

DAY 1 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

CONVERSATION STARTER

How difficult do you believe it was for Jesus to choose to love, serve, and obey even through the suffering, temptation, and difficulty he endured?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.” Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public ministry....

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.

Then the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.” But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. “I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me.”

Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the LORD your God.’” When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came. **Luke 3:21–23, 4:1–13 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

Why is it important that we understand that our Lord also suffered and was tempted?

Why is it important to use the Scriptures correctly?

If you suddenly got everything you have dreamed of, would you be truly and completely happy for all time? If not, how do you need to upgrade your focus, hopes, and dreams?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, teach me not to be enamored by the short-term pleasures and power this world offers. Teach me to focus on you and embrace the life YOU give!

DAY 2 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)**CONVERSATION STARTER**

When was the last time that Jesus, full of grace and truth, offended you or your way of living?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.”

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. “How can this be?” they asked. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

Then he said, “You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: ‘Physician, heal yourself’—meaning, ‘Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.’ But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

“Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian.”

When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way. **Luke 4:14–30 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

How quickly people who didn’t follow Jesus turned from “speaking well” to hating him furiously. Why do you believe the world is quick to 1) use, and 2) abuse Jesus and his followers?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, you give the words of life! Even when I do not understand, give me the strength to trust and obey.

DAY 3 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

CONVERSATION STARTER

How have you seen God working “upstream” in your life?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Yesterday, we read when Jesus quoted the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who was led by the Holy Spirit to write this hundreds of years prior to Jesus’ coming: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD’s favor has come, and with it, the day of God’s anger against their enemies.

To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory. They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago. They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations. Foreigners will be your servants. They will feed your flocks and plow your fields and tend your vineyards.

You will be called priests of the LORD, ministers of our God. You will feed on the treasures of the nations and boast in their riches. Instead of shame and dishonor, you will enjoy a double share of honor. You will possess a double portion of prosperity in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours. For I, the LORD, love justice. I hate robbery and wrongdoing. I will faithfully reward my people for their suffering and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be recognized and honored among the nations. Everyone will realize that they are a people the LORD has blessed. **Isaiah 61:1-9 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

Sadly, the Jews had meager hopes of what God would do for, in, and through them. The severe political and economic oppression brought on by their disobedience had diminished their imagination. Rather than embracing their God-given role to display God’s glory to the world, they just wanted to get even with their oppressors and have a powerful king and a lucrative kingdom. When Jesus showed up to proclaim God’s real Kingdom, they were disappointed and rejected God’s plan, choosing more disobedience followed by more difficulty and suffering. Yet God was faithful. Jesus died for their sins, giving them the opportunity to repent, be forgiven, and finally participate in displaying God’s glory to the world. Over time, God has worked through the faithful, and now YOU get to be a part of God’s plan to reconcile the world to him. How are you making disciples?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, thank you for your love and faithfulness throughout the ages to us, the people who don’t deserve your kindness. Thank you for showing that genuine love is real power!

DAY 4 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

CONVERSATION STARTER

Can you misuse spiritual disciplines?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Earlier in Isaiah, God makes his heart known: “Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don’t be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me. ‘We have fasted before you!’ they say. ‘Why aren’t you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don’t even notice it!’

“I will tell you why!” I respond. “It’s because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like reeds bending in the wind. You dress in burlap and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the LORD?

“No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. **Isaiah 58:1–7 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

How do you see God’s heart in this passage?

Why is the heart behind spiritual activity more important than the activity itself?

While some have argued that the Bible cannot be trusted because it was copied by people in power, this accusation doesn’t hold up...because God’s Word teaches us clearly how to judge ungodly leadership! These standards were not altered, fabricated, or removed! Jesus teaches us to “make right judgments” – which includes being accountable personally before leading others to obey. While it is right to expect leaders/politicians/pastors to follow God’s standards, don’t miss the most powerful impact for you: what in this passage challenges YOU? What is God calling YOU to change?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, you are worthy to receive honor, glory and praise. Teach me to be humble as I worship you and lead others so that I don’t deceive myself into thinking that your Word doesn’t apply to me.

DAY 5 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

CONVERSATION STARTER

What good do you believe God has in store for you? Do you believe “the best is yet to come”?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Isaiah 58 continued: “Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the LORD will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.

“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength.

“You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a builder of walls and a restorer of homes.

“Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don’t pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD’s holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly. Then the LORD will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken!” **Isaiah 58:8–14 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

Why does God bless people?

How does God reveal his heart for you in this passage?

What is your role in embracing God’s plan to bless you and to bless many others through you?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, your creation is so good. And despite our sin destroying the peace we once had with you, you still loved and reached out to us with complete faithfulness. Thank you for not giving up on your people. Teach me to lift my eyes and heart to the heavens and envision what you want to do so I can be a part of your plan on earth to bring people to yourself through Jesus.