



Let My People Go! What is the Central Plot of the Bible?

Session 1

Exodus 3:1-17; Luke 19:1-10



Session Objective

God's salvation is the central plot of the Bible. The story does not begin with the creation but with the Exodus; God delivered the Israelites, the descendants of the covenant, from slavery in Egypt and revealed his holy name. The Exodus interpreted their past and defined their future. The plot of the Bible—God's salvation—is interpreted and revealed in many ways. This course will consider four biblical images: deliverance, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Faith Statement

In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all families of the earth. Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage. Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. . . . In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

—A Brief Statement of Faith (*Book of Confessions*, 10:3, 41-48, 65-76)



Engage

Open in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What comes to mind when you hear the word *salvation*?
- When have you recently heard the words *save*, *saved*, and *salvation*? How were they used?
- In what ways has the Bible spoken to you?
- How would you define salvation to someone who is not a Christian?
- What causes us to think God's salvation is the primary plot of the Bible?



Explore

Read Exodus 3:1-17 and explore these questions:

- What has led God to bring Moses to this encounter?
- What can we learn about the heart of God from the story?
- In what ways is this a story of salvation?
- Christians talk of having a "burning bush" experience in their life. What happens to them?

Read Luke 19:1-10 and explore these questions:

- What did Jesus say and do?
- How did Zacchaeus respond?
- What happened that caused Jesus to say, "Today, salvation has come to this house?"
- What does it mean that Jesus seeks out and saves the lost?



Express

Use the following questions to help the youth express what they've learned.

- Remember your baptism! How have you seen God's saving hand in your life?
- Where in the world are people longing for liberation today?
- What are our hopes, actions, and prayers for their rescue and freedom?

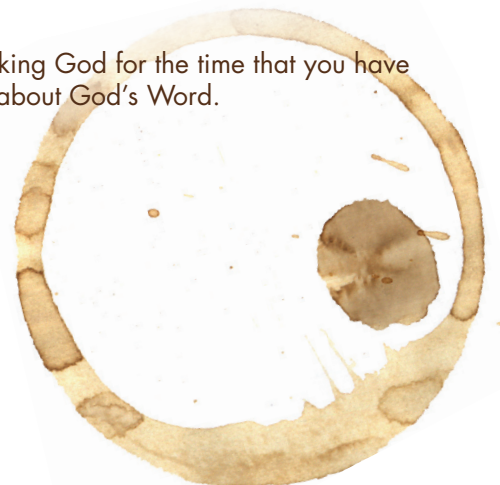
Place yourself in the scene in the film, *Les Misérables*, where John Valjean is saved by the actions of the priest.

- How do you empathize with the desperation of Jean Valjean?
- How do you connect with the demands of the guard for law and justice?
- What is it that guides the priest in offering such grace and forgiveness?
- What is the most surprising aspect of that scene? The most emotional?



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





I Once was Blind! How is Salvation Expressed in the Bible?

Session 2

2 Kings 5:1–15; Luke 4:16–30



Session Objective

One of the primary ways salvation is defined in the Bible is through God's gifts of healing and wholeness. In fact, the word *salvation* comes from a Latin word expressing wholeness and healing. Focusing on the story of Elisha and Naaman reveals that God is gracious in healing and reaches beyond borders. Focusing on Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth stresses the "today" nature of salvation; "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). As disciples of Christ, we are called to cooperate in salvation as part of God's healing team.

Faith Statement

Question 56. What does it mean to be baptized?

"'Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures. We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him."

—The Barmen Declaration (*Book of Confessions*, 8.13–8, 15)



Engage

Open in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- The Bible expresses salvation as this-worldly, it happens in the here and now. In what ways may this be a new understanding for you?
- The word *salvation* means healing and wholeness. What does that reveal about being saved?
- What does it mean to say "we are saved by faith?"
- Where do you see wholeness and healing taking place today?



Explore

Read 2 Kings 5:1–15 and explore these questions:

- What is the major point of the story?
- What does the story tell us about God's love?
- What does Naaman finally do that brings about healing?
- What do you think may have happened after Naaman returned home?

Read Luke 4:16–30 and explore these questions:

- How did Jesus define his ministry?
- In what ways does this story express God's salvation?
- What ultimately changed the attitude of the congregation toward Jesus?
- If someone knew nothing else about Jesus, what can be learned from this story?



Express

Use the following questions to help the youth express what they've learned:

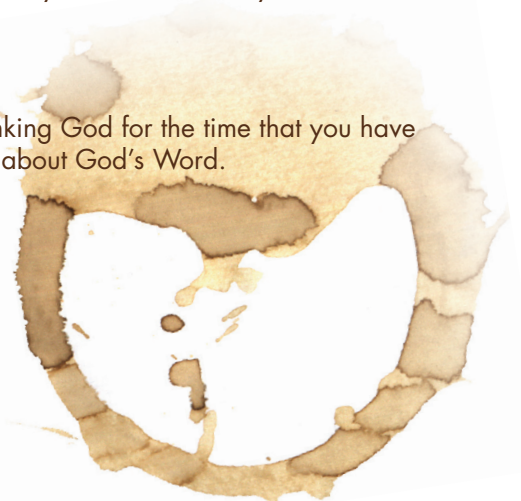
- In what ways do you use your hands for healing? Praying? Serving? Touching? Feeding?
- What signs of healing and wholeness have you witnessed?
- Who among your family and friends are in need of healing?
- What are your prayers asking God to save them?
- How do you respond to messages on Facebook asking for prayers?
- How are you a part of God's healing team?

