned, it was hard for the older son to want to accept his younger brother.

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**Question:**

**After dissecting the disrespect of the younger son's requests and the unconditional love and far-reaching forgiveness of the father, what do you think of the older son's response to the younger brother's return in verses 25-32? Is it relatable?**

**Answer:**

The father's response is starkly contrasted with that of the older son. The older son was filled with resentment and bitterness over the injustice and he refused to forgive his brother. However, the father forgave the lost son because he was filled and overflowing with love. The older son's resentment and unforgiveness rendered him just as lost to the love of the father as the younger son. When we let things keep us from forgiving others, it can keep us from experiencing joy.

As we've mentioned before, Jesus used parables to convey a deeper message to his listeners, and those listening with spiritual ears would receive the heavenly wisdom from the stories. Here, Jesus is comparing the older brother to the



Pharisees of the day. Pharisees were angry and resentful at the idea of a sinner being welcomed into God's Kingdom. They saw themselves as better than and more worthy of God's favor and blessings because of their deeds, sacrifices, and holy lives.

In the same way, it can be easy for us to resent God's grace and forgiveness of others, especially those that we consider to be far worse sinners than ourselves. However, when self-righteousness hinders our rejoicing over the lost coming to salvation in Jesus, we're having the same response as the Pharisees.

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**Question:**

**What's the bigger Kingdom truth and message Jesus taught through this parable and inside each of these relationships?**

**Answer:**

Like the prodigal son, even at our lowest, we should come to God. The youngest son was even practicing what he was going to say to his father when he returned. He was anticipating rejection because he had run away and sunk to the very bottom because of his selfishness.

The story even tells us that the youngest son spent all of this inheritance frivolously and then had to resort to feeding (and even eating) the food of swine. Pigs were considered unclean animals (Leviticus 11:2-8; Deuteronomy 14:8). Jewish people wouldn't even touch a pig to keep themselves from defilement. For the youngest son to stoop to even feed pigs was a great humiliation but eating swine food would have been degrading beyond belief.

Along with that, we see in verse 20, that even when the son was a long way off the father was watching for him and he ran to him. In Jewish culture, men of importance did not run, they wanted to be seen as dignified and respected. For this father to run to his unclean youngest son, throw his arms around him, and



celebrate his return would have been a response that no one would have expected.

The magnitude of this parable can be easily lost on us because we've heard it so often or we don't fully understand the cultural relevance. But this parable would have been groundbreaking and mind-boggling to Jewish people of that day.

Jesus came to rectify us to God. Jesus drives home the fact that God is our Father throughout the Gospels. But not just any father – He is a Father that loves without bound. Many religions frown on the way Christians pray to God as our heavenly Father because they see it as irreverent. But this was the way that Jesus taught the model prayer in Matthew 6: 9-13, which starts with “Our Father in heaven” and this is what He continued to teach through the prodigal son parable.

In one way, we could also read this parable like this: We are the wayward son lost in our sinfulness. God is our loving Father who rejoices over us with gladness and is watching with anticipation for us to return. But instead of an angry and resentful older brother that we see in this story – we see Jesus. He is the “firstborn over all creation,” and He took action to make our return home to the Father possible. Let that perspective of this parable sink in.



## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- In your life, was there something that kept you from turning to or returning to God like the prodigal son?
  
- Has there ever been a time someone has met you with undeserved and unconditional love and forgiveness? Talk through what this was like at the moment. How has that shaped you today?
  
- Here at Home Church, we're no ordinary family. We know that it takes special people to get behind the building of a brand new church. What's the story behind you and your family being part of our Home Church family?
  - What brought you here? Who brought you here?
  - What were times that you saw God show up?
  - What were the times that you were worried?
  - What are you most hopeful for?
  - What have you learned from being here?



## **BRINGING IT HOME**

**Leader:** In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul elaborately describes a body of believers – the Church. He dives into how each member is a different part that plays a specific role in helping the body function, just like the parts that make up the human body. He describes how every part of the body is important. Even those that seem unimportant or are unseen play a significant role in bringing life to the body.

After giving his thorough comparison, Paul pens verse 27, "All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it." That's the truth that we hold here at Home Church. We embrace the truth that this church is a place anyone can call home because all are welcome and wanted, but it goes deeper than that – You are needed.

The story you tell and the part you play in this place are pertinent in bringing life to this body of believers.

When the collection of our stories, as the Church, comes together. It creates a beautiful symphony. We don't all play the same notes or have the same story. But when a body of believers willingly offers up their hearts, their lives, their callings, and their stories as a gift to the King – it creates a resounding and unstoppable move that brings heaven to earth.

**"THIS IS OUR STORY...THIS IS OUR SONG...  
PRAISING OUR SAVIOR ALL THE DAY LONG."**



## LIVE IT OUT

This week...

**Pray:** Pray for God to help you emulate His unconditional love to the world and relationships around you and His help to forgive those who have hurt you.

**Encourage:** Encourage someone around you this week that might feel like their actions are unforgivable. Find a way to show grace and forgiveness that covers any guilt or shame.

