



# FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Find time to explore these questions as a family after each session.

## Session 1

- What do you think of when you hear the word *salvation*?
- What does it mean to say that we are saved through Jesus Christ?
- How would you define salvation to someone who is not a Christian?
- Do you think there is a basic plot to the biblical story?
- Where in our world are people seeking to be set free from bondage?
- What situations call us to work and pray for rescue and freedom?

## Session 2

- The word *salvation* means wholeness and healing. How does that help us know how God loves and what God desires?
- What prayers do you offer for healing? What faces, names, and situations come to mind as you pray?
- In what ways is the life and ministry of Jesus a story of healing and wholeness?
- Where have you had a sighting of salvation? Where have you seen the broken healed?
- How are you being called to help with Christ's healing and saving ministry?

## Session 3

- What does it mean to say that "Christ died for our sins?"
- What is your response to the good news that in Jesus Christ your sin has been forgiven?
- Do you think there is a difference between "you are being saved," "you are saved," and "you have been saved?"
- What do you hear in the words of the benediction, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?"
- What goes through your heart and mind when you sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me?"
- What would you say to a person who asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

## Session 4

- 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?



# THE VOICE IN THE FIRE

## A Dramatic Reading Based on Exodus 3:1–17 (The Message)

**Narrator:** Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of GOD, Horeb. The angel of GOD appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up.

**Moses:** "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

**Narrator:** GOD saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush,

**God:** "Moses! Moses!"

**Moses:** "Yes? I'm right here!"

**God:** "Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

**Narrator:** Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God.

**God:** "I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. Now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wideopen spaces, a land lush with milk and honey. The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I've seen for myself how cruelly they're being treated by the Egyptians. It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."

**Moses:** "But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

**God:** "I'll be with you, and this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain."

**Moses:** "Suppose I go to the people of Israel and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What do I tell them?"

**God:** "I AM WHO I AM. Tell the people of Israel, 'I AM sent me to you.' This is what you're to say to the Israelites: 'GOD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This has always been my name, and this is how I always will be known."



# PUTTING SALVATION INTO WORDS

What does it mean to be saved? How do we understand God's salvation? In the Bible, it is expressed in a variety of ways.

"Salvation is: light in our darkness, sight to the blind, enlightenment, liberation for captives, return from exile, the healing of our infirmities, food and drink, resurrection from the land of the dead, knowing God, becoming 'in Christ,' and being made right with God 'justified.'"<sup>1</sup>

Examine how salvation is put into words in the following stories:

## Read Exodus 15:1-2

"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: 'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.'"

- How did those set free from bondage in Egypt understand salvation?
- Why do the people of Israel celebrate salvation every year at Passover?

## Read Luke 2:27-32

"Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'"

- What do you imagine Simeon meant when he said, "My eyes have seen your salvation?"
- Imagine you are the one holding Jesus. What have your eyes seen of God's love?

## Read Luke 2:10-11

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'"

- What may the shepherds have expected in the birth of a savior?
- Why is salvation always received as good news and announced with great joy?

## Read John 3:16-17

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

- What is the connection between salvation and God's love?
- What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ? What are we to believe?

## Read Luke 9:29-31

"While he was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white. At once two men were there talking with him. They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—and what a glorious appearance they made! They talked over his exodus, the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem." (The Message)

- What do you think Luke meant by using the word "exodus" in speaking of Jesus' death and resurrection?
- In what ways is the story of Jesus the heart of the central plot of salvation?

1. Adapted from Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, (New York: HarperOne, 2003) p. 175.



# WHERE IS YOUR JERICHO?

## Read Luke 19:1-10

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, 'Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today.' So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus. Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.'

"Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost.'"

(Common English Bible)

Pay attention to the actions of Jesus and Zacchaeus:

- What did Jesus do and say?
- What did Zacchaeus do and say?
- What do you think caused Zacchaeus to respond in such a way?
- What was it that caused Jesus to announce, "Today, salvation has come to this house"?
- How is Zacchaeus saved? What do you think may happen next?
- What, to you, is the most surprising thing about the story?
- What is another story about Jesus seeking out and saving the lost?



