

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE



FACILITATOR GUIDE

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Welcome

Jesus the Forgiving Victim offers something quite fresh in the field of introductions to faith while embracing a straightforward Christian orthodoxy. Most Christian formation courses follow the format of education courses in general, which is to invite learners to be taught by an expert. Novices are taught what they need to know in order to belong to that local church or denomination. Once they “pass” the course, they are welcomed into the community and expected to behave as good Christians.

This approach to Christian life and learning has led many people away from the faith rather than closer to God. Why? Because it is actually quite a boring way to live and not at all what Christ had in mind when he invited his followers into a fullness of life they could barely imagine (John 10:10). What James Alison had in mind when he began putting together *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* course over 12 years ago, was to restore to the Christian life the wonder and transformative power of discovering not some new Biblical fact or church doctrine, but that you are loved far more than you know. Where a course of *instruction* tells you about something, gives you information, a course of *induction*, which is what *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* is, works cumulatively and allows you to find yourself summoned into being on the inside of something new.

By embarking on this course, you join others on a journey of discovery that will open your hearts and minds to discovering new things about yourself and your faith. It is a journey from fake goodness, from a false and insecure self, to relaxing into a goodness and security not your own, but in which you discover yourself held. And it is a journey from a unity that needs to create victims toward a unity received from the risen and forgiving victim in our midst. We hope that *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* will be a meaningful part of your journey toward a deeper faith and fuller life in Christ.

Introduction to the Facilitator Guide

This guide contains the information you will need to successfully facilitate the small group meetings for *Jesus the Forgiving Victim: Listening for the Unheard Voice*. Reading the Facilitator Guide is all the training you need to organize and lead a course in your community. Our hope is that you will find the experience of facilitating the course as rewarding as that of a participant.

COURSE MATERIALS

The course materials consist of 31 video sessions, this Facilitator Guide, and a Participant Guide. All the material in the videos is also available in the form of twelve essays. The essays can be purchased as a four book set or as an e-book. Because the content of the essays is virtually the same as the videos, and depending on your learning style, you may find them useful as part of your preparation for the discussions. However, the course is designed so that it is not necessary for you or your participants to read the essays in order to fully participate in the group sessions. Like yourself, some participants may enjoy reading the essays either before or after the sessions as a supplement to the videos, and they should feel free to do so. To purchase a copy of the essays, please visit www.jesustheforgivingvictim.com.

The Participant Guide is a subset of this guide so that the participants have some content overview, questions for personal reflection, and the handouts with the Scriptures that are focused on in each session.

THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE

As you read in the Welcome to this guide, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* is a course of induction. Rather than a course of *instruction* which gives you information, a course of *induction* works cumulatively and allows us to find ourselves summoned into being on the inside of something new. Which is not to say that there is no information in this course! The videos and essays are full of information, but imparting information is not the goal of the course – finding ourselves relating and perceiving in new ways is.

So what does that mean for your role? First, it means that you can relax about mastering the content. You do not have to be an expert in any of this material – James Alison is there in virtual form as a teacher who is well aware of the limitations of his own expertise, and who tries to open up, rather than close down questions. Questions will arise about the content, of course, such as “I didn’t understand this...” or “What did James say about....?” When these questions of clarification about the content arise, it is not your job to have a ready answer. Instead, invite the group to take on the task of answer the questions themselves. Taking some time to master content together is a great way to create a sense of community as you learn new things.

Second, it means that your primary role is to facilitate the process of induction for your small group, which is much easier than it sounds! Simply put, your role is that of a host at a recurring dinner party. Like a good host, you will arrange for the meal, invite the “guests”, be sure they know when and where to meet, and when the guests arrive make introductions and gracefully facilitate conversation. As you meet over a meal over time, you will come to know one another in new ways and discover what it means to receive ourselves and our belonging from Jesus, the risen and forgiving victim in our midst.

Here’s a checklist for you to use as you prepare for that first meeting of your group.

- **INVITE PARTICIPANTS:** Begin with the people who will be in your group. The size can be as small as 3 or 4 or as large as 12. Invite them to join you in taking the course.
- **LOCATION:** The course is designed to take place at the home of a participant. You can meet at the same home or rotate locations among participants. Your job is to recruit volunteers and communicate the location(s) to the group.
- **THE MEAL:** A shared meal is the central element of your meeting. Participants volunteer to provide food and drink. Your job is to recruit volunteers for the meal and communicate the meal schedule to the group.
- **SCHEDULE:** Agree on a schedule for your meetings. Some suggested schedules appear below.
- **THE VIDEO:** Be sure that the video can be viewed at the meeting location. Whether you have downloaded the video or plan to stream it, test the video ahead of time at the location so that things go smoothly at your meeting.
- **PREPARE TO FACILITATE:** Before your first meeting, read the Introduction to the Facilitator Guide (which you are doing right now!). Watch the video and/ or read the accompanying section from the essays for the first session. Read the Facilitator Guide for Session One.
- **ARRIVE EARLY:** Arrive early to be sure that all logistics are handled and that there is nothing left for you to do but greet the participants as they arrive, thank those who are hosting or providing the meal, and enjoy your time together.

SCHEDULING THE COURSE

Work with your participants for a meeting schedule that works for all of you. Meeting weekly allows for the cumulative effect of the material to build appreciably over time. Meeting less frequently is an option, of course, though it is important to maintain the continuity of the course. Ideas for scheduling include:

- Meet weekly for the duration of the course.
- Meet weekly until you complete a part, then take a week or two off before continuing.
- Meet three weeks in a row, one week off.
- Begin each Part with a Friday-Saturday retreat in which you complete the first three sessions of the Part and then continue with a weekly meeting routine.

These are just a few suggestions. Other options may come to mind that would suit your group well.

A SUGGESTED SESSION SCHEDULE

As you know by now, a meal in the home of a participant is the central element for each session of *Jesus the Forgiving Victim*. Because the shape of each session will be guided by the rhythm of the meal, it's helpful to think of the program, including the video, as an extended dinner conversation. As a facilitator, your role will be to work out the link between meal and content as you discern when to introduce the topic for the evening. Here is a list of the different elements in a session and an example of how the pacing might work as you weave together the meal, the video content, and the conversation:

- Arrival, informal conversation, the meal begins
- Introduce the topic with an opening exercise – allow about 10 to 15 minutes for this
- Watch the video – the lengths vary from 30 to 50 minutes
- After watching the video is a good time for a break and perhaps serve dessert
- Discussion – allow about 60 to 75 minutes

Plan on 2 ½ to 3 hours for each session.

Leading the Discussion

PREPARING TO LEAD

Facilitating the *Forgiving Victim* course does not require any special training or expertise. As the course facilitator, your primary goal is to create a safe and welcoming environment for the participants. That is best accomplished by you feeling prepared and secure in your role. We hope you find the following guidelines for being an effective discussion leader useful.

PLAN AHEAD

The decisions you make about your arrangements matter less than the fact that you make them. How will you set up the room so everyone can participate? How will you begin? How will you call upon people? How will you manage time? How will you manage the people who want to speak—and those who do not? How will you end the session?

Use the following checklist as you prepare for each meeting:

- Be sure all logistics of time and meeting place are handled and have been communicated to participants.
- Watch the video for the session.
- Read the accompanying essay for the session.
- Read the facilitator guide for the session.
- Practice the activities and get familiar with the discussion questions.

As you watch and read the material for the session, make note of your own reactions and questions. This will provide you with insight into how your participants may respond, though it is always best to expect the unexpected!

HONOR PREPARATION

When you ask participants to read or think about something in advance, always honor that preparation during the meeting. Don't assign three readings with the intention of only discussing one. Don't tell participants to come prepared to answer a question and never ask it.

EXORCISE THE ACADEMIC GHOSTS IN THE ROOM, DON'T EXERCISE THEM!

Jesus the Forgiving Victim sessions are not intended to be replays of happy college experiences for the good students among us. They are intended to be a welcoming and safe space for meaningful reflection. Participants' previous academic experiences, good or bad, are powerful ghosts in these discussions. Discussion leaders need to be especially wise to do things that will exorcise these ghosts—or at the very least not exercise them—and get people engaged. Things that may help:

- Invite participants to comment on something in the video that stood out to them, or talk with a neighbor about a section that struck them.
- Begin with a question that is easy to respond to—something small and concrete.
- Take advantage of the opening activities. They are designed to invite participants to share from their own experiences. This affirms that everyone has something of value to add to the discussion.

LISTEN, DON'T LECTURE

Participants should do most of the talking. Use your familiarity with the content to ask open ended questions. Listen to what participants are saying and help them articulate the insights and assumptions underneath their words.

ENCOURAGE AND AFFIRM

Encourage participants along the way, because the way will likely feel uncertain.

ALLOW DIFFERENCES TO EMERGE

Any group of people has important differences, even if at first it seems like a homogenous group. As participants respond to a complex idea, these differences will emerge. Help people perceive and explore them. Recognize and honor disagreement and pluralities of interpretation.

START WITH THE VIDEO ITSELF

Provide a short summary if necessary, of the video – a few sentences only. After watching the video, begin the discussion by asking the opening questions one at a time:

- *What jumped out at you?*
- *Where do you have questions?*
- *What seemed really important to you?*

These questions are designed to be open-ended so that everyone can answer. Avoid questions that invite opinion without interpretation (*Do you like this story?*), assert debatable propositions (*Why is the idea of forgiveness so useful?*), or put people on the defensive (*How many of you have a daily prayer practice?*)

HELP THE GROUP UNDERSTAND THE IDEAS IN THE VIDEO BEFORE THEY BEGIN TO ENGAGE WITH IT.

It is important to establish some understanding of content that is being presented before you engage with it. Ask a question that invites participants to explain the main ideas presented in the video.

Trust that questions will emerge. At the same time, as facilitator, resist the temptation to argue for a particular interpretation.

HELP THE GROUP TO RESPECT THE VARIETY OF VIEWS IN THE ROOM

One way to do that is to remember that your role is not to persuade anyone to agree or disagree with the video. Your role is to allow all questions and concerns to come to the surface and to respect them as a sign that the participants feel comfortable enough to be honest with you and one another.

Of course, some people are more open about their points of view than others. You may want to invite quieter participants to speak. If one person dominates the conversation, you might say, *I wonder what other people have to say about this?* If necessary, ask the question (or a new one) directly of another person.

Another technique is to ask the same question again and again. This helps people speak up who may feel shy about expressing themselves, and brings out more and richer perspectives on a question or situation which in turn helps people think more deeply.

BE “VOLUPTUOUS” IN YOUR FACILITATION

Think of facilitation as having two axes—one vertical and one horizontal. The vertical axis is your plan in advance. The horizontal axis is the group’s own responses in the conversation. You want to let the discussion widen out to include the group’s own questions, but then bring it back to the line of inquiry. This pattern of approach makes for shapely or voluptuous facilitation (not voluptuous facilitators, necessarily!).

BEWARE OF YOUR OWN AGENDA

Discussion leaders sometimes become determined to have a group think about the topic in a particular way which the group for whatever reason resists. Let go of your agenda if you meet with clear resistance from the group, however appealing that agenda still seems to you. There may be a variety of reasons why people are silent, “don’t get it,” or resist taking the conversation in the direction a discussion leader wants to go. Relax and let it go! Listen to where the group is; forget about where you think they should be.

In all matters, ask instead of tell. Avoid contributing perspectives as a participant. In particular, resist the temptation to answer peoples’ questions. Turn questions back to the group. *What do you think?*

And finally, remember that the discussion itself is important—not the number of questions asked. If you’ve got a good discussion going, don’t cut it short to “get to the next question.”

CONSIDER SMALL GROUP WORK

Find as many ways as possible to connect personal experience to the topic and participants to one another. One way to make both kinds of connections is to ask one or two key questions in the form of reflective exercises in small groups. Small groups provide more opportunities for individual participation and generate more perspectives on a question than a large group discussion can in the same amount of time.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT HOW YOU WILL END

Different facilitators end their conversations in different ways, depending on their instincts and their gifts. Some like to synthesize and feed back key points. Others like to stop the conversation and conclude simply. What will you do to mark the end? Again, recognize that there is a decision here and be deliberate about it.

TRY A ONE-MINUTE REFLECTION TO CLOSE THE CONVERSATION

Consider using the closing reflection provided at the end of each session in the leader's guide. The exercise should take about sixty seconds. It is a great way to continue to invite that connection between the topics you covered and the participant's experiences. If all else fails, you can invite participants to record their answers to these open-ended questions:

- *What was **useful** (or interesting) about tonight's discussion?*
- *As you leave, what is **your** question?*

The quiet activity of responding in writing brings closure to the conversation.

REMEMBER, THE TAKE-AWAY IS THE CONVERSATION ITSELF

Resist the temptation to give people a concrete product. You have given them a conversation, and that is the gift. To put this another way: You don't get something out of a conversation. The conversation gets into you. And it stays with you. You carry the conversation with you when you leave.

AND FINALLY

This kind of facilitating can be challenging. If you meant to be quiet and talked instead, if you forgot to ask that really good question, missed a great opportunity to tie remarks together, or let the loud guy dominate and didn't attend closely enough to the quiet woman in the back of the room... forgive yourself. You will be more ready to meet the challenge next time!

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Varying the Pace

If you follow the pace set by the essays, you could complete the course in twelve sessions. This option will work for your group if they are willing to do “homework” before you meet for the group meal and discussions or, as in Variation Four, if you would enjoy watching two or three videos at one time.

There are a variety of ways you can prepare for and structure a twelve session variation on the course. We present four here, but another may come to mind that would suit your group well.

VARIATION ONE

Before Each Meeting

- 1 Explain that participants may either read the essay or watch the corresponding videos for the session.
- 2 Divide the content up between a few volunteers who will make notes and report back to the group. You can divide it according to the sections of the essay or by video.
- 3 As discussion facilitator, review the Discussion Questions for the video sessions that correspond to the essays. Select one or two questions from each session to guide the discussion.

During the Meeting

- 1 During the meal, invite the volunteers to present their summaries.
- 2 Use the Discussions Questions you chose ahead of time and enjoy the discussion.

VARIATION TWO

Before Each Meeting

- 1 Explain that participants may either read the essay or watch corresponding videos, *except for the final video for that essay*.
- 2 As facilitator, become familiar with the Session Summaries and select two or three of the main ideas from each video session.
- 3 Also review the Discussion Questions for the video sessions that correspond to the essays. Select one or two questions from each session to guide the discussion.

During the Meeting

- 1 During the meal you will present the Session Summary and highlight two or three of the main ideas from each of the video sessions, *except for the final video*.
- 2 Watch the final video from that essay together.
- 3 Use the Discussions Questions you chose ahead of time and enjoy the discussion.

VARIATION THREE

Before Each Meeting

- 1 Explain that participants may either read the essay or watch the corresponding videos for the session.
- 2 As discussion facilitator, review the Discussion Questions for the video sessions that correspond to the essays. Select one or two questions from each session to guide the discussion.
- 3 Make enough copies for your entire group of the Session Summaries and Main Ideas for each of the video sessions that correspond to the essay.

During the Meeting

- 1 During the meal, distribute the copies of the Session Summaries and Main Ideas to the group.
- 2 Allow 5-7 minutes for the group to read through the pages.
- 3 Use the Discussions Questions you chose ahead of time and enjoy the discussion.

VARIATION FOUR

Before Each Meeting

- 1 As discussion facilitator, review the Discussion Questions for the video sessions that correspond to the essays. Select one or two questions from each session to guide the discussion.

During the Meeting

- 1 Watch the two or three videos that correspond to the essay.
- 2 You can pause after each video for a discussion, or watch all the videos and then have the discussion.
- 3 Use the Discussions Questions you chose ahead of time and enjoy the discussion.

TIMING

Variations One, Two and Three will work according to the 2 ½ to 3 hour timeframe suggested for the meetings, but Variation Four may require an additional thirty to forty-five minutes, or more, depending on the length of the videos that accompany the essay.

ESSAYS WITH CORRESPONDING VIDEOS

The next page shows a list of the essays and corresponding videos for each of the sessions.

PART ONE		ESSAYS		VIDEOS	
1	Starting human, staying human	1 “Don’t speak until you’re spoken to”	1 An odd beginning 31:22 minutes		
			2 The social other 22:15		
			3 Memory and revelation 26:19		
		2 Emmaus and Eucharist	4 The road to Emmaus 30:47		
		5 Dead man talking 37:58			
PART TWO		ESSAYS		VIDEOS	
2	God, not one of the gods	3 Who’s afraid of the big bad book? PART ONE	1 The stoning of Achan 31:01 minutes		
			2 Prophecy and interpretation 19:28		
			3 Interpretation in the Scriptures 22:28		
		4 Who’s afraid of the big bad book? PART TWO	4 The final edition 32:23		
		5 Priests and prophets 22:39			
6 God’s utter aliveness 32:28					
PART THREE		ESSAYS		VIDEOS	
3	The difference Jesus makes	5 Stand up and be godless! On receiving the gift of faith	1 Emergence of the Other other 34:03 minutes		
			2 The gift of faith 31:45		
		6 Undergoing atonement: the reverse-flow of sacrifice	3 Undergoing Atonement: Ancient Hebrews 44:59		
			4 Undergoing Atonement: Gibeonites 27:46		
			5 Undergoing Atonement: Venezuelans 41:03		
		7 Induction into a people	6 Induction into a people 40:31		
			7 What might a new unity look like? 35:32		
		8 Inhabiting texts and being discovered	8 Some results of the anthropological earthquake 27:10		
9 Inhabiting texts and being discovered 37:55					
10 Reading for mercy 35:22					
PART FOUR		ESSAYS		VIDEOS	
4	Unexpected insiders	9 Prayer: Getting inside desire’s shift in us	1 The working of desire 49:55 minutes		
			2 The Our Father 46:02		
		10 The portal and the half-way house: Spacious imagination and aristocratic belonging	3 The restaurant and the half-way house 25:56		
			4 The portal and the Embassy 25:47		
			5 The Banquet 31:09		
		11 A little family upheaval	6 A little family upheaval 31:09		
			7 The beginning in the middle 23:23		
		8 The grandeur in the everyday 24:19			
12 Neighbors and insiders: What’s it like to dwell in a non-moralistic commandment?	9 Neighbors and insiders: The Good Samaritan 39:37				
	10 Neighbors and insiders: From sacrifice to mercy 42:25				

Using the Facilitator Guide

This section of the Facilitator Guide provides you with two important resources: a summary of the content of the course session by session and a discussion guide to use during your meetings. The guide is divided into the four Parts of the course and each Part is divided into the individual sessions. For each session you will find optional “Getting started” questions, a list of any materials you will need, a summary of the main ideas, discussion questions to help prompt conversation, and reproducible Participant Handouts. Before you proceed, be sure to have read through the Introduction portion of the Facilitator Guide which contains the general information you will need to prepare to lead the course.

PART CONTENT SUMMARIES

Each Part begins with an overview of the content and themes. A table with the videos, their running time, and the sections of the *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* course essays that correspond to the video is provided.

SESSION SUMMARY

The session summary gives you a quick look at the content focus for the session. You will see the Session Summary reflected in the Getting Started activities, discussion questions, and Session Wrap-Up.

SUPPLIES

For every session you will need a way for your group to view the video. Information on how to view the videos online is available on the website. If there is a handout with the Scriptures for the session, that will be listed here. The handouts are found at the end of each Part of the Facilitator Guide. You can copy and distribute them to your participants to view during the video and to refer to during the discussion. If a prop or flipchart is suggested for use during the “Getting started” portion of the session, it will be listed here as well.

MAIN IDEAS

The main ideas for the individual sessions are offered to help you prepare for the session. They are quick bullet points that you can use to refresh your memory before each session begins. They are also a tool you can use to gracefully redirect the conversation. If you sense that a conversation is veering off in an unproductive way, you can use a bullet point as a way to steer the conversation back to the video.

“GETTING STARTED” QUESTIONS

As you gather around the table, you can use the “Getting started” questions to introduce the theme for the session. The questions are designed to invite participants to share their memories and experiences with one another. They are not content based and have no right or wrong answers. They are open-ended and hopefully will prompt participants to make connections between the content and their lived experiences. The idea is to encourage sharing and maybe a little laughter before diving into the video. Please use the “Getting started” questions if you find them helpful, and feel free to create your own way to introduce the theme of the session.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each discussion begins with the same three questions: *What jumped out at you? Where do you have questions? What seemed really important to you?* These may, and often are, sufficient for a deep and rewarding conversation. Additional questions are provided if you’d like to explore a particular idea in the video more deeply or simply to encourage conversation if your participants are uncertain about where or how to dive into the discussion. Please do not feel as if you need to cover all the questions for your session to be complete. If you’d like, you can make copies of the questions and distribute them to the participants and ask them which ones they’d like to engage with. Or simply allow your group to follow their own path through the material.

SESSION WRAP - UP

This final discussion question connects back to the Session Summary as well as overall themes of the course, providing a way to end the discussion with a “big picture” question.

TIMING

The suggested times for “Getting started” and the discussion questions are based on a 2 ½ hour session during which time you are eating your meal and taking a break perhaps after the video to get dessert. The times listed provide a baseline number for you to use as you monitor the flow of the evening. For example, if you spend 30 minutes on the “Getting started” question, your discussion time after the video may have to be shortened – or you may all decide to continue talking after your agreed-upon end time. Timing is very discretionary and will vary from session to session. There is no need to interrupt a conversation because it is running over the suggested time. Nor is there any reason to extend a conversation that seems to have naturally ended in order to fill up the suggested time. The important thing is to be flexible and enjoy your time together.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

Handouts for the Scriptures and activities are included at the end of the Part in which they appear. It's a good idea to make copies of the Scripture handouts for your participants, even though they are also included in their Participant Guides. Be sure to make copies of any handouts that are to be distributed to participants for use in activities.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

This is a list of all the Scriptures that are referenced in the individual sessions and appears at the end of each Part of the guide. It might be useful as a reference to have on hand during the discussion. Participants also have this resource in their guide.

GLOSSARY

This is a glossary of terms that are introduced in each Part of the course. It's a handy reference to have on hand during discussions. Participants also have this resource in their guide.

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

PART ONE: STARTING HUMAN, STAYING HUMAN

PART ONE *Content Summary*

One of the really interesting things about theology, and the thing that makes it relevant to our lives, is that it contains within it an anthropology. This means that while theology is the academic discipline of making sense of who God is and what God is about, we can't talk about God without remembering that it is human beings who are doing the talking. So while many theology courses jump right to the God talk, leaving considerations about who we are as human beings implied or unspoken, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* begins by bringing the anthropology out into the open from the start. The questions guiding the first Part are these: What is the shape of God's communication with us? And what is the effect on us of being on the receiving end of an act of communication from God? To answer those questions we begin with an understanding of communication on a human level. We will explore how human beings receive and are shaped by acts of communication from each other. For if God is communicating with us, it will not be in some form unsuited for us. God will not reinvent the communication wheel, so to speak, but will communicate with us at a very human level – hence the title of Part One: *Starting human, staying human*. To understand how God is communicating with us through Jesus and through the Bible, we need at the same time to understand ourselves.

It is very important to go through Part One slowly and carefully. The suggestions for how to present the material allow for ample time for discussion so that participants feel comfortable with this basic anthropology section before continuing on to discover God, Jesus and Christian community.

PART ONE *Videos and Corresponding Essays*

Part One consists of five sessions. Here are the titles and the length of the video clip that accompanies each session as well as the corresponding parts of *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* essays:

SESSION	VIDEO	ESSAY
1	Video Introduction 4:09 minutes An odd beginning 31:22	Essay 1: <i>Don't speak until you're spoken to</i> Introduction, parts 1 & 2
2	The social other 22:15	Essay 1: <i>Don't speak until you're spoken to</i> parts 3 & 4
3	Memory and revelation 26:19	Essay 1: <i>Don't speak until you're spoken to</i> parts 5, 6, 7 & 8
4	The road to Emmaus 30:47	Essay 2: <i>Emmaus and Eucharist</i> Introduction, part 1 & part 2 through paragraph ending “... as we share it with others in the Church and ecclesiastical authority will confirm it later.”
5	Dead man talking 37:58	Essay 2: <i>Emmaus and Eucharist</i> rest of part 2 to end of essay

SESSION SUMMARY

The course begins by examining the usual way in which human beings learn and become proficient at something. We'll receive a working definition of Christianity as the process of finding ourselves on the receiving end of an act of communication.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: *Hebrews 1:1-3*
- 3 If you choose *Getting started: Option 2*:
 - A flipchart or other large blank sheet to write on that all can see
 - A marker

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Hebrews 1: 1-2 describes an odd form of communication from God. In talking to us through Jesus, God is communicating as someone who appeared in the middle of history, but who is also somehow involved in the creation of the world.
- 2 This course is about beginning to become habituated to being the sort of people who might be able to hear God speaking through the Son whom he appointed over all things.
- 3 Putting theology aside for a moment, the course begins with a basic anthropology.
- 4 Rather than grasping onto a theory, human beings learn by being inducted into a set of practices over time such that we find ourselves knowing from within how they work.
- 5 Christianity is the process of finding ourselves on the inside of an act of communication that is developing in us a new set of practices. This means that we discover from within what the ideas really mean as we discover ourselves becoming something, or someone, we scarcely knew before.
- 6 Habits are stable dispositions which you have acquired over time to be able to behave in certain ways. Habits are what make excellence possible.
- 7 There is no such thing as a human who is not shot-through with time. Therefore, time is a condition of our being able to tell the truth about ourselves.

