

Lenten Bible Study Guide: "Life Lessons with Jesus"

A Lenten Journey Through the Gospels

Series Overview:

This Lent, we invite you to embark on a transformative journey through the Gospels of Mark and John. "Life Lessons with Jesus" is a series designed to engage with the profound insights and teachings of Christ as they apply to modern life. Through each session, participants will connect deeply with Scripture, exploring how ancient wisdom informs and enriches our contemporary existence.

Session Format:

Each session will include:

- **Ice Breaker:** A brief activity or question to warm up the group and introduce the session's theme.
 - **Text Study:** An in-depth look at the biblical text, including guided questions for discussion.
 - **Historical Background:** Contextual information to enrich understanding of the Scripture.
 - **Theological/Thematic Exploration:** A discussion on the deeper meanings behind the text and its implications for faith.
 - **Application:** Concrete ways to apply the session's teachings to daily life.
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Week 1: "Wilderness Survival 101" Reading: Mark 1:9-15

- Goals:
 - Understand the significance of Jesus' time in the wilderness.
 - Explore personal 'wilderness' experiences and discuss strategies for spiritual resilience.
- Ice Breaker: Share a moment when you felt like you were in a personal wilderness and how you navigated through it.
- Text Study: Examine the temptations and responses of Jesus in the wilderness.
 - Imagine the wilderness as a character in this narrative. How does its harshness and solitude contribute to the story of Jesus' temptation?
 - What are the similarities and differences between Jesus' temptations and the temptations we face today?

- How does Jesus' response to temptation in the wilderness inform our understanding of spiritual discipline?
 - Historical Background: Contextualize the concept of the wilderness in Jewish tradition and Jesus' time.
 - The wilderness in Jewish tradition is a place of testing and encounter with God, recalling Israel's 40 years in the desert. It symbolizes a place apart from civilization where one's faith is refined.
 - Theological/Thematic Ideas: Discuss the themes of preparation, testing, and dependence on God.
 - Application: Identify ways to find strength and purpose in our own challenging times.
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Week 2: "The Art of Taking Tough Turns" Reading: Mark 8:31-38

- Goals:
 - Delve into the themes of suffering and self-denial in Jesus' teachings.
 - Reconcile the difficulty of Jesus' message with the promise of freedom and fulfillment.
- Ice Breaker: Describe a tough turn you've taken in life and its outcome.
- Text Study: Analyze Jesus' teachings on taking up one's cross.
 - Visualize the scene where Peter rebukes Jesus, and Jesus responds with "Get behind me, Satan." What does this dramatic exchange reveal about discipleship?
 - Why does Jesus speak openly about his suffering and death, and what does this reveal about his mission?
 - How does the concept of 'taking up your cross' challenge contemporary understandings of success and sacrifice?
- Historical Background: Understand the first-century context of suffering and messianic expectations.
 - The cross was a symbol of shame and execution for criminals in Roman times. Jesus redefines it as a symbol of commitment and the cost of following him.

- Theological/Thematic Ideas: Discuss self-denial as a pathway to greater self-awareness and true purpose.
 - Application: Reflect on personal sacrifices and their transformative potential.
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Week 3: "Temple Tantrums: Righteous Rage or Rant?" Reading: John 2:13-22

- Goals:
 - Investigate the implications of Jesus' actions in the temple.
 - Consider the role of righteous anger in our lives.
 - Ice Breaker: Share an instance where you witnessed or felt righteous anger.
 - Text Study: Examine the narrative of Jesus cleansing the temple.
 - Envision the bustling Temple marketplace, the exchange of money, the noise of animals—then Jesus enters. How does this contrast set the stage for Jesus' actions?
 - In what ways did the commercial activities in the Temple deviate from its intended purpose?
 - How does Jesus' action in the temple align with or differ from Old Testament prophetic acts?
 - Historical Background: Contextualize the function and significance of the temple.
 - The Temple was the center of Jewish worship and sacrifice, and the Court of the Gentiles, where the incident took place, was meant to be a place of prayer for all nations.
 - Theological/Thematic Ideas: Explore the line between righteous indignation and unhelpful anger.
 - Application: Identify causes worth 'flipping tables' for in today's world.
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Week 4: "Snakes, Salvation, and Streetlights" Reading: John 3:14-21

- Goals:
 - Connect Old Testament symbolism with Jesus' teachings on salvation.

