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FROM THE EDITOR



Andy McLean

Editor

*The Gospel Project
for Students*

The current volume of *Jesus Saves* takes us to the central event in all of human history—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we see repeated over and over throughout the Bible, the events surrounding the cross of Christ are the reason Jesus came. The disciples may have been thrown off by these events, but Jesus wasn't. He knew the cross was His mission to bear, and He knew exactly what it would cost Him. It was the means God chose to reconcile sinners to Himself, making "him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The promise God gave to Adam and Eve long ago would finally be fulfilled. Jesus, the Promised Seed, would crush the serpent's head, and death itself would be defeated in the death of Christ. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham to provide a lamb by sending the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. And, as Isaiah prophesied, the Suffering Servant was wounded for our transgressions and pierced for our iniquities. All of the foreshadowing in the Old Testament not only pointed forward to Jesus, but also pointed to the mission He would complete.

The cross and resurrection of Christ are central to God's Story in human history. Jesus is the Hero who came to rescue a captive people by taking the punishment they deserved. The cross is also central to our faith as believers. It is because of the cross that we can rightly see ourselves, like Barabbas, as being guilty and set free. It is because of the cross that, like Mary, we can live as if Jesus is better than anything this world can offer. It is because of the cross that, like Peter and the other disciples, we can move past our own personal failures and disappointments and be reconciled to God. And God empowers us for the life mission He has called us to.

AUTHORS

UNIT 1



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THIS STUDY

- **Essential Doctrines:** Each session will also contain an essential doctrine that directly relates to the Bible study material. The essential doctrine is also located in the student's personal study guide, though in an abbreviated format.
- **Christ Connection:** Each session will end with a direct look at how the content studied connects with Christ, emphasizing to students how all of Scripture is pointing to Him. The material in the Christ Connection will also be provided in the student's personal study guide.

▶ YOUR STORY

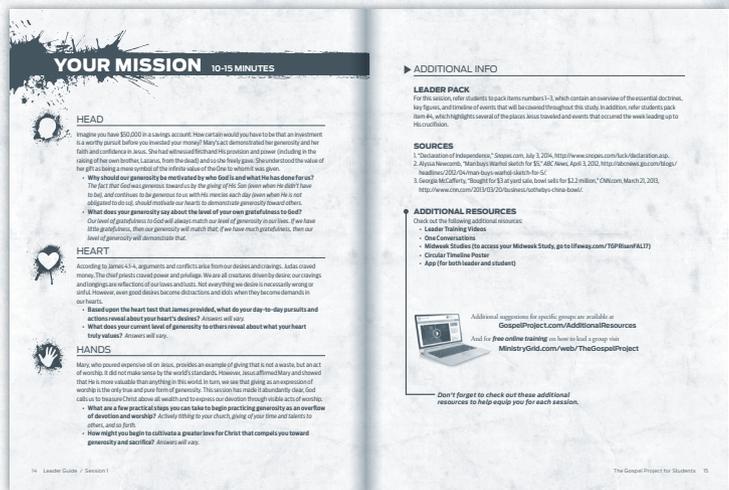
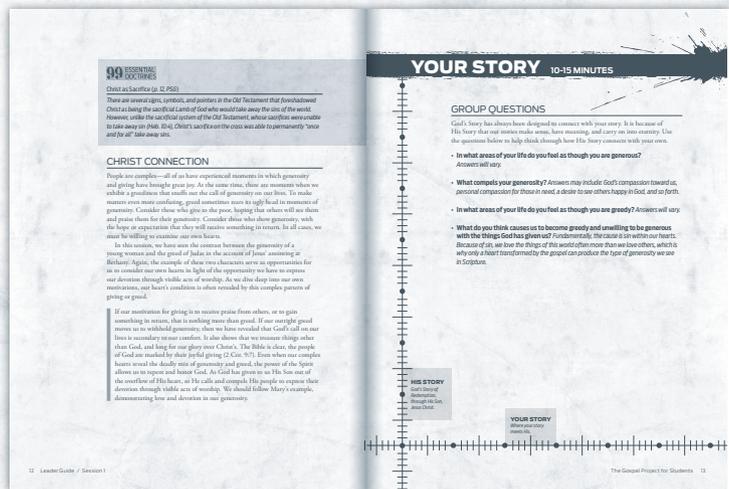
The Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to students' lives today by introducing group discussion questions that highlight how God's Story connects with their story. There are lead-ins with each question in the Leader Guide to help the leader walk students through each question.