GETTING STARTED

Step 1:

20 to 30 minutes
depending on size of the group

As this is your first meeting together as a group, the “Getting started” portion of the session will take a bit longer than the others. Please take time to introduce yourselves to one another. Even if you are already acquainted, it’s a good idea to begin your journey together by saying your name and sharing what prompted you to take a course called, “Jesus the Forgiving Victim”.

EXPLAIN: After everyone has had a chance to comment, explain that the course begins in an unusual way. Instead of jumping into a theological discussion about Jesus the Forgiving Victim, the first three sessions look at how human beings learn, grow, and discover new things about ourselves and our world. Then in video sessions four and five, we meet and get to know Jesus the Forgiving Victim.

Optional Step 2:

5 to 10 minutes

Introduce this option by explaining: It’s time to raise the topic for the first session. Today we will be talking about Christians as people who learn to find themselves on the receiving end of an act of communication from God.

ACTIVITY: Explain that in this activity we will be thinking about different ways God has communicated with human beings in the Bible. You will ask the group to name five different modes of communication from God found in the Bible. For example: God communicated with Moses via a burning bush. Name the following Biblical stories one at a time and ask the group to name the way God communicated in each one. Suggested answers are in the second column.

BIBLICAL STORY	HOW GOD COMMUNICATED
Adam and Eve, after eating from the fruit of the tree <i>Genesis 3:8</i>	speaking in person
Abraham, as Abram receiving God’s call <i>Genesis 12:1</i>	voice speaking
King David, after having Bathsheba’s husband killed <i>2 Samuel 12:7-12</i>	the prophet Nathan
Joseph, Jesus’ father, as Herod prepared to slaughter the infants <i>Matthew 2:13</i>	an angel appears in a dream

Conclude by saying that God has communicated with us in many ways, and that’s where the course begins.

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **An odd beginning**

31:24 minutes

An odd beginning DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

James talks about Christianity having been thought of as grasping onto a theory about what God has done for us and then acting according to a moral code. Is that what Christianity has been like for you? How or how not?

James says that habits are what make excellence possible.

What beneficial practices have you been inducted into?

Who inducted you or how did you acquire your “stable dispositions”?

What is your relationship to the Bible? Do you think of it as an act of communication from God? If so, what do you think God is communicating to us in our particular time and place?

Recalling the exercise from Optional Step 2, go deeper into the impact on our lives that an act of communication from God might have.

SESSION WRAP - UP

Now that you've completed the first session, why do you think this course is subtitled, *Listening for the Unheard Voice*? You may find this quote from the first essay helpful as a prompt for reflection:

"What I hope we are going to be doing together is to begin to become habituated to being the sort of people who might be able to hear God speaking through the Son whom he appointed heir to all things."

SESSION SUMMARY

James introduces us to two very important ideas that will be used throughout the course. The first is that the “social other” is everything in the world other than me and which brought me into being. The second is about desire: we desire according to the desire of the other.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Paper and pens for everyone if you choose *Getting Started: Option 2*

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The “social other” is everything in the world that is other than “me”. It is prior to us and includes other people, the climate, the weather, the country, the geography, the atmosphere, the agriculture that enables food to be grown and so on.
- 2 God is not part of the social other. God is the Other other.
- 3 The social other brought us into being through our parents or guardians who sustained us till adulthood. It is amazing how unviable humans are, for how long: how utterly dependent we are on the social other.
- 4 Humans are incredibly well-equipped imitators and the imitation is kicked off in us by someone doing something to, at, or in front of, us. It is imitation of the social other which produces in us a “self” over time.
- 5 We desire according to the desire of the other.
- 6 Who we are is given by the regard of another.
- 7 It is the social other which reproduces itself in and as the body of each of us, thus bringing into being that subsection of “we” which is a “me”.
- 8 There is a real me: it is this body born in this particular time and place to these particular parents that is learning to negotiate over time with the “we” which precedes it and is around it. The patterns of desire are what make us similar, not what make us different!

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous session showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: Remind participants of James' definition of habits from the last session: *Habits are stable dispositions which you have acquired over time to be able to behave in certain ways. Habits are what make excellence possible.* One example he used was of learning to competently drive a car. Invite participants to share a "stable disposition" which they have acquired over time. (Possible responses: professions, musical skills, athletic skills, foreign language skills, parenting skills, habits of prayer or meditation, cooking skills, sewing, quilting...)

INVITE: After some sharing, invite participants to create a map or diagram on a piece of paper or notecard representing the circumstances in which they learned their stable disposition. Ask them to include the people, the geography, the time involved, the physical objects they interacted with – everything involved in their learning their stable disposition. (Participants will be asked to refer to their map later in the discussion.)

After a minute or two, explain that in this session James will be introducing the concept of the social other, which is another way of talking about the map or diagram you have just made. The social other is what inducts us over time into our stable dispositions.

WATCH VIDEO: The social other

27:17 minutes

The social other DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

75 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

What do you think about the concept of the social other? Does it make sense to you or do you have questions about it?

Perhaps recalling your map from the Optional Step 2 activity, invite participants to reflect on how their desire to acquire the stable disposition they mapped out first reproduced itself in them. (You can, of course, broaden the discussion to include any skill or habit the participants would like to discuss.)

Can you identify the particular person or part of the social other that reproduced the desire for that skill in you?

What part has the social other played in the story you have told about your skill? How might your story be shifting now?

Why does James place so much emphasis on the social other *being prior to us*?

Are you a different person in different settings? If so, offer some examples. Why do you think this happens?

Can you describe “peer pressure” in terms of the social other? Are there times when peer pressure is good for us? When is peer pressure something to be resisted?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Invite participants to reflect on how recognizing our dependence on the social other changes how we understand ourselves. You may find this quote from the first essay helpful as a prompt for reflection:

“There is a real ‘me’ but it is real as a project over time that is being brought into being through this particular body, born in this particular time and place to these particular parents. It is how this body has learned to negotiate over time with the ‘we’ which precedes it and is around it. It is this body over time that is different from anybody else’s.”

SESSION SUMMARY

This session covers three main topics:

Memory: something produced in us over time by our attempts to tell a story about ourselves

Story or Narrative: something essential to our coming into being as a viable person

Discovery: how human beings experience revelation, whether human or divine

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 If you choose “Getting started: Option 2”:
 - ☐ A beautifully wrapped present
 - ☐ Enough notecards and pens for everyone

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Memory is produced in us over time by repetition as mirror neurons fire off in imitation of the gestures and sounds produced by others.
- 2 As we defer our imitation, we begin to combine gestures and sounds into forms of communication and language.
- 3 It’s not that the “We” is a collection of “I”s that banded together. The “We” is what enabled the “I”s to come into being.
- 4 Memory holds together our attempts to start to tell a story about ourselves.
- 5 Narrative is not an extra in our lives; it is constitutive of our lives.
- 6 We revise our story as we go along, and if we didn’t we would be *less* truthful, not *more* truthful. We are all revisionist historians.

- 7 A revelation is something happening outside of your control, but which is going to lead you into a process of discovering things about yourself and others that you didn't know before.
- 8 "Discovery" is the flip side of "revelation" – if something is revealed to you, what that looks like is your making a discovery.
- 9 The gospel story is a story told by people who are *not* good, about something which happened in their midst and which shook up their previous sense of goodness, giving them a longing for a quite other sort of goodness, which they found themselves becoming at the hands of someone else.
- 10 As you undergo this course, what James hopes will happen is that you will be able to relax into the realization that being good or bad is not what it's about. It's about being loved.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session, James is going to discuss that a big part of being on the receiving end of Divine Revelation is being given a new story about ourselves.

INVITE: Invite participants to imagine that the wrapped present you hold is the gift of a new story about ourselves from God. This new story is going to involve revisions to the story we currently tell about how to go about being a good person. To prepare to receive the new story, invite participants to write some ways they would complete this sentence: "Good people are good because they..."

After a few moments, ask participants to share some of the ways they completed the sentence.

ASK: Why might God want to gift us with some revisions to our current story of goodness?

WATCH VIDEO: **Memory and revelation**

26:25 minutes

Memory and revelation DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

75 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

James describes our memories as being constructed from our attempts to start to tell a story about ourselves.

Does this change the way you think about your memories? If so, how?

If memories are more like stories we have “re-membered” from bits and pieces of experiences, can we trust our memories to be truthful? What truth do they convey?

James says that we are “revisionist historians” and that that’s a good thing. What did he mean by that?

How does the account you give about yourself today differ from the one you gave 5, 10 or 20 years ago?

Perhaps recalling the Optional Step 2 activity, discuss this quote from the first essay:

“The presupposition behind this course is that we are *not* good people, that we do not know how to speak well, and that it doesn’t really matter, since it is someone else’s business to make us good, and their business over time.”

Why doesn’t it matter that we are not good people?

How can someone else make us good, over time?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Why do you think the title of the accompanying essay for the first three sessions of the course is, *“Don’t speak until you’re spoken to”*?

SESSION SUMMARY

This is part one of the story of the road to Emmaus found in the gospel of Luke, where we are introduced to Jesus the Forgiving Victim. Emmaus is more than a miracle or appearance story – it is a story about how we interpret Scriptures.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Matthew 11:25-30, Luke 24:13-35

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Luke 24:13-35 raises an important question of interpretation: through whose eyes do you read the Scriptures?
- 2 One answer to this question is found in the book of Numbers: we read our scriptures through the eyes of Moses who is meek, “more so than anyone on the face of the earth.”
- 3 Another answer was given by what we now call Christianity: we read the scriptures through the eyes of Jesus our Rabbi who shows us what real meek Moses was really about.
- 4 Emmaus is a piece of “theological geography”: by not being a definite place of any importance, it can in principle be anywhere at all.
- 5 The Emmaus story is a story about how to interpret: Two people are discussing things which they are unable to interpret and a third person shows up and offers the definitive interpretation from God.
- 6 Luke has deliberately not named the disciple with Cleopas. We are meant to supply our own name: could be you, could be me.
- 7 There is a church structure to the matter of interpretation but Luke is making clear that the central interpretative experience is not a matter of church authority. It happens to anyone, anywhere, at the hand of the crucified and risen Rabbi.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we will explore the question raised by Luke in the story of the road to Emmaus: His question is not what does Scripture say, but how do you read? It's a question of interpretation.

INVITE: To raise the idea that we approach Scriptures through a particular lens, and the lens matters, invite people to share their favorite news sources. Discuss whether the news accounts are "objective" or whether they contain an editorial bias.

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: The road to Emmaus

30:49 minutes

The road to Emmaus DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

75 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

James used the term “hermeneutic” at the opening of this session. Ask if anyone recalls what that word means. (If no one remembers, here’s the answer: Hermeneutic is the Greek word for interpretation. It is used in Biblical studies and refers to a method or principle of interpretation.)

Invite participants to discuss the difference between asking about the Bible “What does the text say?” and “How do you read it?”

Does it help or hinder your approach to reading the Bible to place importance on the hermeneutic, or method of interpretation?

How does the role of the one reading change when the emphasis is on the question, “How do you read it?”

The book of Numbers stresses that Moses was very, very meek!

Why do you think Numbers describes Moses’ meekness as so important?

How does Jesus’ life and teaching demonstrate what meekness is?

Imagine you are in a situation like the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the morning of the resurrection. A stranger asks you to explain, “What things?” How would you explain what happened to Jesus in the last days of his life to someone who had never heard the story before?

Have you had experiences in which you felt you had received a communication from God? Did you trust it, doubt it, or seek help in understanding it from anyone?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Listening to the risen and Forgiving Victim, The disciples on the road to Emmaus were given a new way to interpret the traumatic events that had happened to them and to their community. What might it mean for us to be listening to the unheard voice in the midst of confusing and traumatic events in our own communities or society?

SESSION SUMMARY

In part two of our reading of the Emmaus story, we find the disciples undergoing a reversal that changes their narrative of who they are. At the table at which they thought they were the hosts, they discover that they had been the guests all along. They find themselves joyfully discovering that the Crucified and Risen Lord has enlivened in them a new narrative, one that is both their own, and yet much more than their own.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Luke 24:13-35
- 3 Enough paper and pens for everyone for the Part One Wrap-Up reflection.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Luke portrays Jesus, the definitive interpreter, as an outsider who must first induce the “insiders” to stop squabbling with each other and instead to begin to try and tell their story. It is through their failed telling that they are going to be given the possibility of a new story.
- 2 The interpretation offered to the disciples allows them to see how what was really going on had to be that way and makes perfect sense as part of a deliberate project or trajectory.
- 3 What Luke wants to show us is the shape and incidence among us of the living interpretative presence in the light of which all texts become secondary.
- 4 As the disciples heard Jesus interpret all the scriptures, they knew they were hearing the truth about themselves and their history. They were being re-narrated into being.
- 5 At table, when Jesus blessed and broke the bread and gave it to them, suddenly he is the host and they are the guests.
- 6 Luke portrays this appearance of Jesus as a Yahwistic theophany, an appearance of YHWH. The disciples come to realize that it hadn’t been a “he” who was talking to them, but “I AM”, the driving force all that had happened, as well as the source of who they are and what they are becoming.

- 7 The story ends with the disciples going to Jerusalem and having their experience confirmed by the A team.
- 8 The Risen Lord is this dead man, who lived his thirty-three years and was killed; he is the whole life and death of this dead man being held in life in such a way that death doesn't close him down. We can't easily understand the sort of "being alive" that is able to take inside itself "a being dead" without being in rivalry with it.
- 9 The Risen Lord is a dead man talking without any rancor. It is a victim speaking, but without desire for revenge. Only YHWH can be the source of a protagonism that is not in rivalry with death.
- 10 The structure of Eucharist is the memory of a third person, out there, coming in to disturb you.
- 11 Luke gives a *liturgical* answer to the question: through whose eyes do we read scripture? We read *eucharistically*, through the eyes of one who is present among us and who causes us to undergo a complete change of belonging to our world, including us in a story which is his story, one where he is the protagonist.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: This session concludes our look at the Emmaus story and is the final session of Part One. We'll wrap up with reflections on an unexpected reversal that happens over a meal near the end of the Emmaus account.

ASK: To begin to get inside the disciples' experience of that reversal, ask the host and those who prepared the meal for your session: What gift or experience did you hope to give to us, your guests? Invite others to share similar thoughts on being a host or hostess for other dinners. Then ask everyone to discuss: What is the experience of being a guest like? How is it different from that of a host?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **Dead man talking**

37:52 minutes

Dead man talking DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Do you wish that Luke had included everything that Jesus told the disciples on the Emmaus road? What stories from the Old Testament would you like Jesus to explain?

As the disciples heard Jesus interpret all the scriptures, they knew they were hearing the truth about themselves and their history. James says they were being “re-narrated into being”.

Reflect on what it means to discover that perhaps our stories about ourselves are not completely truthful!

The disciples seemed to react positively – do you think that would be your reaction to being “re-narrated into being”?

How is this appearance of Jesus to the disciples similar to or different from ghost stories?

If unlike ghosts, Jesus did not come back seeking revenge, why did he return?

James says of the Risen Lord that the whole life and death of this dead man being held in life in such a way that death doesn't close him down. In what ways are we closed down by death?

James says that the structure of Eucharist is the memory of a third person, out there, coming in to disturb you. How might understanding Eucharist/ Communion this way change our experience and practice of it?

WRAPPING UP PART ONE

15 minutes

We typically star in our own life narratives. Let's conclude Part One of *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* by imagining ourselves as bit players inside someone else's story. In this story, the protagonist is the presence of the risen and Forgiving Victim.

Invite participants to spend a few moments in silence thinking about and perhaps writing down what their part in the story might be.

After about three minutes, invite anyone who would like to share their reflection.

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE

PART ONE: *Starting human, staying human*

SESSION 1: **An odd beginning**

HEBREWS 1:1 - 3

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART ONE: *Starting human, staying human*

SESSION 4: The road to Emmaus

MATTHEW 11:25-30

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

LUKE 24:13-35

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking (ἐν τῇ ὁμιλεῖν αὐτοῦς) and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other (οὗς ἀντιβάλλετε πρὸς ἀλλήλους) as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad (σκυθρωποί). Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor (παροικεῖς) to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to

him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them (διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς) in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened (διηνοιχθησαν) and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight (αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο). They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART ONE: *Starting human, staying human*

SESSION 5: **Dead man talking**

LUKE 24:13-35

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believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them (διερμήνευσεν αὐτοῖς) in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

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PART ONE: *Starting human, staying human*

Scripture References

VIDEO: AN ODD BEGINNING

Hebrews 1:1-3

VIDEO: THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Numbers 12

Matthew 23

Matthew 11:25-30

Luke 24:13-35

1 Maccabees 4:4

Genesis 40:7-8

Mark 6:48-50

VIDEO: DEAD MAN TALKING

Luke 24:26

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART ONE: *Starting human, staying human*

Glossary

Anthropology | a way of talking about being human; the exploration and study of the origins, the behavior, and the physical and cultural development of the human animal

Desire | a specifically human source of movement, going beyond biologically determined animal instincts. In humans, even our instincts are received by us through the cultural world which brings us into being. We are not born knowing what to desire. Desires are learned in imitation of the social other and are very malleable. We desire according to the desire of the other.

Discovery | the result of revelation and the process corresponding to it. What it looks like when there has been a revelation amongst humans. If you have had a revelation, then you've discovered something. If you haven't discovered something, then nothing has revealed itself to you

Eucharist/eucharistically | Mass or Holy Communion; We read scriptures eucharistically, through the eyes of One who is present among us and who causes us to undergo a complete change of belonging to our world, including us in a story of which He is the protagonist.

Liturgy/liturgical | a rite or body of rites through which we worship. Luke offers a liturgical answer to the question "through whose eyes do we read the scriptures?" by setting his answer in the context of a meal and a blessing.

Mentalist World-View | the false notion that we humans have a clear command center in our brains that imparts knowledge and gives clear orders that are then handed down to our desires or our feelings. It's a very unhelpful picture of how it is to be human. In fact, our capacity to reason is something far subtler than that that and sits upon a huge seedbed of our relationships which have brought us into being.

Other other | God; In contrast to the social other. The Other other is not in rivalry with anything that is nor is it on the same level as us. God is not one of the beings in the order of the universe.

Physics Envy | the “spell” under which many of us labor that suggests to us that what is really truth-bearing in our world is the paradigm bequeathed to us by physics and mathematics.

Protagonism (*see also glossary for Part Three*) | the active force of the principal actor. When we are talking about God, or the Other other, this protagonism is when we find ourselves being moved by God, “I AM”. Normally it refers to whoever is moving us, or we ourselves as movers of others, in a given social circumstance.

“Revelation” | something on the human plane that shakes you up at every level of your being and belonging, alters your relationship to everybody else, and leads you into a process of discovering things about yourself and others that you didn’t know before. The word “divine” attached to revelation merely means that the kind of event, or happening on the human plane, which shakes you into discovering is, exactly as a human event, an act of communication from God.

Social Other | everything that exists in the universe, on a human level (not God). This includes anything with the capacity to move us emotionally or physically (*e.g.* other people, weather, country, geography, *etc.*)

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

PART TWO: GOD, NOT ONE OF THE GODS

PART TWO *Content Summary*

Part Two dives into the Bible, what James sometimes jokingly calls the big bad book. It can be difficult to find our way into these texts because of the linguistic and cultural issues that separate us from the ancient world. We can feel as if we've stumbled into the middle of a heated conversation without knowing who the parties are or what they're so worked up about. Part Two will offer guidance in how we can handle the texts in a more relaxed way so as to get on the inside of some of the issues that the sacred authors were wrestling with. In short, we will be starting to read the Scriptures through the eyes of the Forgiving Victim, just as St. Luke teaches us to do. By the end of this Part we will have discovered that biblical scholarship is less frightening than it might seem and we will have acquired a bit more confidence to dabble for ourselves in these biblical texts without being scared of them.

Our journey through the Scriptures will allow us to glimpse the great Jewish discovery of monotheism. It's odd for us to realize that the great prophets of old would have seemed to their contemporaries more like atheists than like devout followers of a familiar religion. But the discovery that God is not like *anything that is* called into question all the religious structures of the day. The defining appearance of God to Moses at the bush that burns but is not consumed reminds us of the Emmaus theophany in which a man both dead and living is communicating with us. Slowly we are being made aware that everything that is, ourselves and all of creation, is a function of a being who is not in rivalry with any of it. What does it mean to worship a God for whom death is not and for whom Creation comes from nothing? These questions will guide us as we continue to journey with the Forgiving Victim.

PART TWO *Videos and Corresponding Essays*

Part Two consists of six sessions. Here are the titles and the length of the video clip that accompanies each session as well as the corresponding parts of *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* essays:

SESSION	VIDEO	ESSAY
1	The stoning of Achan 31:01	Essay 3, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 1)</i> Introduction through paragraph ending <i>"Except that here we have no independent record of what he thought or felt or said, only the record which emerges from the perspective of his lynchers."</i>
2	Prophecy and interpretation 19:28	Essay 3, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 1)</i> Beginning with paragraph beginning "In our previous Essay, when we looked at the Emmaus story..." rest of Introduction to end of part 1
3	Interpretation in the Scriptures 22:28	Essay 3, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 1)</i> part 2

4	The final edition 32:23	Essay 4, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 2)</i> Introduction, parts 1 & 2
5	Priests and prophets 22:39	Essay 4, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 2)</i> parts 3, 4 & 5
6	God's utter aliveness 32:28	Essay 4, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 2)</i> parts 6, 8 & 9
EXTRA	The development of the "canon" 7:07	Essay 4, <i>Who's afraid of the big bad book (part 2)</i> part 7

The stoning of Achan

SESSION SUMMARY

When we read Scripture through the eyes of the Forgiving Victim we cannot help but see things from the victim's perspective, even if the story is told from the point of view of the persecutors. We will read such a story in this session, the story of the stoning of Achan found in Joshua chapter seven.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Joshua 7

Main ideas

- 1 Using Jesus as our living interpretative principle, we will read Joshua 7.
- 2 Joshua's soldiers have just taken Jericho where God placed everything under a "ban". This means there was to be no looting; everything the soldiers found was to be burned or destroyed.
- 3 The lottery is the ancient equivalent of a witch hunt in which group morale is restored by finding someone to blame.
- 4 Lottery organization is the only function of the word "God" in Joshua 7.
- 5 The group unites against the victim – unanimity minus one. It works even better if the victim agrees to be sacrificed or if his protests are drowned out by a wailing chorus.
- 6 The Lord's burning anger started at the same time as loss of morale, and it ends when morale is restored through the sacrifice of Achan.
- 7 There is nothing divine about this process; it is a very human phenomenon.
- 8 We are right to be queasy about the incident.
- 9 The figure of Christ in the story is Achan, the one who is held to be guilty and sacrificed.
- 10 Joshua 7 and the Emmaus story are the same story told from two different perspectives: the first is from the point of view of the persecutors and the other is from the point of view of the victim.
- 11 The moment the victim's story is heard, it reveals the other story to be a lie.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: As we begin Part Two, we will start to see how meaning opens up to us when we read Scripture through the eyes of the Forgiving Victim. Even stories that we avoided because they made us uncomfortable begin to make sense as part of a larger process of revelation and discovery.

INVITE: To begin this process of discovery, invite participants to share an Old Testament story that has made them queasy or uncomfortable and please explain why.

WATCH VIDEO: The stoning of Achan

31:05 minutes

The stoning of Achan DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Why does James say that we are right to feel queasy about stories in the Bible such as the stoning of Achan? What is it that causes us to feel queasy?

What role does God play in this story?

Discuss how the stoning of Achan worked to restore morale.

Imagine that the story you identified in the Optional Step 2 activity as making you feel queasy was one of the stories that Jesus interpreted on the road to Emmaus. Where might we listen for the unheard voice of the Forgiving Victim in that story?

Somehow Joshua and the Israelites' belief in their own goodness survived the stoning, preventing them from including Achan's perspective in their account of the event. What stories do we tell about our own goodness that prevent us from including the unheard voice of the Achans among us?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Can you think of any stories from American history that would be told very differently if the perspective of the victim were included? Perhaps you can think of stories in the news now that are blaming the victim or excluding the victim's perspective.

SESSION SUMMARY

We will explore problems with two different approaches to reading Scriptures: the Marcionite way of reading and the fundamentalist approach. Then we will see that by approaching Scriptures as a progressive revelation, we can discover new and more true things about God and ourselves.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 There are two common mistakes made in reading Scriptures: the Marcionite error and a fundamentalist reading.
- 2 The Marcionite error is named for an early Christian interpreter of the Scriptures called Marcion. Marcion thought some texts to be so violent that he proposed ditching the Hebrew Scriptures, as something to do with another god.
- 3 A fundamentalist reading says there is one God through the entire Scriptures. This leads to certain readings of Jesus' death as being demanded by the Father.
- 4 Another approach is that of progressive revelation which sees the New Testament working as an interpretative key opening up Hebrew Scriptures and allowing us to see that the one true God was always making Godself known in and through the Hebrew texts as simultaneously God and Victim.
- 5 The Joshua text differs from myths because the human dimension is so visible.
- 6 The point of approaching the texts as progressive revelation is that it enables us to be less frightened of the Hebrew Scriptures, find them less of a "trap" that you must accept if you are to be a "good person."
- 7 There is no such thing as reading these texts without an interpretative key. The Scriptures do not have an interpretative-free meaning of their own.

