



A 6-WEEK STUDY
FROM THE
GOSPELS ON

EASTER

FROM OUR ANNUAL *TEACHING STRATEGY*



WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED WITH . . .
**CARLY BARTLETT, CASSANDRA DORSANT
& STEPHEN SWITZER, BIANCA QUEZADA**

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SERIES OVERVIEW

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history – Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

WEEK 1

This week, we'll see how the plot to kill Jesus began and how the Psalms teach us to go to God during times of trouble.

- **BIG IDEA:** When we're in trouble, God gives us help.
- **BIBLE:** John 11:45-57; Psalm 46:1, 130:1-8

WEEK 2

This week, we'll see how Jesus was betrayed, both by Judas and the crowd who celebrated him on Palm Sunday.

- **BIG IDEA:** When we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.
- **BIBLE:** Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-16, 27:22-26; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9

WEEK 3

This week, we'll explore the story of both Jesus' death and resurrection, and what it means for us today.

- **BIG IDEA:** When sin brings death, Jesus gives life.
- **BIBLE:** John 19:1-30, 20:1-18; Psalm 51:9-10

WEEK 4

This week, we'll see how Jesus comforted his fearful disciples on the day of his resurrection.

- **BIG IDEA:** When all seems lost, Jesus is our hope.
- **BIBLE:** John 20:19-23, 1 Peter 1:3-9; Ephesians 1:18

WEEK 5

This week, we'll see how Jesus was present with his disciples on the road to Emmaus, even when they weren't aware of him.

- **BIG IDEA:** When we feel alone, Jesus is present.
- **BIBLE:** Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116:1-5, 139:7-10

WEEK 6

This week, we'll see Jesus give Peter another chance after he denied Jesus and then hear from Peter on why Jesus died for us.

- **BIG IDEA:** When we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.
- **BIBLE:** John 21:15-19; 1 Peter 2:23-25; Romans 6:11-14

MEMORY VERSE: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." – Colossians 1:13-14 (NIV)

HOW TO DISCIPLE DURING THIS SERIES

We all know teenagers don't get disciplined just by sitting through a message every week. So here's what else we've provided to **help your students develop more consistent spiritual habits.**

THE 4 SPIRITUAL HABITS

We feature one of Grow's 4 Spiritual Habits every month with a unique activity or experience. But the 4 Spiritual Habits show up year-round! **Here are a few of the places you can spot them in this series:**

- **SPEND TIME WITH GOD:** Spending time with God is the primary spiritual habit focus of this series. Each week, students will be invited to connect with God in specific ways by asking for help (Week 1), confessing sins (Week 2), responding to the gift of salvation (Week 3), finding hope (Week 4), noticing God's presence (Week 5), and repenting (Week 6).
- **SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS:** To help them grow closer to God, students will be encouraged to reach out to an adult or friend when they need help (Week 1), find hope in the people God has put in their lives (Week 4), and helping each other notice God's presence (Week 5).
- **USE YOUR GIFTS:** Students will be invited to use their gifts to address injustice (Week 3) and support people who need hope (Week 4). They'll also practice talents like art and acting in many of the activities and reflections.
- **SHARE YOUR STORY:** In Week 3, students will hear the good news of Jesus' salvation and be invited to respond for the first time or share how they've already found salvation in Jesus.



DEVOTIONALS

To help students regularly **spend time with God**, every series comes with daily readings and devotionals through The Bible App. You can access them on your browser or app [right here](#). And don't forget about your [Volunteer Devotional!](#)

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITY

If you're following along with our scope and sequence, our discipleship activity this quarter is **Sent to Heal Challenge** an activity to help students **share their stories**. We also made you some [posters and graphics](#) for this quarter's habit you can print, display, or share online.



MEMORY VERSE

Try challenging students to memorize a verse that corresponds with the Big Ideas or themes of this series. Here's the verse we chose — and [we made graphics](#) you can post, print, or show on screen too!



HOW TO PROGRAM FOR THIS SERIES

Outside of your teaching time, we have a few programming ideas to help this series really come to life — everything from how to **design your room**, to which **games to play**, to what **music to play and sing**.



ROOM DESIGN

For this series, you'll be creating a backdrop reminiscent of the Marvel television series *WandaVision*, which is famous for a pretty epic plot twist.

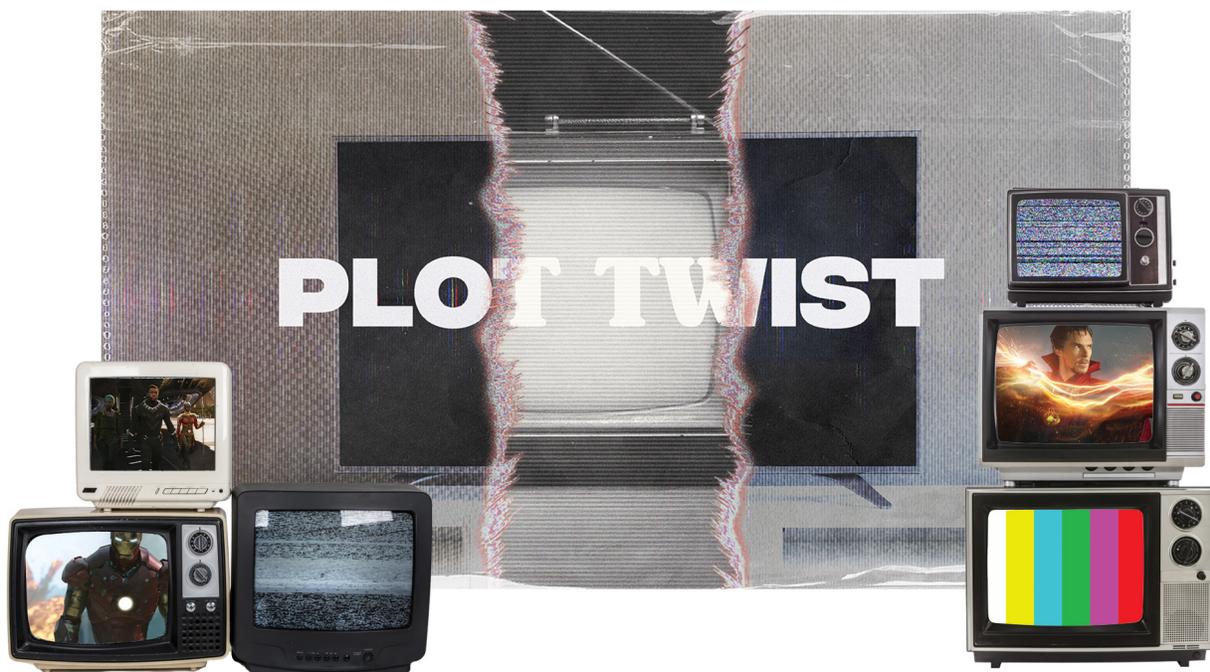
First, you'll need a backdrop. There are tons of ways to create a backdrop that you can re-use multiple times each year. Check out [this post](#) for a list of ideas. For this series, **we recommend using either large panels of plywood or foam insulation boards**. Print the series graphic on a large-format printer and glue it to the backdrop.

Once you have your backdrop, it's time to start collecting a bunch of televisions, both old and new models. Layer them in front of your backdrop at different heights and depths, using whatever tables, stools, or boxes you have available.

Before your teaching time each week, set up your televisions to display a variety of images, like . . .

- Static.
- SMPTE color bars.
- The series graphics or series bumper video.
- Marvel characters or movie screenshots.
- Big Ideas you've already covered.

To do this on older models of televisions, you'll need a computer with an HDMI output and an [adapter like this](#). Display the image on the television by opening the image full-screen on your computer and mirroring your screen.



GAMES

If you have a designated time for games before your worship and teaching time, we have a few suggestions for games you can play! Since this series is all about surprising twists, the games for this series all include a fun "plot twist" or two. To get the instructions and graphics for each game, click the images to the right or visit the Games section of your Grow Students dashboard.

- [Dice Twist](#)
- [Plot Twist Volume 2](#)
- [Sequels and Spinoffs](#)
- [Dice Attack - Movies Edition](#)
- [Behind the Screens](#)
- [Plot Number Twists](#)

MUSIC

Here are a few on-theme worship songs you may want to feature throughout this series . . .

- **"Ain't No Grave"** (Bethel Music)
- **"God All Powerful"** (ARISE Worship)
- **"House Of Miracles"** (Brandon Lake)
- **"Breaking the Dawn"** (C3 NYC)
- **"Nothing More Than You"** (Cory Asbury)
- **"Narrow Gate"** (Ecclesia)
- **"Million Little Miracles"** (Elevation Worship & Maverick City Music)
- **"Mercy"** (Elevation Worship & Maverick City Music)
- **"Evidence"** (Josh Baldwin)
- **"Living Hope"** (Phil Wickham)

And if you want to sing or sample a non-worship song or two (maybe as an opener, a closer, a bonus song during your program), try some of these . . .

- **"Better Days"** (Dermot Kennedy)
- **"You!"** (LANY)
- **"Love I'm Given"** (Ellie Goulding)
- **"Sunday Best"** (Surfaces)
- **"Here With Me"** (Marshmello, CHVRCHES)

We've added these songs to our [Grow Students \(Volume 6\) Spotify playlist](#) for your personal use only, according to Spotify's [terms and conditions](#). For more information on how to use copyrighted music in your services legally, [read this!](#)

GRAPHIC DESIGN

We give you editable graphics so you can make everything your own! If you're going to **edit our graphics** or **create something brand new** . . .

Use this font! Download it [here](#).

INTEGRAL CF BOLD

Use this font! Download it [here](#).

SUBWAY

And use these colors!

 HEX: #878686
CMYK: 49-42-41-5

 HEX: #8F5A57
CMYK: 37-67-58-19

 HEX: #5B5A58
CMYK: 57-51-55-27

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS SERIES

SHOPPING LIST

If you want to try all of our suggestions for this series, here's what you'll need to buy, borrow, Google, or dig for in your storage closet . . .

WEEK 1:

- Screenshots of a few #RealLifePlotTwist tweets like the ones [in this article](#) or a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (1:32-2:37) of Jimmy Fallon reading real-life plot twists
- A short clip [like this one](#) (0:47-2:57) from *Captain America: The First Avenger*
- A short clip [like this one](#) (0:00-2:02) from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*
- The handouts provided in your Week 1 folder
- Pens

WEEK 2:

- A short clip [like this one](#) (0:32-1:58) from *WandaVision* (Season 1, Episode 7)
- 30 nickels
- A [small pouch](#)
- A [dark dye](#)
- One white or lightly colored article of clothing or fabric
- [Clear tubs](#)
- [Disposable gloves](#)
- A tarp or other protected surface
- Salt or vinegar
- White [bandanas](#), [socks](#), [headbands](#), or [t-shirts](#)
- A song like "Take Me Back" (Maverick City Music)

WEEK 3:

- Poster board
- Markers
- A short clip [like this one](#) (0:52-2:34) from *Avengers: Infinity War*
- [Ashes](#)
- A clear container
- A short clip [like this one](#) (1:38-2:42) from *Avengers: Endgame*

- The handouts provided in your Week 3 folder
- Pens
- Easter worship music

WEEK 4:

- Tables
- [Grocery bags](#)
- Non-perishable food items
- A short clip from a video [like this one](#) (0:00-1:29) from *Spider-Man: No Way Home*
- A short clip from a video [like this one](#) (1:57-4:22) from *Spider-Man: No Way Home*
- [Scratch art sheets](#)
- [Sooden stylus tools](#)

WEEK 5:

- Paper or index cards
- Two bowls
- A short clip from a video [like this one](#) (0:00-2:01) from *WandaVision*
- Household items like a plate of food or a microwave, an alarm clock or the alarm app on your phone, and a pair of sneakers or a toy vehicle
- Blank [journals](#)
- Pens
- Markers

WEEK 6:

- Poster board
- Markers
- A short clip [like this one](#) (0:14-0:56) from *Loki*
- The handouts provided in your Week 6 folder
- Pens
- Markers, colored pencils, and crayons

PREP LIST

WEEK 1:

- Print one copy of the **handout** provided for every two students. Cut each handout into halves.