**Talk:** Talk to someone this week about the hard parts of your story, the parts that aren't the prettiest. Sometimes, it's those parts of our testimony that connect the most with another person.

**Journal:** Write out the parts of your story that you like to keep hidden in the dark. Bring them to the light so that God can help you through it and redeem and restore your story in ways only He can.

**Worship:** Confess your sin to God and then let it go. When moments of guilt over confessed sin try to push their way into your mind, praise God for the fact that His promise to forgive our sins is not about our feelings.



## DIGGING DEEPER

If you have extra time, pick a parable to read together as a group. Below are a few parables, and the corresponding verses to help you get started:

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- Lamp on a Stand (Matthew 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-22, Luke 8:16)
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- Yeast (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21)
- Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:3-7)
- Future from a Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32-35, Mark 13:28-29, Luke 21:29-31)
- Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
- Three Servants and the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-27)
- Sheep and Goat (Matthew 25:31-46)

After you read, answer some or all these questions as a group:

1. What's the context? Scan and read some before and some after the parable. That way, you can gather information about **when, where, and why** Jesus is teaching this story.
2. If the parable is in more than one Gospel, what are some similarities and differences between the versions? Are there any different details or language that you notice?
3. What common knowledge is Jesus utilizing as the central theme in this parable? How do you think that resonated or related to people of that day? Can you think of any modern-day equivalent?
4. What message is Jesus trying to teach his listeners about on a personal level in this parable? What's the "bigger than yourself" idea that Jesus is teaching about God's Kingdom?



# WEEK 3

**OUR MESS,  
HIS MASTERPIECE**



# LEADERS GUIDE

## Week 3: Our Mess, His Masterpiece

### SESSION GOALS

**Each session in this 5-week series is to be a building block. The goal is for every person to leave the Home Group discussion with a grasp on the main point and challenged to take action.**

**Main Point:** God can rescue and redeem even the messiest parts of our stories. He alone can use them to bring healing and hope to us and the world around us. He makes beauty from ashes and makes a mess – His masterpiece.

**Action Point:** What are those hard places in your life that you feel like God can't use or redeem? Identify those places, surrender them to Christ, watch Him use them to do His work in you, and minister to those He puts in your path.

### WATCH

Show Session 3: Your Mess, His Masterpiece



## OPEN

**Leader:** Last week, we talked about the calling of all believers to be active participants in God's Kingdom-building. The Apostle Paul writes in the First Book of Corinthians that all believers can partake in this collective ministry because each is an important part that makes up the body of Christ.

We also explored how sharing our story, our testimony, is an essential component in this Kingdom-building process. All this is wonderful news, but as we all know too well, **it's messier than it sounds.**

We live in a broken world full of broken people, including ourselves. So how do we walk in our calling and minister to others with the mess of our own story puddled at our feet?

## READ

Read the story of Judah and Tamar together as a group. It's recorded in Genesis 38. Also, be prepared to do some reading in the surrounding stories in Genesis 37-45.

After this, read Matthew 1:1-16, paying close attention to the names in the genealogy of Jesus.



## DISCUSS

### Question:

**Have you ever read this story in scripture? What stood out to you after reading the story of Judah and Tamar?**

### Answer:

Initially, this is one of those stories that make you wonder how it even made it into scripture. It can be confusing and disturbing to read. The story of Judah and Tamar isn't widely known, even though it immediately follows the more well-known account of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery (Genesis 37).

In chapter 37, we see that Joseph's brothers had sunk into an evil place when they decided that selling their brother to Ishmaelite slave traders was the next best thing to killing him (which happened to be Judah's suggestion) (Genesis 37: 25-28). The only brother that didn't want to go through with harming Joseph was the oldest, Reuben. As the first-born, Reuben had the authority to promptly protect his younger brother Joseph, but instead, he tried to rescue him secretly to save face with his other brothers.

These stories in chapters 37 and 38 also show us how secret sins on the inside can grow to bring about vicious outward actions. Joseph's brothers were overcome with jealousy, so much so, that they wanted him gone by whatever means necessary. So often, jealousy can be the root of a murderous spirit, and if nurtured, it can lead to blinding and dehumanizing hatred of people.

As we read on in chapter 38, we see that Judah's wicked and jealous nature is also passed on to his sons. We see that Judah's quick response to band-aid tough situations by trying to get rid of someone who angers him is still part of his nature as well.

Along with that, it's clear to see that Judah views Tamar's sexual immorality as a



more wicked sin than his own. Which begs the question: Why was Judah so open about his encounter with a prostitute but so quick to want to kill Tamar for her act of prostitution?

To understand this glaring contradiction, it's essential to understand the place of women in Canaan. Then, the primary function of women was to bear children to perpetuate family lines. Now to ensure children belonged to the husband, the wife was expected to be a virgin, and the wife was expected to only be with her husband. Often, women were executed if they didn't follow this practice. Now, some women did not belong to families. If these women were prostitutes and they had children, those children didn't belong to families and they were no one's heirs.