# HEALING WATERS

## A Dramatic Reading Based on 2 Kings 5:1-15 (Common English Bible)

Characters:

Narrator

Naaman

Young Girl

Israel's King

Elisha the Prophet

Messenger

Servants

**Narrator:** Naaman, a general for the king of Aram, was a great man and highly regarded by his master, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. This man was a mighty warrior, but he had a skin disease. Now a young girl from the land of Israel had been captured. She served Naaman's wife and said to her,

**Young Girl:** "I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease."

**Narrator:** Naaman went and told his master what the young girl from the land of Israel had said. The king sent him on his way with a letter to Israel's king. Naaman departed with silver, gold, and changes of clothing. He brought the letter to Israel's king. It read,

**Israel's King:** "Along with this letter I'm sending you my servant Naaman so you can cure him of his skin disease."

**Narrator:** When the king of Israel read the letter, he ripped his clothes. He said,

**Israel's King:** "What? Am I God to hand out death and life? But this king writes me, asking me to cure someone of his skin disease! You must realize that he wants to start a fight with me."

**Narrator:** When Elisha the man of God heard that Israel's king had ripped his clothes, he sent word to the king:

**Elisha:** "Why did you rip your clothes? Let the man come to me. Then he'll know that there's a prophet in Israel."

**Narrator:** Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots. He stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent out a messenger who said,

**Messenger:** "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored and become clean."

**Narrator:** But Naaman went away in anger. He said,

**Naaman:** "I thought for sure that he'd come out, stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the bad spot, and cure the skin disease. Aren't the rivers in Damascus better than all Israel's waters? Couldn't I wash in them and get clean?"

**Narrator:** His servants came up to him and spoke to him:

**Servants:** "Our father, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, wouldn't you have done it? All he said to you was, 'Wash and become clean.'"

**Narrator:** So Naaman went down and bathed in the Jordan seven times, just as the man of God had said. His skin was restored like that of a young boy, and he became clean. He returned to the man of God with all his attendants. He came and stood before Elisha, saying,

**Naaman:** "Now I know for certain that there's no God anywhere on earth except in Israel."





# JESUS ANNOUNCES HIS MISSION

## 1. Read Luke 4:16–30

"Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

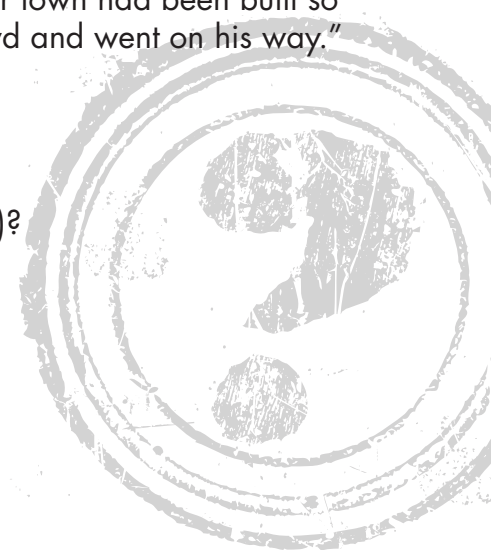
He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

Everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, isn't it?' Then Jesus said to them, 'Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: "Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we've heard you did in Capernaum."' He said 'I assure you that no prophet is welcome in the prophet's hometown. And I can assure you that there were many widows in Israel during Elijah's time, when it didn't rain for three and a half years and there was a great food shortage in the land. Yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only to a widow in the city of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. There were also many persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cleansed. Instead, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed.'