- 8 Prophecy is always read as a movement backwards from your interpretative key. It is going to nudge you into seeing certain words and deeds of the past as pointing towards a certain fulfillment beyond themselves, and sometimes a certain fulfillment despite and beyond themselves.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: This session culminates in an insight about the connection between our interpretative key and prophecy.

INVITE: To begin to get a sense of that connection, invite participants to share their favorite mystery or detective stories. Ask them to describe what effect learning “who done it” at the end had on how they viewed certain characters or events from earlier in the story.

WATCH VIDEO: Prophecy and interpretation *19:33 minutes*

Prophecy and interpretation

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Ask participants to recall James' explanation of what a Marcionite reading and a fundamentalist reading are. (For answers, refer to the Main ideas for this session.)

Why does James say a Marcionite reading of Scriptures is a mistake?

Why does James say a fundamentalist reading of Scriptures is a mistake?

A fundamentalist reading would say that God demanded human sacrifice, but for complicated reasons. This can lead to a certain reading of Jesus' death as being demanded by the Father. In what ways has God's involvement with Jesus' death been interpreted? Which have you found problematic? Which helpful?

James explains that reading the texts through the eyes of the Forgiving Victim is a particular option for interpretation.

What difference does this option make to how we interpret Scriptures?

What unheard voices might emerge using this option?

When we understand the Scriptures as a process of progressive revelation, we see the New Testament working as an interpretative key opening up Hebrew Scriptures.

How is reading Scriptures as progressive revelation like re-reading a mystery novel after you learn how it all turns out?

SESSION WRAP - UP

How does reading Scripture as progressive revelation help us discover new and more true things about God and ourselves?

Interpretation in the Scriptures

SESSION SUMMARY

The struggle around interpretation is not imposed upon Scriptures, but something that happens within them. For a rather important example, we'll look at the different interpretations offered by Jeremiah and Ezekiel around the question of God's involvement with child sacrifice. We'll see how the Binding of Isaac passage from Genesis 22 reflects the movement away from understanding God as a God who demanded the sacrifice of the firstborn.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Exodus 22:28-30; Jeremiah 19:3-6; Ezekiel 20:23-26; Exodus 4:22-26; Genesis 22:1-19

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The Marcionite and fundamentalist temptations were faced by the authors and editors of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves.
- 2 The people we now call the people of Israel had as a regular part of their basic culture the sacrifice of firstborn children.
- 3 Jeremiah, a northern prophet, offers a pre-Marcionite interpretation when he says that it was not YHWH that commanded child sacrifice but another god. (Jeremiah 19:3-6)
- 4 Ezekiel, a fairly conservative Temple priest from Jerusalem, seems to have the fundamentalist temptation. He is saying that yes, child sacrifice was commanded by YHWH, but it was so people would find it so awful they would give it up. (Ezekiel 20:23-26)
- 5 Both prophets faced the same problem yet despite their different solutions they were both dangerously secularizing – they both agreed that true religion did not involve child sacrifice, contrary to their religious contemporaries.
- 6 The story of circumcision as a covenant of peace inserted into the narrative about Egypt may have been part of a history of the interpretative dealing with the moving on from child sacrifice.

- 7 The passage called the Akedah or the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19), may have been an edited version of an earlier story in which Isaac was sacrificed. So the current version, as it appears in our Bibles, reflects moving on from a God who demanded the sacrifice of the firstborn.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we look at texts representing the argument in Israel about whether God required child sacrifice, or sacrifice of the firstborn. Human sacrifice makes us so queasy that we often have a hard time understanding how our ancestors in the faith could believe God required such a thing. But ritualized sacrifice worked in much the same way as the sacrifice of Achan, restoring the community's morale. The movie *Apocalypto* portrayed quite well the effect of sacrifice on the gathered crowd.

Ask if anyone has seen the movie and if they remember the scene of human sacrifice, to please describe it for the group. If no one can do that, you can read the text provided here of what the Priest is saying and how the crowd is reacting during the sacrifice.

These are the days of our great lament. The land thirsts. A great plague invests our crops. The scourge of sickness afflicts us at whim. They say this strife has made us weak. That we have become empty. They say that we rot. *(Crowd is becoming frenzied.)* Great people of the banner of the sun, I say we are strong. *(Cheers)* We are a people of destiny... Mighty Kukulkan! Whose fury could scorch this earth to oblivion, let us appease you with this sacrifice. To exalt you in your glory. To make our people prosper... Warrior, unafraid and willing! *(We see the victim's frightened face.)* With your blood you renew the world! *(The priest has the knife raised above the victim, the crowd is cheering)* Thanks be to you *(as he delivers the killing blow).*

ASK: What crisis is afflicting the community? How did this scene of human sacrifice work to restore morale in much the same way as the stoning of Achan?
How do you think the community accomplished what for us is so very difficult, that of excluding the voice of the victim from their account of the sacrifice?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: Interpretation in the Scriptures

22:30minutes

Interpretation in the Scriptures

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Were you aware that sacrifice of first born children was part of the religious practices of ancient Israel, as of the surrounding nations? How do you feel about that?

The stories about human sacrifice made Marcion queasy, too! Marcion suggested that we ditch such passages from our Scriptures. What value is there in including them?

Do you think the Prophets' goal of separating God from the violence of human sacrifice is a settled issue? There are no more temples for human sacrifice as part of either Judaism or Christianity. What relevance, if any, does this discussion have for us today?

How has your understanding of the story of Abraham and Isaac changed?

SESSION WRAP - UP

In what ways is your understanding of what God requires from religious people changing? What does it mean to be a good religious person?

SESSION SUMMARY

Monotheism emerges in the texts of 2nd Isaiah, but it was a late development. We will look at how the Hebrew Scriptures are not, strictly speaking, monotheistic. Also we'll see evidence in the Old Testament for God the Father (El Elyon), of whom no images could be made and God the Son (YHWH) who could make anthropomorphic appearances. We'll end with a bit of history of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Exodus 6:2-4
- 3 If you choose Optional Step 2, you will need:
 - Bingo cards and list of Bingo terms (included with session handouts)
 - M&Ms or other markers for the Bingo game

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 We read the texts of Scriptures through the eyes of the most recent editors.
- 2 The Hebrew Scriptures are not, strictly speaking, monotheistic. Monotheism emerges as late as the texts of 2nd Isaiah, from the post-exilic period.
- 3 Reminiscences of a polytheistic past are evident in the texts in references to God is a plural form or to God among the gods.
- 4 Henotheism, meaning that plenty of gods exist but you are only to worship one of them, is also present. An example is the first of the ten commandments which takes for granted the existence of other gods.
- 5 A process developed by which El Elyon (God the Most High) of whom no image could be made, and YHWH, who could make anthropomorphic appearances, were both identical and yet distinct. This ancient distinction persists in the New Testament where El Elyon is the Father and YHWH is the son.

- 6 There seems to be ancient evidence confirming that there were two kingdoms and that Israel (the northern kingdom) was vanquished by the Assyrian Empire around 720 BC. It was in the northern kingdom that there were the most important reported theophanies of God to the patriarchs and the sanctuaries associated with them.
- 7 After the Assyrian deportation and in response to the loss of sanctuaries, a text-based religion developed.
- 8 Judah (the southern kingdom) depended on the Jerusalem Temple and the Davidic monarchy until the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 597 BC. It may well have been after this that the south adopted the text-based religion already developed by the north.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we will get an overview of some Old Testament history and a glimpse of the development of monotheism as it emerged in Scriptures. To prepare for the video, we'll play a Bingo game created from the facts, dates and terms we are about to hear.

BINGO! Distribute the bingo cards (there are a total of 12) and something to use as markers (M&Ms are suggested!). Read the terms on the list provided and play the game until someone gets 5 in a row in any direction.

After playing the game, ask participants to call out the terms or dates that are unfamiliar to them. Invite participants to choose one of the terms to listen for in the video and to report on after you view it together. Go around the room and ask each person to name their term to be sure there are no duplicates.

VIEW VIDEO: **The final edition**

32:27 minutes

The final edition DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

Before jumping into the discussion, go around the room and ask participants to share what they learned about the term they chose from their Bingo card.

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Does learning about the editing process of Scriptures change your relationship to the text? If it has been edited, how does it remain an act of communication from God?

How does learning that the Bible is not strictly monotheistic affect your relationship to the Scriptures?

What do you think of God having (at least) two names, El-Elyon and YHWH: “God the Most High” of whom no image could be made, and YHWH who could appear and be seen? Discuss what it means to say that El-Elyon and YHWH are both identical and distinct.

SESSION WRAP - UP

Invite participants to take three minutes to reflect on and perhaps record their thoughts about the following question: If you were creating a newspaper version of the Scriptures, what stories would be on your first page? What would be your lead story?

After three minutes, invite participants to share their reflections with one another.

SESSION SUMMARY

We will explore the process by which it became possible to put distance between God and human victim-making. We will see the movement in Scriptures away from systems of religious purity and of the notion that historical calamity is a punishment for sin. The priestly element of the Hebrew religion, still detectable in Scriptures, gave us the notions of ongoing Creation, Redemption, and Atonement opening up the possibility of God's presence being lived independent of the Temple.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Isaiah 6:1-6, Isaiah 45:15-19, Isaiah 50:4-9
- 3 If you choose Optional Step 2, you will need:
 - Something mechanical or wind-up, like a clock or child's toy.
 - A potted plant, hopefully one that is alive and thriving!

Main Ideas

- 1 The priestly element of ancient Hebrew religion gave us the notions of ongoing Creation, Redemption, Atonement, and a liturgical sense of time but also tolerated or defended child sacrifice and supported the costly temple cult.
- 2 A second tendency is the more textual tradition associated with what scholars call the Deuteronomistic school. It is hearing and obeying the words and not searching for forms of God that is important. Creation became something that had happened in the past and to which we now relate by Torah.
- 3 A school of disciples kept alive Isaiah's priestly vision (Isaiah 6:1-5) over a period of three hundred years beginning in 730 BC. Over time it became clear that the Lord in question is not another god among the gods, but is in fact God, more like nothing at all than like a god.
- 4 This vision of God made it possible to critique the religious victim-creating mechanisms. In the "servant songs" of 2nd Isaiah, a separation between God and human victim-making, and yet a generous process of being able to occupy the victim space on behalf of others begins to become possible.

- 5 In 3rd Isaiah we find devastating critiques of the religious culture of those who were re-building the Temple and setting up a new purity religion.
- 6 Jeremiah seems to have inherited a Northern Kingdom understanding of God offering a “Way” that was not dependent on sacrifice, Temple or monarchy. His school was important in developing the notion of legal covenant, connecting historical calamity to punishment for sins.
- 7 Ezekiel was a conservative Temple priest who was carried off into exile. His vision of God leaving the Holy Place opened up the possibility of the reality of God’s presence being lived independent of the Temple. In Ezekiel (chapter 18) individual ethical responsibility is taught for the first time, breaking away from the notion that God might be punishing children for the sins of their fathers.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we will explore different understandings of Creation and God’s relationship to it.

Explain: Set the mechanical clock or toy and the plant where everyone can see them. Indicating the mechanic clock or toy, explain that one idea of Creation is that it happened once in the past.

Indicating the plant, explain that another idea of Creation is that it is ongoing and that God is still actively engaged in the process of Creation.

Invite participants to share which image best represents how they experience God and Creation.

WATCH VIDEO: Priests and prophets

22:42 minutes

Priests and prophets DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

How does understanding Creation as ongoing, as the Priestly tendency did, affect how we live in the present? How does understanding Creation the way the legal scholars did, as having happened once in the past, affect how we live in the present?

Jeremiah believed that historical calamity could be understood as God's punishment for sins. In what ways is that idea present in the way we interpret events in our lives and communities today?

It wasn't until the servant songs in 2nd Isaiah that the possibility of separating God from human victim-making mechanisms opened up. Invite a participant to read aloud Isaiah 50:4-9 from the handout, a passage in which we can clearly hear the voice of a victim speaking.

Who is persecuting the victim and what form does the persecution take?

How would persecutors describe or defend what they are doing?

How does the victim react to his persecutors?

What role is God playing in this event of persecution?

How is the victim able to avoid feeling shame?

How does Isaiah's interpretation of God's role in punishment differ from Jeremiah's?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Continuing to refer to Isaiah 50:4-9, invite participants to discuss how Isaiah is creating a new possibility for human community and for understanding what God is doing among us.

PLEASE NOTE: The section in Essay 4 called “The development of the ‘canon’” is not included in this video. It is included as an optional video for this session. You can find it listed as a video Extra in Session 2.6. You may enjoy viewing it as part of your preparation for this session.

SESSION SUMMARY

Notions of morality and racial purity appear as the exiles return from Babylon to Jerusalem. Prophetic writings and the Wisdom literature kept alive a different understanding, that of God's utter aliveness and the opening up of Creation from within the Holy Place in the Temple. The bush that burns but is not consumed is an appropriate symbol for I AM, the protagonism that is not in rivalry with anything that is and which brings everything into being.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Ruth 1:16, 2 Maccabees 7:28-29, Exodus 3:1-15

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Exiles returning from Babylon to Jerusalem, called the Judahites, brought with them a program for creating the true Israel based on a moral ideology. This purified version did not mesh with the life of those who had been left behind, the Hebrews.
- 2 The notion of racial purity was a novelty to those who had been in the land all along. It is critiqued in the book of Ruth.
- 3 Prophetic writings from this period critiqued the newly evolved religious system of purity and exclusion. Memories existed of a cult of YHWH from before, where foreigners, eunuchs and others had not been excluded.
- 4 The Wisdom literature kept alive the priestly understanding of God opening up Creation from the Holy Place in the Temple. The opposite of Wisdom was vanity or futility.

- 5 The Deuteronomistic vision focused on listening to the words of the Law and a moralistic Temple structure.
- 6 The first text we have in the Hebrew tradition which speaks unequivocally of both Creation out of nothing and of the resurrection of the dead comes in 2nd Maccabees 7:28-29.
- 7 In Exodus 3:1-15 we get a sense of the sort of thing Jewish monotheism which emerges from the biblical tradition really is.
- 8 The bush which burns but is not consumed is an appropriate symbol for an appearance of God who is not in rivalry with anything that is.
- 9 The symbol becomes more of an act of communication as God calls Moses by name.
- 10 “I AM” is something that cannot be grasped, coming toward you, which turns out to be the real protagonism, the one who brings everything into being, of which we are peripheral symptoms.
- 11 God is bringing into being a new people who are to interpret everything that is happening to them now from within a unitary protagonism.

VIDEO EXTRA: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE “CANON”

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made in Alexandria sometime between 300 and 132 BC, is the oldest version of the Hebrew Scriptures we have.
- 2 The New Testament contains references to texts that were circulated and considered important but did not make it into the Masoretic Text, the authorized list of Scriptures codified by the rabbis in the eighth or ninth century of our era.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we explore the experience of the Exiles returning from Babylon and encountering those who had been left behind.

ASK: Have you ever returned to a place that had been important to you, such as a childhood home or school? What expectations did you have? Did the place meet your expectations or maybe disappoint you in some way?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **God's utter aliveness**

39:31 minutes

OPTIONAL VIDEO EXTRA: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "CANON"

Following "God's utter aliveness", you may want to watch the Extra video for this session. 7:07 minutes

God's utter aliveness DISCUSSION QUESTIONS 60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

When the exiles returned, they brought with them an idealized vision of their home. How have you responded when reality did not live up to your dream or vision?

How can rules and a moral code be helpful to communities?

In what ways can a moral code be hurtful?

What happens to us when we grasp onto a moral code for unity and identity?

James describes the Jewish discovery of God's utter aliveness and that God is not in rivalry with anything that is. Have you ever felt utterly alive? Can you describe the experience?

Discuss what James means when he says that the bush that burns but is not consumed is a perfect symbol for God who is not in rivalry with anything that is, not even death.

In the Hebrew, when you pronounce I AM it sounds more like a breathy exhale than a spoken word. Reflect together on the name I AM and why is it important that it be as ungraspable as a breath.

PART TWO WRAP - UP

Just as the Hebrews discovered God revealed to be not one of the gods, we are still discovering the same thing today.

Who or what are the gods that tempt your devotion?

What story about yourself and your community do these gods communicate to you?

Where or through whom are you discovering God, not one of the gods?

What new story about yourself and your community is I AM communicating to you?

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART TWO: *God, not one of the gods*

SESSION 1: The stoning of Achan

JOSHUA 7

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things; for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethaven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said to him, "Let not all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai; do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are but few." So about three thousand went up there from the people; and they fled before the men of Ai, and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six men of them, and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim, and slew them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

Then Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord GOD, why hast thou brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! O LORD, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth; and what wilt thou do for thy great name?"

The LORD said to Joshua, "Arise, why have you thus fallen upon your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, and lied, and put them among their own stuff. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become a thing for

destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the LORD, God of Israel, “There are devoted things in the midst of you, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies, until you take away the devoted things from among you.” In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes; and the tribe which the LORD takes shall come near by families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come near by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come near man by man. And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a shameful thing in Israel.’”

So Joshua rose early in the morning, and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken; and he brought near the families of Judah, and the family of the Zerahites was taken; and he brought near the family of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken; and he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and render praise to him; and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” And Achan answered Joshua, “Of a truth I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them, and took them; and behold, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the people of Israel; and they laid them down before the LORD. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the mantle and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters, and his oxen and asses and sheep, and his tent, and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor [which means trouble]. And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones; they burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day; then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART TWO: *God, not one of the gods*

SESSION 3: Interpretation in the Scriptures

EXODUS 22:28 - 30

You shall not revile God nor curse the ruler of your people. You shall not delay to offer from the fulness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. *The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me.* You shall do likewise with your oxen and with your sheep. Seven days it will be with its dam. On the eighth day you shall give it to me. (Italics added for emphasis.)

JEREMIAH 19:3 - 6

You shall say: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind. Therefore the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter.

EZEKIEL 20:23 - 26

Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their ancestors' idols. Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live. I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up all their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them, so that they might know that I am the LORD.

EXODUS 4:22-26

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.'" On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by circumcision."

GENESIS 22:1-19

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

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PART TWO: *God, not one of the gods*

SESSION 4: The final edition

EXODUS 6:2-4

And God said to Moses, “I am YHWH. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El-Shaddai, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners.”

BINGO CARDS FOR SESSION 2.4

Call Out List!

This is a scrambled word list. Use it to call the terms!

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1 El Elyon | 19 Omri |
| 2 Maccabees | 20 Henotheism |
| 3 Babylon | 21 Judah |
| 4 720 BC | 22 Northern Kingdom |
| 5 Monolatry | 23 Southern Kingdom |
| 6 First Temple | 24 Moses |
| 7 597 BC | 25 Adam |
| 8 Monotheism | |
| 9 2nd Isaiah | |
| 10 Polytheism | |
| 11 El-Shaddai | |
| 12 164 BC | |
| 13 Exile | |
| 14 Masoretic text | |
| 15 Solomon | |
| 16 YHWH | |
| 17 Joshua | |
| 18 Assyria | |

B	I	N	G	O
Monotheism	597 BC	First Temple	164 BC	Babylon
Henotheism	Omri	720 BC	Maccabees	Masoretic Text
Joshua	Adam	*FREE	Moses	Polytheism
El Elyon	Assyria	YHWH (Yahweh)	Monolatry	Northern Kingdom
Solomon	Exile	2nd Isaiah	El-Shaddai	Judah

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B	I	N	G	O
Masoretic Text	Babylon	Joshua	Adam	Polytheism
Southern Kingdom	El-Shaddai	720 BC	Northern Kingdom	First Temple
Solomon	Henotheism	*FREE	Omri	2nd Isaiah
597 BC	Moses	Monolatry	Exile	164 BC
Monotheism	Assyria	Maccabees	El Elyon	Judah

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B	I	N	G	O
Maccabees	El-Shaddai	Henotheism	Moses	Southern Kingdom
Polytheism	YHWH (Yahweh)	El Elyon	597 BC	Assyria
Judah	Monolatry	*FREE	Babylon	2nd Isaiah
First Temple	720 BC	Masoretic Text	Omri	164 BC
Joshua	Exile	Solomon	Monotheism	Adam

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B	I	N	G	O
First Temple	Maccabees	El-Shaddai	Monolatry	720 BC
Polytheism	Moses	Solomon	Joshua	Monotheism
Babylon	164 BC	*FREE	Assyria	2nd Isaiah
Masoretic Text	YHWH (Yahweh)	Judah	Omri	Adam
Exile	Northern Kingdom	Henotheism	Southern Kingdom	El Elyon

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B	I	N	G	O
164 BC	Maccabees	First Temple	720 BC	Northern Kingdom
El Elyon	Masoretic Text	El-Shaddai	Monotheism	Moses
597 BC	Southern Kingdom	*FREE	Judah	Henotheism
Monolatry	YHWH (Yahweh)	Joshua	Adam	Babylon
Polytheism	2nd Isaiah	Solomon	Assyria	Omri

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B	I	N	G	O
YHWH (Yahweh)	Babylon	Monolatry	Assyria	720 BC
Solomon	El Elyon	Monotheism	Northern Kingdom	Polytheism
Joshua	Henotheism	*FREE	2nd Isaiah	El-Shaddai
Southern Kingdom	Maccabees	Masoretic Text	Adam	597 BC
164 BC	Judah	Omri	First Temple	Moses

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B	I	N	G	O
2nd Isaiah	Exile	Judah	Monolatry	Adam
Monotheism	El-Shaddai	597 BC	Solomon	Joshua
Henotheism	Southern Kingdom	*FREE	164 BC	Polytheism
Masoretic Text	Northern Kingdom	Maccabees	Babylon	720 BC
First Temple	YHWH (Yahweh)	El Elyon	Moses	Assyria

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B	I	N	G	O
YHWH (Yahweh)	Moses	Babylon	Monolatry	Joshua
Polytheism	Omri	El Elyon	El-Shaddai	720 BC
Solomon	Henotheism	*FREE	Adam	2nd Isaiah
Monotheism	Southern Kingdom	First Temple	597 BC	Maccabees
164 BC	Judah	Exile	Masoretic Text	Northern Kingdom

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B	I	N	G	O
Adam	2nd Isaiah	Polytheism	Moses	Joshua
YHWH (Yahweh)	First Temple	Northern Kingdom	Babylon	Judah
164 BC	Southern Kingdom	*FREE	Omri	Masoretic Text
Henotheism	Exile	720 BC	Assyria	Monolatry
Solomon	El Elyon	597 BC	Monotheism	El-Shaddai

<http://print-bingo.com>

B	I	N	G	O
Adam	El-Shaddai	Polytheism	Assyria	Masoretic Text
Solomon	Moses	Northern Kingdom	Omri	YHWH (Yahweh)
El Elyon	720 BC	*FREE	Joshua	Babylon
Monolatry	597 BC	Monotheism	2nd Isaiah	Henotheism
Maccabees	Southern Kingdom	Judah	Exile	First Temple

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Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART TWO: *God, not one of the gods*

SESSION 5: Priests and prophets

ISAIAH 6:1-5

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

ISAIAH 45:15-19

Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together. But Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in chaos.' I the LORD speak the truth, I declare what is right.

ISAIAH 50:4-9

The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him that is weary.
Morning by morning he wakens,
he wakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I turned not backward.
I gave my back to the smiters,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I hid not my face
from shame and spitting.
For the Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been confounded;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who is my adversary?
Let him come near to me.
Behold, the Lord GOD helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

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PART TWO: *God, not one of the gods*

SESSION 6: **God's utter aliveness**

RUTH 1:16

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

2 MACCABEES 7:28-29

"I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers."

EXODUS 3:1-15

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from

your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain.” Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”



PART TWO: *God, not one of the gods*

Scripture References

VIDEO: THE STONING OF ACHAN

Joshua 7:1-26

VIDEO: PROPHECY AND INTERPRETATION

Luke 24:27

Exodus 22:28-30

Jeremiah 19:3-6

Ezekiel 20:23-26

Exodus 4:22-26

Genesis 22:1-19

VIDEO: THE FINAL EDITION

Exodus 6:2-4

VIDEO: PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

Isaiah 6:1-5

Isaiah 45:15-19

Jeremiah 44

Ezekiel 18

VIDEO: GOD'S UTTER ALIVENESS

Ruth 1:16

Proverbs 1:20-33

2 Maccabees 7:28-29

Mark 12:18-27

Exodus 3:1-15

<p>Jesus <i>the</i> Forgiving Victim <small>LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE</small></p>	<p>PART TWO: <i>God, not one of the gods</i></p> <p>Glossary</p>
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El Elyon | God the Most High of whom no image could be made, and who could not be seen in any way. This ancient identity persists into New Testament Judaism where El Elyon comes to be identified with God the Father.