So while the question of his sexual immorality never entered Judah's mind; his concern was for keeping his family inheritance. So instead of killing Tamar and her child, he gave evidence of their encounter to ensure that he kept his inheritance within his bloodline. Ironically, it was actually Tamar (and not Judah) who acted to provide him a legal heir. By law, Judah should have given Tamar to his third son to produce an heir but he didn't.

This story, along with many others, clearly shows us how sexual immorality brings pain, conflict, and brokenness. In this story, we see how God rewires even the messiest life choices and brings redemption – Judah's bloodline was the one Jesus would come from (Matthew 1:1-16).

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**Question:**

**Judah's life stands out starkly against his brother Joseph's life. What are some of the major comparisons between them?**

**Answer:**

Genesis chapter 38 lays out the immoral character of Judah in contrast to the integrity of Joseph. Later we see in chapter 39, that Joseph's wise decisions and



unwavering integrity defined his character. God greatly blessed and rewarded Joseph's faithfulness, using his heavenly insight to save many people in a time of famine, including his own family. However, Judah's evil decisions and wicked heart only bring pain, deception, and strife to his family.

In Genesis 38 and 39, we see both Judah and Joseph tempted with sexual immorality but Judah gives in and Joseph resists. Judah seems to get off scot-free while Joseph is thrown into prison for a sin he never committed. Even then, Joseph never wavered in his faithfulness to God and he continued to use his spiritual gift (interpreting dreams) at one of the lowest points in his life.

While the lives of both Judah and Joseph were defined by very different morals and decisions, they both were natural leaders. Joseph often spoke about the interpretations God gave him about dreams, regardless of others' reactions to them (Genesis 37:5-11, 40: 12-18, 41:25-36).

Also, Judah is seen throughout these portions of scripture as very decisive and able to sway the opinions of others, including:

- Convincing his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37: 26-28)
- Quick decision over Tamar's future (Genesis 38: 24-26)
- Convincing his father to send Benjamin to Egypt with the brothers during the famine (43: 8-10)
- Interceding on Benjamin's behalf when Joseph tests his brothers in Egypt (44:16-34).

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**Question:**

**What is your definition of redemption? Do you see it anywhere in this complicated story of Judah and Tamar?**

**Answer:**

The dictionary definition of redemption is: "The action of saving or being saved"



from sin, error, or evil. The action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment, or clearing of debt.”

Jesus didn't come to make righteous people feel better about their religious practices but to help us see that no one is in right standing with God. He came to redeem the whole world.

As we look over many other names in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, including Judah and Tamar, we see they are all less-than-perfect people. Jesus was the heir that brought complete redemption to his family line and the kinsman redeemer to the entire human race. Jesus didn't come from Joseph's bloodline...he came from Judah's bloodline. Jesus doesn't let a messy story push him away, instead, He rushes in to offer lavish and undeserved love, grace, and forgiveness.

When we follow the trajectory of Judah's life, we see that he showed no regard for his brother Joseph or his father Jacob's life. First, Judah convinced his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37:27); then he joined in with his brothers as they lied to Jacob about the fate of their brother (Genesis 37:32). Then, in Genesis Chapter 38, we read of Judah's sexual immorality with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, and his moral compromise in leading his family.

But we witness a shift between Genesis 37 and 44 in Judah. If you do a quick reading of Genesis 44 and 45, Joseph tests his brothers to see if they have changed. In this testing situation, we see the same Judah (who willingly sold his brother to slave traders) now offers to become a slave himself to save the life of his father's other favored son (Benjamin). Judah displayed deep concern for his younger brother and his father, so much so, that he was willing to die to protect them. That's a change from the Judah we saw in Genesis 37:27-32. This stark change in Judah was noticeable to Joseph as well. This change in Judah's story ultimately moved Joseph to reveal who he was to his brothers.

Judah's offer to take Benjamin's place and to his life as a substitute is a picture of what his direct descendant, Jesus, would do for the whole world.



## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- Talk about what authenticity means to you. Do you think people are drawn to it or repelled by it? Why?
  
- Are you drawn to authenticity in others' stories? Why or why not?
  
- Can you think of a time when you opened your heart to someone about something hard in your past or your story?
  - How did you feel when you opened up about it?
  - How did others respond?
  - Did this experience make you want to share the same openness and authenticity again in the future or not?



## **BRINGING IT HOME**

**Leader:** We see in the messy story of Judah and Tamar, in all its authentic glory, that God brings redemption out of the ruin.

If these Biblical people composed the family tree of the Savior of the World, it just reiterates our desperate need for redemption and salvation. It also calls out how grungy and grimy our hearts are when left to their own devices, and it reminds us that God still works in our mess to make a masterpiece.

The beauty of a messy story is that God alone can bring healing and hope from all the broken pieces. But then again, that is His specialty – fixing and forgiving what we break – over and over again.

A mess turned masterpiece emulates healing happening inside our hearts, on the outside of our life. It's those of us that feel like we have the messiest of stories that can proclaim with an extra measure of gratitude:

**"AMAZING GRACE HOW SWEET THE SOUND,  
THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME,  
I ONCE WAS LOST BUT NOW I'M FOUND  
WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE."**

We don't have to look any farther than the end of our noses to find a messy story that God is working to redeem. God intertwined less-than-perfect stories throughout His Word to show and tell of His redemption, grace, and salvation to the world. And here we are, thousands of years later, looking at those stories as they lead us to Jesus.

