Our story as a people begins in Genesis. It’s important to emphasize that the first creation story (Gen 1-2:3) and the second creation story (Gen 2:4-2:24) were written at different times by different people and are not meant to be contradictory—simply different expressions of the same idea. Here are some key differences between the passages. What more do you and your students recognize?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis 1-2:3</th>
<th>Genesis 2:4-2:24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written as poetry, not literal</td>
<td>Written as a creation legend, not literal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s character: the Director: “Lights, Camera, Action!”</td>
<td>God’s character: the Artist, hands dirty, totally involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates men &amp; women at the same time</td>
<td>Creates woman because man was lonely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets up religious expectations: everything is declared “good”; rest 7th day</td>
<td>Sets up social expectations: man leaves family to form own new family</td>
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The first creation stories are both pretty similar to other creation stories of the time. The Egyptian one has its god create humans out of clay and tears. They often start with something like, “On the first day” or “In the first event,” meaning, essentially, when time began. The key difference is this: only in the Judeo-Christian creation story does God bless everything and call it good. Only in this creation story does God tell his new creations to be fruitful and multiply. In the other legends, the gods’ involvement either ends with creation or he looks at what he’s done and thinks, “Well, crap. That got out of hand pretty quickly. Way too many humans. They’ll become more powerful than me. Better start smashing them.”

Fun Fact: The words Eve and Eden both mean Life.

**If you do not have time to read both creation stories, that’s okay! Pick the one you prefer.**

**Suggested Discussion Prompts**

1. Describe God’s character in both creation stories. How is s/he different? The same?
2. Why do we have creation stories? Do they serve the same purpose today? If not, what value do they have today?
3. Poetry and legends are full of metaphors and symbols. Find a few examples.
Genesis 1:1-2:4a

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.[a]

2 The earth was barren, with no form of life;[b] it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness. But the Spirit of God[c] was moving over the water.

3 God said, "I command light to shine!" And light started shining. 4 God looked at the light and saw that it was good. He separated light from darkness 5 and named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening came and then morning—that was the first day.[d]

6 God said, "I command a dome to separate the water above it from the water below it." 7 And that’s what happened. God made the dome 8 and named it "Sky." Evening came and then morning—that was the second day.

9 God said, "I command the water under the sky to come together in one place, so there will be dry ground." And that’s what happened. 10 God named the dry ground "Land," and he named the water "Ocean." God looked at what he had done and saw that it was good.

11 God said, "I command the earth to produce all kinds of plants, including fruit trees and grain." And that’s what happened. 12 The earth produced all kinds of vegetation. God looked at what he had done, and it was good. 13 Evening came and then morning—that was the third day.

14 God said, "I command lights to appear in the sky and to separate day from night and to show the time for seasons, special days, and years. 15 I command them to shine on the earth." And that’s what happened. 16 God made two powerful lights, the brighter one to rule the day and the other[a] to rule the night. He also made the stars. 17 Then God put these lights in the sky to shine on the earth, 18 to rule day and night, and to separate light from darkness. God looked at what he had done, and it was good. 19 Evening came and then morning—that was the fourth day.

20 God said, "I command the ocean to be full of living creatures, and I command birds to fly above the earth." 21 So God made the giant sea monsters and all the living creatures that swim in the ocean. He also made every kind of bird. God looked at what he had done, and it was good. 22 Then he gave the living creatures his blessing—he told the ocean creatures to live everywhere in the ocean and the birds to live everywhere on earth. 23 Evening came and then morning—that was the fifth day.

24 God said, "I command the earth to give life to all kinds of tame animals, wild animals, and reptiles." And that’s what happened. 25 God made every one of them. Then he looked at what he had done, and it was good.
26 God said, “Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures.”

27 So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. 28 God gave them his blessing and said:

Have a lot of children! Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the ocean, the birds in the sky, and every animal on the earth.

29 I have provided all kinds of fruit and grain for you to eat. 30 And I have given the green plants as food for everything else that breathes. These will be food for animals, both wild and tame, and for birds.

31 God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good! Evening came and then morning—that was the sixth day.

2 So the heavens and the earth and everything else were created.

2 By the seventh day God had finished his work, and so he rested. 3 God blessed the seventh day and made it special because on that day he rested from his work.

4 That’s how God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 2:4b-2:24

When the LORD God made the heavens and the earth, no grass or plants were growing anywhere. God had not yet sent any rain, and there was no one to work the land. But streams came up from the ground and watered the earth.

7 The LORD God took a handful of soil and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man started breathing. The LORD made a garden in a place called Eden, which was in the east, and he put the man there.

9 The LORD God placed all kinds of beautiful trees and fruit trees in the garden. Two other trees were in the middle of the garden. One of the trees gave life—the other gave the power to know the difference between right and wrong.

10 From Eden a river flowed out to water the garden, then it divided into four rivers. The first one is the Pishon River that flows through the land of Havilah, where pure gold, rare perfumes, and precious stones are found. The second is the Gihon River that winds through Ethiopia. The Tigris River that flows east of Assyria is the third, and the fourth is the Euphrates River.

15 The LORD God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it. But the LORD told him, “You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden, except the one that has the power to let you know the difference between right and wrong. If you eat any fruit from that tree, you will die before the day is over!”

18 The LORD God said, “It isn’t good for the man to live alone. I need to make a suitable partner for him.” So the LORD took some soil and made animals and birds. He brought them to the man to see what names he would give each of them. Then the man named the tame animals and the birds and the wild animals. That’s how they got their names.

None of these was the right kind of partner for the man. So the LORD God made him fall into a deep sleep, and he took out one of the man’s ribs. Then after closing the man’s side, the LORD made a woman out of the rib.

The LORD God brought her to the man, and the man exclaimed,

“Here is someone like me!
She is part of my body,
my own flesh and bones.
She came from me, a man.
So I will name her Woman!”

24 That’s why a man will leave his own father and mother. He marries a woman, and the two of them become like one person.
Before you read

- Retell the story of Moses’ early life together, as much as everyone can remember.
- How did he get adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter? (His mom sent him down the river to where she knew the woman bathed because Pharaoh had ordered that all baby boys be killed.)
- Why did he leave Egypt? (He killed an Egyptian for beating up an Israelite and Pharaoh wanted to kill him for it.)
- Where did he go after he ran away? (To the countryside, where he got married and became a shepherd.)

Things to know

- Historical writings of the time reflect a truth, but history was often adapted to teach lessons to groups of people. Exodus is not capital-T-Truth.