WEEK 2:

- For **It Was Me All Along**, place a chair at the front.
- Place 30 nickels in a small pouch.
- For your **Dip-Dyed** object lesson, set up a station where you can dip-dye an article of white clothing. You may want to create a completed example in advance.
- For the **Turning Back** reflection time, set up at least one station where students can dip-dye fabric.

WEEK 3:

- For **Plot Twist Live-React**, print or draw a few common reaction emojis on poster board: thumbs up, thumbs down, heart, exclamation points, and question marks.
- Collect some ashes in a transparent container.
- Print one copy of the **handout** provided for every two students. Cut each handout into halves.

WEEK 4:

- For **Grocery Bag Relay**, set up your stations with grocery bags and non-perishable food items. Research a local organization that supports food-insecure people who you can donate your supplies to later.
- For the **Vibrant Hope** reflection, place a scratch art sheet and wooden stylus under each seat.

WEEK 5:

- For **Super Charades**, fill one bowl with the names of popular celebrities your students will recognize and be able to impersonate. Fill the other bowl with a variety of superpowers.
- For the **Daily Reminders** object lesson, collect a few basic household objects that correspond with the rhythms of eating meals, waking up, and traveling.

WEEK 6:

- For **Scale of Embarrassment**, print or draw the numbers 1-5 on each piece of poster board.
- Print one copy of the **handout** provided for every two students. Cut each handout into halves and prepare art supplies like markers, crayons, and colored pencils.

WHAT TO CUSTOMIZE

You know your students better than we do, so there are probably some things you'd like to change about this series before you start teaching. Here's what you'll need to update if you make changes . . .

- **TEACHING:** Add your own stories, jokes, and any pop culture references that make sense for your group. You can edit each message using the Word documents provided or the [Grow Message Builder](#).
- **DISCUSSIONS:** If you make any changes to your teaching, make sure your discussion questions reflect those changes. You can edit these using the Word documents provided.
- **GRAPHICS:** We've provided graphics in your [Graphics & Video](#) folder already, but we've also provided blank slides in case you need to make your own.
- **PRESENTATION:** Customize your weekly presentations in [SLIDR](#) and use it to show images and videos during your weekly program. Each week of Grow Curriculum comes pre-loaded with content to get you started.
- **EMAILS & HUBS:** Customize and send the [volunteer and parent emails](#) as well as the [Volunteer and Parent Hubs](#) content we've provided for this series to keep everyone's grown-ups in the loop.

WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

To make sure your students, volunteers, and parents are in the loop, follow along with the Marketing Checklist we've provided for this series to make sure you've got everything covered, like . . .

- **STUDENTS:** Throughout the month, post the [Graphics & Video](#) we've provided on social media, like the Big Idea images and Bumper Video. Post the [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) we've provided or use the [One-Minute Sermon Scripts](#) to film a recap video each week and post it on social media.
- **FAMILIES:** Before you begin teaching this series, send parents the [Parent Email](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). After each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to parents online. And don't forget to update your [Parent Hub](#) with the information they need for this series!
- **VOLUNTEERS:** Before you teach each week of this series, send volunteers the weekly [Volunteer Emails](#) we've provided (after you've customized it for your ministry, of course). Before each week of the series, post the Big Idea images wherever you talk to volunteers online and make sure they have their Discussion Guides in advance! And don't forget to update your [Volunteer Hub](#) with the information they need for this series!

And hey! When you post on social media, **don't forget to use the #growcurriculum hashtag and tag us @stuffyoucanuse** to share your ideas and stories with our team and with other churches who are using Grow!

HOW TO HACK THIS SERIES

Every ministry is different. Whether you're teaching middle schoolers, high schoolers, teenagers with special needs, or all three, here's how to hack this series to fit your unique and diverse audience.

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for middle schoolers, here's what to adjust . . .

Before the series begins, poll your students to find out which Marvel movies they've seen. This series incorporates a ton of references to recent Marvel movies, but with middle schoolers, it might surprise you how a movie you consider recent is something your middle schoolers have never even heard of. Finding out which movies they've seen in advance will help you know when to give backstory, when to avoid spoilers, and when to swap for another clip entirely.

Add visual aids to the Bible stories. Middle schoolers thrive with concrete visuals to help them visualize and remember stories — and most churches have lots of Easter-related visuals on hand! Before the series begins, raid your church's storage closet to see what you have handy. Whether it's costumes for a reenactment, set pieces to make a scene come to life, or props to make the stories more tangible, incorporate what you have!

In Week 2, do the Turning Back reflection in small groups. Because this reflection is a little messy, make sure your middle schoolers have adequate supervision, maybe at tables or outside under an adult leader's supervision.

In Week 3, focus more on Jesus' ability to restore us spiritually than Jesus' ability to restore brokenness in the world. Middle schoolers are concrete thinkers, so it can be difficult for them to focus on multiple ideas at once. For a middle schooler, it's enough to focus on the idea that Jesus can spiritually raise us from the dead despite our sin. Trying to also explain Jesus' ability to resurrect things more broadly (injustice, broken relationships, and more) might be too much for them to process, so save that for your high schoolers.

In Week 5, focus more on loneliness caused by friendship struggles than loneliness caused by pain or grief. For

a middle schooler, it's enough to focus on the idea that we feel lonely when we struggle to find friends who connect with us, like us, or accept us. These are things most middle schoolers are experiencing at this age. Trying to also explain how grief or pain can make us feel lonely may be too much for them to process, so save that for your high schoolers.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

In most weeks of this series, the personal stories can be told by teenagers instead of an adult. Middle schoolers may not be able to participate as story-tellers without quite a bit of coaching, but they would love to hear from high schoolers! If you have a handful of trusted high schoolers available, invite them to be story-tellers during this series, sharing their own "plot twist" stories, either as individuals or as a panel.

HACKS FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for high schoolers, here's what to adjust . . .

In Week 2, ask students what they could buy with 30 pieces of silver. As you share the story of Judas betraying Jesus, make the story more relatable by asking high schoolers what they could purchase for the same amount of money Judas received (approximately \$90-500). Your high schoolers will have a better understanding than your middle schoolers about how much items might cost, which will make this detail of the story more tangible.

In Week 4, address mental health concerns like anxiety, depression, trauma, or abuse. In your conversations with students, you may find some of your high schoolers are experiencing (or know someone who is experiencing) anxiety, depression, trauma, or abuse. All of these situations can cause feelings of hopelessness that won't be resolved by one good sermon. Instead, be sure to prepare your volunteers to be looking for students who might be suffering or at risk, and create a list of local mental health resources in advance.

In Week 5, play Super Charades with just a few preselected students, and have high schoolers provide the suggestions. If your high schoolers aren't huge fans of participating in group games, identify just a few students who are gifted performers to be the players upfront. Get the rest of the students involved by having them provide the suggested celebrities and superpowers. For high schoolers, treat this more as an entertaining segment than a competition.

In Week 6, invite students to share their Comic Book Hero results in person or online. Don't make this mandatory, as this time of reflection may be too personal. But some students may be proud of what they made and eager to share it. Others who are looking for ways to share their stories of faith may need a nudge from you that this is a great opportunity! For those who would like to share it, you could do this live by having them read and display their creations, or you could invite them to share it on their own through social media later.

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

In most weeks of this series, the personal stories can be told by teenagers instead of an adult. Invite a handful of high schoolers to be story-tellers during this series, sharing their own "plot twist" stories, either as individuals or as a panel. High schoolers love the opportunity to hear from their peers or even to share their stories with middle schoolers.

In Week 4, replace the opening Grocery Bag Relay activity with a question. If your high schoolers aren't typically excited about upfront games, replace this activity with something else! You can achieve the same goal by asking questions like, "How easy (or difficult) is it for you to ask for help? What's something you really should ask for help with, but you don't? Why don't you ask for help more often?"

HACKS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

REVISE

To make this week more accessible for students with special needs, here's what to adjust . . .

Remember you might have students who have a hard time understanding the concept of a "plot twist." As you teach, explain what a plot twist is slowly. Allow time for questions and provide several concrete examples of plot twists. You might also have students who get frustrated that they didn't see the plot twist happen and become upset or confused. make sure to give heads up when a plot twist occurs.

Add visual aids to the Bible stories. Students with certain kinds of disabilities thrive with concrete visuals to help them visualize and remember stories — and most churches have lots of Easter-related visuals on hand! Before the series begins, raid your church's storage closet to see what you have handy. Whether it's costumes for a reenactment, set pieces to make a scene come to life, or props to make the stories more tangible, incorporate what you have!

Whenever a time of reflection involves writing, pair students up with buddies. Students may need help with writing for a variety of reasons. Some may lack the fine motor skills or mobility needed to physically write, others may need one-on-one help understanding the prompts and verbalizing a response, and others may need an alternative experience entirely. By pairing students up with either peers or trained adults, their buddies can help customize the experience for them, maybe by writing for them, having a conversation with them instead of writing, or providing an alternative activity just for them.

In Week 2, do the Turning Back reflection in small groups. Because this reflection is a little messy, make sure your students have adequate supervision and assistance, maybe at tables or outside under an adult leader's supervision. Students with certain disabilities may struggle with the fine motor skills needed for this experience, while others may struggle with impulse control or emotional regulation.

In Week 3, focus more on Jesus' ability to restore us spiritually than Jesus' ability to restore brokenness in the world. Students with certain disabilities will think more concretely than abstractly, so it can be difficult for them to focus on multiple complex ideas at once. For these students, it's enough to focus on the idea that Jesus can spiritually raise us from the dead despite our sin. Trying to also explain Jesus' ability to resurrect things more broadly (injustice, broken relationships, and more) might be too much for them to process, so skip it!

REPLACE

And here are the Building Blocks you may want to swap for something else . . .

Replace the second passage of Scripture each week with more time spent on the primary story. Some students with certain disabilities will struggle to process large amounts of information and abstract ideas. To make this series more accessible to them, you might consider focusing on only one passage of Scripture each week. If you do, focus on the stories from Jesus' life and skip the secondary passages.

REMEMBER

Whenever you play a video clip during your teaching time (and this series includes a lot of them!) be sure to always turn on closed captioning to accommodate students who are deaf or having hearing difficulty. And remember, not all students will be upfront about their disabilities, so you may not always know who your students are with hearing challenges.



WRITTEN & DEVELOPED WITH . . .

Carly Bartlett is a preacher and writer from the beautiful Pacific Northwest and is pursuing her MDiv. from Nazarene Theological Seminary. Carly loves traveling to Disney World, going on walks with her 90 lb. Goldendoodle, and watching “The Great British Baking Show,” although she can’t bake to save her life! If you’d like to chat with Carly about storytelling in preaching, mentoring the next generation, or what it’s like to manage her wildly curly hair, reach out! She would love to connect with you!

Cassandra Dorsaint is an ordained minister at Faith Celebration Church in Lakeland, Florida. She has a history of revitalizing youth ministries since 2012. When Cassandra isn’t doing ministry in the church, she travels the world with her current position as a regional director helping spread the word concerning vulnerable children and struggling families. Other than that...she’s always trying to find an excuse to go to Disney World! She’s currently taking offers for annual passes now.

Bianca Quezada is the Children’s Ministry Director at Bethany Presbyterian Church in the Queen Anne neighborhood of Seattle. The role involves coordinating many generous volunteers and crafting creative ways for kids to meet Jesus. If you’d like to chat with Bianca about how to get youth talking, equipping volunteers, or science (Bianca has a B.S. in Physics and Astronomy), reach out! She would love to connect with you!