When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was filled with anger. They rose up and ran him out of town. They led him to the crest of the hill on which their town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. But he passed through the crowd and went on his way."  
(Common English Bible)

## 2. Discuss the following questions:

- How does this story define how Jesus understood his ministry?
- Why did Jesus select that particular reading from Isaiah (61:1–3)?
- In what ways does this story define God's salvation?
- What is the impact of the word "today" in the story?
- What ultimately turned the congregation against Jesus?







# HEALING HANDS

Choose one or more of the following stories:

Matthew 8:1–4  
Matthew 12:9–14  
Matthew 20:29–34  
Mark 1:29–31  
Mark 7:31–35  
Mark 8:22–26  
Luke 8:49–56  
Luke 17:11–19  
John 5:1–8

Respond to the following questions:

- What was the need for healing?
- Who was healed?
- What did Jesus do?
- What happened next?



Write a short action statement that begins, “Jesus . . .” followed by an action verb that tells something about Jesus ministry of healing.





# WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

## 1. Read Acts 16:25–33, a story of Paul and Silas in prison.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay."

## 2. Discuss the jailer's question: "What must I do to be saved?" This is the only time this question is asked in the Bible.

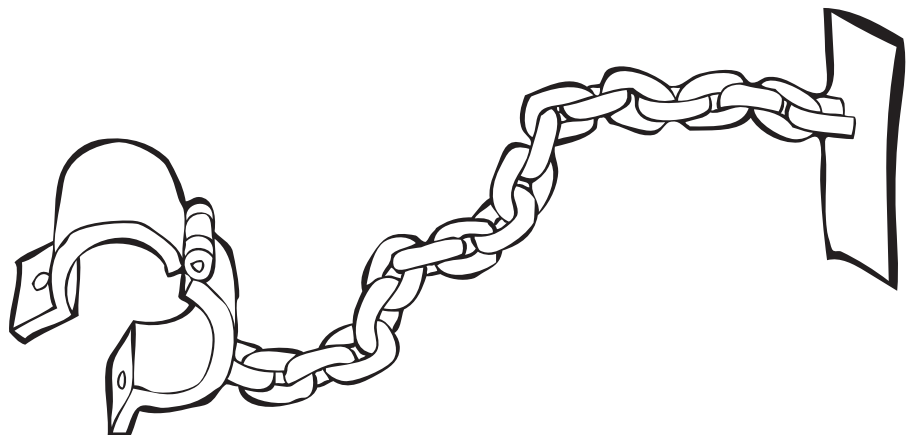
- What do you think the jailer is asking? Saved from what?
- How did Paul and Silas respond to the question? Saved for what?
- How did the jailer respond to the answer? What did he actually "do?"
- Would the question change in meaning if it was changed to "What must I do to be delivered?" or "What must I do to be forgiven?" In what ways?

Notice two different translations:

"Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?" (Common English Bible)

"Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?" (The Message)

- Why do you think the simple answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus," often seems to be changed into a list of requirements, things that we must do?







## ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

The apostle Paul, in a letter to the church in Corinth, states that the death and resurrection of Jesus was “in accordance with the scriptures.”

“Plenty of other Jews of Jesus’ day studied the scriptures with care, insight, and attention. There is every reason to suppose that Jesus did the same, and that he allowed this study to shape his sense of what he had to do. His task, he believed, was to bring the great story of Israel to its decisive climax. The long-range plan of God the creator—to rescue the world from evil and put everything to rights at last—was going to come true in him. His death, which at one level could rightly be seen as an enormous miscarriage of justice, would also be the moment when, as the prophet Isaiah had said, Jesus would be ‘wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities’ (Isaiah 53:5). God’s plan to rescue the world from evil would be put into effect by evil doing its worst to the Servant—that is, to Jesus himself —and thereby exhausting its power.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Wright directs us to the prophet Isaiah. Read Isaiah 52:13—53:12. Choose one or more verse or verses and consider how the early Christians understood that this Scripture was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In what way is Isaiah’s prophecy of “The Servant” used in telling the story of Jesus’ death?

“See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high” (52:13).

“his tomb with the rich” (52:14).