**He wants to use yours and mine to do the very same thing.**



## LIVE IT OUT

This week...

**Pray:** Ask God to help you move past the tough parts of your story. Knowing that God can heal those broken places and redeem every part of your life. When we lean into God's healing and redemption in our life stories, then we can confidently proclaim what Joseph did in Genesis 50 to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

**Encourage:** Ask God to put someone in your path this week who needs you to share the real and authentic parts of your story with them. It may be just the encouragement they need to find healing and redemption in Jesus.

**Talk:** Seek out a fellow Christian this week and ask them to tell you their story. Talk with them about how God has used the ups and downs and the good and bad to build a story that points back to Him.

**Journal:** What are those real, authentic, and messy parts of your story that you think God can't use? Write about them. Think about how God may have already brought you healing, redemption, or good from painful parts of your story.

**Worship:** Purposefully praise God each day this week for specific redemptive works He has done and is doing in your life.



## DIGGING DEEPER

There are many other messy stories in the Bible, like the Judah and Tamar account. If you have extra time, discuss some of these Biblical stories as a group. Then find one or two stories in the Bible and explore how God used a sin-filled and trouble-bound story to bring redemption and hope throughout His Word.

Here are a few ideas to help you get started (but there are many more):

- Adam and Eve (Genesis 3)
- Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)
- The children of Israel and the golden calf (Exodus 32)
- Samson (Judges 13-16)
- David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Kings 1-2, Psalm 51-related passage)
- Jonah (Jonah 1-4)
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9: 1-30)
- Peter's denial (Luke 22:31-65)

**WEEK 4**

**CRAFTING  
YOUR STORY**



# LEADERS GUIDE

## Session 4: Crafting Your Story

### SESSION GOALS

**Each session in this 5-week series is to be a building block. The goal is for every person to leave the Home Group discussion with a grasp on the main point and challenged to take action.**

**Main Point:** God can turn even the messiest and messed-up stories into a powerful and impactful testimony. He wants to work in your life when you surrender it to Him. Not only does God bring beauty from ashes when He writes your story – He also uses it to heal you from the inside out and to bring hope to those in your path.

**Action Point:** This week write out the components of your testimony: Where were you when you decided to follow Jesus? When did you make this decision? Who was with you? Then think about what was happening in your life during this time. Why do you think God called you out of darkness and into His light during that particular season of life? All of these questions are dripping with God's purpose, and none of it happened by accident.

### WATCH

Show Session 4: Crafting Your Story



## OPEN

**Leader:** Last week, we explored some messy stories that show up in scripture. The fact that God used these stories and these less-than-perfect people to bring about the Good News of the Gospel is nothing short of a miracle. This gives us hope that God can rescue and redeem us even at our lowest.

Today, we are going to talk about another hero of the faith with a rocky beginning to his story until he, literally, saw the light. God turned this person's life completely around and sent his story in a new direction. His contribution to spreading the message of Jesus is nothing short of miraculous and it's still building the Kingdom today.

## READ

Read about Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road in Acts 9:1-31.



## DISCUSS

### Question:

**Here's what we know, our story becomes our testimony when Jesus becomes the Lord and Savior of our life. This is also characterized by regeneration or what Jesus calls in John 3:1-21 the "new birth." Salvation through Jesus draws us to repentance, which comes with a visible life change.**

**This very noticeable change occurs in Acts 9. What stands out to you the most about this 180-degree turn in Saul's life? Why?**

### Answer:

Saul was a Pharisee on his way to the top. He was well-educated and zealous about squandering this new movement called, "The Way," by any means necessary. Saul was so passionate about his Jewish beliefs and traditions that he spurred on a persecution campaign against anyone who believed in Jesus as the Christ. We get a very clear picture of how heated this persecution was becoming in Acts 7, when Stephen was stoned for this faith in Jesus.

This persecution caused many Christians to flee Jerusalem and seek refuge in other cities and countries. Saul was on the road to Damascus for this very reason. His mission was to make the 175-mile journey from Jerusalem to Damascus in Syria (a Roman province) to bring back Christians in chains as prisoners. Damascus was an important commercial city because several trade routes passed through the city linking it to other parts of the Roman world. To Saul, stamping out Christianity in this key city was possibly an acute effort to keep the spread of Christianity at bay.

For Saul, being a linchpin in this move to persecute Christians may have been for a few reasons:

- To visibly bring back Christian who fled in chains to stifle the advancement and movement of "The Way" in Jerusalem and other major cities.



- To prevent Christians from causing problems in Rome.
- To build Saul's reputation and further his career as a true Pharisee who was zealous for the law.
- To create a common enemy and unify the different factions of Judaism.

We see in Acts 9:3-5, God had different plans for Saul. On his way to persecute Christians, Saul meets the risen Jesus and it changes everything for him. In future writings, Paul (formerly Saul) pens that this experience was the start of his new life in Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1, Galatians 1:15,16). Jesus is at the very center of this life-changing experience. Saul saw Jesus for himself for the first time and experienced His power to redeem.