Stephen Switzer was a youth pastor in Raleigh, North Carolina for 5 years and currently works as a Project Manager for Stuff You Can Use. He and his wife, Erica, live in San Pedro Sula, Honduras where they oversee a nonprofit called Embraced International which focuses on reunifying kids with their biological families. If you’d like to chat about Honduran coffee, North Carolina barbecue, or go-to podcasts, reach out! He would love to connect with you!

. . . AND THE REST OF THE TEAM!



SERIES DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW: Elle Campbell, Brooklyn Lindsey, David Magallanes, Crystal Quintero, Stephen Switzer, Linda Moon, Bianca Quezada, Jeremy Zach, Daniel Acton, Eddie Witkowski, Stephanie Whitacre

HACKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL, AND SPECIAL NEEDS: Shala Graham, Ty Combs, Amanda Keener, Travis Bannon, Sunny Brown, Stephanie Newland

MENTAL HEALTH REVIEW: David Perez

STUDENT DEVOTIONALS: April Wahl, Crystal Quintero

GAMES: Jeremiah Herring, Tyler Grant

ONE-MINUTE SERMON VIDEOS: David Magallanes, Elle Campbell, Jose Rodriguez, Erica Rodriguez, Vanessa Serrano Cruz, Damean Easter, and the Rescue a Generation team

GRAPHIC & LAYOUT DESIGN: Jules Gray, Elle Campbell

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT: Kenny Campbell, Tash McGill, Ali Gattison, Kellee Gentry, Madison Terry, Caitlyn Smelser, Jada Smith, Avery Cochran, Emily Acton, Jay Logan, Eddie Irvin

VOLUNTEER DEVOTIONAL

PLOT TWIST

STUDY

A plot twist is a disruption to a story that the listeners think they've already figured out. Those who were close to Jesus (or hearing about the things he was saying or doing) already had some assumptions about how the Kingdom of God would be set up and what the Messiah would be like. The twists in the Easter story may come as less of a surprise to you on this side of history, but they were mic drop moments! Experiences Jesus delivered to a people who thought they knew the ending to the story. Imagine the surprise! Take a look at the six stories you'll be teaching teenagers this month. Look for the element of surprise in each story and ask God to reveal the plot twist that's most important for you.

To get ready for this series, **spend a few minutes reading the stories we'll be teaching students this month.** As you do, think about what God has taught you (and is still teaching you) about the story of Easter through these passages, and how these Big Ideas have been true in your life.

WEEK 1: When we're in trouble, God gives us help.

John 11:45-57; Psalm 46:1, 130:1-8

WEEK 2: When we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.

Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-16, 27:22-26; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9

WEEK 3: When sin brings death, Jesus gives life.

John 19:1-30, 20:1-18; Psalm 51:9-10

WEEK 4: When all seems lost, Jesus is our hope.

John 20:19-23; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Ephesians 1:18

WEEK 5: When we feel alone, Jesus is present.

Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116:1-5, 139:7-10

WEEK 6: When we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.

John 21:15-19; 1 Peter 2:23-25; Romans 6:11-14

PRAY

What kind of opinion do you think God has about you? The answer to this question can be found when having a conversation with God. Think about what Jesus was willing to go through for you – and all of humanity. Spend some time re-reading John 3:16. Then, read the verse that follows it. What do these verses suggest God's heart is toward you? Allow yourself to hear the Good News of Easter again and consider what new things God may be wanting to say to you.

Which passage of Scripture or Big Idea from this month is most relevant to you right now? Spend a few minutes asking God to show you how you've already grown in this area, plus the next step you need to take in order to keep growing.

GROW

So what's your next step? Do you need to ask God for some help right now? Have you had a season where you've walked away from your faith or aren't very close to God? Maybe it's time to remember that God isn't walking away from you. Do you need the life that Jesus brings or a new dose of hope? It could be simply remembering that Jesus is with you, no matter what you go through, and always willing to give us another chance.

Whatever your next step is right now, take it. Then help students do the same.

WEEK 1 TEACHING GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

BIG IDEA

When we're in trouble, God gives us help.

BIBLE

John 11:45-57;
Psalm 46:1, 130:1-8

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

IMAGE | #RealLifePlotTwists

- Welcome to *Plot Twist*, where we're talking about life taking some unexpected twists and turns. Sometimes plot twists can be amazing. Sometimes they can be challenging. And sometimes they're just funny.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Show screenshots of a few #RealLifePlotTwist tweets like the ones [in this article](#) or play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (1:32-2:37) of Jimmy Fallon reading real-life plot twists. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)

VIDEO | A Clip from *Captain America: The First Avenger*

- Some plot twists make us laugh, while other plot twists leave us clutching our chairs in suspense, like in a good Marvel movie.
 - If you've ever seen *Captain America: The First Avenger*, you might be familiar with the plot twist that ends the movie.
 - Captain Steve Rogers (or Captain America) has just asked the girl of his dreams to go dancing, and she said yes! And then he promptly crashes his plane into the ocean.
 - Audiences across the world were devastated at this tragic end to our hero's story . . . until the screen lit up one more time.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](#) (0:47-2:57) from *Captain America: The First Avenger*, where Steve Rogers wakes up after being asleep for 70 years. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- When Captain America was flying that plane, he believed he had two possible outcomes – he would either die saving the world or finally go on a date.
 - After he made peace with his impending death, waking up from a 70-year nap was definitely not a plot twist he ever saw coming.
 - Despite the good news he suddenly gained access to the internet, video games, and a microwave for the first time in his life, this plot twist mostly left Captain Rogers feeling lost, confused, alone, and in need of help.

POLL | Who would you call for help?

- You're probably never going to be frozen for 70 years, but there's a good chance you're going to experience a plot twist that will leave you needing help someday. You probably have some amazing friends or family members who would be there for you, but if they weren't available, which of these heroes would you call instead?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite students to respond to each scenario by either raising their hands, applauding, or moving to different areas of the room that you designate for each of the four options.*
- Let's say Wanda Maximoff (Scarlet Witch), Sam Wilson (Falcon/Captain America), Scott Lang (Ant-Man), and Gamora are all available to help you, but you can only text each of them once. **Who do you text if:**
 - You're walking to school when you're intercepted on the sidewalk by a gigantic hungry alligator?
 - You remember you have to give a presentation in your science class about space travel, but you have nothing prepared?
 - Your cat runs away and you find her stuck on top of a street light with no way of getting down?
 - You get on the wrong bus, fall asleep, and wake up with no idea where you are and only enough phone battery to send one message?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What's one weird or funny reason you've needed to ask for help recently?**
 - **When you need help, who do you usually reach out to, and for what reasons?**

QUESTION | What are some #RealLifePlotTwists people experience?

- Some of those scenarios we just talked about are a lot less likely to happen than others, but let's talk about some plot twists that actually happen pretty often. **What are some #RealLifePlotTwists people might experience** — the kind of plot twists that would leave you needing help?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- Unexpected twists are a lot of fun in movies, but real-life plot twists can leave us feeling stuck, lost, or in trouble. Maybe that means . . .
 - Someone you love getting sick.
 - Your family needing to move unexpectedly.
 - A scary breaking news story.
 - A friend hurting or betraying you.
 - A situation you caused by making a bad choice.
- There are so many reasons our lives can take unexpected turns. And when they do, we need help.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **What are some qualities a person would need to have before you'd turn to them for help?**
 - ★ **Why do you think people don't turn to God for help more often?**

STORY | Talk about a time you didn't have anyone to ask for help.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you were in trouble without anyone to ask for help. You might talk about a time you got lost when your phone was dead, had to give a group presentation when your fellow group members were all absent, or didn't have anyone to talk to when your best friend moved away.
- We'd all like to know exactly what the future holds, but the unexpected twists will come. So when they do, how can we find help when everything around us feels uncertain?

SCRIPTURE | John 11:45-57

- When Jesus was here on earth, he was involved in a few plot twists of his own. Back then, his followers were convinced he was going to change the world. They were right, but also wrong.
 - Jesus' ministry only lasted for about three years, but during that time he grew a pretty big following. He healed the sick, performed miracles, and attracted crowds of people everywhere he went.
 - But that kind of influence can have a big downside. While more followers meant more people were getting healed and hearing Jesus' message, it also meant the people who didn't like Jesus were becoming increasingly desperate to silence him.
 - When Jesus performed one of his most unbelievable miracles, bringing his friend Lazarus back from the dead, his influence reached an all-time high. His followers were convinced there was nothing he couldn't do, while his enemies were convinced he was dangerous.
- As Jesus' influence grew, his followers pictured Jesus taking power like a king or emperor and ruling the world with justice and love. But then — plot twist. Jesus' enemies began plotting to have him killed.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read or summarize John 11:45-57.
- For centuries, the people of Israel read the Scriptures and anticipated the day when a savior would come to bring hope, peace, and restoration to the world through Israel.
 - This council, more than anyone else in the world at this time, should have been the first to recognize Jesus as the Savior they'd been waiting for.
 - But because Jesus didn't fit their picture of what their savior would look like, these leaders felt threatened instead of overjoyed at these promises being fulfilled.
- Up until this point, Jesus had been moving, teaching, and doing amazing things pretty freely. But this conversation about him in a room full of powerful people changed that. Suddenly, Jesus had to move more cautiously and prepare for the day of his arrest that he knew was coming.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 130:1-8

- This dramatic shift in Jesus' story would've made life much scarier for his disciples. It likely left them feeling confused, uncertain, and afraid of what was to come. In times like this, I wonder if Jesus and his disciples ever looked to the book of Psalms for help — a book of Scripture they would have known well.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Psalm 130:1-8.
- The author of this Psalm is calling out to God, asking for help during trouble.
 - Around the time this Psalm would've been written, a watchman was someone whose job it was to stay awake through the night and alert the people when the first rays of sunshine appeared in the morning. In a time of war, this person kept watch to sound the alarm if an enemy attacked at night.
 - A watchman would spend all night anticipating and looking for threats, knowing trouble could find them at any moment. If this was your job, can you even imagine how much relief that first glimpse of sunshine would bring?

- This is the image the author of this Psalm wants us to have in mind when we think about the trouble we find ourselves in today. Sure, we're not staring out at a field every night looking for enemy archers, but that doesn't mean we don't sometimes feel that same level of uncertainty or fear.
- For you, maybe everything was going according to plan until . . .
 - Someone you love got sick or hurt.
 - A relationship that meant a lot to you ended.
 - The people you used to connect with the most suddenly became unreachable.
 - A big change caused you to question who or what you can really trust.
 - You found yourself in trouble you caused and aren't sure how to fix it.
- When we're in trouble, help can feel hard to come by. But when that help comes (and with God, it will), it is such a relief.
- When trouble began to follow Jesus and his followers, help didn't seem like it was on the way. But with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. Because **when we're in trouble**, we're not alone. **God gives us help.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

VIDEO | A Clip from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*

- Let's flash back to that Captain America plot twist for a second. When Steve Rogers woke up in an unknown time, surrounded by people who hadn't even been born the last time he was awake, he needed help. After a plot twist like this, anyone would feel stressed, confused, and just looking for a way to understand this new reality.
- But let's fast forward to another key moment in Steve Roger's story. It starts with the phrase "on your left" and ends with — well, you'll see.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](#) (0:00-2:02) from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, where Steve Rogers meets Sam Wilson. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- While most people saw Captain America as a hero who didn't need anything, Sam Wilson could see Steve needed some help — even if that help was just a friend and some great playlist recommendations.
 - If superheroes need a little help sometimes, it makes sense if you do too. There's no shame in that.
 - Trouble finds all of us eventually (sometimes through no fault of our own and sometimes because of our poor choices). So when you're in trouble, remember: needing help doesn't make you weak. It makes you human.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - ⊗ **Why do you think we're sometimes slow to ask for help, from either God or others? What do you think Jesus would say about that?**
 - **What are some situations you might experience where you'd need God's help? How would you want God to help you in those situations?**
 - **What are some other people or places we could go for help in those situations? Do you think God is okay with us getting help from them?**

REFLECTION | On Your Left

- If you're familiar with the rest of Steve and Sam's story, you might know that phrase "on your left" comes back in a later movie. When Steve is once again in trouble, Sam shows up (on his left, of course), to bring him the help he needs. So what kind of trouble are you or someone you love facing right now? And who and what is "on your left?"
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. Give students a few moments to write or draw according to the prompts below. Pause after each prompt to give students time to think and write, playing some reflective music.*
- First, let's think about what's causing you trouble. Write, draw, or jot down a prayer.
 - What's causing you or someone you love pain, stress, or grief?
 - What's a problem you're not sure how to solve?
 - What's a big question or doubt that's been nagging at you?
 - What's a need you have that's not being met?
 - What's an unwise or harmful behavior you're struggling to change?
- Now let's think about the help that's available to you. Write, draw, or jot down a prayer about who or what is "on your left," ready and available to give you the help you need. If you're not sure how to find the help you need, write that down too.
 - What has God promised you through Scripture?
 - What is true about God's character?
 - How has Jesus made himself available to you?
 - How has God come through for you in the past?
 - Who are some people God has put in your life who you can go to when you need help?
 - What are some places you could go to find the help you need?