After You Read

- Tell the rest of the Exodus story together. Name the plagues (water to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock disease, boils, thunder & hail, locusts, darkness, death of first born sons). **Fun Fact:** After the 8th plague, all of Pharaoh’s advisors say, “What’s wrong with you? Just let them go, already!”
- Remember together how God led people the Israelites by day and night (pillars of cloud & fire) and fed them (bread appeared when the dew evaporated, quail came to camp each night, water sprang from rocks).
- God gives the Israelites the 10 Commandments at their first camp at the foot of Mount Horeb. Can you list them? (don’t worship other gods, don’t make idols of other gods and worship those, don’t misuse God’s name, remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, respect your father and your mother, don’t murder, be faithful in marriage, don’t steal, don’t tell lies about other people, don’t be jealous of what other people have)

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What type of person is Moses when we meet him in chapter three?

2. Taking what we know about the rest of the book of Exodus, what type of person is Moses later in his life? What can we learn from him?

3. Can you think of a time you’ve been asked to do something that you thought was too hard or too important or too big for you to do? How did you react? Did you do it?

4. Why did Moses’ mother float him down the river in the first place? How does that relate to the last plague? What did God tell the Israelites to do to keep their families safe during this plague? What Jewish holiday is celebrated in remembrance of this?
5. What do you think the Israelites’ relationship with God was like after they God freed them? Did they do everything he said? Was it easy? Did they ever get in trouble with God?

_The Israelites mess up a lot after being freed and learning the 10 Commandments. Just because they had an amazing experience with God doesn’t mean they immediately became perfect people. In fact, they are so rebellious that God doesn’t take them to the land he had promised them, but takes their children after they all have died (including Moses), instead. Is that fair? Does it need to be?_

6. What do we learn about God’s character from the book of Exodus?

**Exodus 3:1-4:17**

**God Speaks to Moses**

3 One day, Moses was taking care of the sheep and goats of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and Moses decided to lead them across the desert to Sinai,[a] the holy mountain. 2 There an angel of the LORD appeared to him from a burning bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. 3 “This is strange!” he said to himself. “I’ll go over and see why the bush isn’t burning up.”

4 When the LORD saw Moses coming near the bush, he called him by name, and Moses answered, “Here I am.”

5 God replied, “Don’t come any closer. Take off your sandals—the ground where you are standing is holy. 6 I am the God who was worshiped by your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Moses was afraid to look at God, and so he hid his face.

7 The LORD said:

I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt, and I have heard them beg for my help because of the way they are being mistreated. I feel sorry for them, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians.

I will bring my people out of Egypt into a country where there is good land, rich with milk and honey. I will give them the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. 9 My people have begged for my help, and I have seen how cruel the Egyptians are to them. 10 Now go to the king! I am sending you to lead my people out of his country.

11 But Moses said, “Who am I to go to the king (Pharaoh) and lead your people out of Egypt?”

12 God replied, “I will be with you. And you will know that I am the one who sent you, when you worship me on this mountain after you have led my people out of Egypt.”[1]

13 Moses answered, “I will tell the people of Israel that the God their ancestors worshiped has sent me to them. But what should I say, if they ask me your name?”
God said to Moses:  

I am the eternal God. So tell them that the LORD, whose name is “I Am,” has sent you. This is my name forever, and it is the name that people must use from now on.

Call together the leaders of Israel and tell them that the God who was worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to you. Tell them I have seen how terribly they are being treated in Egypt, and I promise to lead them out of their troubles. I will give them a land rich with milk and honey, where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.

The leaders of Israel will listen to you. Then you must take them to the king of Egypt and say, “The LORD God of the Hebrews has appeared to us. Let us walk three days into the desert, where we can offer a sacrifice to him.” But I know that the king of Egypt won’t let you go unless something forces him to. So I will use my mighty power to perform all kinds of miracles and strike down the Egyptians. Then the king will send you away.

After I punish the Egyptians, they will be so afraid of you that they will give you anything you want. You are my people, and I will let you take many things with you when you leave the land of Egypt. Every Israelite woman will go to her Egyptian neighbors or to any Egyptian woman living in her house. She will ask them for gold and silver jewelry and for their finest clothes. The Egyptians will give them to you, and you will put these fine things on your sons and daughters. You will carry all this away when you leave Egypt.

The LORD Gives Great Power to Moses

Moses asked the LORD, “Suppose everyone refuses to listen to my message, and no one believes that you really appeared to me?”

The LORD answered, “What’s that in your hand?”

“A walking stick,” Moses replied.

“Throw it down!” the LORD commanded. So Moses threw the stick on the ground. It immediately turned into a snake, and Moses jumped back.

“Pick it up by the tail!” the LORD told him. And when Moses did this, the snake turned back into a walking stick.

“Do this,” the LORD said, “and the Israelites will believe that you have seen me, the God who was worshiped by their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Next, the LORD commanded Moses, “Put your hand inside your shirt.” Moses obeyed, and when he took it out, his hand had turned white as snow—like someone with leprosy.
“Put your hand back inside your shirt,” the L ORD told him. Moses did so, and when he took it out again, it was as healthy as the rest of his body.

Then the L ORD said, “If no one believes either of these miracles, take some water from the Nile River and pour it on the ground. The water will immediately turn into blood.”

Moses replied, “I have never been a good speaker. I wasn’t one before you spoke to me, and I’m not one now. I am slow at speaking, and I can never think of what to say.”

But the L ORD answered, “Who makes people able to speak or makes them deaf or unable to speak? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Don’t you know that I am the one who does these things? Now go! When you speak, I will be with you and give you the words to say.”

Moses begged, “L ORD, please send someone else to do it.”

The L ORD became irritated with Moses and said:

What about your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know he is a good speaker. He is already on his way here to visit you, and he will be happy to see you again. Aaron will speak to the people for you, and you will be like me, telling Aaron what to say. I will be with both of you as you speak, and I will tell each of you what to do. Now take this walking stick and use it to perform miracles.
Background Information

- There is a severe drought in the land. The widow sharing her water with Elijah is already a big deal.
- Sidon is not a Jewish community, it’s not part of Israel. It’s significant that God send Elijah to save “gentiles”.
- Elijah is one of the MAJOR PROPHETS!!!! He’s a big deal. If Prophets were Presidents, Jacob would be George Washington, Moses would be Lincoln and Elijah would be…maybe FDR? He is powerful, shows up other people’s gods, and helps the poor. A lot.
- Being a widow during this time was hard. Theoretically, the extended family (and lacking that, the community) was supposed to take care of them. They had no protection, though, and no rights. Their husbands’ property wasn’t theirs. If they had a son, it would be his, regardless of age. If they didn’t have a son, then it belonged to the nearest male relative or the government. If a widow went into debt or was unable to pay her taxes, her children would be taken as payment and made slaves—theoretically until the debt was paid off.
- Fun fact: Last year the current eighth graders (then seventh graders) read a story about a prophet who doused wood with water and then prayed to God to light it so that he could show the priests of Baal who the real God was. That was Elijah. Same guy. We will also see him in a later reading this year.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Why doesn’t God just fill the widow’s pantry with oil jugs?
2. Why do you think God sent his prophet Elijah to a widow who’s not even Jewish?
3. How would you react if you were extremely poor and a traveler you didn’t know asked you for food and water?
The LORD told Elijah, “Go to the town of Zarephath in Sidon and live there. I’ve told a widow in that town to give you food.”

