



STORIES **AND** RITUALS

LESSON 29

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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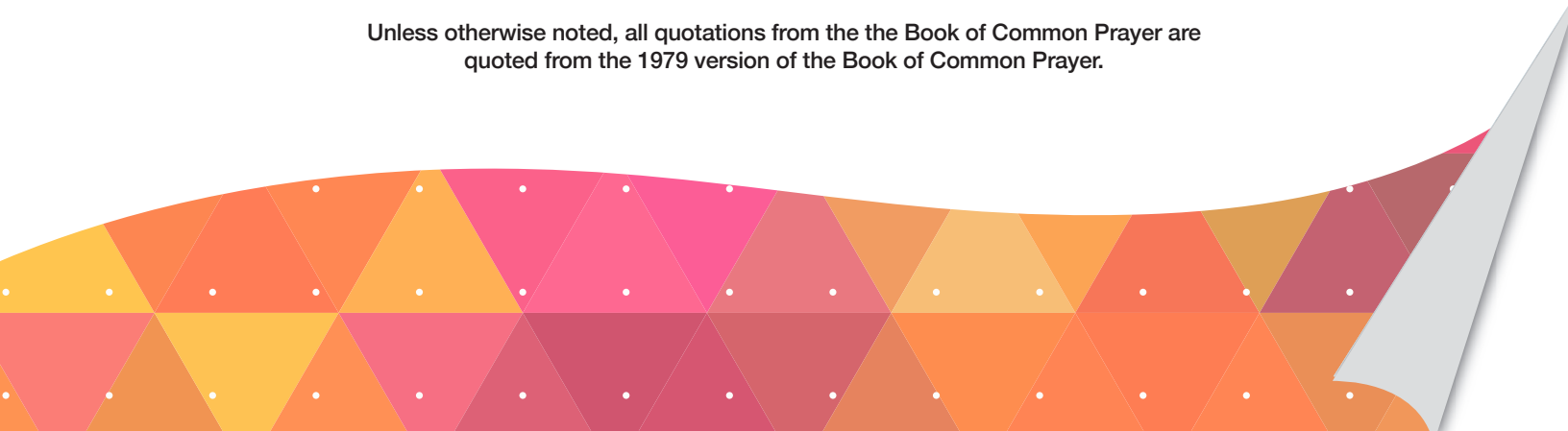
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Jesus' Crucifixion

Texts: John 19:16-42

Big Idea: We find hope in Christ's suffering.

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of finding joy in seriousness by playing a game.
2. Recall the story of Jesus' crucifixion by engaging in a re-telling of the story.
3. Recognize that we find hope in Christ's suffering by participating in a meditation.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
Honey, If You Love Me...

The Story (15 minutes)
Jesus' Crucifixion

The Ritual (15 minutes)
Meditating on the Cross

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
Images of the Crucifixion

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

• Nothing

• Nothing

• Copy of Lesson Sheet 29.1

• Soft, instrumental music (optional)
• Method for playing music (optional)
• Variety of crosses or photos of crosses
• Copy of Lesson Sheet 29.2
• Tea light candles • Lighter

• Smartphones or other devices that connect to the Internet
• Method for projecting images (optional)

• Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today your group will explore the story of Jesus' crucifixion, as told in the Gospel according to John. Though the crucifixion is a story that can be found in all four Gospels, this lesson focuses on the account in John because of its language and imagery.

Jesus' crucifixion is one of the core stories of the Christian tradition. In fact, this story is at the heart of the Christian identity. It has been told in a wide variety of mediums: art, music, film, and many other ways. The cross is an important symbol of the Christian faith. It is through Jesus' death on the cross that we find justification and reconciliation with God and with our neighbors. Yet, today's story also reminds us that the cross means so much more than forgiveness.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the big idea that *we find hope in Christ's suffering*. All too often we hear the story of Jesus' crucifixion and focus only on justification: how Jesus' death has led to the forgiveness of our sins. However, the crucifixion symbolizes so much more. God is revealed to us through the death of Christ. We remember that even in the midst of suffering and pain, we encounter God because God has also faced suffering and pain. We find hope and are transformed through the power of the cross.



What's the Symbol?

The symbol for this story is very obvious: it's the cross. However, during this lesson your group will be challenged to see the cross in a new way. Find a lot of different objects that show the symbol of the cross. Find a large cross to be a focal point, but surround the large cross with other objects in the shape of the cross: necklaces, prayer beads, photos of crosses from around the world... get creative! Ideally, you should have enough crosses so that each person in your group can use one during the lesson.