Saul's salvation experience consisted of:

1. Acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord
2. Confession of his sins
3. Surrender of his life to Jesus
4. Resolve to obey and follow Christ

Just like Saul (later Paul), true conversion centers around a personal encounter with Jesus, which leads us to a new life as we walk in a relationship with Him.

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**Question:**

**Saul's (later to be called Paul) conversion was sudden and spectacular, but other times beginning a relationship with Christ is a quieter experience.**

**Why do you think salvation experiences are not cookie-cutter format? Does that make it easier or harder to be sure of salvation? Does that make it simpler or more challenging to document your salvation story?**

**Answer:**

Most of us like certainty. We want the confidence of ensured completion if we can



check items off a to-do list. It can be tempting to put salvation into a category like this. We say, "I've done 1, 2, 3...so I know it happened." While there is some truth to the fact that unifying and visible changes happen in people who are saved by grace through faith in Christ – but there are no two salvation stories that are the same. They are unique, like a fingerprint on your heart.

In John 3:8, Jesus tells Nicodemus that being born again (salvation) can be compared to the wind. He says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Spirit draws each of us in a unique and (somewhat) mysterious way – and it's our choice in how we respond. Everyone has their own story...but the turning point is always Jesus.

In John Piper's book, *Finally Alive*, he documents the conversion stories of Augustine and C.S. Lewis. These two well-known Christian leaders lived at varying times in history and have very different conversion stories.

Augustine's conversion pulled him from a life eaten up by sexual lust and his salvation experience was fraught with intense emotion. Lewis's conversion happened quietly on a bus ride to the zoo but was set in motion the day before during a conversation about Christianity with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. Piper explains that the "Wind" (a reference to the Holy Spirit) blew in different ways for both of these men, but their active response to it resulted in regeneration and new life – salvation.

If we aim to check off boxes, then our salvation would center on works rather than grace. Our salvation story is about our relationship with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to put us back in right standing with God the Father. We are saved (eternally secure and in relationship with Christ) by grace (Jesus) through faith (us). It requires our faith...not our checklist.

**Question:**

**Think about what Saul heard Jesus say in verse 4, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” By this point, Jesus had already ascended into heaven. However, Jesus is clearly stating that the rise of fierce persecution towards Christians was personal to Him.**

**When we belong to Christ, Jesus lives in us, and our life story belongs to Him. It’s personal to us but also to Jesus. What do you know of Paul’s role in the persecution of the early church and then his building up of the early church?**

**Answer:**

Paul was part of the problem and then later part of the solution. Paul led the charge to persecute the early church (Acts 9:1-2). This persecution pushed the early Christians out of Jerusalem which led to the massive growth and influx of Christianity throughout the surrounding regions. Saul thought he was chasing after heretics but he was persecuting Jesus himself. But God used this persecution to spread His Word. Saul, Pharisees, and other religious elites thought they were stamping out “the Way” – but they were actually spreading it. No one can squander what God has set in motion.

Later, Paul becomes a big part of the solution. God uses his knowledge of the scriptures and education to help him bring the Good News to foreigners, kings, and fellow Jews. He also wrote letters to the early churches crafting the framework of aspects of the early church. These God-inspired letters have stood the test of time because we still look to them today as we continue to build the Kingdom.

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**Question:**

**The meaning of names throughout scripture is highly important to a person’s life trajectory. We often see people living up to their names**



**throughout the Bible, whether good or bad. Saul's conversion also resulted in a name change to Paul (Acts 13:9).**

**Why do you think this was part of Saul's story? What are some other name changes you can think of throughout scripture, and what do you think is the significance?**

**Answer:**

Name changes throughout the Bible occurred to establish a new identity.

The Apostle Paul's original name (Saul) may have been after Saul, the first king of Israel. Both men were part of the tribe of Benjamin as well. Saul in Hebrew means "asked for," which was interestingly lived out in King Saul's life as he was asked for by the Israelites to be their king. God wanted to be their only king but the people insisted they have a physical king in the flesh like all the other nations around them. So God gave them what they asked for – Saul. King Saul was handsome, tall, strong, and looked the kingly part, but his heart was not obedient to God and he was overtaken with jealousy towards David (the king God had chosen to take Saul's place).

Now the name Paul means "small" – starkly different than the kingly name of Saul.

A few other name changes throughout the Bible:

- Abram (meaning "exalted father") to Abraham (meaning "father of a multitude") - Genesis 17:5
- Jacob (meaning "cheater, deceiver") to Israel (meaning "God's people") - Genesis 32:28
- Hoshea (meaning "salvation") to Joshua (meaning "Jehovah saves")

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**Question:**

**As we think about building our own salvation story, remember your story is unique, but regeneration always hinges on our faith in Jesus as the Lord and Savior. What did Saul do after his conversion?**

**Answer:**

First, we see that Saul had to lean on and depend on other trusted believers. God called Ananias to go and help Saul. Even though he was leery at first and concerned over the genuineness of Saul's conversion to which God responded: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."