RESPONSE | Reaching Out

- No matter what kind of trouble you're facing, help is available to you. Sometimes help will arrive even when you don't expect it – but most of the time, it's a good idea to ask for help when you're in trouble.
- So how can you reach out to get the help you need? And who do you need to reach out to today? Will you reach out to . . .
 - **GOD?** Just like the Psalmist cried out and begged God for help, there is no one "right" way to pray. You can talk, think, cry, write, draw, and scream your prayers to God. There is nothing you can do to scare God away when you're in trouble. You can reach out to God.
 - **A TRUSTED ADULT?** Some problems are best solved by someone with a little more experience and wisdom than you. If you don't have many trusted adults in your life outside of church, you can always find some here. You can reach out to us.
 - **A FRIEND?** Your friends love you, but sometimes they need a heads up to know when you're in trouble. When you tell them you need help, it's not a burden. It's a sign for them to turn the love they already feel for you into action by giving you the help you need. Just like Sam did for Steve, a friend is there to talk, support you, gather reinforcements, or just give you some killer song suggestions. You can reach out to your friends.
- It's not selfish to ask for help. When we're in trouble, sometimes the only obstacle preventing us from finding the help we need is us. So reach out. **When we're in trouble, we're not alone. God gives us help.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Have you ever asked God for help but didn't get the response you were looking for? What happened?**
 - ✪ **What are some possible reasons why God doesn't always help us in the ways we want or expect?**
 - **Psalm 46:1. What's one reason you need God's help right now? How are you going to ask for it?**

WEEK 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we're in trouble, God gives us help.

BIBLE

John 11:45-57;
Psalm 46:1, 130:1-8

QUESTIONS

- What's one weird or funny reason you've needed to ask for help recently?
- When you need help, who do you usually reach out to, and for what reasons?
- What are some qualities a person would need to have before you'd turn to them for help?
- Why do you think people don't turn to God for help more often?
- Why do you think we're sometimes slow to ask for help, from either God or others? What do you think Jesus would say about that?
- What are some situations you might experience where you'd need God's help? How would you want God to help you in those situations?
- What are some other people or places we could go for help in those situations? Do you think God is okay with us getting help from them?
- Have you ever asked God for help but didn't get the response you were looking for? What happened?
- What are some possible reasons why God doesn't always help us in the ways we want or expect?
- Psalm 46:1. What's one reason you need God's help right now? How are you going to ask for it?



Provide students with paper or canvas and art supplies. Invite them to imagine their own metaphor for how God helps us, inspired by the metaphors in Psalm 130, and draw or paint that word or image. Take pictures of their art and share them.

WEEK 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we're in trouble, God gives us help.

BIBLE

John 11:45-57;
Psalm 46:1, 130:1-8

QUESTIONS

- **What's one weird or funny reason you've needed to ask for help recently?**
- **When you need help, who do you usually reach out to, and for what reasons?**
- **What are some qualities a person would need to have before you'd turn to them for help?**
- **What are some situations you might experience where you'd need God's help? How would you want God to help you in those situations?**
- **What are some other people or places we could go for help in those situations? Do you think God is okay with us getting help from them?**
- **Psalm 46:1. What's one reason you need God's help right now? How are you going to ask for it?**



Provide students with paper or canvas and art supplies. Invite them to imagine their own metaphor for how God helps us, inspired by the metaphors in Psalm 130, and draw or paint that word or image. Take pictures of their art and share them.

WEEK 2 TEACHING GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

BIG IDEA

When we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.

BIBLE

Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-16, 27:22-26;
Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | It Was Me All Along

- We're back for another week full of plot twists. Let's see if you can guess the twist in this game.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll need six players. Choose one to sit in a chair while the other five stand behind them. Tell your player in the chair that, one at a time, the people standing behind them will tap them on the shoulder and they have to guess who it was. Huddle up with the other five before you start and tell them the plot twist – you will actually be the one tapping their shoulder each time.*

VIDEO | A Clip from *WandaVision*

- Being betrayed or deceived (especially by people we thought we could trust) is the kind of "plot twist" none of us like to experience. But if you're a Marvel fan, you're probably accustomed to this kind of surprise.
 - Today I want to take you to a town called Westview, New Jersey, where the series *WandaVision* takes place.
 - In this story, Wanda Maximoff has been trying hard to keep her town under control, but due to some unknown force, everything keeps going wrong. As the audience, we're left to wonder what this could all be about.
 - But then Wanda's best friend Agnes reveals . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](#) (0:32-1:58) from *WandaVision* (Season 1, Episode 7) where Wanda's friend Agatha reveals herself. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- It's never fun to be confronted by an evil villain, but this plot twist was made so much worse by the fact that Agatha had been pretending to be Wanda's friend!

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What's the weirdest reason you've ever been in a fight with a friend?**
 - **What are some "dealbreakers" you've seen end a friendship? Without naming any names, have any of those ever happened to you?**

POLL | Super Dealbreakers

- If you know a person for long enough, you'll eventually experience some sort of hurt or conflict. One disagreement isn't a reason to stop hanging out with someone, but some things can feel too painful to come back from.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Poll your students with these examples of betrayal from the Marvel Universe. Ask them to raise their hands if they think the scenario would be enough for them to see it as a friendship dealbreaker.*
- **Which of these super-betrayals would be dealbreakers for you?**
 - A new guy walks onto your spaceship and now your friends think he's cooler (and prettier) than you.
 - Your cousin shows up for your party and throws you over a waterfall.
 - Your friends put you in a time machine and briefly turn you into a baby.
 - Your best friend goes behind your back to build a secret fleet of super weapons without even telling you.
- Okay, maybe you've never experienced that kind of betrayal, but maybe you or a friend . . .
 - Spoke negatively about each other.
 - Let the other person down.
 - Chose other friends or interests over each other.
- In friendships, we know there are some dealbreakers that a relationship just can't come back from. So when it comes to having a relationship with Jesus, it makes sense if you have some questions about what his dealbreakers are – and if you've already messed it all up. What could we do in our relationship with Jesus that would make it difficult, if not impossible, to come back from?

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 21:1-11

- Jesus' story is full of plot twists that shocked everyone (well, everyone except Jesus). Sometimes Jesus was the cause of that twist, but sometimes it was other people.
- One of the most well-known days of Jesus' life is what we now call Palm Sunday. It's the day Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey and was met by a cheering crowd.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 21:1-11.*
- When Jesus rode into town on a donkey he was making a powerful statement. Instead of riding in on a huge horse like a military commander or ruler might, Jesus arrived on the scene humbly.
 - Whether the crowd understood that message immediately or not is unclear. But what is clear is they were excited to see Jesus. They were thrilled by his teachings, eager to see him perform miracles, and ready to celebrate him.
 - With that kind of welcome, it would have been difficult for Jesus' followers to imagine anything other than a happy ending to this trip to Jerusalem.
 - But – plot twist. Only a few days later, that same crowd would be calling for Jesus to be killed.
- If you've ever watched a movie with a major plot twist then you know there are several moments that lead up to the pivotal moment. Sometimes a plot twist does happen out of nowhere, but often the storyteller gives you clues. Jesus' story is no different.
 - Jesus told his friends and followers this trip would end in his death.
 - The religious and political leaders in the city had plans in place to trap Jesus.
 - And for centuries prophets had spoken about what was about to happen.

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 26:14-16

- But the crowd turning on him wasn't the only betrayal Jesus would experience before his death. Judas was one of Jesus' disciples who had been with Jesus for three years. For all this time they had traveled, eaten meals, served people, and had countless conversations together. And yet . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Matthew 26:14-16.
- Judas decided to betray Jesus by leading a group of soldiers directly to him so they could quickly arrest him in the night.

OBJECT LESSON | 30 Nickels

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your teaching time, add 30 nickels to [a small pouch](#). Shake the bag and reveal the coins as you teach.
- Judas agreed to betray his teacher, all of his friends, and everything he believed in for 30 pieces of silver.
 - It's hard to know exactly what type of currency and value this bag of coins would've had – but most historians put the range anywhere from \$90 to \$500 in modern-day money.
 - It's easy to stand where we are today and judge Judas for selling out his friend for the price of a gaming console or a smartwatch. But maybe this was about just money for Judas.
- Remember, Judas heard and saw the same plot twist spoilers we were talking about just a moment ago. He heard Jesus talking about how he was going to be executed and saw the leaders of the city put a warrant out for Jesus' arrest.
 - I wonder if Judas felt like his years of hard work and passion were all about to go to waste. After giving up so much to follow Jesus, maybe he wondered, "What if this was all for nothing? What if I was wrong?"
 - These 30 pieces of silver might not have been a fortune, but I wonder if they represented a chance to start fresh for Judas. After all, when we're afraid, we're all prone to do selfish things to protect ourselves, aren't we?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - ⊛ **When someone hurts or betrays you, how do you tend to react? What do you like and dislike about the ways you usually react?**
 - ⊛ **How do you think God reacts when we mess up? Why do you think that?**

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 27:22-26

- After Judas had turned Jesus over to the authorities, a long night began for Jesus. It would be a night full of accusations, beatings, interrogations – and betrayals.
- As Jesus was on trial with one of the political leaders in the area, this leader, known as Pilate, decided he couldn't find any reason to have Jesus punished. So Pilate turned to the crowd, giving them a chance to do the right thing and have Jesus released. But this is where they turned on him.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Matthew 27:22-26.
- The same exact crowd that shouted and praised Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, was now shouting "crucify him!" In less than a week, the crowd had stopped worshipping him and were demanding his execution and humiliation instead.