▶ YOUR MISSION

The Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from day to day. By doing so, we emphasize to students that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

The final page of each session points leaders to additional resources that can be used in conjunction with each study. The resources listed, such as teaching tips videos and One Conversations, are designed to help leaders prepare for each session. There is also information about the leader pack posters that can be used with each session.



01

SESSION ONE

Anointed for Burial

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will see a contrast between the generosity of a young woman and the greed of Judas as displayed in Jesus' anointing at Bethany. These two encounters, with Judas and the woman, encourage us to consider our own hearts in light of the opportunity we have to express our devotion through visible acts of worship.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:6-16

THE POINT

Our heart's condition is revealed either by our giving or our greed.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Not much can compete with the joy of a young child on Christmas morning. For days, or even weeks, boys and girls have probably seen decoratively wrapped presents under a tree decorated with ornaments and lights. Their anticipation builds until it is nearly ready to erupt in joy as paper and bows fly through the air in an unwrapping frenzy on Christmas day.

- **What are some of your most memorable Christmas presents?**

Not much can compete with that feeling—with the exception of the joy the parents experience. For months, mom has planned the perfect present and enlisted dad to purchase and hide it away somewhere in the dark recesses of the attic. Weeks earlier it was wrapped with love. Days before, it was placed under the tree, where it waited until the child's anticipation meets with the parents' desire to see their child's joy. In those moments, it is abundantly clear that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Option 2

When we think of receiving or giving gifts, we tend to think of birthdays or Christmas, right? People often ask, "What did you get for Christmas?" or "What did you get for your birthday?" In those times, it can be easy for us to focus on our own wish lists, or even the present that didn't make it under the tree or in the birthday bag. But what about the times we are able to give gifts to others?

- **Think about the last time you gave someone a gift. What was your favorite part of giving that gift?**
- **Was giving the gift worth the cost of buying it? Why or why not?**

The moment we unwrap our gifts, the anticipation is gone. Maybe we even find ourselves wondering what we want to add to our wish lists for next year. However, the Bible teaches an entirely different focus. As believers, our focus is to be tied to the gospel, tied to God. He is the ultimate gift Giver—He gave His Son to give us freedom from our sins and eternity with Him. God showed His love for us in His giving. We can also show our love for others in the way that we give.

- **How does God's giving to us affect your view on giving to others?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Our heart's condition is revealed either by our giving or our greed.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus:** the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Mary:** sister of Lazarus; follower of Christ
- **Judas:** one of the original twelve disciples; betrayed Christ to the chief priests

PLOT

This quarter opens up with a scene that teaches us about generosity and devotion, while it closes with one of greed and deception. Our main characters include Jesus and His disciples, and Mary, the sister of Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from the dead). Even though this story teaches us important virtues and sins, it primarily offers us a look at the beginning of the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion.

Remember, every time you see this bar in the leader guide, it indicates the same material is also found in the personal study guide as well.

MARY ANOINTED JESUS' HEAD WITH OIL

Our scene begins with Jesus and His disciples in the house of a man named Simon. What took place may seem a little strange in our modern social experiences, but we learn very quickly that what happened under this man's roof should be viewed as an act of devotion and generosity.

6 Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. (Matt. 26:6-7)

At first glance, it is difficult to appreciate what was happening in this scene. For starters, who among us would be at all honored by someone sneaking up behind us and pouring an entire bottle of olive oil or strong perfume on our heads? We would probably be humiliated, if not extremely confused.

However, anointing oil was used for a number of purposes in Scripture. People are most familiar with it in its function as symbolic of an Israelite office or authority. For example, priests were to be anointed with oil (Ex. 29:7), as were kings (1 Sam. 10), and even prophets (1 Kings 19:16). Additionally, certain objects were anointed, as was the case with the tabernacle (Ex. 40:9). What all of these examples have in common is the consistent theme of setting apart a person or thing for devotion to God.

By looking forward, it becomes clear that Jesus was anointed in preparation for the task ahead of Him, namely His death and burial.

Mary's original intentions were not entirely clear. In this act of devotion, was she expressing her belief that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one of God? Or was she one of the first in the Gospels to truly understand that the messianic mission marched through a tomb? Whether Mary was initially and intentionally aware of the significance of her action or not, Jesus clearly saw the act as stretching beyond the present into the future. In this simple glorious act, she prepared Jesus for burial.