“He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity” (53:3).

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (53:5).

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6).

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (53:7).

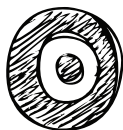
“They made his grave with the wicked” (53:9).

- What is the long-range plan of God the creator? How does it expand upon the common plot of the Bible?
- What difference does it make to know that we are a part of God’s long-range plan?

1. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, (HarperOne, 2010) p. 108.



# MY LORD AND SAVIOR



## THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

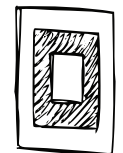
Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

I do.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

I do.

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?  
I will, with God's help.<sup>2</sup>



## PROFESSION OF FAITH

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

I do.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

I do.

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?  
I will, with God's help.

## ORDINATION VOWS FOR OFFICERS

The minister shall ask those preparing to be ordained or installed to stand before the congregation and to answer the following questions:

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?

I do.

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?

I do.

2. *Book of Common Worship*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 408.



# IN CHRIST JESUS

## 1. Read Ephesians 2:8–10.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

- What do you think Paul means by “created in Christ Jesus?”
- What does it mean that faith, as well as salvation, is a gift?

## 2. Read Philippians 4:7, 21.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.”

- What do you think Paul means by “in Christ Jesus?”

## 3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–19.

“The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised. So then, from this point on we won’t recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn’t how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people’s sins against them.” (Common English Bible)

- What happened in Paul’s life that led him to believe that “if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation?”
- What sorts of things does a ministry of reconciliation seek to accomplish?
- Have you ever been reconciled to someone? How did it make you feel?





# SAVING THE WORLD



We are surrounded by a world of superheroes, individuals using their incredible powers to save the world from the forces of evil and destruction, or at least patch up the world until a new threat comes along.



1. Share something about the superhero on your name tag.

- What is their special power?
- How is the power of God far different from the power of superheroes?
- In what ways is God's ultimate goal similar to or different from the goals of the superheroes?
- What are some of the ways we define power today?
- What is unique about the power used by God to save the world?

2. Read Paul's understanding of the awesome power of God:

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved." (1 Corinthians 1:18 [CEB])

"I pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone. He said to me, 'My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness.' So I'll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ's power can rest on me."  
(2 Corinthians 12:8–9 [CEB])

3. In what ways does the message of the good news of Jesus Christ conflict with the strongly held beliefs of our culture? The foolishness of the cross? Power in weakness? That is not the work of a superhero.

- Have you come to know the truth of power in weakness in your own life? In what ways?
- Why is simply saying, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior," a powerful act?



# AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

You are in Christ! We ask you now to enjoy God's new creation by serving our community of faith and the community around us as an ambassador for Christ.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."

You have been called! *Reconciliation* is defined as: the act of making two people or groups of people friendly again after having a serious argument or disagreement and having been separated from each other, or a situation in which this occurs.

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

"In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

You have been forgiven! As the Lord Jesus has revealed himself to you through faith, we ask you to share your faith with those around you so that they too may celebrate the Christ's presence.

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

"All this is God's doing, for he has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ; and he has made us agents of the reconciliation."

You are not called to be secret agents. You are commissioned to be visible agents.

Your actions are to be seen in plain sight. In fact, Jesus asks you to let your light shine!

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

You have been given gifts of the Spirit! We ask you to use your skills, talents and energy to build up all people and to pray for forgiveness and reconciliation.

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

\_\_\_\_\_, I commission you Ambassador of . . .

Are you prepared to serve as an ambassador for Christ?

Yes, with the help of God.

Loving and Gracious God, you call us into paths of ministry. You have given each of us gifts to do your work. Grant us joy in serving as your agents and ambassadors. Help us to keep our eyes open to those times when our words and actions can put in a good word for Jesus Christ. Help us to keep our hearts sensitive to those who desire to know your love in Christ and be reconciled to you. Help us to be reconcilers. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

I commission you Ambassador of