SCRIPTURE | Colossians 1:13-14

- Jesus faced betrayal after betrayal throughout his life, but especially in the days before his death. He saw strangers, his followers, and even his best friends turn their backs on him.
 - But every time Jesus was given an opportunity to give up on people, stop caring about people, or hate people, he instead continued to love them instead.
 - In this way, Jesus actually carried out the biggest plot twist in this story when he was hit with unimaginable levels of betrayal. Instead of doing the expected thing and choosing to give up on the people who hurt him, or even take revenge, Jesus chose love and forgiveness instead.
- The apostle Paul described Jesus' response like this . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Colossians 1:13-14.*
- When people failed Jesus, betrayed him, and turned their backs on him, Jesus could have changed his mind. He could have given up on his whole mission to rescue us. But with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. Because **when we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

STORY | **Talk about a time you hurt someone but they loved you anyway.**

- None of us like admitting it, but the stuff that caused the crowd to turn away from Jesus is the same stuff that causes us to turn away from loving Jesus (and each other) today.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Talk about a time you hurt someone but they loved you anyway. Maybe you said something mean about a friend behind their back, but instead of ghosting you they asked to talk with you about it instead. Or maybe you blamed a friend for something they didn't do, but they were forgiving instead of spiteful. Whatever happened, share how this person showed you love even when you hadn't shown love for them.*
- I'll never forget the example this person set for me. It's so much easier to write someone off, move on from a relationship, or hold onto bitterness than it is to forgive and love someone who's hurt us. Thankfully, Jesus always chooses to forgive and love us – even when we feel like we deserve it the least.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **What are some ways we might turn our backs on Jesus on a typical day?**
 - ★ **If God is always ready to forgive us, what's stopping us from doing whatever we want?**
 - **Read 1 John 1:9. What are some reasons we might not go to God when we've messed up?**

OBJECT LESSON | Dip-Dyed

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, set up a station where you can dip-dye an article of white clothing. You'll need a [dark color of dye](#), one white or lightly colored article of clothing or fabric, a [clear tub](#) filled with water and plenty of dye, [disposable gloves](#), and a tarp or other protected surface where you can dye safely. You may also need salt or vinegar, depending on the dye you purchase. While you teach, dip the fabric partially into the dye repeatedly. You may want to experiment by dipping it into the water for different durations of time and at different depths or splashing dye to create a splatter effect. If you need additional instructions, [check this out](#). You may also want to create another example in advance to show what a finished piece might look like.*
- When I see a perfectly white article of clothing, I get a little nervous. White stains so easily that just a single drop of the wrong substance can leave a permanent mark. Maybe you feel that way about your relationship with Jesus sometimes too. Maybe you think . . .

- "I need to do this perfectly."
- "I can't make a mistake or everything will be ruined."
- "I've already messed this up, so why bother? There's no going back."
- But the last time I checked, a lot of stores sell tie-dyed clothes. We still see value in their messiness, imperfections, and "stains." I think Jesus sees us the same way.
 - He sees the ways we've messed up, failed him, and even betrayed him better than we know ourselves. But he still chose to give everything for us in order to make us new.
 - No, we're not perfect, but Jesus still sees someone lovable and valuable when he looks at us — someone worth dying for.

REFLECTION | Turning Back

- When just about everyone in Jesus' life (his friends, fans, peers, and government) had all turned their backs on him, Jesus continued to love them all.
- None of us in this room turned our back on Jesus on the day of his public trial. We weren't in the crowd that cheered for Jesus' death and we didn't take any part in having Jesus arrested. But we've all had moments when we've turned away from Jesus — or maybe we've never turned toward him in the first place.
- We might turn away from Jesus when we . . .
 - Make other things more important than our relationship with him.
 - Choose to ignore or disregard what he has said.
 - Hurt someone he created and loves.
 - Refuse to make things right when we've done something harmful.
 - Refuse to learn or change when we've done something unwise.
- There are so many reasons we might feel stained, ruined, or unfixable. But that's exactly why Jesus came — to rescue us from darkness and death. There is nothing you can do to get Jesus to turn his back on you. But maybe today you need to turn back toward him.
 - Maybe there's something you need to make right with God so you can get back to growing in your relationship with Jesus.
 - Maybe you need to ask God's forgiveness for the first time (or the hundredth time). No matter which time it is, he's ready to listen.
 - Or maybe you just need to spend some time thanking Jesus for the ways he has already forgiven, loved, and rescued you.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your teaching time, set up at least one dip-dye station for your students. Provide them with white [bandanas](#), [socks](#), [headbands](#), or [t-shirts](#) and invite them to dip-dye as they reflect, ask forgiveness, worship, or pray. Play a song like "Take Me Back" (Maverick City Music), but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information, [read this!](#)
- There is no mistake you can make, no harm you can cause, and no wrong you can do that Jesus isn't ready and willing to forgive. You will never live in a world where Jesus has turned away from you, no matter how many times you turn away from him. **When we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - **When we mess up, why is going to God the best thing we can do?**
 - ★ **Have you ever asked God to forgive you, but struggled to do things differently afterward? How can we change after we've messed up?**
 - **This week, what's something you could do to stay close to Jesus instead of turning away from him?**

WEEK 2

DISCUSSION GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.

BIBLE

Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-16, 27:22-26;
Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9

QUESTIONS

- What's the weirdest reason you've ever been in a fight with a friend?
- What are some "dealbreakers" you've seen end a friendship? Without naming any names, have any of those ever happened to you?
- When someone hurts or betrays you, how do you tend to react? What do you like and dislike about the ways you usually react?
- When you fail or mess up, how do you imagine God reacts? Why do you think so?
- What are some ways we might turn our backs on Jesus on a typical day?
- If God is always ready to forgive us, what's stopping us from doing whatever we want?
- Read 1 John 1:9. What are some reasons we might not go to God when we've messed up?
- When we mess up, why is going to God the best thing we can do?
- Have you ever asked God to forgive you, but struggled to do things differently afterward? How can we change after we've messed up?
- This week, what's something you could do to stay close to Jesus instead of turning away from him?

WEEK 2

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.

BIBLE

Matthew 21:1-11, 26:14-16, 27:22-26;
Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9

QUESTIONS

- What's the weirdest reason you've ever been in a fight with a friend?
- What are some "dealbreakers" you've seen end a friendship? Without naming any names, have any of those ever happened to you?
- What are some ways we might turn our backs on Jesus on a typical day?
- Read 1 John 1:9. What are some reasons we might not go to God when we've messed up?
- When we mess up, why is going to God the best thing we can do?
- This week, what's something you could do to stay close to Jesus instead of turning away from him?

WEEK 3 TEACHING GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

BIG IDEA

When sin brings death,
Jesus gives life.

BIBLE

John 19:1-30, 20:1-18;
Psalm 51:9-10

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

POLL | Plot Twist Live-React

- Welcome back to *Plot Twist*, where we're exploring some shocking twists, both in movies and in real life. When we experience a plot twist in real life, it can leave us feeling all sorts of things – I guess it just depends on what kind of plot twist we're talking about.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print or draw a few common reaction emojis on poster board: thumbs up, thumbs down, heart, exclamation points, and question marks. If you'd like this poll to require movement, place the poster board in different parts of the room and have students run toward the emoji they're voting for. If you'd like a more subdued poll, assign each emoji a movement students can do at their seats, like thumbs up, thumbs down, making a heart shape with their fingers, gasping with their hands on either side of their faces, or scratching their heads in confusion. Present a few "plot twist" scenarios and have them react.*
- **How would you live-react to these plot twists?**
 - You wake up to learn your phone didn't charge overnight.
 - You find \$5.00.
 - Your parents tell you you're moving.
 - Your dog learns to talk and tells you your breath stinks.
 - Your crush likes your most recent post.
 - You turn on the news and see your friend getting interviewed.
 - You win free tickets to a show you've always wanted to see.
 - You win free tickets to a show you've never heard of.
 - You find out you're allergic to your favorite food.
 - Your best friend tells you they're sick of you.
 - Your friend gives his magical time stone to the most dangerous villain in the universe.

VIDEO | A Clip from *Avengers: Infinity War*

- Okay, that last one probably isn't going to happen in real life, but when it happened in a Marvel movie, it was a pretty mind-blowing plot twist. This storyline is old news now, but if you were in the theater when this happened . . . well, nobody could believe what they were seeing.

- If you've seen *Avengers: Infinity War*, you know the villain, Thanos, had been trying to collect six infinity stones that would give him the power to destroy half of all life in the universe.
- Thanos had successfully gathered the first four, but the fifth stone seemed well protected by Doctor Strange. The only way Thanos could get the stone would be for Doctor Strange to willingly hand it over. But we all knew our hero would never let that happen . . . right?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](#) (0:52-2:34) from *Avengers: Infinity War*, where Doctor Strange surrenders one of the infinity stones to Thanos. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- Earth's mightiest warriors, and a few of their alien buddies, had a chance to prevent the universe's greatest threat from accomplishing his evil plans. But then this guy just *handed over* the power in order to save his friend! What?

OBJECT LESSON | Ashes

- If you've seen *Avengers: Infinity War*, you know Thanos did in fact get all six stones and destroyed half of all life in the universe. The last several minutes of this movie show many of our favorite characters simply disappearing into clouds of ashes.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program begins, collect some ashes in a transparent container. You could collect them from a fireplace or purchase ashes [like these](#). Hold them as you teach.*
- Sometimes, like at the end of this movie, a plot twist leaves us feeling like we've run out of options — like things are ruined beyond repair, like these ashes. Once, these ashes were a living tree. But then it was cut down, chopped up to make firewood, and then burned down into ashes. That once-living tree is now dead and gone.
- Maybe you've experienced plot twists like this, like when . . .
 - You worked so hard to achieve a goal, but still failed.
 - You watched a relationship fall apart, no matter how hard you tried to salvage it.
 - Someone you love passed away and you realized you'd never see them again.
 - You made a huge mistake and are still dealing with the consequences.
 - You learned new information that made you realize the world is a lot more broken than you thought.
- Sometimes we'll face plot twists that leave things (or us) seemingly broken beyond repair. So when things feel hopeless, is that the end of the story? Or could there be hope for something more?

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What's one happy "plot twist" you've experienced in your life recently?**
 - **What's one not-so-happy "plot twist" you've experienced recently? How did you react when it happened?**

STORY | **Talk about a time sin damaged things.**

- Throughout Scripture, you hear the word "sin" a lot, but it's not a word you hear very often outside of church. "Sin" just means anything that goes against what God wants for us and the world. It's the thing responsible for so much of the hopelessness and brokenness we see and experience.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life where sin (either yours or someone else's) damaged things seemingly beyond repair. You might talk about experiencing the consequences of your own sin, or being the victim of someone else's sin, or becoming aware of the way sin contributes to violence and injustice on a more global scale. Share what became broken because of sin and how impossible it seemed to fix or heal it.*

- Sin can be something we choose to do, but it can also be something we do accidentally. But either way, sin always causes damage – to us, to others, and to our closeness with God.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **What are some situations that could leave a person feeling broken or hopeless? What do you think "sin" has to do with each of those situations?**
 - **How would you explain "sin" to someone who had never heard of it before?**

SCRIPTURE | John 19:1-30

- Last time, we saw some of the ways sin can create death and damage, both spiritually and physically, when Jesus was betrayed by the people who used to love and follow him.
 - Some of the people who betrayed Jesus were strangers, but at least one of them was one of his best friends.
 - As a result of those betrayals, Jesus was arrested, charges were invented against him, and he was unjustly sentenced to death.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize John 19:1-30.*
- What happened to Jesus was horrifying. Jesus wasn't a criminal. He wasn't violent. He had never harmed anyone – but his message had intimidated the people who were in power, so they were eager to see him killed. As a result, Jesus was . . .
 - Beaten.
 - Made to wear a crown made of thorns.
 - Mocked by soldiers and the crowd.
 - Forced to carry his own heavy execution device.
 - Murdered in a public place where crowds could watch for entertainment.
- Jesus suffered and so did his friends and followers. They knew Jesus as someone who healed the broken, set free those in bondage, and redeemed what was lost. But now he was being killed and there didn't seem to be anything anyone could do about it.
 - Death is the final chapter in every human life and everyone in this city on that day watched Jesus take his final breath.
 - The story seemed to be over. Jesus' enemies seemed to have won. Sin seemed to have won. Jesus seemed to have lost.
 - But while everyone saw death seemingly having the last word, Jesus saw a plot twist coming no one else predicted.