First Temple | also known as the Temple of Solomon, stood in ancient Jerusalem until its destruction in 587 BC by Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II. Though no archaeological evidence for this Temple has yet been found, its period in Hebrew history is associated with the ancient priestly tendency and the monarchical traditions of Jerusalem.

Fundamentalist Error | a modern literalistic reading of the Scriptures, which says that since every word in the Scriptures is true, the words for God in the Old and New Testaments, whether in the beginning, middle or end, must refer to the same God in the same way. There are terrible texts and the same God, so “mental gymnastics” are required to help us reconcile the two Testaments, for instance, by having God punish Jesus instead of us.

Henotheism | effectively synonymous with “monolatry”—attention to a single god. It means, “Plenty of gods exist, but you are to worship only one of them.” Indicated in the first Commandment, which takes for granted the existence of other gods.

Hermeneutical Key | We all approach any text with a background set of presuppositions, whether we are aware of it or not. So your hermeneutical key is your starting point which colors your reading, nudging you into seeing certain words and deeds of the past as pointing towards a certain fulfilment despite and beyond themselves. Becoming aware of this is a good thing, since it enables you to ask through whose eyes you might read the text, which is a precondition for learning something new.

Josiah's Reform | King Josiah reformed the Temple of Jerusalem a few decades before the Babylonian invasion and the fall of Jerusalem, though in ways that are not entirely clear. It may be that the figure of Moses first acquired significance during this period.

Marcionite Error | named for Marcion of Sinope, an early Christian interpreter of Scriptures. Faced with some terrible texts about God, he said that they cannot be the work of the God of Jesus Christ, they must be from another god altogether. He proposed ditching the Hebrew Scriptures, as something to do with another god, and pruned much of the New Testament as well, ultimately making a compendium of the Gospels based on Luke (a Gospel he found more pleasant) and made other things fit into it. Church authority rejected this view, saying that all the Scriptures are one and the two Testaments each make sense of the other.

Monolatry | literally, worship of one god alone. As a modified form of polytheism, the texts of scripture bear witness to monolatry, meaning "Plenty of gods exist, but you are to worship only one of them." This is also indicated in the first Commandment.

Northern Kingdom | one of two political entities in the Ancient Hebrew world, also known as Israel, vanquished by the Assyrian invasion in 720 BC. This was the territory in which the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) had lived, where the great theophanies of God had been reported, and where there were the most important sanctuaries. After the Assyrian deportation and in response to the loss of sanctuaries, Northern priests began to put into writing monuments to their religion; this is most likely where a text-based religion developed.

Polytheism | Literally, the belief in the presence of many gods. There are traces of polytheism in the early Hebrew Scriptures. Clear monotheism emerges in the texts of Second Isaiah. A polytheistic past is revealed in the basic Canaanite word for God (El), which has number (Elohim is a plural word), and there are references to God among the gods (who later become angels). There are hints of varied gender in traces of a mother goddess figure just prior to the Babylonian exile, and one of the titles for God, "El- Shaddai," may indicate a female divinity.

Progressive Revelation | Who God really is emerges simultaneously as both Creator and Victim in clearer and clearer focus throughout the two Testaments, so that what is being done by us in the human world of victimizing gets more obvious before our eyes. As the truth emerges more and more richly in our midst, we can expect the textual effects of that emergence in the Scriptures to look nastier and nastier, because more honest and realistic.

Prophecy | telling the truth about things (speaking for God) in the midst of current situations of confusion and violence. Since true things are long lasting (“the arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice”, as a 20th century prophet said), and often only perceived to be true by others much later than when they are first spoken of, prophecy has come to be associated with the anticipation and prediction of future events; when we call something “prophetic” it’s because we are able to look back, in the light of something that has shown itself to us now, and see how what has happened now is a bringing to completion of what someone earlier had glimpsed and spoken of, when it didn’t seem so clear.

Second Temple | this was built after the return from the period of the exile in Babylon, though at what date is uncertain. It was rebuilt by Herod the Great shortly before Christ’s birth, and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. The platform on which it was rebuilt by Herod survives as the current Temple Mound in Jerusalem. The Second Temple has given its name to the period of the development of Judaism where the figure of Moses and the covenant of Sinai occupied the central place.

Southern Kingdom | also known as Judah, centered on the Jerusalem Temple and the Davidic monarchy until the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 597 BC. It may well have been after this that the south adopted the text-based religion developed by the north, whose later version we know as Second-Temple Judaism.

Theophany | the local self-manifestation of God to a human being, the sign by which God is revealed. Example: Moses and the burning bush. What scholars call the Deuteronomistic school played down the liveliness and excitement concerning God, focusing attention away from theophanies, the things of heaven, and angels, focusing instead on a legally and textually viable way of life.

YHWH | from Ancient Hebrew, of uncertain pronunciation, but read (out of respect for God) as “Adonai” by observant Jews. The Name of God appointed to Israel by El Elyon. Also the name God gave to Moses by which God wished to be named. Could make anthropomorphic appearances. Eventually, becomes not only a god among the gods, but “God – there is no other” in Second Isaiah. Coming into New Testament Judaism, YHWH is recognized as the Son (with El Elyon as the Father).

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

PART THREE: THE DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES

PART THREE Content Summary

In Part Three we'll further fill out the impact which Jesus makes, coming amongst us as the Crucified and Risen One. How his presence does the hard work behind making faith possible for us, what his self-giving up to death achieved, how this opens us up into becoming a new people. We'll also try to catch some glimpses of the Master as we watch Jesus interpret his Scriptures to his own people.

Hopefully we will begin to glimpse what it means to find ourselves in the presence of the Forgiving Victim. Jesus' protagonism causes the solid ground to shift beneath us as we become untied from the more destructive ways in which the social other runs us. Our old identity slowly falls away so that we can begin to tell new, more truthful stories about ourselves. As this Part of the course unfolds, we will begin to discover for ourselves some hints of how being forgiven enables our participation in a new unity; we will begin to discover a social other that is good for us, and find that we are no longer depending on keeping ourselves apart and needing others to be fall guys. As we inhabit the texts of the New Testament we find ourselves called out to form a new people receiving our sense of self and our belonging from the Forgiving Victim in our midst.

PART THREE *Videos and Corresponding Essays*

Part Three consists of ten sessions. Here are the titles and the length of the video clip that accompanies each session as well as the corresponding parts of *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* essays:

SESSION	VIDEO	ESSAY
1	Emergence of the Other other 34:03	Essay 5, <i>Stand up and be godless! On receiving the gift of faith</i> Introduction, parts 1, 2 & 4
EXTRA	The centrality of "belief" 8:30	Essay 5, <i>Stand up and be godless! On receiving the gift of faith</i> part 3
2	The gift of faith 31:45	Essay 5, <i>Stand up and be godless! On receiving the gift of faith</i> parts 5-11
3	Undergoing Atonement: Ancient Hebrews 44:59	Essay 6, <i>Undergoing Atonement: The reverse-flow of sacrifice</i> Introduction and part 1 through paragraph ending "Alexander of Macedon had bought this, and went off to continue his conquests elsewhere."
EXTRA	A Second Temple account of the rite of Atonement 12:30	Essay 6, <i>Undergoing Atonement: The reverse-flow of sacrifice</i> rest of part 1

4	Undergoing Atonement: Gibeonites 27:46	Essay 6, <i>Undergoing Atonement: The reverse-flow of sacrifice</i> parts 2 &3
5	Undergoing Atonement: Venezuelans 41:03	Essay 6, <i>Undergoing Atonement: The reverse-flow of sacrifice</i> parts 4 &5
6	Induction into a people 40:31	Essay 7, <i>Induction into a people</i> Introduction, parts 1-3
7	What might a new unity look like? 35:32	Essay 7, <i>Induction into a people</i> parts 4 & 5
8	Some results of the anthropological earthquake 27:10	Essay 7, <i>Induction into a people</i> parts 6-8
9	Inhabiting texts and being discovered 37:55	Essay 8, <i>Inhabiting texts and being discovered</i> Introduction, parts 1 & 2
10	Reading for mercy 35:22	Essay 8, <i>Inhabiting texts and being discovered</i> parts 3-5

The emergence of the Other other

PLEASE NOTE that the section in Essay 5 called “On the oddness of the centrality of ‘belief’” is not included in this video. It is included as an optional video for this session. You can find it listed as a video Extra in Session 3.1. You may enjoy viewing it as part of your preparation for this session.

SESSION SUMMARY

“Faith” used in a religious context is often far removed from our everyday use of the word. We’ll be offered a human framework for understanding how faith in God is produced in us and begin to glimpse what the shape of that process looks like at a human level.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Enough blindfolds so that you have one for each member your group. You can use actual blindfolds or scarves, handkerchiefs, dishtowels – anything that can securely cover the eyes.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The normal human framework within which words like “faith” and “belief” have meaning is one of relaxation, and yet when those words turn “religious” they suddenly become demands for something which inspires the exact opposite.
- 2 Faith is the habitual disposition which knows and trusts the regular certainty of what is around us, without any need to see it or think about it at all
- 3 Doubt, on the other hand, is the highly developed and skilled subsection of faith in the regular certainty of things thanks to which, from time to time, we may question whether the normal certainty holds in this or that situation.
- 4 The “social other” is this massively faith-inducing, certainty-teaching underpinning to our viability, and yet it is also somewhat ambivalent, sometimes giving us a sense that it is out to get us.

- 5 The Hebrew question is this: Is there in fact Another other, who is not one of the gods, who is not in rivalry with anything that is, and who is completely benign, not in any way “out to get you”?
- 6 “Another other” can only be discovered at the same anthropological level as the social other. The only way of discovering “Another other” is by undergoing an alteration in our way of being tied to the social other.
- 7 When we talk about faith in God, we are talking about being inducted, thanks to an act of communication from Another other who is not in rivalry with anything that is, into undergoing a huge psychological turn-around.
- 8 The apostolic witness is a group of people at our level, chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses. He acted out something in their midst at an entirely human level, and they are the witnesses *to* that acting out and *from, or as a result of*, that acting out. They found themselves having undergone a complete change in their perception of who God is, and what their own culture was about.
- 9 Like a meteorite which hits the earth but all that’s left of it is a concavity, we can think of the apostolic witness as a concavity in whose midst something happened such that they begin to bear witness to it.
- 10 The apostolic witnesses are saying, “As you become part of this concavity, you will find that the same happening that we underwent will surely and faithfully reproduce itself in your lives as well. So the concavity will get bigger, and there will be further ripples from it.”

VIDEO EXTRA: The centrality of “belief”

MAIN IDEAS:

- 1 Most of the social and cultural forms of life that we call “religions” are in fact **not** centered on the notion of “faith”.
- 2 In ancient Greek or Roman society, piety meant offering sacrifices to the appropriate gods. It did not mean having a personal relationship with the gods.
- 3 The central notion of the Torah is that of interpreting the Law and not being concerned with what God thinks or does.
- 4 In Islam the concern is with a formal act of submission and then carrying out practices.

In Christianity, what matters is not so much what *you do*, as what someone else is doing, including you in, altering your subjectivity and producing a new you.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Welcome participants to Part Three of the course: *The difference Jesus makes*. If you'd like, you can offer this recap of where you are on the journey of learning to become the type of people who can listen for the unheard voice in our midst.

In Part One we discovered that talking about God does not require us to leave behind the realities of what it is to be human. And, of course, we encountered the central image of the course, the Crucified and Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus.

In Part Two we quickly dashed through the Hebrew Scriptures and began to see how the Forgiving Victim offers us a richer way to interpret the texts.

In Part Three we will be invited to relax into being held onto by a trustworthy, non-violent God who is for us and not in any way in rivalry with us. We'll see how God was able to show us his trustworthiness by stepping into the midst of our violence as our forgiving victim and we'll begin to work out the effects of that on a human level.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we begin an exploration of what is meant by the word *faith*.

INVITE: We will open the conversation with a trust exercise. Invite participants to divide into pairs. Distribute the blindfolds, one to each pair. Explain that one person will verbally guide his/her partner, the blindfolded person, around the room. Remind participants that this is a *trust* exercise and they should give helpful instructions to their blindfolded partner. After 2 to 3 minutes, have the pairs switch roles for another 2 to 3 minutes.

DEBRIEF: Ask:

When you were blindfolded, what made you feel trusting? What made you feel less trusting?

When you were the guide, what did you do to gain trust? What may have caused your partner to lose faith in you?

WATCH VIDEO: The emergence of the Other other

34:09 minutes

Video Extra: The centrality of “belief”

8:30 minutes

Following “The emergence of the Other other”, you may want to watch the Extra video for this session.

The emergence of the Other other

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Reflecting on the typical use of the word faith in the context of normal human relationships, in whom or what do you place your faith outside of a religious context?

Describe the process by which you came to have faith in them.

Have you ever undergone a loss of faith in someone or something? How did that happen? What happened to your faith?

What has the word faith meant to you in a religious context?

Has faith come easy to you or do you feel as if you “lack” faith?

Perhaps referring to the Optional Step 2 activity, discuss the relationship between faith and doubt. When is doubt, as James says, a highly developed and skilled subsection of faith?

James says that “Another other”, that is God, can only be discovered at the same anthropological level as the social other. What Jesus did, then, was to act out in the midst of the apostolic group something that completely changed their perception of who God is and what their own culture was about.

Which of all the things that the apostles witnessed Jesus doing, do you think most changed them?

What change occurred in their perception of who God is?

What change occurred in their perception of what God was revealing to them through their Scriptures?

Do you find the apostolic group to be trustworthy witnesses? If not, whose testimony would you trust?

SESSION WRAP - UP

When we talk about our own faith in God we are talking about undergoing a huge psychological turn-around just like the apostolic group.

In what ways is your perception of who God is changing?

In what ways is your perception of what your own culture is about changing?

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we undergo a reversal in our thinking about faith, discovering that far from being something we must have or summon up ourselves, faith in God is something Jesus was making possible for us. The effort is all on Jesus side! We'll explore some of what it looks like to be on the receiving end of the gift of faith in our attitudes toward death, goodness, our stories about ourselves, and what it means to doubt or have a crisis of faith.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Hebrews 2:14-15
- 3 If you choose Optional Step 2, you will need:
 - Enough copies of the "Four Facts" handout to distribute to your group.
 - Pens or pencils for everyone.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Normally we think of faith as something we've got to have in order to believe in Jesus. What James is saying is, no, if you actually read the texts, the effort is entirely on the other side. Jesus was about making it easier for us to have faith in God.
- 2 God is not frightened of death, contaminated by death, or touched by death at all. When Jesus occupies the place of death for us and makes it non-toxic, this has everything to do with revealing the utter aliveness of God, and consequently, of everything that is, as part of a vibrant project we can learn to dare to take part in.
- 3 Jesus was also visibly acting out on the human anthropological level that God is not frightened of us, scandalized by us, by our cruelty, our violence, our incompetence, our stupidity. Jesus wanted to make three-dimensional for us that God loves us.
- 4 One of the odd consequences of the gift of faith is that it ceases to become so important to be *good*. Christianity presupposes that we don't start good and then screw up. We start screwed up.
- 5 As we find ourselves loved, so we are able to let go of our attempts at being good and so able to give up trying to manipulate people into loving us.

- 6 It's precisely as you stop having to do good things that you will find yourself wanting to respond to love by doing something good.
- 7 Part of this undergoing of being loved is the highly increased awareness of our not being truth-tellers. It enables us to become more relaxed as we find ourselves being given a richer, more realistic, more truthful story than the one we held onto before.
- 8 Crises of faith are, more often than not, far better described as occlusions of the self. They are bits of us cracking up, but this is exactly what you would expect if someone is nudging you into a bigger world.
- 9 The point of the gift of faith is the disposition produced in us by someone who really, really wants us to be free, not bowed down or crippled, not trapped by gods or frightened of death.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: One of the consequences of receiving the gift of faith is a highly increased awareness of our not being truth-tellers and at the same time learning to be relaxed about it.

EXPLAIN: We are going to play a game that requires you to tell a lie about yourself! It's called Four Facts, but only three of them are true. The others in your group will guess which fact is false.

Distribute the Four Facts handout and divide the group into teams of four or less (not more than four). Explain that they will write four facts about themselves in the box at the top of the page, one of which will be false. The facts can relate to hobbies, family, work, education, habits, etc. Allow a few minutes for them to write their facts.

Then instruct them to take turns reading their facts aloud to their team members. Those listening will guess which is the false fact and record it on their sheet.

After everyone has had a turn, instruct them to select one person at a time to hear which fact of theirs the others recorded as false. Then the person reveals which fact was actually false. Repeat until everyone has had a turn.

DEBRIEF by asking:

What strategy did you use to make your false fact believable?

Who was the best “liar” in your group? Who was the worst “liar”?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **The gift of faith**

31:49 minutes

The gift of faith **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Have you gone through periods of doubt as well as faith in your life? Please describe your experience.

What do you think of James’ idea that doubt is a natural and expected part of faith? Does this change the way you understand your own times of doubt?

Please share your response to this statement from James: “Christianity presupposes that we don’t start good and then screw up. We start screwed up.”

Describe the ways you like others to think about you in order to garner praise or acceptance. What story do you tell and how do you present yourself to get a good reaction?

Referring to the Optional Step 2 activity, ask how it felt to be thought of as a good liar.

Reflect on what it might feel like to discover that the stories we tell about ourselves might be less than truthful.

Does it make a difference to how you feel about that discovery if you discover it as a result of being given a richer, more realistic, more truthful story?

SESSION WRAP - UP

How might your story or style of self-presentation be changing as you find yourself needing to be less good as a consequence of being loved?

Undergoing Atonement: Ancient Hebrews

PLEASE NOTE that the reading of Sirach 50:5-16 in Essay 6 which ends the section called “Ancient Hebrews” is not included in this video. It is included as an optional video for this session. You can find it listed as a video Extra in Session 3.3. You may enjoy viewing it as part of your preparation for this session.

SESSION SUMMARY

This is the first of three sessions in which we examine Atonement, what is meant by saying that Christ died for our sins, through three imaginative exercises. In this session we will imagine ourselves at the ancient Hebrew rite of Atonement, because before atonement was a theory, it was a liturgy. As we learn about the role of the Priest and the sacrificial victim in the liturgy, we will discover the key idea of the ancient feast: God, YHWH, coming into materiality, vesting himself in the flesh of the High Priest, so as to perform a sacrifice for God’s people.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 If you choose Optional Step 2, you will need copies of Handout: Crucifixion for each member of the group.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Before “Atonement” was a theory it was a liturgy. The whole purpose of a liturgy is that it is something that people *undergo* as something that is done for, towards, or at them.
- 2 What we know of the atonement liturgy that was performed by Ancient Hebrews in the Temple of Solomon comes to us from the imagination of the Hebrews living long after the destruction of the first Temple.
- 3 The whole point of the Temple was that it was a microcosm of Creation. The Holy of Holies was taken to be the place of God “outside” of Creation, and so outside of time, of space, of matter.
- 4 Material existence begins at the Veil which surrounds the Holy of Holies.

- 5 The key idea of the feast of the Atonement was that God, YHWH, would come into materiality, vesting himself in the flesh of the High Priest, so as to perform a sacrifice for God's people.
- 6 The Creator comes into the midst of Creation to un-ensnarl Creation from within, to make everything that is flow anew towards giving glory to God.
- 7 Sins are derived from the process of *atonement* or *forgiveness*, which massively precedes them and enables them to be understood as *that which can be forgiven*.
- 8 The distinctions in the words of institution at the last supper between "my Body given for you" and "my Blood, shed for you and for all," may well refer to the rite of Atonement in which the High Priest distribute the portions of the slaughtered lamb to the priests and sprinkles the blood in the Holy Place. By giving portions to all his disciples, as well as the cup, Jesus was indicating that henceforth they were all priests.
- 9 In the Gospel narratives of the crucifixion, Jesus is simultaneously both the lamb standing in for YHWH and the scapegoat, both the self-giving YHWH and the tortured and driven-out victim – as the rite is both fulfilled and brought to an end forever.

VIDEO EXTRA: A Second Temple account of the rite of Atonement

MAIN IDEAS:

- 1 Sirach 50:5-16 is an account of a version of the First Temple rite of Atonement from the Second Temple period.
- 2 The Creator is coming into the midst of creation, and so every element of creation has come alive and resplendent.
- 3 The distinction of the names El Elyon and YHWH becomes important as part of the rite of Atonement in that the distinctions in God are reunited. Part of this rite was celebrating the coming together of God as One (see Zechariah 14:9).

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In the next three sessions we will be directly examining what is known as Atonement. Before beginning the discussion, it will be helpful to hear the different ideas and experiences of Atonement the participants bring with them.

ASK: Distribute the copies of the Handout for this session and ask:

How would you describe what is going on in this picture?

What does it mean to say that *Christ died for our sins*?

WATCH VIDEO: **Undergoing Atonement: Ancient Hebrews**

45:02 minutes

VIDEO EXTRA: **A Second Temple account of the rite of Atonement**

12:30 minutes

Following “Undergoing Atonement: Ancient Hebrews”, you may want to watch the Extra video for this session.

A Second Temple account of the rite of Atonement

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

In what ways is the Ancient Hebrew Atonement sacrifice different than what James called the Aztec model, the people making a sacrifice to God?

What is significant about the Temple being a microcosm of Creation?

God entered through the veil of materiality in order to perform the sacrifice that was to “un-ensnarl Creation, to make everything flow anew towards giving glory to God.”

If God takes on material form, what does that imply about God’s relationship to Creation?

From what is Creation being “un-ensnarled”?

Often in classic Atonement theory God is imagined to be angry or insulted by human sinfulness. (Such an idea may have come up in the Optional Step 2 discussion.)

What does God’s attitude toward human sinfulness appear to be in the ancient Hebrew liturgy?

What sort of response might that call forth from us?

James explains that awareness of sin is derived from undergoing the process of forgiveness. In other words, forgiveness comes first and understanding of sin follows from that.

How does that change the way you think about sin and forgiveness?

How does undergoing forgiveness induct us into new patterns of desire?

SESSION WRAP-UP

Revisit the question from the opening of the session: What does it mean to say that *Christ died for our sins*?

Undergoing Atonement: Gibeonites

SESSION SUMMARY

In our second imaginative exercise about Atonement, we will imagine ourselves as ancient Gibeonites in a delicate political situation. Key insights about Atonement emerge from this exercise: There is an angry divinity in this story, needing sacrifice, and it is us. We see that God is really for us in every possible way and his generosity is not to be second-guessed.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: 2 Samuel 21:1-9, Romans 8:31-32, John 19:13

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 In this session we will imagine Atonement as a political movement towards us by imagining ourselves as the Gibeonites, a small subsection of people known as the Amorites.
- 2 In 2 Samuel 21:1-9, we read that King Saul had violated a treaty with the Gibeonites, that's us, and killed a number of the tribesmen. So Israel owes the Gibeonites a debt of blood. God's appearance in the story is to point out the bloodguilt.
- 3 A famine is blamed on the bloodguilt, so King David summons the Gibeonites and asks how he can set things right.
- 4 The Gibeonites first say that they have no demands, but King David reassures them that he is not out to get them.
- 5 The Gibeonites ask for seven sons of Saul to be handed over for execution. This delights King David, since the sons of Saul are his rivals for the throne.
- 6 In the story it is King David who is making the sacrifice to us Gibeonites. We have a right to this; it is our need for vengeance that must be requited.
- 7 The angry divinity in this story, needing sacrifice, is us.

- 8 Romans 8:31-32 refers to this story when Paul says, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” In other words, Paul is saying, “Remember the story about David and the Gibeonites? Remember how they couldn’t trust him at first and how he gained their trust through an astute political move, by offering up the sons of someone else? Well, God is even more than David; God offers his own son, that is, *himself*. So God is really for you in every possible way and his generosity is not to be second-guessed.”
- 9 This is the same as the Temple liturgy in which the Holy One comes out of the Holy Place to offer sacrifice on the altar for, towards, at the people. In Paul’s reference to the story of the Gibeonites once again we have a movement from un-ambivalent goodness *towards* us, the human group needing our vengefulness to be assuaged.
- 10 In John’s Gospel, Jesus is brought for questioning by Pilate to “the mound of Gibeon” to indicate that Pilate is being pushed by the wrath of the crowd into acting in the same unpleasant way that David did. He also unwittingly is standing in for God, enabling God to give his own son into the hands of wrathful humans.
- 11 In “The brief meditative pause”, James asks us to remember a time when we were forgiven by someone, to recover what it felt like to be forgiven, to be let off.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: As part of our imaginative exercise about Atonement, in this session we are going to imagine ourselves in a difficult political situation. We’ll be part of a small tribe that feels they have been wronged by King David.

ASK: Can you recall a time when you felt a group you identified with had been wronged? (Possible group identities are gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, family, religion, local church, etc.)

Did you feel that your group was entitled to an apology or some form of restitution?

What finally satisfied you? Or are you still waiting for satisfaction?