- Illuminate the concepts of light and darkness in our faith journey.
- Ice Breaker: Discuss an enlightening moment in your spiritual life.
- Text Study: Analyze Jesus' discourse on being 'lifted up' and the symbolism behind it.
 - Consider the image of the bronze serpent on a pole, a symbol of healing and salvation in the wilderness. How does this foreshadow the crucifixion?
 - What is the significance of Jesus referring to the story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness?
 - How does the contrast between light and darkness function in Jesus' discourse on salvation?
- Historical Background: Explore the significance of serpents in ancient Israelite culture.
 - In Numbers 21:4-9, Moses creates a bronze serpent to heal the Israelites, prefiguring Jesus being 'lifted up' for humanity's salvation.
- Theological/Thematic Ideas: Discuss the juxtaposition of condemnation and salvation.
- Application: Consider ways to be a 'streetlight' in our communities.

Week 5: "When Seeds Die: Life's Paradoxical Gardening Tips"

Reading: John 12:20-33

- Goals:
 - Unearth the paradoxical truths about growth and change as taught by Jesus.
 - Apply the metaphor of a seed's transformation to personal spiritual growth.
- Ice Breaker: Share a time when an ending in your life led to unexpected growth.
- Text Study: Discuss the meaning behind Jesus' teaching on a grain of wheat.
 - Picture a single grain of wheat falling into the earth, dying, and bringing forth a plentiful harvest. How does this image encapsulate the message of sacrifice and growth?

- How does the metaphor of a dying seed reflect the process of transformation in the Christian life?
- What does Jesus mean when he talks about hating one's life in this world?
- Historical Background: Understand agricultural practices and metaphors in Jesus' time.
 - Agriculture was a common part of life in ancient times, and Jesus often used farming metaphors to illustrate spiritual truths about growth and the kingdom of God.
- Theological/Thematic Ideas: Explore the necessity of sacrifice for transformation.
- Application: Identify areas in life where 'dying to self' can lead to new beginnings.

Week 6 Palm/Passion Sunday: "A Tale of Two Parades: Triumph and Tragedy in Jerusalem" Readings: Mark 11:1-11 and Mark 15:1-39

- Goals:
 - Experience the emotional spectrum of Holy Week, from Palm Sunday's highs to Good Friday's lows.
 - Reflect on the themes of humility, sacrifice, and redemption as they relate to Jesus and to ourselves.
- Ice Breaker: Share a personal experience of a time of great joy closely followed by a time of sorrow.
- Text Study: Contrast the triumphal entry with the path to the cross.
 - Visualize the two different parades: Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey with crowds shouting "Hosanna!" and later, Jesus walking towards Golgotha amidst shouts of "Crucify him!" What turns of emotion and allegiance do these images evoke?
 - How do the events of Palm Sunday contrast with those of Good Friday, and what does this reveal about Jesus' kingship?
 - What is the significance of the crowd's response to Jesus on both occasions?

- Historical Background: Provide context for the political and social climate of Jerusalem during Holy Week.
 - Palm Sunday reflects the Jewish expectation of a triumphant messianic king. However, Jesus subverts these expectations with his humble approach, prefiguring the unexpected nature of his kingdom.
- Theological/Thematic Ideas: Discuss the concept of messiahship and the subversion of expectations.
- Application: How can we align our personal expectations with God's plan, especially in moments when our hopes and reality diverge, and what steps can we take to embrace humility and sacrifice in our own lives in a manner that reflects Jesus' journey from Palm Sunday to Good Friday?