When Elijah came near the town gate of Zarephath, he saw a widow gathering sticks for a fire. “Would you please bring me a cup of water?” he asked. As she left to get it, he asked, “Would you also please bring me a piece of bread?”

The widow answered, “In the name of the living LORD your God, I swear that I don’t have any bread. All I have is a handful of flour and a little olive oil. I’m on my way home now with these few sticks to cook what I have for my son and me. After that, we will starve to death.”

Elijah said, “Everything will be fine. Do what you said. Go home and fix something for you and your son. But first, please make a small piece of bread and bring it to me.”

The LORD God of Israel has promised that your jar of flour won’t run out and your bottle of oil won’t dry up before he sends rain for the crops.”

The widow went home and did exactly what Elijah had told her. She and Elijah and her family had enough food for a long time. The LORD kept the promise that his prophet Elijah had made, and she did not run out of flour or oil.

Several days later, the son of the widow got sick, and he kept getting worse, until finally he died.

The woman shouted at Elijah, “What have I done to you? I thought you were God’s prophet. Did you come here to cause the death of my son as a reminder that I’ve sinned against God?”

“Bring me your son,” Elijah said. Then he took the boy from her arms and carried him upstairs to the room where he was staying. Elijah laid the boy on his bed and prayed, “LORD God, why did you do such a terrible thing to this woman? She’s letting me stay here, and now you’ve let her son die.” Elijah stretched himself out over the boy three times, while praying, “LORD God, bring this boy back to life!”

The LORD answered Elijah’s prayer, and the boy started breathing again. Elijah picked him up and carried him downstairs. He gave the boy to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive.”

“You are God’s prophet!” the woman replied. “Now I know that you really do speak for the LORD.”
Fourth Reading

Luke 1:5-1:45
Matthew 1:18-25
Luke 2:8-38
Matthew 2:1-23

Jesus’ Birth & Childhood

Background Information

- The gospels tell different pieces of Jesus’ life because they were written to different audiences with different goals, although they are all considered biographies.

- Matthew was written around 70 AD for early Christians, so they could have the narrative of their faith. He invests a lot of his time showing how Jesus fulfilled prophecies about the Messiah from the Old Testament because at that time, Christians were highly criticized by Jewish Pharisees. This was a tool for explaining and defending their faith.

- Luke’s gospel is actually a two volume set: Luke & Acts are meant to be read together. It’s written to a literary Greek audience around 60-70 AD. Luke focuses a bit on showing the connection between Christianity and Judaism because Greeks had the most respect for the oldest religions. Luke is a very careful writer: everything is chronological and precise. He is helping set societal expectations.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. How many people knew about Jesus’ birth before it happened, whether through the Holy Spirit or an angel? Why were these specific people told?

2. Describe the scene when the angel visits Mary. How does she feel? How does she react? What does the angel look like? Is the angel nice or scary? Mary tells the angel, “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me as you have said.” Why did she say yes to being Jesus’ mom? Why did Joseph say yes to being his dad?

3. Jesus is tempted in the desert for 40 days before he begins his ministry. What does this mean? Why was it necessary? How did Jesus make it through the 40 days?

4. How do you feel after reading through the story of Jesus’ early life?

5. Describe Jesus’ early life. How was it peaceful? Where was there conflict?

6. How do you think Jesus thought of himself as a child? Do you think he knew he was God’s son? Do you think he performed any miracles as a child?
Luke 1:5-45

John the Baptist’s birth foretold

5 During the rule of King Herod of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron. 6 They were both righteous before God, blameless in their observance of all the Lord’s commandments and regulations. 7 They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to become pregnant and they both were very old. 8 One day Zechariah was serving as a priest before God because his priestly division was on duty. 9 Following the customs of priestly service, he was chosen by lottery to go into the Lord’s sanctuary and burn incense. 10 All the people who gathered to worship were praying outside during this hour of incense offering. 11 An angel from the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw the angel, he was startled and overcome with fear.

13 The angel said, "Don’t be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to your son and you must name him John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many people will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the Lord’s eyes. He must not drink wine and liquor. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. 16 He will bring many Israelites back to the Lord their God. 17 He will go forth before the Lord, equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers[a] back to their children, and he will turn the disobedient to righteous patterns of thinking. He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this? My wife and I are very old."

19 The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in God’s presence. I was sent to speak to you and to bring this good news to you. 20 Know this: What I have spoken will come true at the proper time. But because you didn’t believe, you will remain silent, unable to speak until the day when these things happen."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they wondered why he was in the sanctuary for such a long time. 22 When he came out, he was unable to speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he gestured to them and couldn’t speak. 23 When he completed the days of his priestly service, he returned home. 24 Afterward, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. She kept to herself for five months, saying, 25 “This is the Lord’s doing. He has shown his favor to me by removing my disgrace among other people.”

Jesus’ birth foretold

26 When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, 27 to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David’s house. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 When the angel came to her, he said, “Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!” 29 She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. 31 Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name
him Jesus. 32 He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. 33 He will rule over Jacob’s house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen since I haven’t been with a man?”

35 The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God’s Son. 36 Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. 37 Nothing is impossible for God.”

38 Then Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

Mary visits Elizabeth

39 Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. 40 She entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. 43 Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.”

Matthew 1:18-25

Birth of Jesus

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn’t want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. 20 As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

23 Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,
And they will call him, Emmanuel.[s]
(Emmanuel means “God with us.”)

24 When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he didn’t sleep with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.
Luke 2:8-38

Announcement to shepherds

8 Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. 9 The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. 11 Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. 12 This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” 13 Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 14 “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

15 When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go right now to Bethlehem and see what’s happened. Let’s confirm what the Lord has revealed to us.” 16 They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. 18 Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. 20 The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

Jesus’ circumcision, naming, and temple presentation

21 When eight days had passed, Jesus’ parents circumcised him and gave him the name Jesus. This was the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived. 22 When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (23 It’s written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.”) 24 They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what’s stated in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. [b]

Simeon’s response to Jesus

25 A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn’t die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus’ parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. 28 Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

29 “Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word,

30 because my eyes have seen your salvation.