What is your relationship to the one who offended your group like now?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: *Undergoing Atonement: Gibeonites* *27:49 minutes*

Undergoing Atonement: Gibeonites

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *60 minutes*

Let's begin with the exercise James offered us at the end of the video by trying to remember a time when we have been forgiven for something. Did you ask to be forgiven or was forgiveness offered without your asking for it? What did it feel like?

Turning to the story about the Gibeonites, what jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

In this political story, King David needs to satisfy a blood debt he owes the Gibeonites. In other words, he needs to make a sacrifice to appease the Gibeonites.

Discuss what James means when he says that the angry divinity in the story, needing sacrifice, is the Gibeonites – us!

How does that impact how we understand who the angry divinity at Christ's crucifixion was?

In what ways do we play the part of an angry divinity with one another? (Refer to the discussion from Optional Step 2.)

What does it mean to say that God is not in rivalry with us when it comes to how God responds to our anger in Romans 8:31-32, Paul refers to this story and compares what David offered the Gibeonites to what God offers us.

Discuss the difference between what David offered and what God offers.

What is Paul saying about how God responds to our need for vengeance?

SESSION WRAP - UP

In what ways has this look at the Gibeonites and the passage in Romans revealed God's un-ambivalent goodness and generosity towards us?

Undergoing Atonement: Venezuelans

SESSION SUMMARY

In our final imaginative exercise, we'll be looking at Atonement as a personal movement towards us. We'll see the role played in our identities and group cohesiveness by ganging up against someone. And we'll see what is made possible when that someone, our victim, responds to us with forgiveness.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Mark 5:1-20, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Romans 3:21-26, and "Crucifixion"

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 In this session we will look at Atonement as a personal movement towards us, since the genius of what Jesus was about was in bringing all three dimensions together in one act.
- 2 In the story of the Gerasene demoniac, the people of the town find him to be a useful cultural marker. When he was around they knew what bad was. He is bad, so we are good. Because we have crazy around, we know that we are sane.
- 3 When the evil spirit is released into the pigs, they all imitate each other in their frenzy, without any braking mechanism. They rush down the hill together and drown.
- 4 By turning up and suddenly humanizing their whipping boy, Jesus has perhaps challenged the Gerasenes too much, too soon. They've no way of coping with the loss of their crutch, and are deeply at sea.
- 5 Jesus tells the former demoniac to stay among the townspeople which will be very challenging, because they'll be awfully tempted to want to gang up on him again, or do something to try to re-establish their order, their sense of boundaries.
- 6 James tells the story of Fernando, the guy at school that everyone picked on. He was the class fairy, who everyone teased and bullied, and made his life hell.
- 7 When Fernando transfers out of the school, the bullies are bereft until they found another class fairy to gang up on as their social marker, much as the demoniac was for the Gerasenes.
- 8 The also-rans, those who are not either the bullies or the class fairy, live in fear of being the next target of abuse. So they make sure they side with their bigger, more popular classmates as an act of self-defense.

- 9 Imagine that Fernando comes back. In the “big stick scenario” Fernando returns as a powerful figure and the former bullies apologize and try to get on his good side. Same game as before, but now Fernando is the one with the big stick.
- 10 Now imagine Fernando is forced to return because he needs some documentation from the school. He is ashamed and sneaks in, hoping no one sees him. Nothing has changed.
- 11 In a third scenario, Fernando comes back to visit the school. He is relaxed, unbothered, and harbors no resentment. The class bullies barely notice his return. But the also-rans worry that he is out for revenge. Fernando explains that he didn’t mind occupying the place of the one who gets it in the neck for them. And he’s come back to see if they can learn to do without all that and learn to play a new game.
- 12 They begin to realize that Fernando had been the protagonist all along, who unknown to us was already working at taking us out of the game whose rules we understand. It is we who were at the receiving end of his protagonism.
- 13 The also-rans realize that Fernando shows incredible strength by occupying the place of toxicity without being run by it, but also that all that strength is a power that likes us.
- 14 Jesus, in going to his death, brought together the liturgical, the ethical and the personal in a totally benevolent movement towards, for and in the face of, us frightened, violent creatures who find it so difficult to imagine ourselves as loved.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we are going to see how we often need someone to be bad to know we are good.

ASK: Have you ever experienced *Schadenfreude*, a feeling of pleasure at someone else's misfortune? This feeling often happens around people at a distance from us, such as politicians or celebrities. Discuss why it can sometimes feel good to think of someone else as having failed or having been caught doing something bad.

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **Undergoing Atonement: Venezuelans** 41:07 minutes

Undergoing Atonement: Venezuelans

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

How has your understanding of the role the Gerasene demoniac played in his community changed after listening to this session?

In what ways did the community rely on having the demoniac around to know they were good people?

Have you ever found yourself in one of the roles in the Fernando story: as a member of the popular or “in” group, as the one who is bullied like the class fairy, or as an also-ran?

How were different participants in the situation maintaining their sense of goodness over against someone else?

Whose voice went unheard in those situations?

How would their perspective have changed the stories being told by others?

How does the story of Fernando willingly occupying the place of shame for his classmates change how you understand Jesus going to his death for us?

How does imagining the different ways that Fernando could have returned shed light on the reason Jesus returned the way he did?

What would it have been like for us if Jesus had returned with a big stick?

What impact would it have had on us if he had returned in shame?

James says that Jesus returns asking us to play a new game that does not involve a big stick or being ashamed. What game is that?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Distribute the copies of the Handout: Crucifix and ask: Now that we have completed the three imaginative exercises around Atonement, please share if your explanation of what is going on in this image and what it means to say that *Christ died for our sins* has changed, and if so, how.

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we'll see that Atonement and the birth of a new people are different sides of the same thing. By disrupting our old way of forming unity over against someone, Jesus effected a change at the anthropological level, launching a project called church. What opens up when we can enter into the perspective of the victim is the possibility of being forgiven – literally, let go, from the victimizing way of creating and maintaining togetherness, and thus of beginning to relate to other people without the need to gang up in order to survive.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: 1 Peter 2:4-10, Hosea 2:23, John 11:49-52
- 3 If you choose Optional Step 2A, you will need one card for each participant of The Procession, by John August Swanson. The cards can be purchased at www.anppm.org online store for \$3.00 each.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 In the last session, we saw that what the Gerasenes and Fernando's classmates had in common was a way of coming together in a certain way because they had somebody who was *not them*. This is the sacrificial model for forming unity.
- 2 When that way of forming unity is disrupted by the making human of the one who was "not us", the members of the groups have two options: find another someone who can be *not us*, or learn a new way to form unity.
- 3 What the two options have in common is that their ways of being together depend on a victim. It is the perspective on the victim that is different.
- 4 The deliberate project of which Jesus is the living stone completely reverses the sacrificial model, such that by standing alongside, and receiving our identity from, the apparently shamed one, empowered by the real honor and reputation that is his, we will be enabled to move entirely outside the entrapment of shame.
- 5 Once the sacrificial way of forming unity is disrupted it becomes a repetitive mechanism which just grinds on and on, tying people into self-diminishing patterns of behavior. In other words, something real has happened at the anthropological level.

- 6 To obey the word of God is to undergo the act of communication which inducts into a new people. The group that is summoned is nothing less than a new form of humanity.
- 7 Jesus has effected a change at the anthropological level, launching a project called church that had as its aim, from the beginning, to set up the possibility of all people being reconciled.
- 8 Atonement and the birth of a new people are different sides of the same thing. What is bounded, for those who are enabled to enter into the perspective of the victim, is the possibility of being forgiven – literally, let go, from the victimizing way of creating and maintaining togetherness, and thus of beginning to relate to other people without the need to gang up in order to survive.
- 9 Jesus' creative and founding activity, the living out of the role of the Forgiving Victim, is available wherever any group of people create their unity by ganging up against others, and whatever the particular cultural forms taken by their identity forged over against others. This is a distinctly non-religious, non-churchy project.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2A:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we will see how Atonement and the birth of a new people are two sides of the same thing.

EXPLAIN: Distribute the cards, *The Procession*, by John August Swanson. Point out that this is the painting that you have seen in the background of some of the video session. The original is in the Vatican Museum's Collection of Modern Religious Art.

ASK: What do you see in this image – name as many elements as you can.

What is happening?

How are the elements connected? For example, are the Bible stories connected to what the people are doing?

Does this image tell a story about what church is?

Optional Step 2B:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we will see how Atonement and the birth of a new people are two sides of the same thing.

ASK: If you have or do now belong to a church, please describe the membership requirements. In what ways do some requirements lend themselves to creating community over against others?

D I S T R I B U T E P A R T I C I P A N T H A N D O U T

W A T C H V I D E O : Induction into a people

40:35 minutes

Induction into a people D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Discuss what James means by saying that Jesus intended to found the church, but that this project is not particularly religious or churchy in the way we normally think of church.

Ask this question here if you did not use it in Optional Step 2B:

If you have or do now belong to a church, please describe the membership requirements. In what ways do some requirements lend themselves to creating community over against others?

Are there ways of belonging to a church community that allow for the possibility of a new unity to emerge that does not involve defining ourselves over against another?

James explains that what Jesus was doing in founding the church was undoing “existing forms of cultural togetherness”. How would you describe those forms of togetherness or belonging?

SESSION WRAP - UP

As old forms are undone, Jesus makes possible a “complete recasting of the way humans live together.” What are the signs that something like this might be happening in your community?

What might a new unity look like?

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we hear about the day the Hebrew religion went universal. We find ourselves inside Peter's discovery that there is no over-against in God. Reading Acts 10 we can almost sense the shock of the anthropological earthquake as it becomes clear that the shamed one, the cursed one is in fact the source of honor and forgiveness.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Acts 10
- 3 If you choose the Optional Step 2 activity, you will need a copy for each participant of the Handout: Cicada Tacos Recipe

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Given that the standard mechanism for group formation is one in which the quickest shortcut is "Who am I supposed to not be like?" or "Give me a difference!" what is it going to look like to not be over against anything at all?
- 2 Acts 10 is Luke's account of an extraordinary anthropological earthquake: the day that the Hebrew religion went universal.
- 3 Cornelius, the Roman centurion, was a "God-fearer," someone who worshipped in synagogues and lived the sort of moral life that flowed from monotheism, but did not actually convert to Judaism. He was a half-insider, half-outsider.
- 4 Peter has a vision which repeats three times in which a voice assures him that God has cleansed things that Jews were forbidden to eat, so Peter must no longer call them unclean.
- 5 The vision appearing three times connects it with the shame of Peter having denied Jesus three times.
- 6 The only time in the New Testament that Peter uses the Petrine Authority is to unbind the Gentiles: "but God has shown me that I should not call any human common or unclean."

- 7 Peter has been shown not to call any person impure or unclean. Now he sees that there is no over-against in God; therefore being on the inside of the life of God cannot legitimize any form of group identity which includes self-definition against another.
- 8 Reading Acts 10 we can almost sense the shock of the anthropological earthquake as it becomes clear that the shamed one, the cursed one is in fact the source of honor and forgiveness.
- 9 Peter magnificently catches up with what's going on by authorizing the sign to match reality, and with this the first Gentiles are baptized, insider status ceases to be over and against anything at all, and Judaism goes universal.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we hear about Peter's vision in which God insists he eat unclean things. As Peter lives with the consequences of this vision, he discovers that for God, no one is considered unclean.

DISCUSS: Handout copies of the Cicada Tacos recipe and invite someone to read aloud the list of ingredients. Ask another participant to read the cooking instructions. Allow participants to voice their immediate reactions to the idea of eating cicadas.

ASK: Does this sound appetizing?

If you would not eat Cicada Tacos, please explain why.

Would you be persuaded to eat Cicada Tacos if I told you that experts say that they are rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, low in fat, and have zero carbs? If not, why not?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **What might a new unity look like?**

35:36 minutes

What might a new unity look like?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Recalling the feelings of disgust expressed over the cicada recipe, discuss how Peter may have felt about being told to eat the unclean things.

Might he have felt similar disgust about entering a Gentile household?

Is there anything God might ask you to do that would evoke similar feelings?

The vision appearing three times connects it with the shame of Peter having denied Jesus three times.

What connection do you think Peter made between his shame and the command to eat unclean things? How are they alike?

What enables Peter to make the leap from the command to eat unclean things to saying that “God has shown me that I should not call any human common or unclean”?

What individuals or groups of people do you find yourselves calling common or unclean? What would enable you to make the leap that Peter made?

SESSION WRAP - UP

How has Peter's pattern of desire been re-formed? What is he learning about God's desires for the shape of religious communities?

Some results of the anthropological earthquake

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we work through the implications of Peter's discovery that the repulsive other is part of the same thing as we are. The one foundation of the Church is a shamefully crucified victim. And from that one repulsive other there begins the gathering of all people out of every nation, tribe, and language, all of whom are discovering who they are for the first time as they drop their boundaries over against each other. This is what it means to say that the church is *catholic*, the Greek word meaning "universal".

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 If you are brought up within a purity code, you actually learn to feel repulsed by unclean things. Ritual uncleanness is often accompanied by a physical reaction of disgust. You become a function of the purity code.
- 2 A massive loss of identity occurs as a group finds itself overcoming revulsion, repugnance, strong identity, and discovering the profane, threatening other as its equal.
- 3 As you discover this former other is inside the same thing as you on the same terms as you, you realize that this means that *you are never going to be you again*. A new "we" is being created. This is what James means by the process of learning to receive identity in the collapse of identity.
- 4 The one foundation of the Church is a shamefully crucified victim. And from that one repulsive other there begins the gathering of all people out of every nation, tribe, and language, all of whom are discovering who they are for the first time as they drop their boundaries over against each other.
- 5 What Jesus inaugurated was the possibility of a being together in which there is, in principle, no social "other", no group, nation, ethnicity, gender or any other identity we create in a binary way, that is not able to be brought into the gathering, the ekklesia, the new people of God.

- 6 This is what it means to say that the church is *catholic*, which is just a Greek word meaning “according to the whole” or “universal”.
- 7 Catholicity is not a decree, it’s a process, and a process of reconciliation produced by a witness to the truth.
- 8 Catholicity is everywhere latent. Wherever people sacrifice, it is possible for the sacrificed one to be Christ.
- 9 There is only one source of holiness for any of us, and it comes from the Forgiving Victim. You can’t be good, let alone holy, except in as far as you are forgiven.
- 10 The holiness of the Church describes this process of a new people being brought into being as a process of forgiveness.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we discuss the implications of Peter’s discovery that he is to call no one unclean, that for God there are no outsiders.

ASK: Have you ever heard the quip, “Why should I want to go to heaven when all my friends will be in hell?” Discuss what that expression implies about the types of people who go to heaven. Is this the type of heaven where you would like to spend eternity?

WATCH VIDEO: **Some results of the anthropological earthquake**

27:11 minutes

Some results of the anthropological earthquake

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Have you ever had the experience of discovering that some hated other was more like you than you had realized? What did it feel like to lose the difference between you? Did you experience, as James discusses, “a massive loss of identity”?

What has the word “catholic” meant to you? What meaning of the word does James offer?

There is a traditional hymn that begins, “The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord”. Discuss what meaning might be conveyed by re-phrasing it this way: The church’s one foundation is the Forgiving Victim.

What did you think of James’ reflection that the phrase “This day you will be with me in Paradise” was first spoken to a thief on a cross mounted on a city dump? Is that kind of heaven appealing to you?

If the result of the anthropological earthquake is that there are no longer insiders or outsiders, what is the basis for group identity? How do we form community or hold on to a sense of goodness without being over against another?

SESSION WRAP - UP

What does church look like in practice if the source of honor and forgiveness is the cursed outsider?

Inhabiting texts and being discovered

SESSION SUMMARY

A miracle is an extraordinary happening. It becomes a sign when the extraordinary happening becomes an act of communication. In this session we look at two miracle stories in which Jesus both heals and offers a sign that YHWH is working through him. What God is doing through Jesus is bringing the people out of Egypt and making them into a new people.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Mark 3:1-6, Deuteronomy 11:26-28, Deuteronomy 30:15-18, Deuteronomy 4:32-35, and Luke 11:14-20
- 3 If you choose the Optional Step 2 activity, you will need a copy for each participant of the Handout: I Have a Dream

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 In the next two sessions we will be looking at how Scripture can be part of our undergoing the act of communication which the disciples encountered on the road to Emmaus.
- 2 Jesus opened up Scripture to them and became the living interpretative principle in their midst. He gave their whole story back to them in such a way that they found themselves occupying a new place through those texts. We will explore some texts together in which we see that dynamic at work.
- 3 Humans are story-telling animals. It is through story that we have access to the truth. We can remember the same events from the point of view of those who find their togetherness at the expense of a victim, or as told by the forgiving victim at whose expense that togetherness was, and no need longer, be built.
- 4 James handles the texts as carefully prepared manuals for story-tellers, enabling them to find themselves inside the stories.
- 5 The account of the healing of the man with the withered hand in Mark 3:1-6 begins with Pharisees gathered in a synagogue who want to “categorize” the man, put him in a box, fit him into the categories of their story.

- 6 When Jesus' asks "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" he is referring to Moses' instructions in Deuteronomy to choose life by obeying the law. Disobeying the law means pursuing death and evil. One of the things you can't really do when faced with this choice is to say, "I will obey the commandments, which means not choosing life."
- 7 Jesus is grieved by their "hardness of heart", which is to say that Jesus is enacting Moses looking at the gathered as Pharaoh who will not "let my people go". The man with the withered arm has become a stand-in for the people of Israel.
- 8 Not only that, but by asking the man to stretch out his hand and restoring it (Deut. 4:32-35), Jesus has offered an indisputable sign that it is YHWH who is at work in him.
- 9 Jesus' miracles, where something which causes wonderment happens, are always signs pointing to something much bigger than that. A miracle is an extraordinary happening; a sign is how people interpret what happened.
- 10 Luke's reference to the "finger of God" in the healing story refers back to the contest between Aaron and Pharaoh's wizards in Exodus. The wizards cause plagues that are self-destructive, finally surrendering over the production of gnats, calling that the finger of God.
- 11 Asking Jesus for a sign that the healing was from God reminds us of Pharaoh asking for a sign from Moses and Aaron. The real sign was not any of the magic tricks, but God bringing the people out of Egypt and making them into a new people.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In the next two sessions we'll look at further dimensions of finding ourselves on the inside of a big anthropological shift, by looking at the sort of shift Jesus himself produced among his listeners as he brought out the fuller meaning of Old Testament texts.

ASK: Distribute the copies of the Handout: *I Have a Dream* and ask if anyone knows the patriotic American song, *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*? It's sung to the tune of *God Save the Queen* and the opening stanza is "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

What liberty is being lauded here?

Who won the liberty and who was it for?

(If there are participants from other nations in your group, ask them to share a verse from their patriotic anthems.)

EXPLAIN: Martin Luther King, Jr. famously invoked *My Country, 'Tis of Thee* in his *I Have a Dream* speech because it was a song everyone knew and he wanted to bring out the fuller meaning of it for them in the context of the struggle for civil rights. On your handout you have a copy of the end of that speech.

INVITE: Invite participants to read the speech, going around the room allowing each person to read one sentence.

ASK: What new meaning did Dr. King bring out in that old patriotic song?

Who was included in the celebration of liberty who had not been included before?

Who do you think felt encouraged that day?

Who might have felt challenged or threatened?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **Inhabiting texts and being discovered** 37:58 minutes

Inhabiting texts and being discovered

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Discuss the difference between a miracle and a sign. Why does James say that the two healing miracles were signs? What were they signs of?

In the healing of the man with the withered hands, Jesus is challenging the Pharisees at the heart of their sense of their own goodness. He accuses them of not living up to their own ideal of following Moses and the law.

What ideal of goodness was Dr. King challenging in his *I Have a Dream* speech?

What ideal of goodness do we strive to live up to? Whose unheard voice might challenge that ideal?

Discuss how you would feel if Jesus challenged your sense of goodness as he did the Pharisees?

Have you ever been involved with a group or organization that argued over things that didn't really matter? Did it ever lead to self-destructive behavior, as with Pharaoh's wizards? What did it take to move the focus of the organization on to the issues that mattered, or was that never accomplished?

SESSION WRAP - UP

In what ways might Jesus be grieved by our own or our community's "hardness of heart"?

SESSION SUMMARY

In this final session of Part Three, we encounter Jesus giving his contemporaries and us a reading lesson in how to interpret Scripture and our lives. We are always faced with two choices: we can interpret (and live) in such a way that we create mercy, and in such a way that we create sacrifice. In the two stories from Luke we will read together, Jesus enacts mercy and offers himself as the interpretative principle for Scriptures and our lives.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Luke 13:10-17, Judges 3:12-25, Job 36:5-16, Luke 19:1-6, Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, Matthew 12:7
- 3 If you choose the Optional Step 2 activity, you will need:
 - Enough headbands, one for each participant.
 - One index card for each participant which you have prepared in advance. Write one of the following terms on each card. If you have more than twelve people in your group, make additional copies of “Poor Synagogue goer” and “Poor Jesus follower” till you have the number you need.
 - Bent-over woman
 - Jesus
 - Synagogue leader
 - Rich Synagogue goer (1)
 - Poor Synagogue goer (2)
 - Rich Tax collector
 - Poor Jesus follower (3)
 - Leper
 - Woman of ill repute

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals a woman who has been bent over for eighteen years. The number eighteen harkens back to the story in Judges in which the people of Israel have been bound down under the evil King Eglon for eighteen years. They cry out to the Lord and the Lord sends them a deliverer.
- 2 However, in Luke's story the woman is not crying out for a deliverer. When she is healed by Jesus, the leader of the synagogue rejects Jesus. In other words, not only are the people of Israel not crying out for a deliverer, but when one turns up, the leader of the synagogue reacts like the evil King of Moab.
- 3 At this reaction, Jesus calls them "hypocrites" which is a reference to the book of Job: "the godless in heart (hypocrites) cherish anger; they do not cry for help when he binds them." In effect Jesus is saying that the people in the Synagogue cherish their own resentment rather than crying out for help when bound.
- 4 The real Israel cried out to YHWH for delivery, and in the absence of that, YHWH has come into their midst to rebuke them for their weddedness to resentment which leads them to not cry out. These people are undergoing a visitation from YHWH.
- 5 In Luke 19:1-6, we have Zacchaeus, a rich tax collector. Tax collectors were in effect the local enforcer of foreign taxation, and were expected to profit from it. They were thought of as quislings or traitors.
- 6 Zacchaeus is in a dangerous situation: he is a half-insider, half-outsider: one of us but also one of them. Being in a crowd could be risky for him.
- 7 Small in stature but as eager as the crowd to see who Jesus is, he wisely climbs a tree to observe at a safe remove from the crowd. Jesus then looks up and sees him, with warm regard rather than the hostility of the crowd. This is an odd experience for Zacchaeus who is usually looking up at others who are looking down on him.
- 8 Despite the grumbling of the crowd, Jesus stays at Zacchaeus' house. What Jesus is emphasizing is that YHWH delights in including people in, in bringing the most improbable, and indeed unsuitable people back in; YHWH has no delight in resentful righteousness.
- 9 As in the Emmaus story, the role of guest and host are reversed, protagonism is inverted so that it is the apparent guest who is the real host.
- 10 Whenever you interpret anything, you can read it two ways: in such a way that your interpretation creates mercy, and in such a way that it creates sacrifice.
- 11 When Jesus tells the Pharisees "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'", he is giving a reading lesson: "Go and sit under this word, and allow it to become the interpretative key to your approach to your fellow human beings."

- 12 Sacrifice is not only what goes on in the Temple, but the act of creating goodness over against others who are then judged, condemned as guilty and treated as sinners.
- 13 “Learning what this means” is not about getting the rules right, but about taking responsibility for your interpretation.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: We are going to read together two stories from Luke in which Jesus encounters people nursing hostility and resentment.

EXPLAIN: In this activity, we are going to play the parts of different people we might have encountered travelling with Jesus on the road. As we imagine ourselves in these roles, we will pay attention to times when we feel angry, ignored or resentful. The twist in this game is that you will not know your identity, though everyone else will! From their interactions with you, you will begin to discern who you are and how you should behave in this social setting from two thousand years ago.

Reassure participants that this game is not about historical accuracy and so they can feel free to bring their own imagination into the situation. There is no right or wrong way to respond to one another in this game!

Distribute the head scarfs. After everyone has tied theirs on, place one of the prepared notecards inside the headband on each of their foreheads so that the words are plainly visible.

EXPLAIN: Explain that the only rule in this game is that they must relate to one another according to the identity on the other person’s headband. Invite them to stand up and move around the room as they play the game. Explain that you will stop the game in about seven minutes.

PLAY THE GAME for about 7-10 minutes.

ASK: What were the clues that helped you guess your identity?
How did it feel to be your character?

Did you feel angry at any time? If so, please describe the situation.

Did you feel resentment towards anyone? If so, please describe the situation.

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **Reading for mercy**

46:56 minutes

Reading for mercy DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

In the story from Luke of the woman bent over for 18 years, when the synagogue leaders react angrily to Jesus healing the woman, Jesus accuses them of cherishing their anger.

Why would someone cherish their anger?

What benefits are derived from doing so?

Have you ever cherished your anger?

Brainstorm together how the crowd following Jesus feels about Zacchaeus when Jesus chooses to go to his house. Have you ever felt similarly, as if someone underserving of attention was singled out for praise? Does Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus help you interpret your reaction?

