



SESSION 8: PRODIGAL

TOPIC: Why Jesus? pt. 1

GOAL

The goal of this session is to walk the teens through salvation history and help them understand Jesus' role in welcoming us back into the family of God.

KEY CONCEPTS

The story of salvation is our story, just as our personal family history is our story, so we should make every effort to truly understand it.

God's heroes are ordinary people whose only claim to fame is that they trusted in and were faithful to Him.

Jesus is the culmination of God's centuries-old plan and work. We have the opportunity to know, appreciate, and love this gift, or to forget and disregard the sacrifice of the one true God.

KEY TERMS

Incarnation: The fact that the Son of God assumed human nature and became man in order to accomplish our salvation in that same human nature. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, is both true God and true man, not part God and part man.

Promised Land: The land of Canaan, generally thought to be the whole of western Palestine. It was promised to the Israelites by God after their sojourn in the desert.

Salvation History: The pattern of specific events in human history in which God clearly reveals His presence and saving power.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:11-24

CATECHISM

55

59

64

65

457-460

522

762

ABOUT THIS SESSION

The Gather is an activity that challenges the teens to identify the authors of famous quotes. The Proclaim uses the story of the prodigal son to explain salvation history and God's unceasing mercy and forgiveness. During the Break, the teens read about one of the covenants in the Old Testament and discuss it with their small group. The Send recaps and closes the session with prayers of petition.

ENVIRONMENT

Create a timeline of salvation history and hang it on a wall or project it on a screen.

AS YOU GET STARTED

For a Gather that incorporates additional media, collect various depictions of Jesus from pop culture, classic art, movies, and television shows. Challenge the teens to identify as many depictions as possible and then lead a discussion about how each depiction does (or does not) really represent who Jesus is.

GATHER *Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)*

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the session and begin in prayer.

Fake Jesus Video (5 min)

Play the video "Fake Jesus" as a transition into the game.

Jesus or... (15 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space and instruct them to remain with their small groups. Explain that the small groups will be competing against one another to determine who said the famous quote. Read a quote aloud. The first small group to correctly name the author receives one point. Keep score and award a prize to the small group with the most points at the end of the game.

Use the following quotes as a starting point and be sure to add more that are applicable to your teens:

- "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Martin Luther King, Jr.
- "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." Jesus (Luke 6:32)
- "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Mahatma Gandhi
- "Stand with anyone that is right; stand with him while he is right and part with him when he goes wrong." Abraham Lincoln
- "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes." Jesus (John 3:8)
- "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." Jimi Hendrix
- "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Jesus (Luke 12:34)
- "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Jesus (Matthew 7:12)
- "Deliver us serenity. Deliver us peace. Deliver us loving." Kanye West
- "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." Jesus (Matthew 6:34)

PROCLAIM

"Prodigal" Teaching (15 min)

The Prodigal Son

Begin by reading Luke 15:11-24.

This parable is a great reminder of our own need to return to God. It reminds us that we have often left God the Father behind by sinning against Him, but He is always waiting to welcome us home. This story is also representative of the history of God's chosen people. Throughout salvation history, God's people have repeatedly sinned against Him, only to realize their sin and return to Him.

God never rejects us when we return to Him. We are never too far gone to turn around and be received by God; this is the amazing truth that we understand when we enter into salvation history. God is like the father in the story of the prodigal son, always ready to welcome us back and say, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet... for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Luke 15:22-24

The story of salvation is our story, just as our personal family history is our story, so we should make every effort to truly understand it. We need to understand everything that has been done for us so we can fully appreciate where we are now.

Where It All Began

Our story begins with creation. God made mankind in His image and likeness, a phrase we hear often without really comprehending it. In biblical times, to say that you were made in someone's image and likeness was to say that you were their son or daughter. Let that sink in for a moment. We were meant to be God's sons and daughters. We were meant to be the royal heirs of God's heavenly Kingdom. We were destined to perfectly love Him and be loved by Him for all of eternity.

Genesis 1:26-27, 5:3

But then sin entered the world. And just like when the prodigal son left his father, we too, through original sin, abandoned our Father and can no longer call ourselves His children simply because we were born. But like a loving father, God desires to welcome us back to His family. He wants to include us in the familial relationship with Him for which we were created. And thus, the rest of salvation history is the story of God trying to gather us back into — and keep us as members of — His family.

CCC 55; Genesis 3; Luke 15:18

Extending the Family

God began to gather the family together when He called Abraham to leave his mother and father and go to the land that He would show him. Abraham did as God asked, so God promised to make his descendants numerous and abundant. God blessed Abraham and his wife, Sarah, with a baby boy, who they named Isaac. Even today, we can trace our Christian heritage back to Abraham, which is why we call him our "father in faith."

CCC 59, 762; Genesis 12:1-3, 21:1-3; Romans 4:11-12

Isaac had a son named Jacob, who God renamed Israel. Israel had 12 sons who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel and are the reason why the Hebrews are often referred to as the Israelites in Scripture. Israel's 12 sons eventually moved to Egypt to avoid a famine, which led to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt.

Exodus 1:8-14; Genesis 32:28, 49:1-28, 46:16-21

And so, God called Moses to set the Israelites free from their bondage and lead them to the Promised Land. God was delivering them from slavery and yet, they rebelled against Him, questioning Him and speaking out against Him. Like the prodigal son, they wanted to do things on their own and God, in His goodness and love, gave them what they wanted.