What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about how God is revealed to them through their pain and brokenness. They will do this by participating in a guided meditation while looking at a cross. Finally, participants will light a candle as a symbol of the hope we find through the cross.



Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Cover a large table with a piece of fabric or linen. Gather a wide variety of crosses and pictures of crosses (at least one per participant). Arrange these crosses on the altar. Place a few candles among the crosses. Prep any materials you need for the Dig Deeper activity, if needed.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?** Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

Honey, If You Love Me...

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Invite everyone to stand in a circle. Begin by standing in the middle of the circle.
- **Is it easy or hard for you to find joy in the midst of being serious? Let's find out!**
- Walk up to one person in the circle. When you approach them, say: "Honey, if you love me, will you please, please smile?" However, your goal is to ask a question in a way that makes them smile. Ways to do this include saying it in a funny voice, adding movement, getting close to their face, etc.
- You may not touch the person while you ask the question.
- If the person does not smile, approach a different person in the circle and ask the question, until you get someone to smile. If the person does smile, switch places with them so that they are now in the middle of the circle.
- The person in the middle can only leave the circle when they can switch places with someone who smiles.
- Continue playing the game until you run out of time.
- **Was it easy or hard for you to stay serious? Why?** *[Answers will vary.]*
- **Has there ever been a time when you've felt pain or suffering? What happened?** *[Answers will vary.]*
- **Is it easy or hard for a person to find hope and joy while they are in pain or suffering? Why?** *[Answers will vary.]*



THE STORY

(15 MINUTES)

Jesus' Crucifixion

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 29.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 29.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 29.1
- After the story, ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God sent Jesus to live among us, and to suffer on the cross; God felt pain and suffering on the cross; God brings us hope through the death of Jesus; etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: Like Jesus, we feel pain and suffering; we see the pain and suffering that Jesus experiences on the cross; we find hope in the crucifixion of Jesus; etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world experienced the pain and suffering of the crucifixion, there is still pain and suffering in the world today, the world finds hope in the crucifixion of Jesus, etc.]*
- **The story we heard today, the story of Jesus' crucifixion, is an important story in our Christian tradition. Most of the time, we recognize the symbol of the cross as a reminder that through Jesus' death, we have received forgiveness of sin. However, the cross means so much more! It is a reminder that God felt pain and suffering, and God continues to be revealed to us in our moments of pain and suffering, too. In our moments of brokenness, God brings us hope and peace.**



THE RITUAL

(15 MINUTES)

Meditating on the Cross

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (*optional*)
- Method for playing music (*optional*)
- Copy of Lesson Sheet 29.2
- Variety of crosses or photos of crosses
- Tea light candles
- Lighter

Before the session:

- Find a variety of crosses, or photos of crosses, to use for this activity. There should be enough crosses so that each person in your group can use one.
- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 29.2. Read through the mediation so that you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly. Light any candles on your altar area.
- **In today's story, we heard about the crucifixion of Jesus. We also talked about how the cross, a major symbol of our faith, reminds us that God is with us in our moments of brokenness, suffering, and impossibility.**
- Motion to the crosses set up on your altar. **In a moment, I am going to invite you to come to our altar and pick a cross. You can have any cross you like; choose one that stands out to you and to which you feel drawn.**
- Invite participants to approach the altar and pick a cross. Then, invite them to find a spot in the room to sit. They should sit in a place where they can still hear you, but also in a place where they feel like they can personally focus.
- **Now that everyone has a cross, we are going to use them to help us meditate. Focus on your cross. You can place it on the floor in front of you, or you can hold it; do whatever feels most comfortable to you. Follow along and pray as I read the meditation aloud.**
- Begin reading the mediation on Lesson Sheet 29.2, pausing where needed to allow participants time to reflect.
- Once you finish reading the meditation, ask participants to gather together, holding their crosses. Process the experience by asking the following questions:
 - **Was it easy or hard for you to focus on the mediation? Why?** [Answers will vary.]
 - **How do you think Jesus felt when he was on the cross?** [Answers will vary, but may include: hurt, sad, distant from God, in pain, etc.]
 - **Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you felt like God was far away? When you felt like you were suffering? What was that experience like?** [Answers will vary. Invite participants to share their answers as they feel comfortable doing so.]
- **It is true that there is much pain and suffering in the world. We all have times in our lives when we feel broken, we suffer, and we feel that God is far away. However, in those moments, the symbol of the cross can remind us that God is with us in our pain and suffering. This is because, through Jesus, God faced pain, suffering, and death on the cross. The crucifixion brings us hope in our pain and suffering, too.**

THE RITUAL - CONTINUED

- Give each person a tea light candle. Place the lighter near the altar.
- **In a moment, I will invite you forward with your candle and your cross. Place your cross back on the altar. Then, light your candle and place it on the altar, too. As you place your candle, thank God for the hope we receive through Jesus' crucifixion.**
- Invite participants forward, one at a time. Help them place their crosses and light their candles, as needed.