How have you interpreted the reference to sacrifice in Hosea 6:6, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings”?

James says that sacrifice is more than what happens in the Temple. What is sacrifice?

How does this contrast with God’s call for mercy?

WRAPPING UP PART THREE

When Jesus tells the Pharisees “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’”, he is giving a reading lesson: “Go and sit under this word, and allow it to become the interpretative key to your approach to your fellow human beings.”

Brainstorm together every day, mundane examples of times when we all can feel angry or resentful towards others. What would change if mercy was the key to our approach to others?

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 2: The gift of faith

HEBREWS 2:14 - 15

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

FOUR FACTS

Write four facts about yourself in the box in the space provided below. Three of them should be true; one of them should be false. The facts can relate to hobbies, family, work, education, habits, *etc.*

List four facts about yourself below (*three true and one false*)

1

2

3

4

Listen to the four facts of the others on your team, and write the fact you think is **FALSE** for each of them.

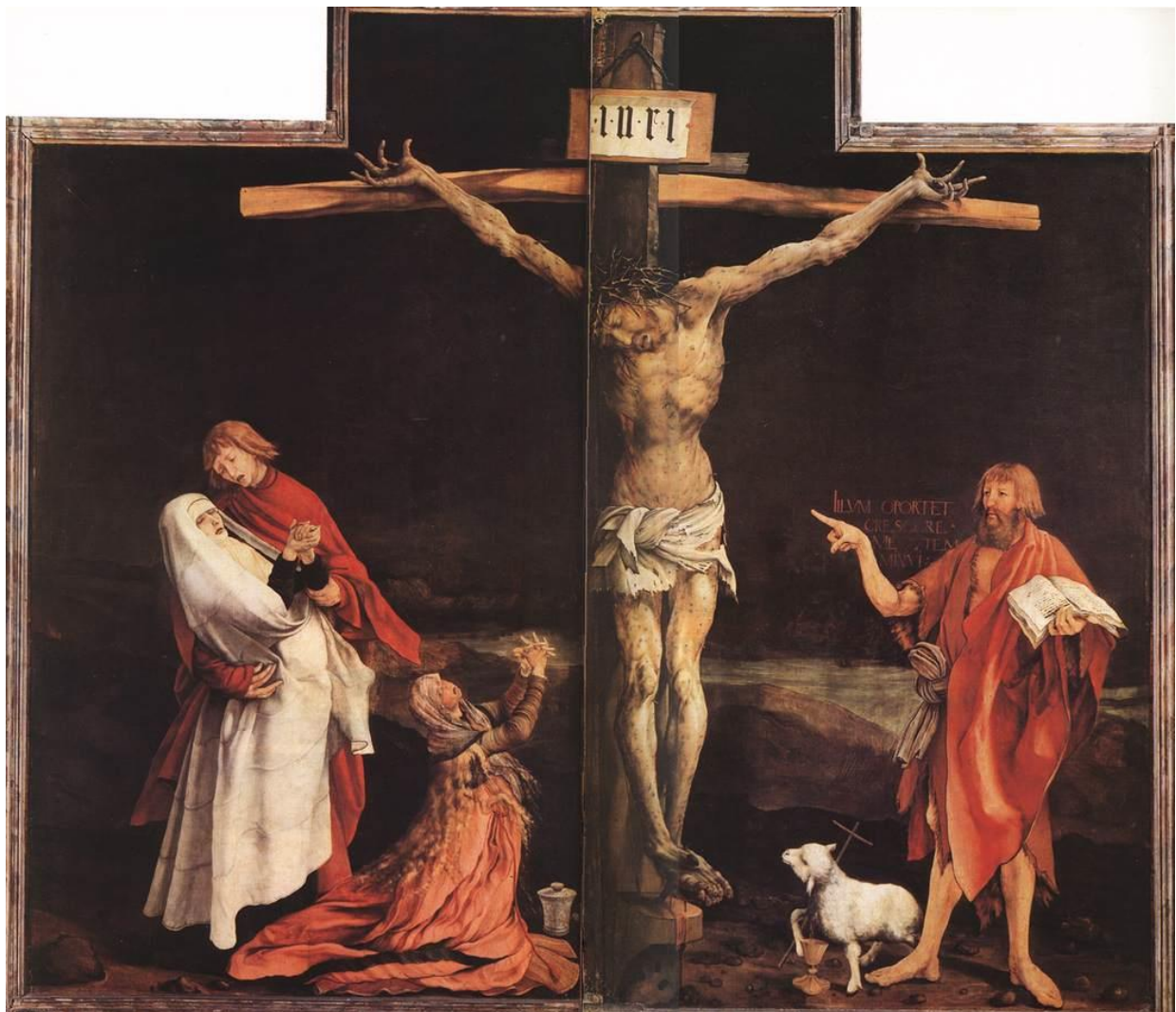
NAME	FALSE FACT
NAME	FALSE FACT
NAME	FALSE FACT
NAME	FALSE FACT

Jesus
the **Forgiving**
Victim
LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 3: **Undergoing Atonement:**
Ancient Hebrews

CRUCIFIXION



Grunewald, Isenheim Altarpiece (Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar)
<http://www.wga.hu/art/g/grunewal/2isenhei/1view/1view1c.jpg>

Jesus
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LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 4: **Undergoing Atonement:**
Gibeonites

2 SAMUEL 21:1 - 9

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."

So the king called the Gibeonites. Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to slay them in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah. And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make expiation, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?"

The Gibeonites said to him, "It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel."

And he said, "What do you say that I shall do for you?"

They said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them up before the LORD at Gibeon on the mountain of the LORD."

And the king said, "I will give them."

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD which was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

R O M A N S 8 : 3 1 - 3 2

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?

J O H N 1 9 : 1 3

... brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha.

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 5: **Undergoing Atonement: Venezuelans**

MARK 5 : 1 - 20

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.- And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him, "Send us to the swine, let us enter them." So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood. And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. But he refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marveled.

2 CORINTHIANS 5 : 18 - 21

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

ROMANS 3 : 21 - 26

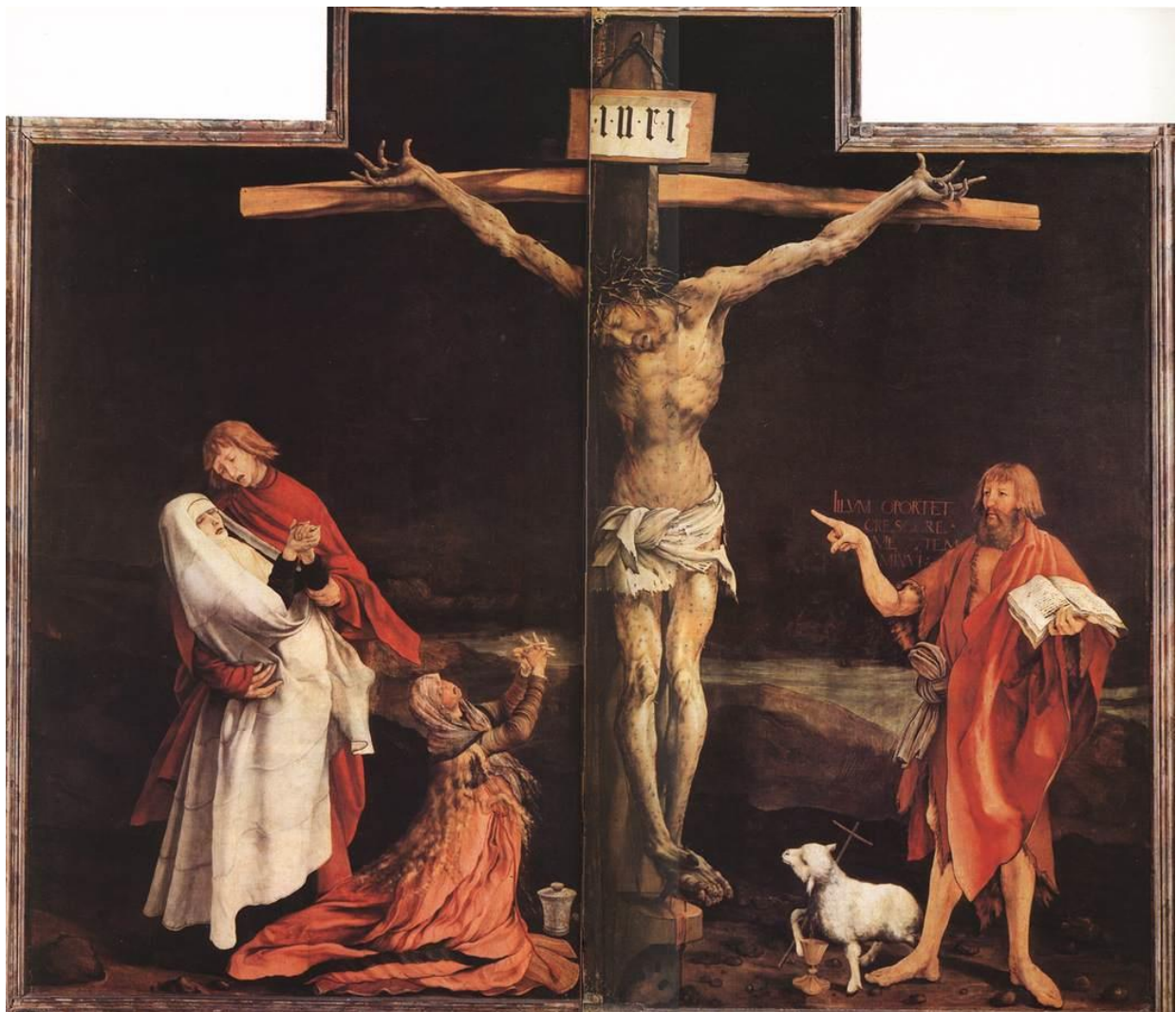
But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

Jesus
the **Forgiving**
Victim
LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 5: **Undergoing Atonement:**
Venezuelans

CRUCIFIXION



Grunewald, Isenheim Altarpiece (Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar)
<http://www.wga.hu/art/g/grunewal/2isenhei/1view/1view1c.jpg>

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 6: Induction into a people

1 PETER 2:4 - 10

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; And like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame." To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner," and "A stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall"; for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

HOSEA 2:23

"... and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Not pitied, and I will say to Not my people, 'You are my people'; and he shall say 'Thou art my God'."

JOHN 11:49 - 52

"You understand nothing at all. You do not conceive that it's expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." He did not say this from himself, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 7: **What might a new unity look like?**

CICADA TACOS RECIPE



CICADA TACOS

Ingredients: 2 tablespoons butter, 1 ½ pounds of cicadas (wings, legs and heads removed) , 1 tsp. chili powder, one tomato finely chopped, one onion finely chopped, 1 ½ tbsp. ground pepper, 1 ½ tbsp. cumin, 3 tbsp. taco seasoning mix, one handful chopped cilantro, taco shells, sour cream, shredded cheddar cheese, shredded lettuce

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat the butter in a frying pan and fry the cicadas for 10 minutes, or until cooked through.
2. Remove from pan and roughly chop into ¼ inch cubes. Place back in pan.
3. Add the chopped onions, chilies, tomato, season with salt, and fry for another 5 minutes on medium-low heat.
4. Sprinkle with ground pepper, cumin and oregano to taste.
5. Serve in taco shells and garnish with cilantro, sour cream, lettuce and cheddar cheese.

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 7: What might a new unity look like?

ACTS 10

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius.” And he stared at him in terror, and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.” When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has cleansed, you must not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had

seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say." So he called them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; and he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any human common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, saying, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the seaside.' So I sent to you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

And Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 9: Inhabiting texts and being discovered

MARK 3 : 1 - 6

Again [Jesus] entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

DEUTERONOMY 11 : 26 - 28

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known."

DEUTERONOMY 30 : 15 - 18

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you this day, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I

declare to you this day, that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.”

DEUTERONOMY 4:32-35

“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, *by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm*, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.” (Italic added for emphasis)

LUKE 11:14-20

Now he was casting out a demon that was dumb; when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons”; while others, to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven. But knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

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I HAVE A DREAM

...This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

**EXCERPT FROM THE CLOSE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S
 SPEECH DELIVERED AUGUST 28, 1963 IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

SESSION 10: Reading for mercy

LUKE 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

JUDGES 3:12-25

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms. And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. But when the people of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he girded it on his right thigh under his clothes. And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people that carried the

tribute. But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he commanded, "Silence." And all his attendants went out from his presence. And Ehud came to him, as he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat. And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly; and the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and closed the doors of the roof chamber upon him, and locked them. When he had gone, the servants came; and when they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "He is only relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber." And they waited till they were utterly at a loss; but when he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them; and there lay their lord dead on the floor.

J O B 3 6 : 5 - 1 6

"Behold, God is mighty, and does not despise any; he is mighty in strength of understanding. He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their right. He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous, but with kings upon the throne he sets them for ever, and they are exalted. *And if they are bound in fetters and caught in the cords of affliction, then he declares to them their work and their transgressions, that they are behaving arrogantly.* He opens their ears to instruction, and commands that they return from iniquity. If they hearken and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasantness. But if they do not hearken, they perish by the sword, and die without knowledge. The *godless in heart* cherish anger; *they do not cry for help when he binds them.* They die in youth, and their life ends in shame. *He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity.* He also allured you out of distress into a broad place where there was no cramping, and what was set on your table was full of fatness." (Italic added for emphasis)

LUKE 19:1-6

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

HOSEA 6:6

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.

MATTHEW 9:13

"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

MATTHEW 12:7

"And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless."

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PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

Scripture References

VIDEO: THE GIFT OF FAITH

John 14:1, 29

Hebrews 2:14-15

Galatians 5:1

VIDEO: UNDERGOING ATONEMENT: ANCIENT HEBREWS

Luke, Gospel of

John 17

Matthew 27:24-25

Sirach 50:5-21

Zechariah 14:9

VIDEO: UNDERGOING ATONEMENT: GIBEONITES

2 Samuel 21:1-9

Romans 8:31-32

John 19:13

VIDEO: UNDERGOING ATONEMENT: VENEZUELAN S

Mark 5:1-20

Matthew 8:28-34

Luke 8:26-39

Luke 22:19

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Romans 3:21-26

VIDEO: PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

Isaiah 6:1-5

Isaiah 45:15-19

Jeremiah 44

Ezekiel 18

VIDEO: INDUCTION INTO A PEOPLE

1 Peter 2:4-10

Isaiah, Psalm 118

Deuteronomy 4:10

Hosea 2:23

John 11:49-52

VIDEO: WHAT MIGHT A NEW UNITY LOOK LIKE?

Acts 10:1-48

Luke 7: 1-10

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Galatians 3:13

VIDEO: INHABITING TEXTS AND BEING DISCOVERED

Luke 24:27

Mark 3:1-6

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

Deuteronomy 30:15-18

Exodus 9:22; 10:12,21; 14:26

Numbers 11:23

Deuteronomy 4:32-35

Luke 11:14-20

Exodus 8:19

VIDEO: READING FOR MERCY

Luke 13:10-17

Judges 3:12-25

Job 36:5-16

Luke 19:1-10

Hosea 6:6

Matthew 9:13

Matthew 12:7

John 8:2-11

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART THREE: *The difference Jesus makes*

Glossary

Apostolic Witness | the witness to what Jesus did and what he was about that was borne by the twelve Apostles. They were chosen by Jesus for the purpose of being able to give witness to him. They accompanied him in his public ministry, from his baptism in the River Jordan until his ascension into heaven. Beyond Jesus's teachings, which they passed on, they are people who underwent something because he was in their midst. He acted something out in their midst at an entirely human level, and they are the witnesses to that acting out both in what they said and put into writing, and by the visibility of the impact of that acting out on their lives.

Atonement | the central Christian claim that Christ died for us and for our sins, associated with forgiveness. Before it was a theory, it was a liturgy performed in the First and Second Temples. The Hebrew word that we translate as "atonement" originated from a word meaning "covering," the notion that the priests were casting a protective covering over the people to shelter them from any possible wrath of the Lord. The rite was considered not merely as paying for transgressions but involved an understanding that creation itself needs to have its bonds opened up and renewed so it may give witness to, and shine with evidence of, the glory of God.

Catholic | a Greek word meaning "according to the whole" or "universal." Its colloquial meaning as "opposed to Protestant" or "loyal to the Pope" is a debasement. The notion of catholicity is not an add-on to the Gospel or an optional extra once you've got your basic Christianity sorted out. It is an essential dimension of what Jesus was about.

Church (Latin *ecclesia*) | To say that Jesus founded the Church means something very specific. It means that starting with his words in the Eucharist, "This is my body which is given up for you", Jesus was deliberately enacting the laying in Zion of the new foundation stone which Isaiah had prophesied. He was demonstrating in advance, by means of a solemn mime, which he urges us

to extend in time and space, that he was about to become the victim around whom the new unity would in fact be created.

Crisis of Faith | or Crisis of Self, a normal and expected part of faith. It's precisely because you are relaxed about someone bigger than you holding you that you are relaxed enough to undergo crises of self. If there isn't anyone bigger than you holding you in being, then you have to hold tight to yourself, and not allow yourself the luxury of being re-worked from within.

Double Bind | when we receive two contradictory instructions at the same level of meaning, both of which we seek to obey. This leads to a form of paralysis and accompanying psychological distress. Typically this is because of our inability to distinguish between "imitate me here" and "do not imitate me here yet, for your own good" in our relationships. Double binds may tie us into repetitive mechanisms, which will make us, in turn, less competent and more dangerous than we might otherwise have been.

Liturgy | customary and traditional worship rites. Undergone and performed by a group of people as something is done for, towards, or at them, in their midst. An activity commemorating and bringing to life a purely benevolent being coming towards you, doing something for you.

Moab | a neighboring kingdom to that of Ancient Israel. It became a symbol of evil and oppression. It oppressed and conquered Israel in the period of the Judges, and Israelites served the King of Moab for 18 years.

Pharisees | a group of observant lay religious teachers and leaders active at the time of Christ. It is members of this group who accuse Jesus, in Mark 3:1-6, of performing a miracle on the Sabbath, which, since it was a form of "work", was against the law. It is easy for us to read the Pharisees as the bad guys in the stories about Jesus (and all religious groups seem to appeal to their fair share of legalistic sticklers), but it is possible that they were, at least initially, more sympathetic to Jesus, actually testing him, eager to see how he'd cope with the situation they put before him, in case he really was the Prophet who was to come.

Protagonist/protagonism (*see glossary for Book 1*) | Where we had thought of ourselves as in charge, we are beginning to see that all along, and without God in any way wanting to diminish or humiliate us, it is we who were at the receiving end of his protagonism. “I AM” is something that cannot be grasped, coming toward you, which turns out to be the real protagonism, the one who brings everything into being, of which we are peripheral symptoms.

Scapegoat | The presence of YHWH crucified and risen amongst us is of a forgiving victim, the scapegoat come back without vengeance, shown to have been actively creating the breakthrough moment of new unity all along. A considerable refinement of the wrath perceived around Mt. Sinai, which was the projection from wrathful people onto a voice that could barely be heard breaking through to them.

Scapegoat Ritual | a Temple ritual, part of an ancient rite of Atonement, later re-described in the book of Leviticus, by which a lamb that stands in for a demon is expelled. The priest laid hands on it, transferring to it all the sins and transgressions of the people, and it would then be driven with sticks out of the Temple and likely to the edge of a precipice, from which it would have been forced to jump. Probably, after the priest laid hands on it, no one else should touch it, since it had become a seriously taboo object. This is in contrast to the Ancient Greek ritual, in which the people of the city would touch the robes of the man as he walked out to be cast from a cliff, thus transferring their sins to him before he died.

Sign | the interpretation of something notable that happens. Jesus’s miracles are always signs. They happen within a context, pushing an interpretation. Something comes to be seen that was not seen before. As the people work out what Jesus’s signs mean, their whole understanding of goodness and togetherness is upended.

Wisdom | a goddess-like figure with whom God had created everything and brought everything into being, starting at the Holy Place, and which, or who, dwelt with God in the Holy of Holies along with His Holy angels.

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING *for the* UNHEARD VOICE



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

PART FOUR: UNEXPECTED INSIDERS

PART FOUR *Content Summary*

At this point in our journey we are discovering new dimensions of how we are insiders within a great shift: old patterns of belonging are being undone from within; we can no longer so easily form identities over and against victims because the Forgiving Victim has called us into a new space. As we work through our desire and our belonging, what will the new shape of community take, one in which there are no longer insiders and outsiders, only those who are being inducted into a human story in which death does not have the final say? And how will we respond to the challenges that flow from this?

PART FOUR *Videos and Corresponding essays*

Part Four consists of ten sessions. Here are the titles and the length of the video clip that accompanies each session as well as the corresponding parts of the *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* essays:

SESSION	VIDEO	ESSAY
1	The working of desire 49:55	Essay 9: <i>Prayer: Getting inside desire's shift in us</i> Introduction, parts 1 - 4
2	The Our Father 46:02	Essay 9: <i>Getting inside desire's shift in us</i> parts 5 - 8
3	The restaurant and the half-way house 25:56	Essay 10: <i>The portal and the halfway house: Spacious imagination and aristocratic belonging</i> Introduction, parts 1 – 2 through paragraph ending “The half-way house, like the Church, is an effective sign of a draw from beyond itself that is empowering its residents into becoming creators of society.”
4	The portal and the Embassy 25:47	Essay 10: <i>The portal and the halfway house: Spacious imagination and aristocratic belonging</i> rest of part 2 - 5
5	The Banquet 31:09	Essay 10: <i>The portal and the halfway house: Spacious imagination and aristocratic belonging</i> parts 6 & 7
6	A little family upheaval 31:09	Essay 11: <i>A little family upheaval</i> Introduction, parts 1 - 3
7	The beginning in the middle 23:23	Essay 11: <i>A little family upheaval</i> parts 4 & 5
8	The grandeur in the everyday 24:19	Essay 11: <i>A little family upheaval</i> part 6

9	Neighbors and insiders: The Good Samaritan 39:37	<p>Essay 12, <i>Neighbors and Insiders: What's it like to dwell in a non-moralistic commandment?</i></p> <p>Introduction, parts 1-3 ending with the paragraph that ends, "And how victimhood is an ineluctable reality in our species."</p>
10	Neighbors and insiders: From sacrifice to mercy 42:25	<p>Essay 12, <i>Neighbors and Insiders: What's it like to dwell in a non-moralistic commandment?</i></p> <p>rest of part 3-6</p>

The working of desire

SESSION SUMMARY

Part Four continues our journey of discovering ourselves on the inside of the big anthropological shift set in motion by Jesus the Forgiving Victim. In this session we look at the way what we call prayer involves undergoing huge shifts at the level of desire. Jesus' instruction on prayer takes for granted our need for approval. Rather than receiving our regard from the social other, Jesus urges us to receive our regard from "Another other" who is not part of the social other and so not in rivalry with us.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Matthew 6:1-8, Romans 8:22-27

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The common understanding of desire is that my desires are rational and originate within a fairly stable self or "I" who desires objects. If I desire the same thing as someone else, this is either accidental or the result of the other person imitating my desire.
- 2 Following this understanding as we read in Matthew 6:7-8, if God knows our desires before we express them then there is no need to pray at all.
- 3 This common understanding of desire suggests that my real self is essentially private and how I act in public always contains a certain dissimulation.
- 4 James' follows a different understanding of desire put forward by René Girard's mimetic theory: we desire according to the desire of another. It is the social other, the social world which surrounds us, which moves us to desire, to want, and to act.
- 5 Through this body being imitatively drawn into the life of the social other, gesture, language and memory form an "I" that is in fact a symptom of the social other.
- 6 In this picture, prayer is going to start from the presupposition that we all desire according to the desire of an other. It is going to raise the question: Yes, but which other?

- 7 In the world of animist cults it is perfectly obvious that people are moved by what is other than themselves. Spirits, idols and so forth are merely violent disguises by which the social other temporarily displaces us, makes us act “out of character” and traps us into being functions of themselves.
- 8 The Spirit of God, however, is not in rivalry with us and is thus able to move us from within, bring us into being, without displacing us. This is why we refer to the Spirit as indwelling, or inhabiting a person, without any connotation of violence.
- 9 Jesus moving off to pray shows that he understood his need to detox from the pattern of desire of the crowd.
- 10 Jesus takes for granted that we need approval. The question is: whose approval is going to run us?
- 11 If we get the approval of others, we are given a “self” that is the function of the group’s desires. Belonging and approval go together so that it is exceedingly unlikely that we will be self-critical in our relationship with the group.
- 12 Some of us play the part of villain, but that also is a form of relying on the regard of the other for your sense of who you are.
- 13 Jesus urges us to receive our regard from “Another other” who is not part of the social other and so not in rivalry with us.
- 14 The storeroom is a place where we can detox from the regard of the social other.
- 15 Our Father who sees in secret doesn’t despise our smelly little desires, and in fact, suggests that if only we can hold on to them, and insist on articulating them, that we will actually find ourselves, over time, moving through them organically to wanting more.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Welcome participants to Part Four, *Unexpected insiders*. Explain that at this point in our journey we are discovering new dimensions of how we are insiders within a great shift. As we work through new patterns of desire and belonging, we will ask:

What will the new shape of community take, one in which there are no longer insiders and outsiders, only those who are being inducted into a human story in which death does not have the final say?