31 You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples.

32 It’s a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and a glory for your people Israel.”
His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too.”

Anna’s response to Jesus

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:1-23

Coming of the magi

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”

3 When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

6 You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
   by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
   because from you will come one who governs,
   who will shepherd my people Israel.”[b]

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another way.

Escape to Egypt

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search
for the child in order to kill him.” 14 Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. 15 He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: *I have called my son out of Egypt.*

**Murder of the Bethlehem children**

16 When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. 17 This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

18 **A voice was heard in Ramah,**
   weeping and much grieving.
   Rachel weeping for her children,
   and she did not want to be comforted, because they were no more.

**Return from Egypt**

19 After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. 20 “Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” 21 Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. 23 He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.


**Jesus as a child in Nazareth**

39 When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. 40 The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him.

**Jesus in the temple at Passover**

41 Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. 42 When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. 43 After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn’t know it. 44 Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends. 45 When they didn’t find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to
Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We’ve been looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father’s house?” But they didn’t understand what he said to them.

Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.
Background Information

Mark

- The gospel of Mark was written by John Mark with information from Peter around 64 AD. It was written during a time of persecution for Christians. Mark makes a point of including not only Jesus’ miracles, but also his sufferings—a way to show his Roman audience that both are involved in following Christ.
- Baptism was practiced as a sign of repentance by non-Jews who were converting to Judaism. John telling Jewish people that they needed to repent and be baptized was like calling them to the faith anew. Scholars say he was telling people that everyone had to approach God on equal terms, whether Jewish or not (very different, since Jewish people are considered God’s chosen people). It would have been considered offensive.
- Only slaves removed people’s sandals. For John to say he’s not worthy of untying Jesus’ sandals is saying that he’s not even worthy to be Jesus’ slave.
- The dove is purposely reminiscent of the dove in the story of Noah’s Ark, bringing up the theme of God making the world new and fulfilling a promise.
- Most Jewish people at this time were extremely poor, only very few were considered rich. Fishermen are some of the only people somewhere in between in the middle class. They weren’t leaving a failing business, they were leaving their families’ livelihoods—good livelihoods.
- Although they were not poor, they were not overly-educated. All Jewish boys went to school as children, but by the time they were 12, either they would be selected for higher education where they followed around a rabbi and learned his teachings or they would be apprenticed into the family trade. Paul is the only apostle who had higher education—he was on his way to becoming a Pharisee when he experienced Jesus.
- Telling his disciples to leave their families was extremely counter-cultural. “Honor your father & mother” was considered to be the greatest commandment (this is before Jesus taught otherwise), so anything that separated a family was avoided.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Why is it important to learn John’s story? (Also, FYI, this John is different than the John who wrote the gospel.)
2. What strikes you about John as a person?
3. If Jesus is God, why did he need to get baptized by John like all the regular people?
4. What do you think Jesus’ time in the desert was like? How did Satan tempt him?
5. How is Jesus’ message different than John’s? How is it the same?
6. How would you feel if you were at school and a stranger came up to you and said, “Follow me?” What would make you want to go with him?

Mark 1:1-20

Beginning of good news

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s Son, ² happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

   Look, I am sending my messenger before you.
   He will prepare your way,
   a voice shouting in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight.”

John’s preaching

4 John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. 5 Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. 6 John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus is baptized and tempted

9 About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. 11 And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

12 At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

Jesus’ message

14 After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God’s good news, saying, “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”

Jesus calls disciples

16 As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 “Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” 18 Right away, they left their nets and followed him. 19 After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee’s sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. 20 At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

Matthew

You do not need to read all of Matthew 5–7. Pick the headings that look interesting to you and your students or that you think will generate the best conversation.
General Background Information

- Matthew wrote his gospel topically, not chronologically, so although this is called "The Sermon on the Mount", Jesus may not have rattled all of this off in one sitting. This is kind of like Matthew’s movie montage of the Jesus’ teachings.
- These two chapters are considered “the ethics of the kingdom”. Jesus is laying down what it means to live a repentant life. He’s detailing the ways in which the kingdom of God is different than the world.
- Background information and suggested discussion prompts are included after every section.

Matthew 5:1-12

*Background Information*

- "Happy are people...” is a poetic literary form from the Old Testament.
- Jesus is specifically speaking to the then-popular belief that the kingdom of God will be brought by a violent upheaval. He's saying, "The kingdom of God is for people who love peace and mercy. For people who 'do the right thing' and rely on God.”
- In v. 10-12, Jesus is talking about the prophets of the Old Testament and likening the call to follow him to what the prophets went through (Lots of physical and spiritual hardships! Also lots of miracles!)

5 1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. 2 He taught them, saying:

*Happy people*

3 “Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 “Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

5 “Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

6 “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

7 “Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

8 “Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

9 “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.

10 “Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. 12 Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.
Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What does it mean to have a pure heart?

2. How do you feel about the idea that if you are insulted because of your faith in this life you will be rewarded in heaven?

3. Name people or groups of people you know who fit the description in each verse. Who are the hopeless? Who are the grieving? The humble? The hungry for righteousness? Etc.

Matthew 5:13-16

Background Information

- Real salt can’t lose its saltiness. This is a parallel to disciples: real disciples can’t stop acting like disciples.

Salt and light

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

Suggested Discussion Prompts:

1. What does it mean to be salty?

2. What does it mean to be the light of the world?

3. What are some ways we hide our light? What would life be like if we let our light shine on a lampstand?

Matthew 5:17-20

Background Information

- Jesus is basically upholding the law handed down from Moses here, but taking issue with how it’s being enforced and lived out. Instead of the law helping people live together in society under God’s rule, people are living under the rule of law.

- Rebellion against Jewish law would make the rebel an outcast and no longer part of Jewish society.

Jesus and the Law

17 “Don’t even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven’t come to do away with them but to fulfill them. 18 I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth
exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. 19 Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Suggested Discussion Prompts:

1. What does Jesus mean when he says that he hasn’t come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it?

Matthew 5:21-26

Background Information:

- Specifically in these sections on law, Jesus is using language and teaching like a trained, official rabbi would—only better.
- It was common knowledge that God accepts only those gifts made with a pure heart. That wasn’t really enforced in any way, though. Jesus is reiterating the heart of the law—don’t just follow it to the letter and/or figure out loop-holes around it, but let it inform the way your heart and mind work.
- Hell in v. 22 is what the Jews think of as hell: the opposite of paradise where the wicked would be burned up or tortured forever, depending on your school of thought.