- **The perfume Mary used was expensive. What does this tell you about Mary's sacrifice and her love for Jesus?** (p. 10, PSG)
- **What does Mary's gift teach us about giving to others?** (p. 10, PSG)

TIMELINE

ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

Mary anoints Jesus' head with oil.

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM

Jesus enters the city riding on a donkey.

THE LAST SUPPER

The fulfilling of the New Covenant.

Whenever you see PSG page numbers listed, it indicates that there is a section in the personal study guide for students to interact with.

JESUS PRAISED MARY'S GIFT OF DEVOTION

An early nineteenth century copy of the Declaration of Independence was purchased for four dollars and later resold for over two million dollars.¹ An Andy Warhol sketch was purchased for five dollars and appraised for two million dollars.² A Song Dynasty bowl was purchased for three dollars and sold for over two million dollars.³

Occasionally, national news will share the story of an epic find of some great fortune among long forgotten and discarded boxes in an attic or garage. As many often say, "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

Essentially, this is what caused the disciples wanted to ask about the waste of the oil.

⁸ And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? ⁹ For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." (Matt. 26:8-13)

For the disciples there was no compelling reason to empty an entire bottle of valuable oil on Jesus' head. However, they missed the significance of the act of devotion and expressed their belief that her gift is wasted. But by demeaning this woman and the value of this act, the disciples unknowingly demeaned Jesus Himself and His coming death and resurrection.

Remember, these sections are optional and can be skipped if preferred.

● GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

This was an extravagant gift. Matthew noted that it was expensive, John affirmed that it was a pound of pure nard (12:3), while Mark was even more specific. According to him, the value of the nard is roughly 300 denarii (Mark 14:5). Considering that a denarius was roughly equivalent to a day's wages, this jar was worth nearly one year's salary. Imagine someone today taking \$50,000 and setting it on fire, and you will understand the confusion of the disciples.

Now, imagine someone giving her life savings for the sake of Christ and you will understand Mary's devotion. Since women were generally not able to have jobs that would provide such income, this was probably a family heirloom that was not only worth a lot of money, but also had sentimental value.

Of course, the disciples' desire to provide for the poor is noble as well. After all, the Bible commands us to care for the poor and the apostles exemplified such a longing.

Take a look at these passages that command us to look after the poor:

- Proverbs 22:9
- Proverbs 21:13
- 1 John 3:17
- Galatians 2:10
- **What are some other passages in Scripture that command us to care for the poor?**

But the Bible also suggests that there is a time for all things (Eccl. 3:1-8). There is a time to give your oil to the poor and there is a time to use it in devotion to Christ.

Not only did Jesus praise her action, but He also declared that it would be forever etched in the story of the gospel as an example of devotion and love. Throughout Scripture, the people of God are marked by their giving.

JUDAS PLANNED JESUS' BETRAYAL

While we see a picture of devotion and generosity in Mary, the story here also shows greed and betrayal. Take a look:

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. (Matt. 26:14-16)

Matthew immediately moved from the anointing to the betrayal, and what was implied in his account was made explicit in John. According to John 12, it was Judas who led the chorus of condemnation of the woman's anointing, and it was not from love of man, but of money. Thus, when he went to the chief priests and asked for payment, his motivations had already been exposed. Judas was not driven primarily by religious or theological conviction, but by greed.

The contrast between Judas and Mary could not be more striking. Mary was willing to forfeit wealth for Jesus. Judas was willing to forfeit Jesus for wealth.

The contrast between Judas and Jesus is even more stunning. Judas sacrificed others for his own gain. Jesus sacrificed Himself for the gain of others.

May we strive to be like Mary who gave her most precious possession for Christ, but even more so to be like Christ Himself, who gave Himself fully and freely that we might be set free from the bondage to greed and lust.

TIMELINE

JESUS IS ARRESTED

Jesus agrees to drink the cup of suffering.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus as our substitute sacrifice.

HE IS RISEN

The resurrection of the Son of God.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Christ as Sacrifice (p. 12, PSG)

There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Heb. 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently "once and for all" take away sins.

CHRIST CONNECTION

People are complex—all of us have experienced moments in which generosity and giving have brought great joy. At the same time, there are moments when we exhibit a greediness that snuffs out the call of generosity on our lives. To make matters even more confusing, greed sometimes rears its ugly head in moments of generosity. Consider those who give to the poor, hoping that others will see them and praise them for their generosity. Consider those who show generosity, with the hope or expectation that they will receive something in return. In all cases, we must be willing to examine our own hearts.

