

DAY 1 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Do you believe God is "up close and personal" or "distant and uninterested" in the world?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder. For you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor's rod, just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian. The boots of the warrior and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned. They will be fuel for the fire.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! **Isaiah 9:1–7 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Jesus came to take the heavy burdens of the world onto himself. What burdens are you still carrying—and are you going to let Jesus shoulder the weight so you can live free?

"His government and its peace will never end." This is good news for citizens of Heaven. Does this give you hope beyond the tumultuous uncertainty of our world?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, sin has marred this once-perfect universe. It has broken families, hurt hearts, and spoiled dreams. Yet in the middle of the mess, Jesus was born—perfect in every way. We did not deserve him...and we still don't. But we humbly and gratefully submit to Jesus' rule in our lives—and we thank you that his government and peace never ends!

DAY 2 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What do you hope Heaven will be like?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

Jesus said to his disciples the night before he was crucified for the sins of the world, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going."

"No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it! **John 14:1-14 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Notice how many times this Scripture mentions the "Father." Jesus, in his humility, always pointed people to the Father. Jesus, the "visible image of the invisible Father" (Colossians 1:15), helps us understand God's true nature and heart. When you think about "God," does the picture look anything like Jesus?

In a troubled world, Jesus invites us to NOT be troubled, but to turn the energy of worry into a bold and faithful HOPE in Jesus. How is he turning your worries into hope?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, teach me to trade my worry for trust! Again and again and again...

DAY 3 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What has been truly secure and long-lasting in your life?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do. Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession. **James 1:2–18 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Consider troubles to be opportunity...*investment*...*planting*...yielding "great joy." Do you believe this is an immediate "slap a happy face on your difficulties and escape all uncomfortable feelings" or "give **hope** a chance to grow in really difficult circumstances so you can harvest joy in the future"?

Has God honored or humbled you?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, thank you for making us, your church, your prized possession! Thank you for faithfully never changing or casting a shifting shadow.

DAY 4 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is a memorable time you were convinced you were right and found out you were wrong?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked. Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

"For this is how God loved the world: He **gave** his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." **John 3:1-17 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

If you were to describe God's offer of Jesus to you as a gift, what have you done with the gift? Have you pridefully left it wrapped, untouched, untried? Have you lived it, tested it out, worn it out and humbly come to Jesus for more?

Have you been born again—by God's spirit?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, you are a generous giver. You have made yourself available for mere people to choose or reject. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to have a relationship with you through Jesus. I choose to love and trust you!

DAY 5 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What relationship(s) are most important to you at this time in your life?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."' So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'

But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!' His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'" **Luke 15:11–32 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Who do you resonate most with—the father, son, or older brother?

What relationship do you need to mend?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, thank you for illustrating how far you will go to love and redeem me!