Law of murder

21 “You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, Don’t commit murder, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, ‘You idiot,’ they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, ‘You fool,’ they will be in danger of fiery hell. 23 Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift. 25 Be sure to make friends quickly with your opponents while you are with them on the way to court. Otherwise, they will haul you before the judge, the judge will turn you over to the officer of the court, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 I say to you in all seriousness that you won’t get out of there until you’ve paid the very last penny.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Why is it so important to Jesus that we not think bad thoughts about our peers?
2. Why is it important to make peace with an enemy before giving God a gift?
Matthew 5:27-30

Background Information

- Jesus is again pointing to peoples’ hearts and asking them to control their thoughts and emotions, not just follow the letter of the law.
- Many Jewish people believed that in whatever state you died (armless, blind, etc.) you would be resurrected. Jesus is using that image to make his point.
- Only women could be guilty of adultery at this time in history.

Law of adultery

27 “You have heard that it was said, Don’t commit adultery. [b] 28 But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart. 29 And if your right eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body go into hell.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What is adultery? How is adultery the same or different in 2014 AD vs. 30 AD? Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to teach about it?

Matthew 5:31-32

Background Information

- "Adultery" here refers only to a wife having an affair, not the husband.
- It’s hard for us to understand because we aren’t first century Jews and this is translated, but Jesus is using hyperbole here to say that divorce isn’t okay unless one of the partners has irrevocably broken the marriage covenant. Some Jewish rabbis allowed divorce and remarriage for any reason. Jesus is asking them to take it more seriously.

Law of divorce

31 “It was said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a divorce certificate.’ [c] 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife except for sexual unfaithfulness forces her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What do you think marriage meant to the people of the time? Why was it important to them?

2. Is marriage important today? If so, how?
3. What do you think life would be like for a divorced woman in Jesus’ day? (Hint: John 4:7-26)

Matthew 5:33-37

Background Information

- It was common practice to swear oaths (like a legal, binding oath) by things other than God so that if you broke the oath, you wouldn’t be breaking the second commandment (don’t use God’s name in vain). Jesus is saying that, ultimately, everything you swear on is God’s and people are just looking for loopholes.

Law of solemn pledges

33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago: Don’t make a false solemn pledge, but you should follow through on what you have pledged to the Lord. (Matthew 5:33a) 34 But I say to you that you must not pledge at all. You must not pledge by heaven, because it’s God’s throne. 35 You must not pledge by the earth, because it’s God’s footstool. You must not pledge by Jerusalem, because it’s the city of the great king. 36 And you must not pledge by your head, because you can’t turn one hair white or black. 37 Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. How often do you use the phrase, “I swear to God!” What does it mean to you?
2. How often do you tell people yes when you mean no or vice versa?
3. Why is it important that we follow through on the things we promise?

Matthew 5:38-42

Background Information

- "Eye for an eye“ was part of Hamurabi’s code, a law even earlier than the 10 Commandments handed down by Moses. Most of the world still followed the code, including Jewish people.

- Slapping someone’s right cheek was the most offensive thing you could do to them (aside from killing them).

- Roman soldiers could demand the labor of people and animals at any time. They are who Jesus is referring to in v. 41. People would not have liked being told to serve their oppressors.

Law of retaliation

38 “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. (Matthew 5:38a) 39 But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. 40 When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. 41 When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. 42 Give to those who ask, and don’t refuse those who wish to borrow from you.
Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. This is a good example of what theologians call “the upside down kingdom of God”. What is upside
down about these commands? Why is Jesus telling people to do the opposite of what comes
naturally?

Matthew 5:43-48

Background Information

- The Old Testament didn’t exactly say you should hate your enemies, but hating God’s enemies was
  encouraged. People also didn’t generally pray for enemies, unless they prayed that God would
  strike them dead. At the most, people were generally nice to gentiles in the hopes that they would
  convert to Judaism. So this is really a new way to look at the law.

- Tax collectors were the lowest of the low in Jewish society. They not only worked for the Romans
  (willingly), but actually earned their salary by taking more tax money from people than was
  actually owed. The Romans didn’t pay them, they basically had to raise their pay by demanding
  more taxes.

Law of love

43 “You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor[1] and hate your enemy. 44 But I say to
you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you 45 so that you will be acting as children of your
Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the
righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t
even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you
doing? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in
showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Why do good and bad things happen to both good and bad people?

2. What does v. 46 mean?

3. What does v. 48 mean?

Matthew 6:1-4

Background information

- Greeks & Romans of the time gave money to public works and the poor so they would be popular
  and have power. Many Jewish people of the time believed they could earn their salvation by giving
  above and beyond.
Showy religion

6 "Be careful that you don’t practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

2 "Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. 3 But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing 4 so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Jewish people at the time thought they could earn their salvation. How do we as Christians get salvation? Do we have to earn it?

2. How does it make you feel when you see people practicing their religion in order to get attention?

3. Think of a time you did something good for someone and no one knew about it (and maybe still doesn’t!). How did it make you feel?

Matthew 6:5-6

Background Information:

- Group prayer wasn’t super-common in synagogues at this time, so if people prayed aloud in the synagogue in front of other people, it was generally so they could improve their reputation or appear more holy.

- Jesus is being a bit hyperbolic, here, but he’s basically saying, "Go pray in the pantry by yourself." Homes had open floor plans and no door on anything except the entryway and cupboard.

Showy prayer

5 "When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. 6 But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. How do you pray? Do you like to make up a prayer as you go? Do you ever recite the prayers we say at church?

2. Why does Jesus say that it’s important not to show off to other people in our prayers?
Matthew 6:7-15

Background Information

- Jews believe that God is like a loving Father who wants to answer his children’s requests.
- Greeks & Romans prayed to their gods by heaping up titles and promises in front of their requests. (Oh, most powerful Zeus, defeater of enemies and king of Olympus! I will serve you forever if only you...”)
- Although they were thought to be okay, there weren’t a lot of formal, rote prayers like Episcopalians use, today. The Lord’s Prayer is one of the first!

Proper prayer

7 "When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. 9 Pray like this:

Our Father who is in heaven,

uphold the holiness of your name.

10 Bring in your kingdom

so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.

11 Give us the bread we need for today.

12 Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you,

just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.

13 And don’t lead us into temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one.

14 “If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you don’t forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your sins.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What do you think God wants to hear from you when you pray?

2. Is it okay to pray angry things to God? (Either if you are angry at someone or if you are angry at God for something.)

3. What topics does the Lord’s Prayer cover? What is it really saying/asking for?
Matthew 6:16-18

Background Information

- Fasting was a common practice at the time: people not only denied themselves food, but also water, lotion, bathing, etc. They thought it made them better people/more holy.

Showy fasting

16 “And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. 17 When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. 18 Then you won’t look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What does Jesus mean when he says, “I assure you that they have their reward.”