The trajectory of Paul's conversion looks like this:

1. Turned to Jesus (repentance) - Acts 9:6
2. Filled with the Holy Spirit - Acts 9:17-18
3. Got baptized - Acts 9:18
4. Ate and strengthened (learning and growth in the Word) - Acts 9:19
5. Spent time with the disciples - Acts 9:19
6. Preached Christ (shared the Gospel and his testimony) - Acts 9:20



## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- In Acts 22: 1-21, we see Paul sharing his testimony – his story – to a crowd that sought to kill him. We see Paul take some strategic steps in connecting with his audience. First, he spoke in their language, acknowledged their motives, and recognized that he too would have done the same before His salvation in Christ. Then he launched a defense of Christianity.
- Connection is key to communication. The same goes for our own story when we use it to build God’s Kingdom. Your story is for you but God also wants to use it to bring others to Himself.
  - What does it look like to craft your story with connection in mind?
  - Has there been a time that you were able to use something unique to you and your story to encourage someone, witness to someone, or break down barriers?
- Paul addresses several times in scripture that he was the chief of sinners. Paul spearheaded the early persecution of Christians but God saved him and used him in mighty and influential ways. God used him, specifically, to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). Never count yourself out to be used by God – He can and will use your whole story.

So what parts of your story do you:

- Struggle with?
- See God’s hand actively at work?
- See work needing to be done?



## **BRINGING IT HOME**

**Leader:** An encounter with Jesus turned Paul's life around in a major way and resulted in his missionary work through the region and his letter to the churches that make up a large portion of the New Testament. Only God can bring about change like that and pack it with purpose and impact. But He is still doing that inside our lives and our stories today. We may not see it all right now but rest assured – He's working.

When we take time to wade through the when, where, why, and how of crafting our story, it can clarify how God works in and through us.

This week, let's take some time to think purposefully about how God is working in our lives to bring about His plans to heal us, give us hope, and build His Kingdom. So that we can proclaim like Paul in his letter to Timothy, a young pastor that looked to Paul for leadership and guidance:

**“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” -1 Timothy 1:15-16 NIV**

Now, that's a story worth sharing.



## LIVE IT OUT

This week...

**Pray:** Pray for God to help you see the unique parts of your story that make up your testimony...like His fingerprint on your heart.

**Encourage:** Seek out someone who might think they are too far gone or their life is damaged beyond repair. We know this isn't true! Share times in your life that you felt the same and how God rescued and redeemed those parts of your story. Encourage them and share that Jesus can do the same for them.

**Talk:** If there are parts of your story that are hard to grapple with, seek out a trusted friend, confidant, or counselor. God has given us people and resources to help in our times of need.

**Journal:** Write out the when, where, why, and how of your salvation story. Sometimes life moves so fast that we forget to take the time to go back to the basics of where it all began.

**Worship:** Remember to praise God for the life changes in your story that came from His gift of salvation!



## **DIGGING DEEPER**

Think about other Biblical and/or historical conversion stories that contributed to a 180-degree life change in people. Talk about how their salvation changed things in a big way for the world around them as it did for the Apostle Paul.

Here is a short list to help you get started. If you don't know these stories, look them up together as a group or search for others.

- The thief on the cross (Luke 23: 42-43)
- John Wesley
- Martin Luther
- C.S. Lewis
- St. Augustine

**WEEK 5**

**CRAFTING  
YOUR STORY  
TO SHARE**



# LEADERS GUIDE

## Session 5: Crafting Your Story to Share

### SESSION GOALS

**Each session in this 5-week series is to be a building block. The goal is for every person to leave the Home Group discussion with a grasp on the main point and challenged to take action.**

**Main Point:** When God changes our life, our desire to share that story shift should pour out of us. We don't have to feel shame over what God has changed in us. It's often hearing a personal testimony of God's grace, forgiveness, and hope that brings others to Him.

**Action Point:** Share your story this week. Use what you have written about your story over the last few weeks to help you better understand how God has changed you from the inside out and how that message can connect with someone who needs to know there is hope for their own life.

Is there a specific person God has placed on your heart who needs to hear your story? Reach out and share your story with them. It will build trust, deepen your relationship, and put them in the path of Jesus.

### WATCH

Show Session 5: Crafting Your Story to Share



## OPEN

**Leader:** Last week, we talked about Paul the Apostle and how his encounter with Jesus drastically changed his life. We see Paul sharing parts of his story all throughout the New Testament to demonstrate how different his life and mission looked after meeting Jesus.

Today, we are going to talk about a woman who had a life-changing encounter with Jesus and her response was to share it with everyone. Jesus's gentle way of bringing her to faith started with her story – even the parts that were hard for her to grapple with. Instead of meeting her with judgment, like everyone around her, Jesus met her with love and tenderness. It's His kindness that leads us to repentance, His indwelling presence that changes us, and His hope for the world that makes us want to share it.

## READ

Read about the woman at the well in John 4:1-42.