SCRIPTURE | John 20:1-18

- Days after Jesus' public execution, Mary, one of Jesus' closest disciples, went to visit Jesus' tomb. She didn't show up expecting a new chapter in the Jesus story. She was there to mourn the story she thought had just ended. Jesus' followers were grieving the loss of . . .
 - Their friend.
 - Their hope.
 - Their identity.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize John 20:1-18.*
- When they found out Jesus' body was missing, this wasn't immediately good news. It seemed like one more sick plot twist in the after-the-credits scene of a tragic movie. They didn't think, "Maybe he's alive," because that would be impossible . . . right?

- The Easter season is the time we celebrate the real plot twist we now know was waiting for the disciples on this Sunday morning so many years ago. Jesus was, and is, very much alive. Death and sin didn't have the last word after all.
- But this plot twist wasn't just for Jesus' friends back then. It's for us today too, because Jesus is still alive and still defeating sin and death.
- In the midst of death, grief, and hopelessness, Jesus has the power to change the story by bringing life and hope into dead and hopeless places.
- When sin leads to destruction and brokenness, it doesn't always seem like there is hope for change or redemption. But with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. What happened on that first Easter Sunday is proof that **when sin brings death, Jesus gives life.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **What do you think Jesus' death and resurrection tell us about sin and its effects?**
 - ★ **What do you think Jesus' death and resurrection tell us about what God is like?**

VIDEO | A Clip from *Avengers: Endgame*

- If you're a Marvel fan, you know that moment when Doctor Strange gives Thanos the infinity stone isn't the end of their story either. At the time, it may have seemed like the Avengers lost to Thanos. They were defeated, half of them faded into ashes, and the story was over and beyond repair . . . but Doctor Strange saw the possibility of one more plot twist.
 - Before he surrendered the time stone, Doctor Strange told his team there was only one possible scenario in which the Avengers could defeat Thanos.
 - After they lost the first battle, we all assumed they failed to find that one possibility. But one three-hour movie later, we learned what he really meant.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](#) (1:38-2:42) from *Avengers: Endgame*, where Iron Man defeats Thanos. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- It may have seemed like Doctor Strange was surrendering to defeat, but his surrender was actually strategic. With his sacrifice, he saw a plot twist coming that no one, including their enemy, could've imagined.

REFLECTION | Death and Life

- The Easter story is not about everything turning out exactly the way we would expect or want it to, but it is about realizing broken things are not doomed to stay broken forever.
 - We don't have to stay broken.
 - Our relationships with God don't have to stay broken.
 - Our world doesn't have to stay broken.
- Because of Jesus, there is now hope and life when there used to only be death and hopelessness. But how? And what can we do to help make that a reality?
 - **GRIEVE WHAT'S BROKEN.** Sometimes, the Easter season can feel a little bit like "toxic positivity." Jesus-followers can sometimes be so excited to focus on the joy and hope of Jesus' victory over sin that we fail to acknowledge all the pain sin has caused. While we certainly have reasons to celebrate, it doesn't erase sin or all the pain and brokenness it causes. It's good to grieve . . .

- **OUR PAIN:** When someone we love is hurting or we lose someone or something important to us, it's normal to feel all sorts of feelings. Jesus isn't asking you to pretend to be happy when life is painful. We can grieve the things that bring us pain.
- **OUR SIN:** When we realize we have caused harm by falling short of what God wants for us, it's not only *normal* to experience grief — it's actually *helpful*. We can and should grieve the mistakes we've made and the pain we've caused. Then we need to let that grief push us to make things right.
- **INJUSTICE:** When the world is violent, unfair, and full of suffering, it's evidence that sin is still at work in the world. God invites us to not just ignore or go numb to that kind of injustice, but to see and grieve it.
- **ASK GOD TO RESTORE WHAT HAS BROKEN.** When we let ourselves see and grieve the things that are broken in and around us, it can sometimes feel a little scary or overwhelming. But remember, there is hope and a solution. Take those things to Jesus and ask him to bring new life into the things that are broken — including you, your world, and the whole world.
- **JOIN GOD IN RESTORING WHAT IS BROKEN.** Only Jesus can conquer sin and death. Only he can transform us. Only he can bring new life to things that are broken. But here's what's amazing — he invites us to join him in that process.
 - When we've messed up, we can take action to help make things right.
 - When we notice someone in pain, we can reach out in love.
 - When we see the world is broken, we can be part of the solution.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 3 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. Invite students to write on the left where they see sin and death (in themselves, in their lives, or in the world). On the right, invite them to write what "plot twist" they want to see God create in those areas.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Why do you think it's so important to take time to grieve the things that are broken, like Mary did?**
 - ✪ **How do you think God might be inviting you to spend more time grieving what is damaged . . .**
 - In the world?
 - In your life?
 - In your faith?
 - In you?
 - **Read Psalm 51:9-10. What's one way Jesus has already done this for you or one way you'd like him to?**
 - **This week, what's one way you want to see Jesus transform death into life? Does it have to do with:**
 - Your mistakes?
 - Your relationship with God?
 - Your life?
 - The world?

MUSIC | Easter Worship

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Close with your favorite song celebrating Jesus' resurrection.*
- The hope of the resurrection means that even when things seem hopeless and we're grieving, we can look for signs of life. This week . . .
 - **LOOK FOR HEALING.** Where did you once only see pain, but can now see peace? Where can you see things already changing and being transformed?
 - **LOOK FOR HOPE.** How has God come through for you in the past? If Jesus could defeat death, what might he be able to do in the situation you're facing now?
 - **LOOK FOR GOD'S INVITATIONS.** There is no situation where Jesus cannot bring healing, but where might he want you to join him? How might he be inviting you to right wrongs or bring life into someone else's pain?
- Easter Sunday isn't about wishful thinking that everything will be okay. It's not about ignoring what's wrong. It's about trusting that Jesus can take what seems beyond repair and make it brand new. Because **when sin brings death, Jesus gives life.**

WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When sin brings death,
Jesus gives life.

BIBLE

John 19:1-30, 20:1-18;
Psalm 51:9-10

QUESTIONS

- What's one happy "plot twist" you've experienced in your life recently?
- What's one not-so-happy "plot twist" you've experienced recently? How did you react when it happened?
- What are some situations that could leave a person feeling broken or hopeless? What do you think "sin" has to do with each of those situations?
- How would you explain "sin" to someone who had never heard of it before?
- What do you think Jesus' death and resurrection tell us about sin and its effects?
- What do you think Jesus' death and resurrection tell us about what God is like?
- Why do you think it's so important to take time to grieve the things that are broken, like Mary did?
- How do you think God might be inviting you to spend more time grieving what is damaged . . .
 - In the world?
 - In your life?
 - In your faith?
 - In you?
- Read Psalm 51:9-10. What's one way Jesus has already done this for you or one way you'd like him to?
- This week, what's one way you want to see Jesus transform death into life? Does it have to do with:
 - Your mistakes?
 - Your relationship with God?
 - Your life?
 - The world?

WEEK 3

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When sin brings death,
Jesus gives life.

BIBLE

John 19:1-30, 20:1-18;
Psalm 51:9-10

QUESTIONS

- What's one happy "plot twist" you've experienced in your life recently?
- What's one not-so-happy "plot twist" you've experienced recently? How did you react when it happened?
- What are some situations that could leave a person feeling broken or hopeless? What do you think "sin" has to do with each of those situations?
- How would you explain "sin" to someone who had never heard of it before?
- Read Psalm 51:9-10. What's one way Jesus has already done this for you or one way you'd like him to?
- This week, what's one way you want to see Jesus transform death into life? Does it have to do with:
 - Your mistakes?
 - Your relationship with God?
 - Your life?
 - The world?

WEEK 4 TEACHING GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

BIG IDEA

When all seems lost,
Jesus is our hope.

BIBLE

John 20:19-23; 1 Peter 1:3-9;
Ephesians 1:18

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Grocery Bag Relay

- Welcome back to *Plot Twist*, where we've been talking about some pretty major and unexpected twists — in our lives, in Jesus' life, and in the lives of our favorite fictional superheroes too.
- You all may not have actual superpowers, but there is one modern-day test of super strength I want to challenge you with today.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, set up two tables with [grocery bags](#) and a ton of non-perishable food items. Create at least two teams of three and give them 30 seconds to get as many of their items into the grocery bags as they can. Put another 30 seconds on the clock and ask one person from each team to carry as many grocery bags as possible from one end of the room to the other. Their teammates are allowed to help them carry the bags if they ask for help — but don't tell them that! See if they can figure it out on their own. Whichever team delivers the most total items (with or without their teammates' help) wins. After your program, find a local organization that supports food-insecure people in your community and donate your supplies.*
- Isn't it funny how sometimes we forget to ask for help? When we're faced with a challenge, sometimes we think we have to do it all alone, even when we don't. So why don't we always ask for help when we need it? Maybe because we . . .
 - Are too proud or embarrassed to admit we can't do it alone.
 - Don't want to inconvenience others.
 - Don't trust anyone would help us even if we asked.

VIDEO | A Clip from *Spider-Man: No Way Home*

- We're heading into the Marvel *multiverse* this week with the story of a character who faced a challenge he absolutely could not handle on his own. It all started when two different Spider-Men (Spider-Mans?) showed up in a world they didn't quite understand, but that needed their help.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (0:00-1:29) from *Spider-Man: No Way Home* where the alternate universe versions of Peter Parker show up because they want to help. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*

- These two Peter Parkers could sense the Peter Parker in this universe needed their help.
 - Now, it's a superhero movie, so you might assume the help Peter needed was some extra web-slinging and bad-guy-fighting.
 - But Peter had just lost the last of his family when his aunt May was killed.
 - At the beginning of the movie, he'd had big dreams of righting wrongs. But at this point, he just wants to give up.
 - So before they could start fighting villains, these two new Spider-Mans (Spider-Men?) understood a different kind of help was needed first.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **When life is painful or overwhelming, what helps you find joy or hope again?**
 - ★ **What are some reasons people might feel lost or hopeless? Which of those can you relate to?**
 - ★ **When life is painful or overwhelming, what are some unhealthy ways people tend to react? Which of those can you relate to?**

VIDEO | Another Clip from *Spider-Man: No Way Home*

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (1:57-4:22) from *Spider-Man: No Way Home* where all three Peters meet to discuss their past mistakes and traumatic experiences. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- At the beginning of this scene, Peter was ready to give up.
 - He's usually known for being cheerful and optimistic, but this time he was hurting, defeated, and feeling hopeless.
 - He's usually known for doing the right thing, always looking for ways to help others and make a difference. But this time he was tired of the effort and ready to let someone else deal with it.
 - And he's usually known for being a team player, but this time he was pushing away the people who wanted to help.
- When we go through really painful experiences, these are some of the ways they can impact us. The two older Peter Parkers understood that because they had been there before. So they gave Peter the thing he really needed: hope.
- But hey, we're not Spider-Man. We're not battling supervillains and we don't have the ability to contact people from other dimensions. So when life gives us a "plot twist" that leaves us feeling lost and defeated, where can we find hope?
 - But not false hope — the kind that promises everything will be okay even when it probably won't.
 - And not toxic positivity — the kind that says to just be happy even when everything is falling apart.
 - We need the kind of hope that acknowledges our pain is real — and then helps us see we're not alone, and there's still something worth fighting for.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | John 20:19-23

- For the last few weeks, we've been following the stories of Jesus' last days here on Earth. Last time, we explored the biggest plot twist in Jesus' story and in the history of humanity — Jesus' death and resurrection.