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a book by C. S. Lewis in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, Eustace stumbles into the dragon piles of gold. In his greed he himself is turned into a dragon. He is saved only when Aslan the lion claws deeply through the thick skin to restore his body down to tender human flesh. Eustace is then bathed in water (baptism?). It's reminiscent of a prayer confessing that "we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves." In what way does this scene help us understand our salvation through Christ? Do you recognize a part of yourself in this story?



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





Session Objective

Salvation is God's gracious act; it does not depend upon anything that we must do. We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. The good news is that in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven; it is not something that we have earned. Jesus saves and we are embraced in God's love.

Faith Statement

"For he is our righteousness, life and resurrection, in a word, the fullness and perfection of all the faithful, salvation and all sufficiency. For the apostle says: 'In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,' and, 'You have come to fullness of life in him' (Colossians 1 and 2). Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, and the true awaited Messiah. For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world, in whom by faith are saved all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world."

—The Second Helvetic Confession (Book of Confessions, 5.076–5.077)



Engage

Open in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Why, in the Sacrament of Baptism, is the parent asked: *Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?*
- Why, in Confirming Baptismal Vows, is a youth asked: *Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?*
- Why, in the Ordination of Officers, is the first question: *Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*



Explore

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–5 and explore these questions:

- What does it mean to say that "Christ died for our sins?"
- What does it mean to affirm that "he was raised on the third day?"
- Why is Christ's death and resurrection the heart of the "good news?"
- What does "in accordance with the scriptures" signify?
- Is there a difference between "you are being saved," "you are saved," and "you have been saved?"

Read Luke 15:11–32 and explore these questions:

- Why did Jesus tell this parable? Who was his audience?
- In what ways is this a story of God's salvation?
- When and where did Jesus possibly tell this story?

Introduce one answer to that question in the movie, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Point out that the director has imagined a possible setting, context, and audience. Jesus tells his parable to challenge Peter to change the way he feels about Matthew. Peter stands at the door and listens as Jesus tells the story of the two sons. Peter comes to realize that he is the older brother who feels jealousy toward his younger brother. Peter's embrace of Matthew, a transforming moment of forgiveness, is a powerful scene.



Express

Jesus lived, taught, and prayed forgiveness, especially in the prayer he taught his disciples, the Lord's Prayer. It is a powerful expression of God's forgiveness as well as a constant reminder of our need to forgive others. Think about the words in the prayer:

"forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," or "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," or "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

- What are your specific prayers in seeking God's forgiveness?
- What relationships with family, friends, classmates, neighbors, and so on are in need of forgiveness?

Begin the prayer. Pause after *forgive us* and be specific in your requests.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





Session Objective

The death of Jesus upon the cross is God's supreme act of reconciliation. The mystery of salvation is that God's love is known through the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus; God's power is revealed in weakness. As Paul writes: "We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10).

Faith Statement

"God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd's life given for his sheep, atonement by a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for humankind. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work. The risen Christ is the savior of all people. Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as God's reconciling community. Christ is head of this community, the church, which began with the apostles and continues through all generations."

—Confession of 1967 (Inclusive Language Version, 9:09–9:10)



Engage

Open in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What is something you have learned about God's love? How have you experienced it as gift?
- What takes place when people reconcile? In what way has God in Christ reconciled us?
- What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? What is it you can do?
- What are the needs for reconciliation you see in our community?
- In what ways is God at work? What does God desire from us?



Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 5:19–21 and explore these questions:

- What does an ambassador do?
- What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?
- What authority does an ambassador have?
- What are your "spheres of influence?" Where are the places and communities where you spend your time?
- What does being an ambassador for Christ suggest in those places?



Express

Read a section from the Confession of 1967:

"The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the reconciliation of people with God and with one another, in which they joyfully eat and drink together at the table of their Savior. Jesus Christ gave his church this remembrance of his dying for sinners so that by participation in it they have communion with him and with all who shall be gathered to him. Partaking in him as they eat the bread and drink the wine in accordance with Christ's appointment, they receive from the risen and living Lord the benefits of his death and resurrection. They rejoice in the foretaste of the kingdom which he will bring to consummation at his promised coming, and go out from the Lord's Table with courage and hope for the service to which he has called them." (Confession of 1967, *Book of Confessions*, 9.52)

- In what ways do you and the congregation celebrate reconciliation in the Lord's Supper?



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.