Exodus 3:7-8, 14:11

When the Israelites eventually made it to the Promised Land, God helped them conquer their enemies and settle in the land. They were still afraid and did not trust God, so they once again rebelled and sinned against Him. They even threatened to kill Moses and return to slavery in Egypt. They wandered in the desert for 40 years until God brought them back to the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 1:30-33, 28:7; Numbers 14:4

Even though the Lord was on their side and delivered their enemies into their hands, the Israelites turned away from Him again and again, worshipping false idols and forgetting all He had done for them. Like the prodigal son, they were ungrateful for the many gifts the Father had given them and became greedy, wanting more. But when they abandoned God, they found that their enemies had the upper hand. They were once again enslaved and suffering.

Judges 2:1-3, 6:1-2, 13:1

So they called out to God and He delivered them with mighty warriors and amazing wonders. General Sisera, who oppressed the Israelites, was slain by Jael with a tent peg through the temple. Samson harassed the enemies of the Israelites by tying torches to the tails of wild animals and setting them loose in their crops. He even defended himself against 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey. **God sent Gideon into battle against insurmountable odds and Gideon was victorious.** Over and over again God forgave the Israelites for their sins and welcomed them back into His family.

Judges 4:21, 7:7-25, 15:4-5, 15:12-16

The Israelites eventually demanded a king for their new kingdom and God provided. The most famous of these kings was David, who killed the giant Goliath and delivered victory to the Israelites, thus winning their favor and admiration.

1 Samuel 8:19-22, 17:41-51; Deuteronomy 1:30-33; Numbers 14:4

The Kingdom of David was overthrown shortly after David's death. Invaders conquered God's people and sent them into exile to be slaves in foreign lands, but God did not forget His people. God sent them prophets who reminded them of His faithfulness and proclaimed the coming of a savior who would restore the Kingdom of Israel.

CCC 64

What Do They All Have in Common?

God's heroes are ordinary people whose only claim to fame is that they trusted in and were faithful to Him. Abraham was a nomad. Moses was a shepherd living in the wilderness. When God called Moses, he was not even tending his own flock; he was essentially a hired hand. Jael was a woman and women were not seen as equal to men. Gideon was a doubter who demanded sign after sign from God before coming to believe in Him. David was just a teen, so insignificant that when the prophet Samuel came to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the future king, not even Jesse thought it would be David.

1 Samuel 16:8-11; Exodus 3:1; Genesis 11:27-28; Jeremiah 1:6; Judges 6:36-40

The main characters in the story were not just nobodies; they all were all great sinners, as well. Abraham doubted God's promises and had relations with a woman who was not his wife, thus becoming an adulterer. Moses was a murderer and outlaw. In fact, when God called him, Moses had killed a man and was in hiding. David eventually became an adulterer and a murderer, too.

God always chose the unexpected and imperfect people to do His work. In Jesus, however, we have someone unexpected but perfect. God sent His own Son who had been with Him since the beginning, who had witnessed the many times God's people turned their backs on Him. As St. John the Evangelist wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

John 1:1, 1:14

God Became Man

And so, God became man. He became man to save us and deliver us from our bondage, but not from physical bondage and slavery. He came to free us from something much more sinister and deadly: our bondage to sin and death. He came to establish a kingdom, but not a physical, political kingdom. He came to establish the Kingdom of heaven on Earth and to make us all citizens of that Kingdom.

CCC 457-460; Acts 1:6

Jesus was not what anyone expected. He grew up in a small, dull town called Nazareth. When Philip told his brother Nathanael that he found the promised Messiah, a messiah from Nazareth, he responded, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Acts 1:6-7; John 1:45-46

Even when we look back on the Incarnation today, we feel like Jesus should have come as someone powerful and authoritative. Instead, He came as someone meek and humble. As St. Paul wrote, “Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”

Philippians 2:5-8

In this humility — and truly in everything — Jesus is our model of holiness. He shows us how to live and how to love. By His Incarnation and death, He made it possible for us to once again enter into God’s family, to be God’s adopted sons and daughters through Baptism. He is the culmination of God’s centuries-old plan and work. We have the opportunity to know, appreciate, and love this gift, or to forget and disregard the sacrifice of the one true God.

CCC 65, 522

BREAK

Salvation History Scripture Study (25 min)

Prior to the session, have the Core Team choose one or two of the following passages about salvation history to discuss with their small group. Divide the teens into their small groups. Begin in prayer and then invite a teen to read the chosen passage.

- Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-13)
- Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:1-8 or Genesis 22:1-19)
- Isaac and the 12 Tribes of Israel (Genesis 49:1-27)
- Moses (Exodus 3:1-12)
- David (2 Samuel 5:1-4)
- Jesus (John 3:16-17)

Use the following questions to facilitate a discussion about the passage:

- Describe the passage in your own words.
- What stands out to you in this passage?
- Why is this passage significant? What covenant is made or broken in this passage?
- How does this story relate to us, today? How does it relate to our Church?
- How does this story relate to your personal relationship with Jesus?

SEND

Recap and Closing Prayer (10 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Recap the topic of the session, highlighting Jesus' fulfillment of salvation history. Close the session in prayer, inviting the teens to offer any intentions they have aloud. If the teens are struggling to offer their own prayers of petition, consider using the following prayers as a starting point:

- For teens who are experiencing serious illness, that Christ would bring them comfort and healing.
- For our families, that we may continue to grow closer to each other and to God through our faith journey.
- For our teachers, coaches, and all those who lead us, that they may be strengthened in their work.
- For all those who are struggling with mental illness, that they may find healing and hope.
- For any teens who are homeless, that God would bring people into their lives to help them find shelter, work, and stability.
- For teens who are struggling with addictions to drugs or alcohol, that they may enter recovery and become free of addiction.
- For women who are experiencing a crisis pregnancy, especially teenage women, that they may choose life for their unborn son or daughter and receive the support they need to follow through with this choice.