- Easter Sunday is a big day. It's the day we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death. It's a day of joy and celebration. It's the day all of Christianity is based on!
- But the good news of Easter Sunday didn't erase the horrible things Jesus and his friends endured leading up to Jesus' resurrection.
- Jesus' resurrection showed us that Jesus can make dead things alive again and can make broken things new again. But that doesn't erase what happened. It doesn't mean the death and brokenness never happened.
- Jesus' friends had seen their friend brutally murdered. Some of them had betrayed Jesus and each other. They'd feared for their lives. They'd gone into hiding.
- Jesus' friends had survived what was probably the most traumatizing experience of their lives. So when Mary, Peter, and John announced the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive . . . well, can you blame them if they were still a little fearful?
 - The disciples locked themselves away for safety, afraid they could be arrested and killed the same way Jesus had been.
 - With their lives on the line, they probably weren't ready to believe Jesus really was back — not until they'd seen it with their own eyes.
 - When you've been hurt or experienced a loss as big as what these people had experienced, it's not easy to figure out how to have hope again.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read *John 20:19-22*.
- Do you see what Jesus did?
 - When his friends were feeling lost and hopeless, he went straight to them. He didn't even wait for them to open the door. He simply appeared, right there in the midst of their fear and pain.
 - His first words were, "Peace be with you." This isn't just a cool way of saying "hello." It was reassurance that they really could have peace again — and he was there to help them find it.
 - Then Jesus showed them his pierced hands and scarred side. He didn't get angry with them for not believing or hit them with an, "I told you so." Instead, Jesus gently and patiently helped them believe that the good news they'd heard really was true after all.
- And then for another plot twist, Jesus did something extraordinary. He offered them his Spirit — the Holy Spirit, who had been promising to send them. As we learn in other places in Scripture, the Holy Spirit is . . .
 - God's presence dwelling within us.
 - Our Helper.
 - Our Teacher.
 - Our Comforter.
 - And so much more.
- Jesus wasn't just telling his disciples to "get over" all the horrible things that had happened to them, nor was he promising nothing bad would happen to them again. Instead, he promised them something that would help them withstand anything they'd ever face. Jesus promised to give them his Spirit, who would be with them always.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **How did Jesus give hope to his disciples when they needed it?**
 - **How does Jesus continue to give us hope today?**

SCRIPTURE | 1 Peter 1:3-9

- Peter was one of the disciples who walked with Jesus through Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection, and beyond. He's one of the people who saw Jesus' empty tomb on the day he rose from the dead.
 - After Jesus' resurrection, Peter played a vital role in sharing the good news of Jesus in new places. He helped grow the Church by writing letters to the Jesus-followers in different cities to teach, encourage, and pastor them.
 - Some of the letters Peter wrote actually became part of the Bible we have today, including the "book" (or letter) we now call 1 Peter.
 - In this letter, Peter wrote to encourage a group of Jesus-followers who were facing harassment and religious persecution for following Jesus. They were experiencing real pain, fear, and distress.
 - When Peter wrote this letter, I wonder if he was remembering those days of hopelessness after Jesus' death. I wonder if he remembered how much he needed to hear that message of peace and hope Jesus shared with him and his fellow disciples.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.
- Peter didn't promise an end to this community's pain and suffering. That's not something he could control or ensure. Instead, Peter pointed them to the same thing he needed and was given when he too felt like all was lost: "a living hope through resurrection."
 - With Jesus, this isn't a false hope – the kind that promises everything will be okay even when it probably won't.
 - With Jesus, it's not toxic positivity – the kind that says to just be happy even when everything is falling apart.
 - With Jesus, it's the kind of hope that acknowledges our pain is real – but we're not alone, and there's still something worth fighting for.
- When Jesus was killed, his disciples feared all hope was lost. In the early days of the church, many of Jesus' followers had the same fears. But with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. Because **when all seems lost, Jesus is our hope.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **In what ways do you think the hope Jesus offers is more than just optimism or wishful thinking?**
 - ✪ **Has Jesus ever given you hope during a difficult time? Tell us about that experience.**

STORY | Talk about a time you found hope in Jesus.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life about a time you felt lost, but found hope in Jesus. What was going on? What help did you need or wish you'd had? How did you find hope in Jesus?*
- We were never meant to go through difficult things alone or in our own strength. But when life is difficult and everything seems lost, how exactly can we find the hope Jesus offers?
 - **FIND HOPE BY SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS.** Like we saw with his disciples, Jesus offers hope by offering his presence. When his disciples were afraid and in need, Jesus was right there with them. We have the same ability to be in Jesus' presence today, so . . .

- Tell God honestly what you're going through and feeling.
- Read what Scripture says about how Jesus cared for people — and know he'll care for you in the exact same way.
- Reflect on, or even memorize, words that remind you of God's promises. Maybe that's a passage of Scripture or maybe it's a song of worship.
- **FIND HOPE IN GOD'S SPIRIT.** When you have the Holy Spirit, God's presence is always with you. The Holy Spirit is always ready to . . .
 - Comfort you.
 - Guide you.
 - Give you peace.
 - Remind you of what's true.
- **FIND HOPE BY TELLING YOUR STORY.** Share your story with people you trust because sharing your pain with someone can help relieve some of the weight. Think of someone you trust who you could talk to this week. We are not meant to do life alone, so reach out and talk to someone, like . . .
 - A small group leader.
 - A pastor.
 - A parent.
 - A sibling.
 - A close friend.
 - Or a professional counselor.
- **FIND HOPE TOGETHER.** Maybe right now you aren't feeling lost or hopeless, but you know someone who is. If that's the case, reach out and support them, knowing there will probably be a day when you need someone to support you in return.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **Read Ephesians 1:18. Who is someone you know (including yourself) who needs this prayer right now, and why?**
 - **This week, what's one step you're going to take toward finding hope for yourself or someone you care about?**

REFLECTION | Vibrant Hope

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, purchase [scratch art sheets](#) for each student. Place one under each seat, along with a [wooden stylus tool](#). Invite them to respond to God in words or pictures.*
- At some point, we'll all experience times in our lives that feel scary, hopeless, or dark — kind of like that dark sheet of paper in front of you. Painful, or even traumatic, experiences can leave us feeling like all the hope, joy, and color has disappeared from our lives.
- As you look at this dark canvas, talk to Jesus about your pain or the pain someone you love is experiencing. You don't have to speak out loud and you don't even have to write words, but for the next few moments, spend time talking with Jesus in words or images.
- You might want to . . .
 - Define a next step you can take today.
 - Write a prayer asking Jesus to give you hope.
 - Write a prayer thanking Jesus for the hope he's already given you.
 - Note a word, phrase, image, or idea you want to remember from today.
 - Create an image of what hope feels or looks like to you.

- Or maybe you want to respond to one of these questions . . .
 - If Jesus showed up in this room right now, what might he say to you?
 - Where have you experienced peace or hope before?
 - Who is a person who gives you hope?
 - What's something that would give you hope right now?
- As words or pictures come to mind, begin to scratch away the dark canvas. Notice that the darkness doesn't go away all at once. But as we start to invite Jesus into that darkness, color and vibrancy begin to emerge, little by little.
- When everything seems dark, I know it's difficult to imagine finding peace and hope again. But it's more than possible. Remember, Jesus is always ready for one more plot twist. Because **when all seems lost, Jesus is our hope.**

WEEK 4

DISCUSSION GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When all seems lost,
Jesus is our hope.

BIBLE

John 20:19-23; 1 Peter 1:3-9;
Ephesians 1:18

QUESTIONS

- What's the best thing that happened to you this week? What's the worst?
- When life is painful or overwhelming, what helps you find joy or hope again?
- What are some reasons people might feel lost or hopeless? Which of those can you relate to?
- When life is painful or overwhelming, what are some unhealthy ways people tend to react? Which of those can you relate to?
- How did Jesus give hope to his disciples when they needed it?
- How does Jesus continue to give us hope today?
- In what ways do you think the hope Jesus offers is more than just optimism or wishful thinking?
- Has Jesus ever given you hope during a difficult time? Tell us about that experience.
- Read Ephesians 1:18. Who is someone you know (including yourself) who needs this prayer right now, and why?
- This week, what's one step you're going to take toward finding hope for yourself or someone you care about?



Pray for each other and anyone you mentioned in your conversation who needs hope right now.

WEEK 4

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When all seems lost,
Jesus is our hope.

BIBLE

John 20:19-23; 1 Peter 1:3-9;
Ephesians 1:18

QUESTIONS

- What's the best thing that happened to you this week? What's the worst?
- When life is painful or overwhelming, what helps you find joy or hope again?
- How did Jesus give hope to his disciples when they needed it?
- How does Jesus continue to give us hope today?
- Read Ephesians 1:18. Who is someone you know (including yourself) who needs this prayer right now, and why?
- This week, what's one step you're going to take toward finding hope for yourself or someone you care about?



Pray for each other and anyone you mentioned in your conversation who needs hope right now.

WEEK 5 TEACHING GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

BIG IDEA

When we feel alone,
Jesus is present.

BIBLE

Luke 24:13-35;
Psalm 116:1-5, 139:7-10

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Super Charades

- We're back for another week of *Plot Twist* and yet another game – it's charades, but with a "plot twist," of course.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, cut several strips of paper or index cards and find two large bowls. Fill one bowl with the names of popular celebrities your students will recognize and be able to impersonate. Fill the other bowl with a variety of superpowers, like invisibility, super strength, and heat vision. Create two teams of actors and have them each select one slip of paper from each bowl. Then, have them take turns trying to get the audience to guess both the celebrity and their newly discovered superpower.*

VIDEO | A Clip from *WandaVision*

- For the last few weeks, we've been looking at what happens when unexpected twists happen. We've talked about those twists in our own stories, in the stories of Jesus and his followers, and in the stories of some of our favorite superheroes too.
 - If you've seen any of the movies we've talked about, you know Marvel movies love a good plot twist. These plot twists are sometimes funny, sometimes dramatic, and always leave us on the edge of our seats.
 - But several years ago, Marvel gave us a plot twist that felt much different from the twists it gave us in the past. This plot twist did so much more than just entertain. It sparked conversations about loss and grief.
- In the series *WandaVision* series, Wanda Maximoff is devastated by the grief of losing the love of her life, as well as her entire family. The losses she experienced from childhood all the way through adulthood pushed her create an alternate reality for herself. In this world she invented, she was able to live with the people she loved – or at least, pretend to.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (0:00-2:01) from *WandaVision* of Wanda creating her own reality to cope with her loneliness and grief. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*

- Wanda felt so alone and isolated in the real world that she created her own imaginary world, full of people she could love (and control).
 - None of us have this kind of superpower that allows us to create a whole new world for ourselves that we can control . . . but have you ever kind of wanted to?
 - Wanda had literally lost all of the people who mattered most to her, so of course she was lonely. But she was also in pain, and pain has a way of making us feel alone, no matter why we're hurting.
- Maybe you know what that's like — I know I do.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **If you could design an imaginary friend and have them come to life, what would they be like?**
 - **Do you think a lot of people experience loneliness? Why or why not?**

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

STORY | Talk about a time you felt alone.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Talk about a time you felt alone. This could be about a time you really were alone because your friends made plans without you or you moved to a new city. Or this could be about a time you felt alone because you were going through something painful that made you pull away from others — maybe you were experiencing anxiety or depression, or your family was struggling and you didn't want anyone to know, or someone you loved was sick and you didn't have anyone to talk to about it. Either way, share why you felt lonely and how your loneliness impacted you.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **What are some reasons you've felt alone before?**
 - **When you feel alone, what helps you feel less lonely?**

POLL | Have you ever felt lonely, even when you weren't alone?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite students to respond "yes" to the following question by raising their hands.*
- This is true for me, so I'm wondering if it's true for you. **Have you ever felt lonely, even when you weren't alone?** Maybe it's because . . .
 - You're struggling to find friends you really connect with.
 - You're hurting or struggling in a way you didn't think most people would understand.
 - People have hurt you before and now it's hard to trust anyone.
 - You push people away when you don't think you deserve to be cared about.
- Loneliness isn't just about having other people nearby, is it? You can be surrounded by people without really feeling known, understood, loved, or cared for. But sometimes that kind of connection or care is hard to find — especially when we're already struggling or hurting.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 24:13-35

- If you've been here recently, you know we've been following Jesus' journey from the days just before his death and resurrection to what happened afterward — and all the plot twists those days contained.