2. Why is it important not to let people know you are fasting if that’s what you are doing?

Matthew 6:19-21

No Additional Background Information

Earthly and heavenly treasures

19 “Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. 20 Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. 21 Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. “Earthly treasures” is more than money. What else do we spend our time storing up here on earth that won’t do us any good in heaven?

2. How would like be different if we didn’t focus on money or anything we listed from the first question?

3. What does v. 21 mean?

Matthew 6:22-24

Background Information

- There is an idiom at play here: a healthy eye is considered generous and a diseased eye is stingy.

- People at this time thought that light came out of eyes, enabling people to see.
Seeing and serving

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! 24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Suggested Discussion Topics

1. What does it mean to be full of light? Full of darkness?
2. What do light and dark have to do with God and wealth?
3. When is wealth a bad thing? When is wealth a good thing?

Matthew 6:25-34

Background Information

- People of this time and location have very little beyond their basic needs and those were often in jeopardy, too. Drought or flood or cold could ruin a family’s livelihood quickly.
- Many Jewish scholars of the time thought that God was concerned with humans, only. Jesus paints a different picture: if God cares for birds, how much more does he care for humans, whom he freed and guided and chose as he people?

Worry about necessities

25 “Therefore, I say to you, don’t worry about your life, what you’ll eat or what you’ll drink, or about your body, what you’ll wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds in the sky. They don’t sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth much more than they are? 27 Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t wear themselves out with work, and they don’t spin cloth. 29 But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn’t dressed like one of these. 30 If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it’s alive today and tomorrow it’s thrown into the furnace, won’t God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? 31 Therefore, don’t worry and say, ‘What are we going to eat?’ or ‘What are we going to drink?’ or ‘What are we going to wear?’ 32 Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 Instead, desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. What do you worry about?
2. What do we learn about God’s character in this passage?
3. When is it healthy to worry? When is it unhealthy to worry?

Matthew 7:1-6

Background Information

- Jesus is using hyperbole here to be funny and make a point!
- Dogs and pigs were unclean animals to the Jews. They would have nothing to do with them.

Judging

7 “Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged. 2 You’ll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. 3 Why do you see the splinter that’s in your brother’s or sister’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when there’s a log in your eye? 5 You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you’ll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s or sister’s eye. 6 Don’t give holy things to dogs, and don’t throw your pearls in front of pigs. They will stomp on the pearls, then turn around and attack you.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Unpack this metaphor about the splinter and the log. What is Jesus saying? When have you picked at splinters in other peoples’ eyes? How do you feel when someone does it to you?
2. Unpack the metaphor about the dogs and pigs. What does this have to do with splinters and eyes?

Matthew 7:7-12

Background Information

- Jewish scholars of the time didn’t hand out promises like this. They stayed in the gray area on whether or not God would answer a prayer. Jesus is making a really bold statement.
- V. 11’s wording sounds odd to our ears, but Jesus is using an old turn of phrase his listeners would have been familiar with. Kind of a “you know better” expression.

Asking, seeking, knocking

7 “Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened. 9 Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? 10 Or give them a
snake when they ask for fish? 11 If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him? 12 Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

**Suggested Discussion Prompts**

1. In v. 7-8, who is Jesus talking about? Who is answering the door?

2. Jesus promises that if we look for God, we will find him. Where and when can we look for God? Describe a time you saw God at work.

3. How should we treat people, if we want to be treated the same way?

4. Who in our lives is it easiest to not treat the way we want to be treated? Parents? Siblings? People who don’t fit in at school? Why do we treat them this way and how can we change that behavior?

**Matthew 7:13-14**

**Background Information**

- This message is pretty counter-cultural for the time. It was commonly thought that Jewish people would go to heaven simply by virtue of being Jewish.

**Narrow gate**

13 “Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. 14 But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.

**Suggested Discussion Prompts**

1. What is the narrow gate and how do we find it?

2. Why is it hard to follow the road to life?

**Matthew 7:15-19**

**Background Information**

- Although the Jewish people believed that prophets like in the Old Testament no longer existed, they firmly believed in false prophets who tried to lead them astray. They recognize false prophets by their disputing of the law of Moses. Jesus is saying that teachers may say good things, but they’re still false prophets if they don’t practice what they preach.

**Tree and fruit**

15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but inside they are vicious wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruit. Do people get bunches of grapes from thorny weeds, or do
they get figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, and every rotten tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can’t produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree can’t produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore, you will know them by their fruit.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Have you ever met someone who talked a good game but didn’t actually do anything they talked about? What were they like?

2. What does it mean to know someone by their fruit?

3. If God know you by your fruit, what kind of fruit are your growing? (I don’t mean apples.)

Matthew 7:21-23

No Additional Background Information

Entrance requirements

21 ”Not everybody who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 On the Judgment Day, many people will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name and expel demons in your name and do lots of miracles in your name?’ 23 Then I’ll tell them, ‘I’ve never known you. Get away from me, you people who do wrong.’

Suggested Discussion Prompts:

1. What does Jesus say about people who talk about God but don’t follow what he says to do?

2. Where does grace and forgiveness fit in with all of this?

Matthew 7:24-27

Background Information

- Rabbis often debated whether hearing the Law or following the Law was more important.

- Jesus speaks with authority here in a way that rabbis typically did not.

Two foundations

24 “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. 26 But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. 27 The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”
Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Unpack the metaphor of the house on the rock. What does Jesus mean? What does the house stand for?

2. Why is it tempting to build on sand?

Matthew 7:28-29

Background Information

- Rabbis gained authority by building on what others rabbis said in the past. Jesus is claiming these commands and thoughts as his own.

Crowd’s response

When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he was teaching them like someone with authority and not like their legal experts.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Sometimes in life there are people you know who speak truth to you and when they speak, you know it’s the truth. What is this person like? What makes them different from other people?