And how will we respond to the challenges that flow from this?

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: This session includes a review of desire and the way in which we are inducted into patterns of desire by the social other.

INVITE: Invite participants to share a memory of a desire for a birthday or Christmas gift that they desperately wanted as a child.

ASK: As you look back on your desire, do you consider it to have been a wise or a foolish desire?

Did you pray to God about this gift? What was your prayer?

How did the adults in your life respond upon hearing of this desire?

How did you respond to either receiving or not receiving the gift?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **The working of desire**

38:05 minutes

The working of desire DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

James begins by reviewing a central idea in the course, that we desire according to the desire of the other. He repeats this insight from Part One: “Through this body being imitatively drawn into the life of the social other, gesture, language and memory form an ‘I’ that is in fact a symptom of the social other.”

At this point in the course, does it ring true to say that you are a symptom of the social other?
Can you offer examples?

What good things are you discovering flow from the social other?

How does the social other sometimes move us in ways that are not good for us?
Can you offer examples?

Discuss the difference between being *possessed by* a spirit and the *indwelling of* the Spirit.

In what way is possession an act of violence?

How does the Spirit of God dwell within us without any connotation of violence?

Describe a time when you were admired and honored publically. Some examples are receiving an award, advancement, or perhaps recognized as the unofficial leader of your social group.

How did it feel to be admired?

What impact did it have on your sense of self?

Is it an experience you would like to repeat? Why or why not?

Jesus teaching on prayer takes for granted that we need approval. When we get the approval of others, we are given a “self” that is the function of the group’s desires.

What are the pitfalls of being a function of the social other?

Referring to the Optional Step 2 activity, have you ever prayed as an adult for something you would be ashamed to admit in public? Why does James say that praying our “smelly little desires” is a good thing?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Is there a place that does (or could function) like the storeroom for you, where you can go to detox from the regard of the social other? Perhaps it is not a physical space, but a time during the day. Take a moment to select a “storeroom” if you do not already have one, and in the next few moments see if you can locate a smelly desire that could be voiced in that place. (If participants are keeping a journal, you can suggest they record their smelly desire there.)

SESSION SUMMARY

As we read the Our Father in this session, James invites us to imagine ourselves as highly malleable, being stretched between two force-fields, two patterns of desire – that of the social other and the Other other. The Our Father is inducting us into a pattern of desire which will enable us to inhabit the regard of the Other other for whom death is not and for whom scarcity is simply not a reality.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Luke 18:1-8, Luke 6:28, Matthew 5:44-45, Isaiah 55:1-3, Matthew 6:7-15

Main ideas

- 1 By becoming insistent desirers, we will actually be given a heart, be given to be. If we do not desire, we will not have a heart.
- 2 In Luke 18:1-8, the judge is a perfectly non-mimetic person and the widow is the equivalent of a smelly desire.
- 3 God is not like the judge, he is like the irritating desire which gets stronger and stronger. It is only through our wanting something that God is able to give it to us.
- 4 The simple act of saying “I want” is psychologically important, because saying it involves me in getting over the shame of being found to be the sort of person who wants such a thing.
- 5 The reason we are to pray for those who persecute us is so as to become part of the pattern of desire of the Other other, who is not part of the tit-for-tat of the social other, and is perfectly generous towards it.
- 6 Being held in the regard of the Other other for whom death is not allows us to take on projects whose fruition we may not see.
- 7 What is it like to be looked at through eyes that only know abundance, for whom scarcity is simply not a reality?

- 8 Spending time in the larder allows us to be public in a new way, daring to imagine unimaginable things and thrilling to the belief in “something out of nothing”.
- 9 In Jesus’ picture it is God who is the subject, who has a desire, an intention, a longing, and we who are asking to become a symptom of his pattern of desire, rather than that of the social other.
- 10 As we read the Our Father, imagine yourself as highly malleable, being stretched between two force-fields, two patterns of desire. The Our Father is inducting you into a pattern of desire which will enable you to inhabit the “being stretched” which is how the desire of the Other other brings us into being.
- 11 Evil is not a thing in itself, it is only known in its being left behind, never to be given oxygen by being dignified with a concentrated gaze.
- 12 The mimetic working of our desire, that we desire according to the desire of the other, does not seem to be a foreign import into these texts on prayer, but offers a rich reading of them that goes with their flow.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: This session includes a line by line reading of the Our Father.

INVITE: To introduce the topic, invite participants to share the version of the Our Father that they use. Ask the group to recite the Our Father aloud together, allowing the differences to just be there.

ASK: What is your favorite verse from the Our Father? What does it mean to you.

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **The Our Father**

46:01 minutes

The Our Father DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

In the parable of the importunate widow, James says that God is not like the judge but rather the widow, who represents a persistent, smelly desire. How is God like a persistent smelly desire?

In what ways does our pattern of desire shift if we pray for those who persecute or abuse us?

How does our pattern of desire begin to shift when we can imagine ourselves held in the regard of God for whom death is not?

Or for whom scarcity is not a reality?

Or for whom everything is open-ended and pointing to more than itself?

Discuss this excerpt from Essay 9: “[Jesus] knows how susceptible we are to taking our enemies on board, and becoming just like them by acting out reciprocally towards them. So he offers us this recipe for freedom: do not allow yourselves to be run by those who do you evil.”

What does it mean to say that we can “be run” our enemies?

What is accomplished by praying for our enemies?

How does James talk about evil in this session? In what way is evil something that we can encourage with “a concentrated gaze”?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Recalling your favorite verse in the Our Father, in what ways is that verse preparing us to hear an unheard voice speaking to us?

The restaurant and the halfway house

SESSION SUMMARY

The next three sessions will offer, by means of some images, a way in to a non-idolatrous living of Church, one characterized by spacious imagination and a complete lack of rivalry in the belonging. In this session we will play with two images that enable a shift of perspective, allowing Church to become a sign of our being drawn into more healthy and productive patterns of life.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The Church is not an object we grasp, but a sign of our being grasped and held.
- 2 The next few sessions will be an attempt to offer, by means of some images, a way in to a non-idolatrous living of Church, one characterized by spacious imagination and a complete lack of rivalry in the belonging.
- 3 In the image of a Really Classy Restaurant in which we are Really Aristocratic Guests, the Master Chef has invited us to dine because he likes us and the food he prepares is a sign of his delight in us.
- 4 The waiters in this restaurant have the mistaken idea that the restaurant is all about them and that they know better than the Chef. They often look down on the guests and become involved in their own petty quarrels and rivalries.
- 5 Because we are Aristocratic Guests, we do not become embroiled in the waiters' quarrels, but are actually untroubled by and perhaps even fond of them. The Chef manages to smuggle his food to us, the distracted waiters notwithstanding.

- 6 This image allows us to have a shift in perspective. Most discussions of what is meant by Church emanate from a waiterly perspective, giving the waiters way too much importance. In fact, Church is really all about the Chef making something available for increasingly aristocratic guests, and what the guests then make of what they are given.
- 7 The image of the halfway house allows another shift in perspective about Church. Like a halfway house for people coming out of prison, the Church is not an end in itself but exists as a staging post on the way to more healthy and productive patterns of life.
- 8 Like the halfway house, the Church is a sign of a benevolent intention from outside the pattern of prison socialization.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In the next few sessions, James is going to offer us a few images of Church not as something we can grasp onto, but as a sign of our being held onto and drawn into more healthy and productive patterns of life.

INVITE: One image he is going to use is that of a Really Classy Restaurant. Restaurant experiences can be either good or bad, of course.

ASK: Ask participants to describe a time they had a good restaurant experience. Please explain what made the experience so good for them.

Then ask if anyone has had a bad restaurant experience. Please describe what made the experience bad.

WATCH VIDEO: **The restaurant and the halfway house** *26:00 minutes*

The restaurant and the halfway house

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

What does it mean to say that we sometimes find ourselves making an idol of the Church?

Are there other institutions you have made an idol of?

How have you reacted when, or if, they have disappointed you?

How does idolizing the Church empty it of any potential for truth?

What sort of role have the “waiters” in Church played in your sense of belonging to Church?

Have they been a stumbling block for you? If so, in what way?

Or have you, as a waiter, been a stumbling block for guests? If so, in what way?

Would you like to cultivate a more “aristocratic” relationship with them?

What would help to develop an aristocratic pattern of desire?

How does it change your expectations of Church to think of it as a halfway house, not an end in itself but a sign of a draw from beyond itself?

SESSION WRAP - UP

How easy or difficult is it for you to forgive bad waiters or bad chefs in Really Classy Restaurants?

How easy or difficult is it for you to forgive the Church you know when it fails to live up to the sign it is meant to be?

What would help free you to be run by the Chef's delight in you?

The portal and the Embassy

SESSION SUMMARY

With more intriguing images, we are invited to imagine Church as a sign that what we had taken for normal was in fact more like being in prison. The whole point of the sign that is Church is to enable us to get used not to being run by death, shame, fear and rivalry so that we can be freed for new forms of togetherness and enjoyment right here.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 This session begins with a final similarity between the half-way house and Church: both are structured spaces in which people move beyond being free *from* something to being free *for* something. In the case of Church, being free from being run by death and its fear to being free for new forms of togetherness and enjoyment.
- 2 The Good News is a communication that we needn't be in prison thus making us aware that what we regarded as normal was more like "being in prison".
- 3 Like a portal from another universe, Church is a sign that a completely unknown reality has started to instantiate itself in our midst, thus altering our understanding of the social reality we took for normal.
- 4 What's odd is that the portal that has opened up looks remarkably like a dead criminal, executed under shameful circumstances. It seems more like a failure than a rich act of communication.
- 5 At first the portal feels like an invasion, and then like a "prison break-in". Slowly we become aware that a prison with a hole in it is no longer a prison. Some may prefer the stability of inside, but the fact is that the entire system has been altered.
- 6 What used to be a closed system which didn't even know it was closed, turns out instead to be a satellite reality dependent on a huge and massively healthy "outside" whose existence had not previously been suspected.

- 7 The employees of an Embassy are citizens of another country in our midst as bearers of the values and interests of their own country. Their gaze can teach us to look at our own country and values in a quite different light from the ones to which we are accustomed.
- 8 Ambassador has a looser meaning of someone who has become a shining example of what a school or apprenticeship hopes to turn out.
- 9 The whole point of the portal is not to extract people from prison and send them somewhere else, but to “turn” apparent citizens of one reality into active agents of another. Part of the work of the portal, its half-way house function, is to enable us to get used to not being run by death, shame, fear and rivalry until such time as we find ourselves “turned” so that we can actually become part of its Embassy function.
- 10 It turns out that the portal that has opened up has never had any intention of taking any of us “elsewhere”. It turns out that the only “elsewhere” is *here*.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: James is using a series of images to demonstrate that Church life involves undergoing a huge shift in perspective. Sometimes travel to a foreign country can give us an entirely new perspective on our culture. And sometimes having a foreign guest in our house can allow us to see ourselves through their eyes.

ASK: If a member of your group immigrated to your country as an adult, begin by asking them to recall what seemed strange about the customs they encountered when they first arrived. Has anyone ever had a guest from another country stay in their home? What things that were part of your daily life did they find difficult to understand?

Has anyone ever discovered a new perspective on their life while travelling?

WATCH VIDEO: The portal and the Embassy

25:52 minutes

The portal and the Embassy DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

In what ways are we imprisoned by our fear of death?

How does the unheard voice of a shamefully executed criminal free us from that free?

James says: "It turns out that the portal that has opened up has never had any intention of taking any of us 'elsewhere'. It turns out that the only 'elsewhere' is *here*."

What is the "elsewhere" being referred to?

Is the prayer Jesus taught us, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven," a prayer for the opening of the portal?

If so, how does that change our pattern of desires towards "here"?

One of the functions of Church is to enable us to get used to not being run by rivalry until such time as we find ourselves becoming active agents for the new reality.

In what ways are we and our communities run by rivalry?

What are the signs that we are becoming active agents for the new reality in which we are freed *from* rivalry *for* something new?

What particular practices or activities of your local church, if you belong to one, function as a sign of the new reality?

SESSION WRAP - UP

This can be done as a group conversation, in pairs, or as a silent journaling exercise:

Sometimes when we travel to a foreign country, we resist the cultural experiences that are opening up for us. It can feel comforting to find a familiar food or drink and we long for the familiar. What parts of life in “prison” do you find comforting? In what ways might your longing for the stability of the familiar prevent you from experiencing the new reality that is opening up?

SESSION SUMMARY

This session continues the theme of freeing ourselves from idolatry of Church by looking in particular at rules and clerical leadership. We will work out the implications of the realization that in the half-way house that is the Church there is not a single officer who is not just as much an ex-con as all the other residents.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Matthew 20:25b-28, John 5:44, Luke 12:1b-2, Mark 7:13, Matthew 23:4, Matthew 23:24, Matthew 23:8, 10b
- 3 Paper and pens for everyone.

Main ideas

- 1 This session continues on the theme of freeing us from idolatry, in particular of rules and clerical leadership.
- 2 Prohibitions have no real place in the life within the Church. They are merely moot remnants of what things looked like before you found yourself sucked into a new way of life.
- 3 Because all your freedom is *for*, to such an extent that you don't really understand any more what freedom *from* is from: you are so entirely dedicated to what is constructively appropriate that all prohibitions are moot.
- 4 For some people, it is hard to imagine the world of freedom beyond the rules, that the restrictions are only the entry-point into a process of re-habitation.
- 5 In the halfway house that is the Church there is not a single officer who is not just as much an ex-con as all the other residents. Church officers may appear to be more like prison guards than officers whose joy it is to help us get adjusted to a new reality.

- 6 And the officers themselves, with only the tiniest hint of an intuition of what a healthy society looks like, may react to a changing situation by calling for a lock-down rather than helping the residents imagine creative new possibilities for freedom.
- 7 Behind the images of restaurant, halfway house, portal and Embassy is the Wedding Banquet unfurling itself in our midst, beginning to turn us into signs of a becoming in which we are held securely. This is the central reality made available to us through the Mass.
- 8 Because this is a party for us to enjoy, we can allow a certain raucousness of humor, spilling over from the banquet, to break through to us.
- 9 By laughing at ourselves with others, we begin to discover how like them we are, what fun it is to be with them, and how much fun it is going to be to enjoy them more in the future.
- 10 Those who resist being able to laugh at themselves, whose sense of righteousness clings to an impossibility of being tickled by ridicule, may experience the laughter emanating from the Banquet as wrath.
- 11 Being able to inhabit the tension between treating something seriously and not taking it seriously at all is an essential element of life in the Church.
- 12 Only those who are prepared to sit lightly to being a nobody will be found, to their own surprise, to have become a somebody!
- 13 Where true Authority has been given it will always be sensed in the enlivening of the sign in those being taught, and in the transparency and loss of self-importance of the one teaching.
- 14 A normal part of growing in health in the new Kingdom is a “trust but verify” attitude towards religious leaders and religious teachings.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we are invited to imagine something of the freedom and joy that accompanies life within the new reality that is breaking in through the portal called Church.

EXPLAIN: Work in pairs to develop a step by step guide to washing your hands. You will have 5 minutes to get down as precisely as you can instructions for hand washing for someone who has never encountered a sink, faucets, running water, soap, towels or anything else involved with hand washing.

DEBRIEF: After about five minutes, ask for one pair to volunteer to allow you to follow their instructions to see how well they work! Move the group to a sink and have one of the pair read the instructions slowly, step by step. You will do exactly what the instructions say, and nothing more!

Allow the group to discuss how well or how poorly the instructions worked.

ASK:

Who do you think would find these rules helpful?

Would you find the rules helpful or would they impede your efficiency?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **The Banquet**

31:13 minutes

The Banquet DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

What has your relationship been to rules coming from religious authority?

Do you see a value in the rules or have they been stumbling blocks to your sense of belonging in the Church?

James says that prohibitions have no real place in the life within the Church. Why do you think he makes that claim?

What is the role of humor and laughter in the life within the Church?

James says that the laughter emanating from the Banquet may be experienced by some as wrath. Why might that be so?

Why is suspicion of religious leaders a normal part of the growth in health in the new Kingdom?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Just as the hand washing rules point beyond themselves to a proficiency in which the rules are no longer necessary, we can imagine some rules of the Church in the same way.

What Church rules do you feel point beyond themselves to a freedom of life in which they are no longer necessary?

A little family upheaval

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we fill out the idea of secondariness and the alteration of our relationship to our past and our future that flows from the shift of perception that who I am does not start with me. We will see how sin, forgiveness and Creation are part of a movement in which “I AM” involves us on the inside of creation: *being forgiven is prior to being created and sin is known in its being forgiven.*

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Hebrews 1:1-2, John 16:7-11
- 3 Construction or other art paper, an assortment of crayons, markers or colored pencils
- 4 Copies of the Handouts: Draw By Instruction #1 and Draw By Instruction #2

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The session continues the discussion of what is meant by “secondariness” by recalling two images from previous sessions: Johnny being forgiven by Mrs. O’Reilly and the laughter which is central to the heavenly banquet.
- 2 What these images have in common is that both Johnny and the person learning to laugh at themselves have found themselves undergoing a hugely healthy shift of perception such that *who they are doesn’t start with them.*
- 3 Secondariness does not go along with any sense of being “second rate” or “only second” but is accompanied by a sense of relief, and of a possibility of opening out.
- 4 It is a moment of someone else’s presence towards me which opens up for me my own relationship, simultaneously, to my past and my future. When trudging along by myself, my past is behind me and my future is before me. But undergoing something in the present at the hands of someone who is much stronger than myself, I discover that who I thought I was and who I think I am becoming are both altered by the quality of that presence.

- 5 The image of the bureaucratic ruler of a small planet is illustrative of two things:
 - The change of perspective that occurs when what seemed like a not-particularly significant object in your ken moving towards you, turns out to be in fact a vastly superior force moving you towards them.
 - A particular moment of awareness, the tipping point of the axis, in which you are able to look back at where you were coming from and see it in an entirely new light. “Oh my God, to think that I used to think that that was normal and stable!” You are on the cusp of two realities: one is grinding down into futility, the other is spinning you into a more demanding participation in the life of something beyond itself.
- 6 When we talk about what Jesus came to do, did and is doing in our midst, we are talking about what looks to us like an alteration of the axis of Creation rather than a resolution of a moral problem.
- 7 In the order of apparent logic, an “it” God creates an “it” world in which we find ourselves, do something wrong, and need forgiving, by an “it” intervention which puts things right.
- 8 In the order of discovery we only discover the beginning through our experience in the middle: “I AM” is determined to make alive in us the wonder of being God, and so decides to involve us on the inside of creation.
- 9 In our case, *being forgiven is prior to being created*. This is what the ancient doctrine of “Original Sin” teaches, insisting on that very delicate “backward glance from the cusp of the new creation” as vital to any understanding of who we are finding ourselves to be and how we should behave.
- 10 There was a notion of sin, and righteousness and judgment that was proper to our world, in which the prosecuting counsel, the accuser, always tended to win. This understanding is being completely reshaped because it turns out that the victim of this world’s judgment, sense of righteousness, and definition of sin was God himself.
- 11 *Sin is known in its being forgiven.*

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: This session focuses on the new understanding of sin and forgiveness made possible by what Jesus did, and is doing, in our midst.

INVITE: To begin, distribute the art paper and crayons, markers or colored pencils and give this instruction:

“Please draw a picture of anything you choose. You will have 5 minutes.”

DO NOT GIVE ANY OTHER INSTRUCTIONS! If participants ask for more direction, simply repeat the initial instructions. Some participants will find this difficult, but that’s okay.

EXPLAIN: Now we are going to take turns completing a drawing by following instructions. Divide the group into pairs and then distribute *Handout: Draw By Instruction #1* to one member of each pair being careful that the other member does not see it. Explain that the person with the handout will be guiding their partner to complete two drawings by verbal instructions only. You will have two minutes to complete as much of the images as you can.

After two minutes, explain that you will now switch roles: the one who was drawing will now give instructions and the one who was giving instructions will now be drawing. Distribute *Handout: Draw by Instruction #2* to the other half of the pair as before, explaining that they have 2 minutes to guide their partner by verbal instruction to complete as much of the drawings as they can.

After everyone has had a chance to draw by instruction, invite the pairs to compare their drawings to the originals and discuss the similarities and differences they observe.

DEBRIEF: Which exercise was easier for you: creating the original drawing or drawing by instruction?

What made things difficult or easy in each of the exercises?

Which was more fun for you and why?

Describe how it felt to be receiving the instructions. Did you feel pressure or did the instructions help you relax?

Would you describe your drawing as second rate or an improvement on the original?

CONCLUDE: The usual way of drawing a picture is to begin with an image and then go about creating it. The first exercise followed that pattern, requiring us to generate an image and then draw it. In the second exercise we worked in reverse: the instructions to create it were given to you first, and then you discovered the image. In this session we are going to see that oddly enough, sin and forgiveness involve a similar reversal in our normal way of thinking.

D I S T R I B U T E P A R T I C I P A N T H A N D O U T

WATCH VIDEO: **A little family upheaval**

31:13 minutes

A little family upheaval **D I S C U S S I O N Q U E S T I O N S**

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

How would you explain what James means by our “secondariness”?

He says that there is nothing “second rate” about our secondariness. What does our secondariness make possible for us?

The phrase used by children in rebellion against parental authority, “You’re not the boss of me!” often captures adult feelings as well.

What is important about claiming to be the “boss” of yourself?

What are some of the pitfalls of clinging to the idea that who you are begins and ends with you?

Recalling the two different ways of creating a drawing from Optional Step 2 activity, why might it be a relief to discover that who you are doesn’t start with you at all?

What seemed important to you about the experience of the bureaucratic ruler on the small planet?

How does this image shift, if at all, your understanding of yourself as the protagonist of your own life story?

Have you ever felt the draw of a much stronger presence altering your reality? Can you describe the experience?

James says that what Jesus came to do, did and is doing in our midst was not about the resolution of a moral problem but an alteration in the axis of Creation.

Have you thought of Jesus as having come to resolve a moral problem? If so, what problem was it?

How has Jesus shifted the axis of Creation?

An interesting reversal happens when we begin to discover that sin is known in its being forgiven.

How does that shift the typical sequence of sin and forgiveness?

Can you describe the process by which being forgiven precedes the awareness of sin?

James says that *forgiveness is prior to being created*.

In what way does our creation begin in the middle, with our being forgiven?

SESSION WRAP - UP

What does sin look like through the eyes of the Forgiving Victim? What attitude does the Forgiving Victim have towards our sin?

The beginning in the middle

SESSION SUMMARY

The Gospel accounts of Jesus death and resurrection in Luke and John narrate a sense of setting right what had gone wrong in the Garden in Genesis. We will see that the true narrative of Creation is to be found as the definitive Adam emerges as forgiving victim, thus opening up the possibility of our sharing in something utterly non-futile – Creation.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Genesis 3:19; Luke 22:42, 44; Luke 23:43-46; Romans 8:18-23; Genesis 3:2-3

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 In this session we'll look at some narrative ways in which the New Testament brings out how it was that a particular human intervention in history was the fulcrum by which the Creator involves us as active participants in Creation.
- 2 What we have in Luke's narrative account of Jesus' Passion is Genesis run backwards, Jesus getting right what Adam got wrong.
- 3 In Luke's account of praying at the Mount of Olives Jesus is standing in for Adam, the human pattern of desire, or will, is being drawn once more to the Father's pattern of desire. (Genesis 3:19 and Luke 22:42, 44)
- 4 What the Creator looks like while creating is not what it appears to be in Genesis – an outside force arranging and ordering things out of some sort of formlessness. What the Creator Spirit looks like, and is, is the pattern of desire of the one who occupies the space of being a dead person for us out of love. (Luke 23:43-46)
- 5 The real beginning has appeared in what appears to be the middle. This looks like, and is, a painful upheaval full of suffering, which is in fact an act of childbirth. (Romans 8:18-23)

- 6 Chapter 20 in the Gospel of John narrates this same sense of setting right what had gone wrong in the Garden in Genesis. Previously, Eve had been excluded from the Garden, but that exclusion has now been undone.
- 7 As in Luke, in John's account of Jesus' appearance to Mary and the disciples gathered in the room behind closed doors, it turns out that the Spirit from Creation is in fact the Spirit of the Forgiving Victim, and that it is in the degree to which we allow ourselves to be enlivened by the Spirit of the Forgiving Victim that we enter into being created.
- 8 The early Christian texts show that the true narrative of creation is to be found in the account of Jesus death and resurrection, where the definitive Adam emerges as forgiving victim, thus opening up the possibility of our sharing in something utterly non-futile – Creation.
- 9 The forgiveness of sins, rather than being in the first instance a moralistic matter, is what it looks like for us that the Deathless One has opened up the battened-down culture which eventually makes outsiders of us all.
- 10 The Forgiving Victim dares us to aspire to be valued insiders in the adventure of Creation from our place on the cusp of the shifting axis.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

In this session the focus is on some narrative ways in which the New Testament brings out how we are being involved by the God as valued insiders in adventure of Creation.