DIG DEEPER (10 MINUTES)

Images of the Crucifixion

Materials:

- Smartphone or other devices that connect to the Internet
- Method for projecting images (optional)

Before the session:

- Do a simple Internet search to find different images of the crucifixion. Ideally, participants should do this research during the lesson. However, if Internet access is difficult in your space, you may wish to provide pre-printed images, books, or magazines for students to use.

During the session:

- Split participants into pairs. Make sure that each pair has a device that can access the Internet.
- **Jesus' crucifixion is an important story for Christians. In fact, many people have depicted the crucifixion through art, music, and other types of media. Let's research what images of the crucifixion are out there, and how the images we see bring us hope.**
- Invite pairs to do a simple Internet search and find some images of the crucifixion. After 10 minutes, bring the group back together.
- If possible, ask a couple of pairs to share their images. You may wish to project them so that the whole group can see.
- For each image, briefly discuss:
 - **What adjectives would you use to describe this image?** *[Answers will vary.]*
 - **Does this image remind us that we find hope in Christ's suffering? If so, how? If not, why?** *[Answers will vary.]*

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

**In me there is darkness,
But with you there is light;
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;
I am restless, but with you there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;
I do not understand your ways,
But you know the way for me.
--Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Lesson Sheet 29.1

Jesus' Crucifixion

A story from the Gospel according to John:
Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified.

The soldiers took Jesus, and he became a prisoner. He carried his cross to Golgotha, which means "Skull Place." When they arrived at Golgotha, they nailed him to the cross he carried. There were two others crucified with him—one on his right, and one on his left (Jesus was in the middle). Pilate had an inscription written on Jesus' cross. It said, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The chief priests didn't want Pilate to write this inscription because they knew that many people would read it. However, Pilate wrote it anyway. When Jesus was crucified, the soldiers took his clothing and his shoes. They divided his clothes and cast lots among themselves for everything.

There were women standing nearby, while Jesus was crucified: Mary, Jesus' mother; Mary, the wife of Cleopas; and Mary Magdalene stood near the cross. Jesus saw his mother and one of his disciples, the one whom he loved, standing nearby. He said to his mother, "Here is your son." And he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And, from that moment on, the disciple took care of Jesus' mother.

Jesus knew that everything was almost finished. He told the soldiers that he was thirsty. So, they handed Jesus a sponge soaked with sour wine. Jesus tasted the wine, and after, he said, "It is finished." Then, he bowed his head and died.

Jesus died on the day before the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders did not want to leave his body on the cross because the Sabbath is an important day in the Jewish culture. The leaders asked Pilate to break the legs of those being crucified, and to have the bodies taken down. The soldiers broke the legs of the two crucified with Jesus, but when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead. So, they didn't break his legs. Instead, a soldier took a spear and pierced Jesus' side. Blood and water rushed out.

After Jesus was taken off the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus, asked Pilate if he could take Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission, so Joseph took the body away. Nicodemus, another follower of Jesus, was there too. He had a large mixture of myrrh and aloë. They followed Jewish burial customs and covered Jesus' body with spices, and wrapped him in linen. Then, they placed Jesus' body in a brand-new tomb, located in a garden. No one had ever been buried there, so it became Jesus' tomb.



Lesson Sheet 29.2

Meditation for Ritual



Use this meditation during the Ritual activity.

Look at your cross and think about your answer to this question: why do we, as Christians, see the cross as an important symbol of our tradition?

Spend approximately 30 seconds looking at your cross.



A meditation by the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

“Suffering encountered in the love of the one who is crucified—that is the ‘extraordinary’ in Christian existence.”

– Look at your cross and think about your answer to this question: what is Bonhoeffer saying?

Spend approximately 30 seconds looking at your cross.



A meditation by the theologian Martin Luther:

“He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.”

– Look at your cross and think about your answer to this question: what is Luther saying?

Spend approximately 30 seconds looking at your cross.



A reading from 1 Corinthians 1:18:

“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

– Look at your cross and think about your answer to this question: what is Paul saying?

Spend approximately 30 seconds looking at your cross.



– Look at your cross again. Think about a time in your life when you felt far away from God. How does the story of the cross bring you hope in the midst of pain and suffering?

Spend approximately 30 seconds looking at your cross.