2. Why do you think people listened so eagerly to Jesus? What was special about him?

3. What does it mean to teach with authority?

4. How do these teachings of Jesus make you feel? Do you want to go out and follow them? Are they a little weird? How do they apply to your life?
The Prodigal Son

Background Information

- This is the third story in a row that Jesus tells about finding something lost. In the first, the shepherd leaves his 99 sheep to find the hundredth. In the second, the widow spends her other nine coins in celebration after she searches high and low for the tenth. In this climax, a father welcomes back a lost son.
- Jewish readers would have immediately thought the father was a fool for being so lax.
- Most commonly, a father’s estate would be divided between the elder and younger son before he died, although he still maintained control of the money and land. The sons would have known what would be theirs in the future. The elder son got 2/3 of the estate and the younger one 1/3. Although it was really disrespectful to ask for his inheritance early (like saying, “I wish you were dead”), the younger son isn’t taking anything away from the older brother.
- Pigs are unclean animals to Jewish people. They never had anything to do with them. To be contemplating eating the pigs’ food shows just how desperate the younger son is.
- Old Jewish men Do. Not. Run. He would have had to hike his robe up and show off his legs.
- The best robe in the house would have belonged to the father. The ring would have been a signet ring—a family ring, often with a family crest on it. Slaves did not wear sandals.
- When the older brother addresses his father he’s being extremely disrespectful and normally would have been beaten for talking like that. We can’t see it in the text because of the translation, but Jewish audiences would have taken it as more proof that the father was lax.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Prodigal means extravagant. Who in this story is prodigal? (Often the story is called “The Prodigal Son”, but he is not the only extravagant one.)
2. Why doesn’t the father let the younger son finish his apology?
3. How do you think the younger son felt when his dad came running to him?
4. Why is the older brother angry at the end?
5. What do you think the older brother’s final response was to his father? Did he go in to the party?
Luke 15:11-32

11 Jesus also told them another story:

Once a man had two sons. 12 The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons.

13 Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

15 He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs.[e] 16 He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating,[f] but no one gave him a thing.

17 Finally, he came to his senses and said, “My father’s workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! 18 I will go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.’”

20 The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

21 The son said, “Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son.”

22 But his father said to the servants, “Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals[g] for his feet. 23 Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. 24 This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found.” And they began to celebrate.

25 The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants over and asked, “What’s going on here?”

27 The servant answered, “Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf.” 28 The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. 29 But he said to his father, “For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. 30 This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast.”

31 His father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.32 But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found.”
Background Information

- v. 1-13 parallel God revealing himself to Moses so closely that Jewish audiences would have understood that it was purposeful.
- Jewish people expected the return of Moses & Elijah when the Messiah came.
- Jewish people were taught that when Elijah returned, all the faithful departed would be resurrected.
- The word Peter uses for dwellings here is the same as the dwellings the Israelites lived in while in the desert with Moses.
- "Moving mountains" was a Jewish idiom for an insurmountable problem.

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Why does Peter want to build dwellings to mark the occasion of seeing Elijah & Moses?
2. When else does God say something similar to "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Why does God repeat it, now?
3. Why did the disciples react to the voice of God with fear?
4. How was John the Baptist like Elijah?
5. What do you think Jesus meant in v. 17? Why would he feel like that?
6. Unpack Jesus’ metaphor with the mustard seeds and mountains.
7. Leading up to chapter 17, Jesus performs several miracles and Peter admits that he thinks Jesus is the Messiah. Immediately following chapter 17, Jesus gives his final teachings and then goes into Jerusalem where he is finally arrested. Why is this story about the transfiguration (Jesus being transformed while talking with the Old Testament prophets), faith, and resurrection important here?
8. In many ways, this passage is the beginning of the end of the story for Jesus. Everything he says and does changes direction after this. Have you ever had a moment in your life that changed the direction of your future? (Moving, a moment with God, not making a team, losing a friend, etc.)

Matthew 17:1-23

The Transfiguration

17 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I[a] will make three dwellings[b] here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved;[c] with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” 8 And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” 10 And the disciples asked him, “Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” 11 He replied, “Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; 12 but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.
Jesus Cures a Boy with a Demon

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, 15 and said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.” 17 Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.” 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” 20 He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection

22 As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, 23 and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.” And they were greatly distressed.
Eighth Reading Matthew 26:17-35 Jesus’ Death & Resurrection
Luke 22:35-71
Mark 15
John 20-21

Matthew 26:17-35 Background Information

- Passover had to be observed in Jerusalem, so sharing your house with guests wasn’t unusual; the way Jesus goes about it may be.
- Sharing a meal together/being hospitable created a very close bond in these days—to share food from the same bowl and then betray the person you shared with would be unthinkable.
- “It would have been better if he hadn’t been born,” was a common phrase from rabbis and in the Old Testament, used on people who missed their opportunity to encounter God.
- The ceremony of bread and wine is part of the Passover meal, but Jesus changes the words. What he says becomes our model for communion.

Luke 22:35-71 Background Information

- It’s generally thought that Jesus makes sure they have swords with them so that a) he fulfills a prophecy about him being among the lawless and b) the guards have a concrete reason to arrest him, setting the rest of the events leading to his death and resurrection rolling.
- It was common to stay up really late on Passover and share stories of God’s redemption; it’s odd that the disciples were unable to stay awake.
- Kisses were signs of deep loyalty and affection for a teacher, so Judas’ kiss is extremely hypocritical.
- It wouldn’t be easy for Peter to sneak into the home of the high priest; it was like a compound and everyone who worked there would know he didn’t belong.
- Peter, a Galilean, would definitely have a strong accent very different from the Judeans’ (the guards and servants).
- Many, many Jewish laws and customs were broken in the treatment of Jesus—the mocking and beating before a trial, being taken to the high priest’s house, starting proceedings at night, asking Jesus to give testimony against himself (admit he’s the Messiah), etc.
- Typically, Jewish law very carefully guarded the rights of the accused until found guilty, and even then tended toward mercy; that obviously doesn’t happen here.
- The Sanhedrin are the ruling religious court of Israel, there were 71 members.

Mark 15 Background Information

- Because the night trial of Jesus was illegal, the Sanhedrin needed Pilate to back them up quickly.
• The high priests push the “King of the Jews” angle with Pilate because proclaiming himself King of the Jews would be considered treason to the rulers of Rome and Pilate should immediately sentence him to death.
• Barabbas was a violent revolutionary—the high priests were trying to make Jesus look like Barabbas, but worse, because they said he set himself up as king.
• A beating often happened as well as the crucifixion, but it was usually on the way up the hill or after already being nailed to the cross, not beforehand and not this vicious.
• Crucifixion was designed to be the most cruel, most torturous form of execution.
• History tells us that Pilate made a lot of Jewish enemies when he first became governor and, since then, had been hesitant to do anything to make the Jews dislike him more. This may be why he gives in even though he doesn’t seem personally convinced.
• The soldiers who dress up Jesus and mock him are specifically mimicking the way a prince would be treated and what a prince would wear at this time.
• Cyrene is modern day Libya.
• Roman soldiers could make anyone do work for them at any time (hence Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross).
• The myrrh/vinegar mixture was used to dull pain; Jesus chose to take it all on, instead.
• It was normal for Roman soldiers to divvy up the criminal’s belongings.
• The ninth hour is around 3 pm; Jesus died at the time of evening prayers in the temple.
• Darkness symbolized judgment.
• In v. 34 Jesus quotes Psalm 22.
• The crowd thinks he is calling to Elijah because they thought Elijah came to rescue important rabbis as they died.
• It typically took a few days to die on the cross—and usually from asphyxiation as the lungs gave out under the strain the body was taking. Jesus dies much more quickly.
• Tearing the veil in the temple was a symbolic act: it used to divide the people from God (he was too holy to be in their presence, so he stayed behind the curtain; it was a little Wizard of Oz). Jesus is showing us that he judged the old temple system and overturned it—God is among his people, now, not separate.
• Having women disciples who travelled with him and the other male disciples was definitely new to Jewish society and pretty scandalous.
• Joseph (this is not his dad) was a member of the Sanhedrin (not all the Sanhedrin had to agree in order for something to get done, and it would have been dangerous for Joseph to go against this influential and wealthy crowd).
• Most people who were crucified were not buried, and if they were, it was in a criminal’s grave. Joseph is getting a special favor for Jesus.
• Jesus would have been buried very quickly, because he died around 3:00 and the Sabbath, when no work could be done, started at 6:00 when the sun set.
Jewish burial custom at the time was to wrap the body in linen and lay it in a tomb for one year to decompose. After one year, a family member would reopen the tomb and gather the bones in a box to be put in a hole in the wall of the tomb with the rest of the family’s dead.