In this session, we have seen the contrast between the generosity of a young woman and the greed of Judas in the account of Jesus' anointing at Bethany. Again, the example of these two characters serve as opportunities for us to consider our own hearts in light of the opportunity we have to express our devotion through visible acts of worship. As we dive deep into our own motivations, our heart's condition is often revealed by this complex pattern of giving or greed.

If our motivation for giving is to receive praise from others, or to gain something in return, that is nothing more than greed. If our outright greed moves us to withhold generosity, then we have revealed that God's call on our lives is secondary to our comfort. It also shows that we treasure things other than God, and long for our glory over Christ's. The Bible is clear, the people of God are marked by their joyful giving (2 Cor. 9:7). Even when our complex hearts reveal the deadly mix of generosity and greed, the power of the Spirit allows us to repent and honor God. As God has given to us His Son out of the overflow of His heart, so He calls and compels His people to express their devotion through visible acts of worship. We should follow Mary's example, demonstrating love and devotion in our generosity.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **In what areas of your life do you feel as though you are generous?**
Answers will vary.
- **What compels your generosity?** *Answers may include: God's compassion toward us, personal compassion for those in need, a desire to see others happy in God, and so forth.*
- **In what areas of your life do you feel as though you are greedy?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What do you think causes us to become greedy and unwilling to be generous with the things God has given us?** *Fundamentally, the cause is sin within our hearts. Because of sin, we love the things of this world often more than we love others, which is why only a heart transformed by the gospel can produce the type of generosity we see in Scripture.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Imagine you have \$50,000 in a savings account. How certain would you have to be that an investment is a worthy pursuit before you invested your money? Mary's act demonstrated her generosity and her faith and confidence in Jesus. She had witnessed firsthand His provision and power (including in the raising of her own brother, Lazarus, from the dead) and so she freely gave. She understood the value of her gift as being a mere symbol of the infinite value of the One to whom it was given.

- **Why should our generosity be motivated by who God is and what He has done for us?**

The fact that God was generous toward us by the giving of His Son (even when He didn't have to be), and continues to be generous to us with His mercies each day (even when He is not obligated to do so), should motivate our hearts to demonstrate generosity toward others.

- **What does your generosity say about the level of your own gratefulness to God?**

Our level of gratefulness to God will always match our level of generosity in our lives. If we have little gratefulness, then our generosity will match that; if we have much gratefulness, then our level of generosity will demonstrate that.



HEART

According to James 4:1-4, arguments and conflicts arise from our desires and cravings. Judas craved money. The chief priests craved power and privilege. We are all creatures driven by desire; our cravings and longings are reflections of our loves and lusts. Not everything we desire is necessarily wrong or sinful. However, even good desires become distractions and idols when they become demands in our hearts.

- **Based upon the heart test that James provided, what do your day-to-day pursuits and actions reveal about your heart's desires?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does your current level of generosity to others reveal about what your heart truly values?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Mary, who poured expensive oil on Jesus, provides an example of giving that is not a waste, but an act of worship. It did not make sense by the world's standards. However, Jesus affirmed Mary and showed that He is more valuable than anything in this world. In turn, we see that giving as an expression of worship is the only true and pure form of generosity. This session has made it abundantly clear, God calls us to treasure Christ above all wealth and to express our devotion through visible acts of worship.

- **What are a few practical steps you can take to begin practicing generosity as an overflow of devotion and worship?** *Actively tithing to your church, giving of your time and talents to others, and so forth.*
- **How might you begin to cultivate a greater love for Christ that compels you toward generosity and sacrifice?** *Answers will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack items numbers 1–3, which contain an overview of the essential doctrines, key figures, and timeline of events that will be covered throughout this study. In addition, refer students pack item #4, which highlights several of the places Jesus traveled and events that occurred the week leading up to His crucifixion.

SOURCES

1. “Declaration of Independence,” *Snopes.com*, July 3, 2014, <http://www.snopes.com/luck/declaration.asp>.
2. Alyssa Newcomb, “Man buys Warhol sketch for \$5,” *ABC News*, April 3, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/04/man-buys-warhol-sketch-for-5/>.
3. Georgia McCafferty, “Bought for \$3 at yard sale, bowl sells for \$2.2 million,” *CNN.com*, March 21, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/20/business/sothebys-china-bowl/>.

● ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPRisenFAL17)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

Don't forget to check out these additional resources to help equip you for each session.