## DISCUSS

**Question:**

**Jews and Samaritans did not have friendly interactions at this time in history. Often Jews would travel many miles out of the way so they wouldn't have to travel through Samaria.**

**What do you think is the significance of scripture tellings us that Jesus needed to go through Samaria? Has God ever impressed on your heart to say something to someone or go to a certain place, seemingly out of the blue, only to find out that there was a purpose behind the silent pull?**

**Answer:**

Last week, we talked about how the oppression of the early church led many Christians to scatter throughout the region. Many religious elites thought this persecution would silence the message of salvation through Jesus but instead, it spread the Gospel of Jesus. Now, even before Jesus's death and resurrection, we see the same type of spreading of the Good News happening in this passage.

For this reason, there may have been several reasons why Jesus had to go through Samaria:

1. Oppression was already beginning to rise against Jesus, particularly from the Pharisees. This religious sect resented Jesus's popularity and His message, which often challenged their teachings. It wasn't time for Jesus to confront these religious leaders openly yet, he was only at the beginning of his earthly ministry. So for this reason, he left Jerusalem and went north toward Galilee.
2. Jewish people did everything in their power to avoid traveling through Samaria because of historical and cultural tension. Jesus had no reason to live under these cultural barriers and restrictions so he went the shortest route to Galilee through Samaria.
3. Jesus knew he would reach Jacob's well in the heat of the day. This was a time



when most people didn't come to draw water, but this woman didn't want to go to the well and be judged by others. So Jesus's presence at the well was strategic and personal. He came to Samaria to meet this woman at the well. This is a beautiful display of Jesus's mission to reach those cast aside and to bring them into His Kingdom.

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**Question:**

**A significant piece of this story is how many aspects of it seem out of place. These references can get lost on us in today's world, but in ancient Hebrew days, a conversation happening at a well at noon between a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman would have never happened.**

**Why do you think Jesus purposefully interacted in this way? What does that say about His purpose on earth? What does that say about our purpose on earth?**

**Answer:**

Many cultural boundaries were broken at the meeting at the well between Jesus and this Samaritan woman. Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. When the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians, many foreign people came into the area to settle the land and keep the peace (2 Kings 17:24). There was intermarriage between the Jews in the area and these foreign people that resulted in a culturally mixed group of people. The Jewish people hated this mixed race of people called Samaritans, and they viewed the Jews that married foreigners as betraying the Jewish people. For this reason, the Samaritans set up a different center for worship on Mount Gerizim (referenced in John 4:20, but it was destroyed 150 years before) instead of in Jerusalem.

This conversation between Jesus and the woman was groundbreaking because:



1. She was a Samaritan, and He was a Jew (Jews were supposed to hate Samaritans).
2. She was a woman known to be actively living in sin.
3. The well was a public place, and no respectable Jewish man would have been talking to a woman, especially a woman with all these bad things going for her.

But we see that Jesus did anyway. His love, grace, salvation, and message have no bounds and restrictions. This story shows us that the Gospel is for everyone. For this reason, we must be prepared to share the Good News of Jesus at any time or any place to any person. Jesus constantly crossed barriers to share his message of hope and salvation to the world – and if we follow Him – we must do the very same thing.

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**Question:**

**As we talked about in week 1, Jesus often used the physical world to explain deeper parts of the spiritual world and only those listening with spiritual ears would hear the message. We see this shift happen inside this encounter.**

**Why do you think Jesus used water as the connector? And what did He mean by living water?**

**Answer:**

Wells were a central part of life in the ancient world. These wells were literally a symbol of life and without a water supply, everything and everyone in the area would have died. A well was almost always located outside a city on the main road. Twice each day, (in the morning and the evening) women would come and draw water from the well. But this woman came in the middle of the day when it was hottest and no one else was out. This woman came at noon, probably to avoid meeting people who knew about her tainted reputation. She came outside the



city to the source of life that she needed – she thought she was coming to find physical water but she left having found Living Water. Just like our bodies hunger and thirst for food and water, so do our souls. Jesus gave her a life-changing message of truth about salvation and hope that would quench her spiritual thirst forever.

At first, the woman mistakes the message and assumes Jesus has water that will quench her physical thirst and fix the problem of her having to come to this well in the heat of the day. She was initially interested because she thought this water could make her life easier. But as we find, Jesus didn't come to take away challenges. He came to change us on the inside so we could be equipped and empowered to face our problems with a God perspective and spiritual mission.

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**Question:**

**We see in John 4:16-19 that when Jesus brought up his knowledge of the woman's story that she quickly changed the subject. Often, when God begins to highlight changes that need to be made in our lives, our first response is to squirm and want to run away. But Jesus used gentleness and tact to let this woman know that despite her past, her citizenship, and her questions – nothing would disqualify her from God's gift of Living Water.**

**Where do you specifically see Jesus using tender tact in this scripture to explain Kingdom truth in love?**

**Answer:**

We see in John 4:15, that the woman didn't understand Jesus's message upfront. But Jesus allowed the woman to ask questions and start piecing together aspects of his message for herself – without judgment yet in truth and love. It takes time for us to accept changes that will impact the very foundation of our lives and sharing the Gospel will not always have immediate results. When you share your story and share the message of the Gospel with people, it's important



to give them time to weigh the matter and walk with them in gentle grace as Jesus works in their life.