ASK: Share the popular one-liner that is sometimes used to excuse mistakes: *God isn't finished with me yet!*

What would it mean to “be finished”?

What does this quip reveal about our attitudes towards our failures and imperfections?

Is God’s attitude towards our failures and imperfections different than our own?
If so, in what way?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: The beginning in the middle

23:25 minutes

The beginning in the middle **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

James says that in Luke’s account of the Passion we see Jesus, the definitive Adam, getting right what the first Adam got wrong. What was it that Adam got wrong? What is Jesus getting right?

What is revealed about the Creator in the Gospel accounts is that the Creator Spirit looks like, and is, the pattern of desire of the one who occupies the space of being a dead person for us out of love.

What is created by occupying that space?

In Romans 8:19, we read about ourselves: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.” It seems that Creation has been “groaning in travail” waiting for us, the sons of daughters of God!

How does it feel to discover that we are valued insiders of the life of God?

How does it feel to discover that everyone, even those whom we thought of as outsiders, are on the inside with us?

James says that according to both Luke and John, the Spirit from creation is in fact the Spirit of the Forgiving Victim; that it is in the degree to which we allow ourselves to be enlivened by the Spirit of the Forgiving Victim that we enter into being created.

How does one become open to the forgiveness offered by the Forgiving Victim?

How does receiving forgiveness create a new you?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Referring to the opening activity, rephrase the quip to: *God isn't finished with Creation yet!*

Ask:

In what ways might God still be active in Creation?

How might God be involving us in the ongoing work of Creation?

The grandeur in the everyday

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session we encounter Mary as the first and most complete example of “secondariness”. And we will see how John gives us an account of Jesus death as the fulfillment of the rite of Atonement, stretching it out of theater and into history. By what Jesus has done among us and for us, we find ourselves being brought into a new family, all of the same generation, brothers and sisters who are becoming secondary beacons of I AM.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Luke 8:19-21, Dante’s Canto XXXIII, John 19:26-27, John 16:20-22, Isaiah 66:7-8; John 20:17, Mark 10:29-31

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 The culminating Theophany, in which the very presence of YHWH, the Creator, allows himself to be glimpsed takes place not on some suitably majestic mountain or even in a Temple Sanctuary but in a hideaway whose locked status “for fear of the Jews” is almost a parody of the veiled Holy Place in the Temple.
- 2 Mary, Jesus’ mother, becomes the portal through which Creation out of Nothing takes place, to be in historical fact what had been symbolized by the Tabernacle overshadowed by the Presence of the Most High.
- 3 Mary is the first and most complete example of “secondariness”, receiving who she is through the regard of the Presence which has come into history through her.
- 4 Mary is not in rivalry with the huge elective family that her son is bringing into being (Luke 8:19-21). By the day of Pentecost, her motherhood of Jesus has been stretched into her being sister of her son’s sisters and brothers. The one who provided the raw material for the New Creation has become an insider within that new creation.

- 5 In the immediate run-up to Jesus' death, John tells us about several things that happen as the ancient Atonement rite is fulfilled, being stretched out of theater and into history:
 - Like the Priestly garments, Jesus' tunic is seamless
 - The soldiers cast lots over the tunic, as the High Priest would have cast lots to decide which of the unblemished lambs would stand in for YHWH and which for Azazel
 - Jesus is given vinegar to drink; the priests consumed the entrails of the lamb (the "portion of the Lord" with the help of vinegar)
- 6 Jesus' final word in John's Gospel can be translated "it is completed" or "finished" or "consummated" or "settled by sacrifice". Each translation brings out a different dimension of meaning that is present in the word.
- 7 John 19:26-27 can be read in light of the image of "travail" or giving birth: Jesus urges his mother whom he greets as "Woman" as though she were Eve, to behold him, her son and draws the eyes of the beloved disciple towards himself as *mother*, indicating that in his going to death he is bringing to birth a new family.
- 8 The grandeur of Creation has erupted quietly into some very subtle changes of relationship among very ordinary people. What is being brought into being is a new family, one in which the elective has a huge priority over the biological.
- 9 We find ourselves being brought into a new family, all of the same generation, brothers and sisters who are becoming secondary beacons of I AM.
- 10 The "communion of saints" refers to the elective family of named persons within history who know and like each other. These people have found that all the joy of the new creation has been birthed in them as they have been empowered by the forgiving victim to step out of rivalry, revenge and resentment into being held together by the light that flows from the lamb.
- 11 The unnamed disciple in the Emmaus story allows any one of us to inscribe our name into the story alongside Cleopas and find ourselves as named members of a real family, creating real and lasting ties, discovering who we really are around the presence of the Forgiving Victim.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session, we discover how I AM is bringing us into a new family, all of the same generation, as elective brothers and sisters.

INVITE: Invite the group to divide into pairs. Ask them to share with one another a story from their childhoods that they enjoy recalling with a sibling, cousin or friend close in age. Allow about 3-5 minutes.

DEBRIEF: Back with the whole group ask:

How do your parents or adults in the story remember the event you recalled?

How do shared memories strengthen bonds?

How do our memories remind us of who we are?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **The grandeur in the everyday**

24:21 minutes

The grandeur in the everyday DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *60 minutes*

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Please share what Mary, Jesus' mother, has meant to you and your faith journey.

James describes Mary as the portal through which Creation out of Nothing takes place and also as the most complete example of "secondariness".

How can we follow Mary's example of not being in rivalry with each other as brothers and sisters of her son?

How does this shift in generational relationships represented by Mary as mother stretched into being sister give us a model for the very subtle changes taking place in everyday relationships?

Given all the sibling rivalry in the Old Testament (Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, for example), how is Jesus making possible a new kind of sibling relationship?

How do the stories you shared in the Optional Step 2 activity represent something of how the new non-rivalrous stories we are learning to tell will shape us into a new unity?

In going to his death, Jesus opened up the possibility for God to be our Father in the same way the he was Jesus' father. What does it mean to say that God is our Father?

James shows us several ways the Gospel of John points to Jesus fulfillment of the rite of Atonement.

Do you recall some of the connections John makes?

What does Jesus' mean when he says, "It is finished"? What is finished?

How is the Atonement liturgy being fulfilled?

Why do you think this section is called "the grandeur in the everyday"?

What subtle changes in everyday relationships are opening up for us?

SESSION WRAP - UP

Reflect together on why this section is called "the grandeur in the everyday". What grandeur is made possible by finding ourselves part of a real family, one that forms its unity around the presence of the Forgiving Victim?

Neighbors and insiders: The Good Samaritan

SESSION SUMMARY

In our reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel, we will glimpse what it is like to be on the inside of the life of God. The answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" turns out to be "The one who showed him mercy." An insider in the life of God is an active creator of neighborliness.

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: Colossians 3:1-5, Luke 10:25-37, Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Leviticus 19:33-34

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Christianity is a religion of grace, not of laws or morals.
- 2 In this picture of Creation, it's the Alive One coming towards us who opens us up to the realization that where we were before was dangerously out of kilter and we are being drawn towards something much greater.
- 3 The approach in Paul's letters is not "do X, and then you will become Y", but rather, "Because you are finding yourself X, so do Y".
- 4 The whole burden of this course has been this: how it is that someone coming towards us, and into our midst, catches us by surprise and enables us to be turned into ... ourselves-for-each-other, something much richer and more zest-inspiring than we could guess while we thought we knew who we were. The very reverse of boring!
- 5 The question "What would Jesus do?" presumes an absence: "What would Jesus do if he were here?" Asking "What is Jesus doing?" presumes a presence, more like "What is it like to live according to the Spirit which Jesus is breathing into us?"
- 6 We are being drawn into a flexible imitation of Jesus, not imitating him mechanically, but creatively.

- 7 Luke frames the parable of the Good Samaritan as a discussion of what it looks like to become an insider in the life of God.
- 8 Our only access to finding ourselves loved is through learning to love someone else.
- 9 In Leviticus we find the meaning of neighbor heading in the direction of becoming universal, which is worrying legally. If everyone is your neighbor, then the term “neighbor” loses its meaning.
- 10 The Priest and also the Levite had quite solid motives for giving a wide berth to the potential corpse. Coming in contact with corpses or blood would definitely impede their ability to serve God in the Temple.
- 11 The Samaritan is not a totally outside “other” – a complete foreigner. He occupies the place of being sufficiently like us to get us all riled up by the minor differences between us. As in our reading of the Road to Emmaus, the one who will turn out to be the bearer of what is true is the one who seems to be “not one of us”.
- 12 On seeing the half-dead man, the Samaritan is “moved to pity” – the exact word in Greek used to describe God as “viscerally moved”. This is what it looks like to be on the inside of the life of God. This contrasts with the form of taking part in the life of God of the Priest’s Temple duty to eat the entrails of the sacrificed animal.
- 13 The word neighbor refers not to the passive object of the benevolence, mandated or not, but to the active creator of neighborliness. The answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” turns out to be “The one who showed him mercy.”
- 14 Being on the inside of the life of God is finding yourself swept up into the inside of an infinitely attentive creation of neighborliness amidst all the victimary contingencies of human life.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

Step 1:

Invite participants to share ways in which they have noticed the content, questions or insights from the previous sessions showing up in their lives.

Optional Step 2:

Introduce this option by explaining: In this session we are going to explore how being insiders in the life of God is anything but boring! James says that it involves us in flexible imitation of Jesus.

EXPLAIN: We are going to play a game to see what emerges from a simple instruction to imitate one another. The game is called Evolution! Here's how it works:

Someone begins by making a movement and an associated sound. Examples are clapping your hands twice, snapping fingers, or waving your hand while saying "Hi there!" The person next to them imitates the first person and adds something of their own, a new movement or sound. For example, clapping your hands once followed by a finger snap. The imitation plus one new thing continues around the circle and if mistakes happen, they get incorporated, too. The game is over when the movements have been passed around the circle, returning to the first person who tries to repeat the entire sequence.

PLAY THE GAME

DEBRIEF: What does this game have to do with the flexible imitation of Jesus?

What was required in order to imitate the movements and sounds accurately?

Was trying to imitate one another boring? What was *not* boring about it?

Did you find adding the new element challenging or easy? How so?

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **Neighbors and insiders: The Good Samaritan**

39:39 minutes

Neighbors and insiders: The Good Samaritan

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

The approach in Paul's letters is not "do X, and then you will become Y", but rather, "Because you are finding yourself X, so do Y".

How does this change our approach to being good?

What is the use or function of a moral code in Paul's configuration?

Discuss the perspective of the Priest and the Levite: How was it possible for them to see their own actions as good and Godly?

In what ways might we be falling into a similar pattern of goodness?

What was so "good" about the Samaritan?

How – and who – was he imitating flexibly and not mechanically?

What was important about having a Samaritan be the bearer of truth? In what ways did it challenge or stretch the lawyer?

What "bearer of truth" might challenge or stretch you in the same way?

After hearing this reading of the parable, how would you answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

SESSION WRAP - UP

Invite participants to journal in silence about the following question: What prejudices or moral codes prohibit you from showing mercy to a hated other or unheard voice?

SESSION SUMMARY

In the final session of the course, we reach some conclusions about living according to mercy, the resurrection as an impetus for moral life, and that being inducted into the Christian faith is about being drawn in, by an initiative not our own, into becoming aware of what has been done for us. They are, however, only conclusions in the sense that the course is ending. As we discover the most difficult truth of all, that we are liked irrepressibly as we are, our journey continues as we seek to discover what the new shape of community will take, one in which there are no longer insiders and outsiders, only those who are being inducted into a human story in which death does not have the final say. And how will we respond to the challenges that flow from this?

SUPPLIES

- 1 Video monitor
- 2 Handout: John 13:34, John 15:12-17, John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
- 3 Handout: Course Logo
- 4 You might consider having a special dessert to celebrate the completion of the course.

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 Goodness or badness according to “sacrifice” enables us to be good by contrast with some defiling other.
- 2 Goodness or badness according to mercy is discovered in our being moved, or not, to show neighborliness to one considered defiling.
- 3 The attitude toward victims (the defiling other) is the criterion for neighborliness.
- 4 The Samaritan is able to draw near to the place of death with no fear. He is not moved by death; it holds no draw or fascination for him.
- 5 The deathlessness of God is such that it is not in rivalry in any way at all with the reality of death. What is meant by the resurrection as an impetus for moral life, is that we are inducted into beginning to live as if death were not.

- 6 We desire according to the desire of another who is our model. If the model is God, and the object “creation” or everything that is, then the questions becomes, “how do we learn to love, to desire, everything that is, in the same way that God does?” But God is not like human models in any obvious sense.
- 7 What we have in Jesus’ resurrection is a fully human set of eyes for whom death is not, a real human life story that is a living out at the anthropological level of the deathlessness of God.
- 8 As death loses its power, so commitment to the flourishing of what is fragile and precarious becomes possible, and our relationship to time changes.
- 9 The new commandment Jesus gives to his disciples consists in his doing something for his disciples. His loving them in quite a concrete way sets something in motion such that they are going to find themselves enabled to reproduce it for each other.
- 10 Because we desire according to the desire of the other, the question is always: which other? When the other is Jesus, then, as we see Jesus doing for us, so we do.
- 11 If Jesus’ commandment in John 15:12-14 were a moralistic commandment it would be as if Jesus said, “Look, I’ve done something for you, now do what I say.”
- 12 On the contrary, the gift of creating the possibility for the disciples to become Jesus’ friends and his commandment for them to create it *are the same thing*. There is no moralism here.
- 13 Jesus makes it possible for us to share his desire at the level of equality which is that of friendship. So we are enabled to desire as Jesus desires, according to the Father.
- 14 This is essential to being inducted into the Christian faith: it presupposes that before we do anything, we are drawn in, by an initiative not our own, into becoming aware of what has been done for us.
- 15 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is much richer than an abstract piece of moralism; it is an invitation to dwell in what it looks like to be undergoing the presence of One who loves us, to be held in the regard of the Forgiving Victim in our midst.
- 16 What we’ve been looking at in this course is how the regard of one who likes us coming into our midst to try to prove to us that most difficult of truths: that in the midst of all the mess, the fear, the violence and the hatred which abound in our world, we are *liked* irrepressibly as we are.

GATHERING OVER THE MEAL

20 minutes

GETTING STARTED

10 to 15 minutes

As you gather for your last session, explain that before you watch the video you will reflect on the road you have travelled together.

Invite participants to share a fond memory from the time you have spent together.

What ideas or insights from the course have been particularly meaningful for you?

INTRODUCE THE VIDEO

In this final video, James will make some conclusions and raise questions that will guide us as our journey with the Forgiving Victim continues beyond the framework of the course.

DISTRIBUTE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

WATCH VIDEO: **From sacrifice to mercy**

42:22 minutes

From sacrifice to mercy DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

60 minutes

What jumped out at you?

Where do you have questions?

What seemed really important to you?

Discuss the different ways goodness and badness is achieved according to sacrifice and according to mercy.

How did, does, Jesus make God available to us as a model of desire?

Discuss James' reasons for saying that Jesus' new commandment to love one another is not a moralistic commandment.

Now that you have reached the end of the course, share how your understanding of what Christianity is all about has changed.

Do you agree with James statement from the introduction to the course, that Christianity is about discovering just how much you are loved?

Distribute the Handout: Course Logo and ask:

How would you explain the course title, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim: Listening for the Unheard Voice*, and the logo image of the Lamb to someone who wanted to know what the course is about?

AS YOU COMPLETE THE COURSE

Please share this message from James with your group:

"So here is where this introductory course leaves off. I hope that you have begun to get a sense of something that is true independently of my attempt to teach it, a center of meaning to which I've been pointing but which is not of my invention, one from which so much more flows than I have been able to bring out here. I hope that you are leaving with an enriched sense of the Crucified and Risen One who is just there, alongside you, calling you into being, forgiving you and challenging you, teaching you to laugh at yourself, not despising you or putting you down. One who wants to see what you are going to make of this, is curious and excited to journey with you in ways I can't anticipate. So where will you take it? How will you build each other up? I look forward to your filling me in so that my journey is enriched by yours!"

ASK: Where would you like to go from here?

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 1: The working of desire

MATTHEW 6 : 1 - 8

“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

ROMANS 8 : 22 - 27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 2: The Our Father

LUKE 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people." In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

LUKE 6:28

"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

MATTHEW 5:44-45

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, *so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.* (Italic added for emphasis)

ISAIAH 55:1-3

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

MATTHEW 6:7-15

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Jesus
the **Forgiving**
Victim
LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 5: The Banquet

MATTHEW 20:25B - 28

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your slave: even as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

JOHN 5:44

“How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

LUKE 12:1B - 2

“Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”

MARK 7:13

“You ... make void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on.”

MATTHEW 23:4

“They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to move them.”

MATTHEW 23:24

“You blind guides, you strain out gnats and swallow camels.”

MATTHEW 23:8, 10B

“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren ... you have one master, the Christ.”

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 6: A little family upheaval

HEBREWS 1:1 - 2

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

JOHN 16:7 - 11

“It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Defence Counsellor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment; about sin, because they do not believe in me, about righteousness because I’m going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

Jesus
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LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 6: **A little family upheaval**

DRAW BY INSTRUCTION #1

IMAGE A

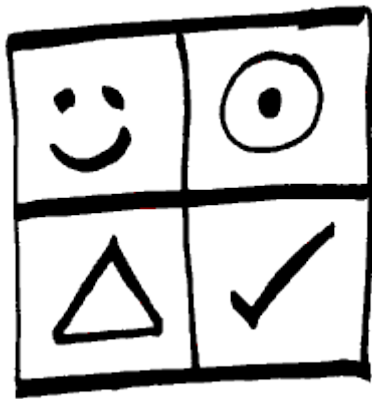
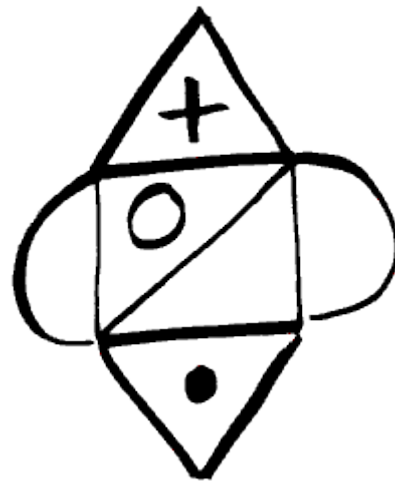


IMAGE B



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LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 6: A little family upheaval

DRAW BY INSTRUCTION #2

IMAGE C

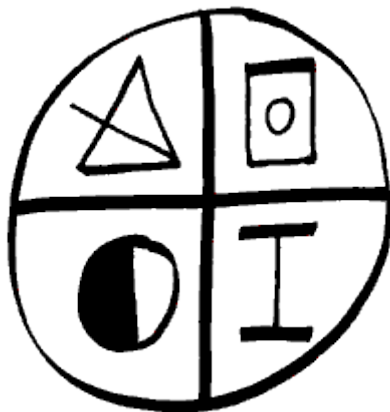
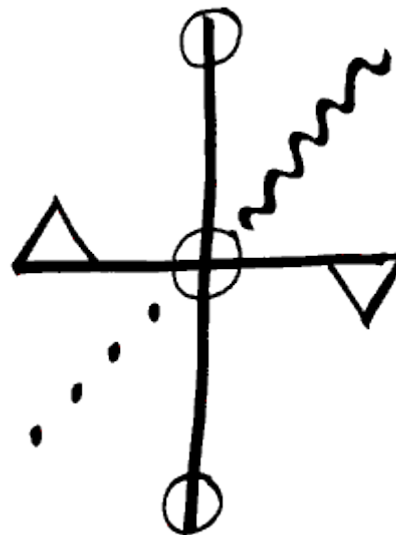


IMAGE D



Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 7: The beginning in the middle

GENESIS 3:19

"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return."

LUKE 22:42, 44

"Father, if you wish, take away this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

And being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like clots of blood falling down upon the ground.

LUKE 23:43-46

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said "Father into thy hands I commit my Spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

ROMANS 8:18-23

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

GENESIS 3:2-3

"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 8: The grandeur in the everyday

LUKE 8:19 - 21

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." But he said to them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

THE FIRST LINES OF CANTO XXXIII OF DANTE'S *PARADISO*

Maiden yet a Mother, daughter of your
son; at once the most humble of creatures
yet higher than them all; for in you the
plan from before all time rests as in its
final end; So much did you ennoble
human nature, that its creator had no
second thoughts about becoming its
creature.

JOHN 19:26 - 27

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

JOHN 16:20 - 22

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

ISAIAH 66:7-8

“Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a son. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her sons.”

JOHN 20:17

“Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

MARK 10:29-31

“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Jesus the Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 9: Neighbors and insiders: The Good Samaritan

COLOSSIANS 3:1-5

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.

LUKE 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" And taking him up, Jesus said ... "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

DEUTERONOMY 6:5

... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

LEVITICUS 19:18

“You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

LEVITICUS 19:33-34

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

Jesus *the* Forgiving Victim

LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE

PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

SESSION 10: From sacrifice to mercy

JOHN 13:34

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

JOHN 15:12-17

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another."

JOHN 3:16

For it was in *this* way that God loved the world: that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (Italic added for emphasis)

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

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PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

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COURSE TITLE AND LOGO

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PART FOUR: *Unexpected insiders*

Scripture References

VIDEO: THE WORKING OF DESIRE

Matthew 6:7-8
Matthew 6:6
Romans 8:22-27
Mark 8:33
Matthew 6:1-4
Matthew 6:5-6

VIDEO: THE OUR FATHER

Luke 18:1-8
Luke 6:28
Matthew 5:44-45
Isaiah 55:1-3
Matthew 6:7-8
Matthew 6:9-15

VIDEO: THE BANQUET

1 Corinthians 6:12
Matthew 20:25
John 5:44
Luke 12:1b-2
Mark 7:13
Matthew 23:4
Matthew 23:24
Matthew 23:8,10b
Thessalonians 5:19

VIDEO: A LITTLE FAMILY UPHEAVAL

Hebrews 1:1-3
John 1:1-2
1 Corinthians 8:6
Colossians 1:15-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 16:7-11

VIDEO: THE BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE

Genesis 1:1-2
Genesis 3:19
Luke 22:42
Luke 22:44
Luke 23:43-46
Romans 8:18-23
John 20:1-23
Genesis 3:2-3
Genesis 2:7
John 20:22

VIDEO: THE GRANDEUR IN THE EVERYDAY

Luke 2
Luke 8:19-21
John 19:26-27
John 16:20-22
Isaiah 66:7-8
John 19:34b
John 20:17
Mark 10:29-31

VIDEO: NEIGHBORS AND INSIDERS: THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Colossians 3:1-5
Romans 6:3-14
Luke 10:25-37
Deuteronomy 6:5
Leviticus 19:18
Leviticus 19:33-34
Hosea 6:6

VIDEO: NEIGHBORS AND INSIDERS: FROM SACRIFICE TO MERCY

Romans 12:1-2
John 13:34
John 15:12-14
John 15:15-17
John 3:16
1 Corinthians 13:4-7
John 16:33

<p>Jesus <i>the</i> Forgiving Victim <small>LISTENING for the UNHEARD VOICE</small></p>	<p>PART FOUR: <i>Unexpected insiders</i></p>
	<p>Glossary</p>

Bibliolatry | the default Protestant error is “bibliolatry,” making an idol of the Bible.

Ecclesiolatry | the default Catholic error is “ecclesiolatry,” making an idol of the Church.

Evil | There is nothing evil in God, and any attribution of evil to God prevents us from trusting God wholeheartedly. Genuinely evil confluences of relationships and events really do occur, but we are wise to be very sparing in our use of the word. In fact, the thing about evil is the more we try to define it and face it, the more fascinating it becomes, and the more we turn into the object of our fascination. Any of us can see this when we see someone we know get fixated on an enemy or rival, and then, without realizing it, become more and more like them until they are mirror images of each other. The real force in the universe is love, not evil. Love seeks to rescue us from our tendency to enclose ourselves in ever-smaller spaces through fear, and instead to bring us into a flourishing aliveness.

Narcissism of Minor Differences | the way in which there is much greater chance of rivalry between people who are very much alike, than between people who are quite different from each other. A fury is often triggered when we encounter an “other” who is uncomfortably like us, bringing out elements of what we don’t like about ourselves, but don’t realize it. For instance, to understand the story told in Luke 10, it is helpful to understand that the Samaritans worshipped the same God as their Jewish neighbors, with a slightly different, but overlapping, set of Scriptures. They didn’t acknowledge Jerusalem as a sacred center, worshipping instead on Mount Gerizim. So Jews and Samaritans, owing to their extreme proximity and similarity, were a perpetual reproach to each other, sources of reciprocal moral infuriation.

Secondariness | the relaxing sense we can sometimes glimpse of “it doesn’t all start with, or gravitate around, me”. So, the more time we spend in the presence of “I AM,” we catch a glimpse of ourselves as real, contingent, alive; we discover that we are held in being by something prior to us, something that is not at the same level as ourselves or in rivalry with anything. This is not a form of diminishment, or being put down, but an accurate and objective sense of createdness, something which can in fact be relaxed into with gratitude.