John 20-21 Background Information

- Because Jesus was buried hurriedly before the Sabbath started, Mary Magdalene goes to his tomb to finish preparing the body.
- It was customary for mourners to remain in their homes and, in some cases, visit the tomb of the loved one in the seven days following a death. They publicly mourned—partially to show how important and loved the deceased was, but also partially to get all their emotions out.
- The disk-shaped rocks that covered the doorways of tombs would require several men to move them.
- Jewish men did not respect the words of women as truth or evidence; Jesus, however, appears to women first and sends them out to testify to what they saw.
- The “beloved disciple” is John, the writer of this gospel.
- “Rabbouni” is the affectionate word for “teacher” (vs. “rabbi”).
- v. 22 parallels Genesis 2, when God breathes life into his humans and Ezekiel 37 when God’s Spirit, in the form of wind, revives the dead.
- In Jewish tradition, having the Holy Spirit qualified the disciples to speak for God and prophesy.
- v. 27-28 is when people other Peter start referring to Jesus as God.
- Fish were often caught at night and sold in the morning.
- Peter is probably not really naked; he’s likely in an undergarment of some kind at the least. Jewish men did not hang out together naked.
- The symbolism around sheep and shepherds is important here: up to now, Jesus has been the shepherd and his disciples have been his sheep. He taught about that a few times. They are still his sheep, but Jesus is asking Peter to take on new responsibility.
- Jesus hints to Peter how Peter will die in v. 18 (it’s well-supported tradition that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome around 64 AD, martyred for leading people to Christ).
- When Peter asks about John, Jesus isn’t being very clear. Scholars don’t think he’s saying John is never going to die. More probably, he is saying John won’t be martyred like Peter—and according to church history, he wasn’t (he was exiled on an island when he wrote Revelation).

Suggested Discussion Prompts

1. Remind everyone of which person you picked to pay attention to through the narrative. What did they do? How do you think they felt at different points in the story? [For example: a) when Judas betrayed Jesus, b) when Jesus was arrested, c) when Peter denied Jesus, d) when Jesus died, e) when they saw Jesus resurrected, f) when the disciples saw Jesus from the boat.] What can we learn from them?
2. What do you think is the most important part of this narrative? Why?
3. How did reading this make you feel?
4. Describe Thomas
5. Do you personally believe Jesus died and was resurrected? What makes you sure or what makes you doubt it?
6. Think about Thomas. How does he feel and why does he doubt his friends?
7. Think about Peter. How did he feel from the time he denied Jesus to the time he saw the empty tomb? Why did he run to the tomb? Describe how you think he felt when he jumped out of the boat and swam to Jesus.
8. What does Jesus ask Peter to do? What does that mean?
9. What are we called to do in response to Jesus’ death and resurrection? The answer may be different for each person.

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Before you read:
*** Everyone pick a person to follow/pay close attention to through the following narrative: Jesus, Peter, Mary Magdalene and the women, John (the beloved disciple), Thomas, the Sanhedrin, etc. ***

Matthew 26:17-35

The Passover with the Disciples 26:17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” 18 He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

20 When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve;[c] 21 and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” 22 And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” 23 He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” 25 Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

The Institution of the Lord’s Supper 26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the[c] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” 30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
Peter’s Denial Foretold  
31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

32 But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”  
33 Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.”

34 Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”  
35 Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

Luke 22:35-71

Purse, Bag, and Sword  
35 He said to them, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “No, not a thing.”  
36 He said to them, “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.  
37 For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.”

38 They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He replied, “It is enough.”

Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives  
39 He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him.  
40 When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

41 Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.”

42 Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.  
43 In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

44 When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief,  
45 and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus  
47 While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him;  
48 but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?”

49 When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?”  
50 Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

51 But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him.

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?”

53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”
Peter Denies Jesus 54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. 55 When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. 56 Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” 57 But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” 58 A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” 59 Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

The Mocking and Beating of Jesus 63 Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; 64 they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” 65 They kept heaping many other insults on him.

Jesus before the Council 66 When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. 67 They said, “If you are the Messiah,[1] tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; 68 and if I question you, you will not answer. 69 But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” 70 All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” 71 Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!”

Mark 15

Jesus before Pilate 15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. 2 Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.” 3 Then the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” 5 But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Pilate Hands Jesus over to Be Crucified 6 Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. 7 Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. 8 So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. 9 Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” 10 For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. 12 Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do[a] with the man you call[b] the King of the Jews?” 13 They shouted back, “Crucify him!” 14 Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more,
“Crucify him!” 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

**The Soldiers Mock Jesus** 16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters[c]); and they called together the whole cohort. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18 And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” 19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20 After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

**The Crucifixion of Jesus** 21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22 Then they brought Jesus[d] to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” 27 And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.[e] 29 Those who passed by derided[f] him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” 31 In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah,[g] the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

**The Death of Jesus** 33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land[h] until three in the afternoon. 34 At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” 36 And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” 37 Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he[j] breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” 40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.
The Burial of Jesus 42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45 When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

John 20-21

The Resurrection of Jesus 20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, [b] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples 19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus and Thomas 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin[c]), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

The Purpose of This Book 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe[d] that Jesus is the Messiah,[e] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples 21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,[l] Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6 He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards[g] off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him,
“Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

**Jesus and Peter** 15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

**Jesus and the Beloved Disciple** 20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” 22 Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” 23 So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

24 This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. 25 But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.