We can often see people squirming or running when they have an encounter with Jesus because it exposes sin in their life and their need for Christ. It can be hard to grapple with that need at first. We see this in John 4:16-20. While Jesus let the woman ask questions and even change the subject – but He gently drew the conversation back to the central message of hope and healing from the Living Water – salvation through Him alone.

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**Question:**

**In verses 27 through 38, we see that the woman has begun to listen with spiritual ears, but Jesus’s disciples are more in tune with their physical hunger rather than spiritual hunger.**

**What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”?**

**Answer:**

In verse 34, the food that Jesus is talking about was spiritual nourishment. This includes Bible study, prayers, and going to church but it also doing God’s will in your everyday life. We do this by sharing the Gospel with those around us when God opens the door.

We are not only spiritually nourished by what we take in (scripture, sermons, prayer time, etc.) but also what we give to the world around us that leads them to Jesus. This type of selfless giving feeds us spiritually in a way that only others who do that same kind of Kingdom-giving can fully understand. It’s another Kingdom truth that can only be found when we devote ourselves to following Jesus when it makes sense and when it doesn’t.

**Question:**

**We started our 5-week study with Jesus sharing a story (a parable) about sowing seeds of the Gospel. Now, we see Jesus talking about a harvest.**

**What do you think is the significance of Jesus emphasizing both the sowing and reaping aspects of salvation?**

**Answer:**

Jesus talks about the wages He offers those who share the Gospel in verses 36-38. These wages are the joy of working for Christ and seeing the harvest of new believers. These wages of joy come to those sowing the Gospel, who see no immediate results but share the Good News anyway. As well as the reward of joy to those reaping the harvest, who see people come to Christ. In verse 38, when Jesus uses the phrase "others have done the hard work," it may be a reference to John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets who paved the way for Jesus to bring the Gospel to fruition.

Never count out your work for Christ, whether you are sowing seeds of the Good News or helping bring in the harvest of Christ's saving work – both are important callings set in motion and completed in Christ Jesus.



## **OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

- What has God shown you specifically through this 5-week study?
- What have you learned about your story?
- Are there any barriers that still need to be overcome for you to feel empowered to share your story with those around you?



## BRINGING IT HOME

**Leader:** We started our 5-week study by talking about Jesus's parable of the seeds. Jesus was the one scattering seeds for a spiritual harvest, and now we continue to see him planting seeds of faith and hope in hearts. The farming technique in those days was to scatter seeds everywhere to ensure a harvest.

Here, in John 4, Jesus is scattering spiritual seeds in places that none of the religious elites of the day wanted to go – Samaria. Jesus met a woman with a questionable past at a well in the heat of the day and asked her for a drink of water. Where everyone else would have turned away – Jesus leaned in. Jesus loves with no bounds, no restrictions, and no judgment. He scatters seeds of His salvation and Kingdom far and wide to everyone.

How fitting it is that we end this study with Jesus talking about the harvest we will reap if we sow the Gospel and don't lose heart. We also see the beautiful and far-reaching results of this spiritual harvest in verse 42. It all started when Jesus changed one woman's story. She shared her story with the world around her, and that testimony led many to Jesus. Oh, that we would see a harvest like that, so those around us would also say:

**“Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”**

When we share our story, it puts people in the path of Jesus. Together, let's scatter those seeds of the Good News everywhere we go and pull people into God's love every chance we get – Both you and I have a story to tell. **Let's go!**

**“Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.”**

**-John 4:35b-36**



## LIVE IT OUT

This week...

**Pray:** Pray for God to put people in your path this week that need to hear the hope of your story – the good, the bad, and the messy. Ask God to help you be a mouthpiece to bring about His message to the world around you.

**Encourage:** Encourage other people who know Jesus as their Lord and Savior to share their stories with those around them. As we saw from the scripture today, sharing your story is a way to bring others to Jesus in a mighty and Kingdom-building way.

**Talk:** Talk to someone this week about a specific part of your past that Jesus redeemed. Like Jesus, actively work to share your story with others in a gentle, kind, and tactful way – one that shines light into darkness and plants a seed of hope in hearts.

**Journal:** Write out or add to the parts of your testimony that Pastor Kenny talked about in the video:

- Where was I before I met Jesus?
- Where, when, and how did I meet Jesus?
- What have I seen change in my life since meeting Jesus?
- What have I learned since meeting Jesus?
- What hope do you carry that you can share with others who maybe haven't met Jesus?

Connect the dots in your story to get a bigger picture of how God's working in your life and the world around you.

**Worship:** Sharing your story – your testimony – is an act of worship. It is a response to God's goodness in your life. We'll be itching to tell those around us when we learn to see it that way, just like the woman at the well.



## **DIGGING DEEPER**

In the Old Testament, many verses talk about thirsting after God as we thirst for water. Look up these verses together as a group and talk about the connection throughout these scriptures and how it relates to Jesus's message to the woman at the well as He offers her Living Water.

- Isaiah 55:1
- Psalm 36:9
- Psalm 42:1
- Jeremiah 2:13
- Jeremiah 17:13
- Zechariah 13:1





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