- As we continue with Jesus' story today, we're going to pick up once again on the day of his resurrection because, well, a lot happened that day!
- After Jesus rose from the dead, he visited some of his disciples like Mary, Peter, and John. We heard their stories last time.
- But today I want to introduce you to two other followers of Jesus who were walking home to a town called Emmaus.
- These two Jesus-followers had heard Jesus was alive, but when you've actually seen your friend die, that's not a very easy thing to believe.
 - While these two walked home (a seven-ish-mile journey), they had plenty of time to discuss everything that was going on.
 - There were plenty of major plot twists from the past few days for them to discuss, but they were about to experience one of their own.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Luke 24:13-35.*
- It's hard to say exactly why these two couldn't recognize Jesus right away when he started walking alongside them. They knew him well and would've been familiar with his face and voice.
 - Maybe Jesus was in disguise, but that's kind of a weird way to mess with your grieving friends.
 - Maybe Jesus intentionally prevented them from recognizing him for a while. He is God, after all. He can do things like that.
 - Or maybe their grief over the loss of their friend was acting like a blindfold. Maybe their sadness made it hard to believe good things could really happen anymore. Maybe their pain was preventing them from seeing what was right in front of them.
- Jesus wasn't offended when his friends didn't recognize him. Instead, Jesus patiently walked with them, discussed their feelings and doubts with them, and helped explain some of the events from the past few days that were the hardest to understand.
- When they finally arrived in Emmaus and sat down for a meal together, they finally realized Jesus had been right there, with them the whole time.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Why don't you think Jesus' friends recognized him on the road to Emmaus? What do you think helped them finally recognize him?**
 - ✪ **What do you think Jesus was thinking when his friends didn't recognize him? Why do you think so?**

QUESTION | Why do you think sharing a meal opened their eyes?

- Seven miles is a long distance to walk. For what was probably about two hours, they talked with Jesus without ever realizing who they were talking to. But the moment they sat down to eat, everything changed.
- **Why do you think sharing a meal opened their eyes?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- We can only guess the reason why this happened because Scripture doesn't give us the exact answer. But let's consider a few possibilities.
 - Maybe seeing Jesus "break bread" reminded them of the times they'd see him do that in their many meals together over the years.

- Maybe it reminded them of the time he broke five loaves of bread and used them to feed 5,000 people.
- Maybe they looked at Jesus' hands while he was breaking the bread and finally noticed the holes where the nails had just been, just a few days prior.
- These disciples spent seven miles reflecting on the loss of their friend and teacher, but they had forgotten what Jesus had already promised them. Maybe it just took a simple reminder (like a meal with friends) to remind them Jesus promised he would never leave them to suffer alone.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 116:1-5

- There's a book in the Bible called the Book of Psalms. It's full of songs and poems people have written to and about God. Many of them are prayers, asking God for help, mercy, or protection.
 - The people who wrote these psalms are often asking God to save them from enemy armies and threats on their lives.
 - You and I may not need to ask God for protection over those dangers, but the same God who heard the prayers of the psalmists hears ours today.
 - So are you feeling alone, misunderstood, or without help or support? Do you need a friend or a listening ear? Do you need to know you're not alone? Then maybe this could be your prayer.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Psalm 116:1-5.
- Jesus probably won't appear by your side as you're walking to school this week, but he's just as close to you as he was to his disciples on the road that day.
 - When you don't have anyone to lean on, Jesus is there.
 - When you don't think anyone understands you, Jesus does.
 - When you're not sure anyone cares, Jesus does.
- When Jesus died, his followers were feeling the loss of their friend and teacher. But with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. Like Jesus' disciples discovered on the road to Emmaus, **when we feel alone, Jesus is present.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **Have you ever sensed Jesus' presence with you when you really needed it? What happened?**
 - **Read Psalm 139:7-10. When is it easy for you to believe this? When is it difficult?**

OBJECT LESSON | Daily Reminders

- For Jesus' followers who walked with him on the road to Emmaus, it was the act of sharing a meal that helped them see Jesus was right there with them. Their lives had been so consumed by their grief, sadness, and loneliness that they were unable to see the good right in front of them until this simple reminder opened their eyes.
- There were obviously some pretty amazing, even miraculous, implications to this story – but the basic act of remembering something from your past because you get around something familiar is pretty common. That's why . . .
 - If you go to your old kindergarten classroom you suddenly remember the stories, faces, and names of the people you knew there.

- When you visit a relative's house you remember the games you've played and meals you've shared there.
- Certain smells, sounds, songs, and sights bring back vivid memories and emotions.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, collect a few basic household objects that correspond with the rhythms below. You might choose a plate full of food or a microwave to symbolize meals, an alarm clock or the alarm app on your phone to symbolize mornings, and a pair of sneakers or a toy vehicle to symbolize traveling. Reveal the objects as you talk about them.*
- When it comes to our relationship with Jesus, we don't have to go looking for Jesus – he's already present with us every step of the way. So maybe we don't need to focus on trying to find Jesus. Maybe we just need to focus on the things that remind us he's already with us.
- This week, what if you identified a few objects you see every day, at predictable times of the day, and let them be reminders of Jesus' presence with you? Like . . .
 - **WHEN YOU EAT.** Jesus loved to share meals with the people he loved. In fact, it was one of the last things he did with all of his disciples in one place and the thing that reminded his disciples in Emmaus of who he was. This week, whether you sit down to eat or run out the door with a breakfast bar in hand – remember, Jesus is with you.
 - **WHEN YOU WAKE UP.** I don't love being awake early in the morning, but I do love starting my day the right way. A good breakfast, a glass of water, maybe even getting a jump on a project, a book, or a workout – a good morning can be the key to a great day. But morning can also remind us of the day Jesus changed history forever by waking up and walking out of a grave. This week, maybe try setting an extra alarm that goes off while you're brushing your teeth or picking out your clothes – a reminder every morning that Jesus is with you.
 - **WHEN YOU TRAVEL.** Whether you're walking, riding a bike, jumping on a school bus, or sitting in the backseat of someone else's car, we all spend time most days traveling from place to place. So this week, what if you saw your travel time as a reminder that Jesus is with you, just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus? So as you tie your shoes or put on your seatbelt this week – remember, Jesus is with you.

RESPONSE | Seven Mile Journal

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, place a blank [journal](#) and a marker or pen under each seat. Encourage them to customize their journal cover, maybe with:*
 - *A phrase like "I'm not alone," or "Jesus is with me."*
 - *Bible verses that remind them of God's presence.*
 - *A drawing of the road to Emmaus.*
- There are so many ways we can practice noticing Jesus' presence on a daily basis. But this habit takes time to create, so let's start practicing together.
 - The disciples on their way to Emmaus spent seven miles walking and talking with Jesus. We're not going to ask you to walk seven miles, but here are seven questions that could help you remember Jesus is present with you, wherever you are.
 - This week, try using this journal to respond to one of these seven questions each day. Then see how much more aware of Jesus' presence you become.
 - What do I imagine Jesus wants to say to me right now?
 - If I were walking with Jesus what would we talk about?
 - Who is someone who has helped me grow closer to Jesus recently?
 - What's a situation where I noticed Jesus' presence recently?
 - What's something I heard or read recently that reminded me of Jesus?

- What can I thank Jesus for today?
- What's something I can do to be more like Jesus today?
- Remember, we never have to beg Jesus to be with us because he's always nearby – even when that's hard to believe. **When we feel alone, Jesus is present.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **How would it change things for you if you really believed Jesus was always with you?**
 - **This week, how are you going to remind yourself that Jesus is with you? How can we remind each other?**

WEEK 5

DISCUSSION GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we feel alone,
Jesus is present.

BIBLE

Luke 24:13-35;
Psalm 116:1-5, 139:7-10

QUESTIONS

- If you could design an imaginary friend and have them come to life, what would they be like?
- Do you think a lot of people experience loneliness? Why or why not?
- What are some reasons you've felt alone before?
- When you feel alone, what helps you feel less lonely?
- Why don't you think Jesus' friends recognized him on the road to Emmaus? What do you think helped them finally recognize him?
- What do you think Jesus was thinking when his friends didn't recognize him? Why do you think so?
- Have you ever sensed Jesus' presence with you when you really needed it? What happened?
- Read Psalm 139:7-10. When is it easy for you to believe this? When is it difficult?
- How would it change things for you if you really believed Jesus was always with you?
- This week, how are you going to remind yourself that Jesus is with you? How can we remind each other?

WEEK 5

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we feel alone,
Jesus is present.

BIBLE

Luke 24:13-35;
Psalm 116:1-5, 139:7-10

QUESTIONS

- If you could design an imaginary friend and have them come to life, what would they be like?
- Do you think a lot of people experience loneliness? Why or why not?
- When you feel alone, what helps you feel less lonely?
- Read Psalm 139:7-10. When is it easy for you to believe this? When is it difficult?
- How would it change things for you if you really believed Jesus was always with you?
- This week, how are you going to remind yourself that Jesus is with you? How can we remind each other?

WEEK 6 TEACHING GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

BIG IDEA

When we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.

BIBLE

John 21:15-19; 1 Peter 2:23-25;
Romans 6:11-14

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

POLL | Scale of Embarrassment

- Welcome to our final week of *Plot Twist!* For the last several weeks we've been talking about twists, turns, surprises, and all sorts of unexpected things.
 - Sometimes the plot twists we face are beyond our control. They're things that just happen to us.
 - Sometimes our plot twists are totally in our control – in a good way! Maybe we make a big decision, take a risk, or try something new that changes the course of our lives forever.
 - And sometimes . . . well, sometimes we cause our own plot twists accidentally – in a not-so-great way. As we wrap up this series today, I want to talk about the times when we screw up our own plots with accidents, mistakes, mess-ups, and failures.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print or draw the numbers 1-5 on poster board. If you'd like this poll to require movement, place the poster board in different parts of the room and have students run toward the number they're voting for. If you'd like a more subdued poll, ask students to hold up the number of fingers they're voting for.*
- Mess-ups come in all shapes and sizes, so tell me, **on a scale of 1-5, how embarrassing would these accidental "plot twists" be?** Give me a 1 if you would be fine if the whole world knew about this and a 5 if you can't imagine anything more humiliating.
 - You finally get the courage to text your crush and they leave you on read.
 - You show up to school and realize you are wearing the same outfit as your best friend.
 - You try to text your friend about another friend who annoyed you, but you accidentally text *that* friend instead.
 - Someone cute sees you picking your nose.
 - You wait outside a store waiting forever for the automatic door to open, only to find out it's not automatic at all.
 - You realize you've had food in your teeth for at least three classes.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **Tell us your most embarrassing story – or make one up. We'll try to guess if it's true or not.**
 - **When you mess up, what do you think the difference is between feeling embarrassed and feeling guilty?**

STORY | Talk about a time you messed up.

- It can be pretty embarrassing to mess up, but it's bound to happen to all of us eventually.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story about a time you messed up and disappointed yourself and others. Maybe you messed up accidentally by doing your part in a group project badly. Or maybe you messed up intentionally by making an unwise decision, breaking a rule, or doing something hurtful.*
- Our mess-ups have real-life consequences for us and often for the people around us. We don't mean to hurt ourselves or others (at least, not all the time), but we often find ourselves being hurtful anyway.
 - Maybe right now you're thinking of some of your own mistakes that still make you cringe with guilt or embarrassment.
 - Maybe you're thinking about someone who hurt you recently with one of their mess-ups (accidental or not).
- Either way, we all know what it's like when someone messes up. And sometimes it's hard to fix the damage done when that happens.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

VIDEO | A Clip from *Loki*

- Now that we're in our last week of this series, we have one more story from Jesus' life to cover — and one last Marvel plot twist to connect to it. This one involves the character arc of everyone's favorite bad guy in The Avengers' universe, Loki.
 - The Loki television series takes place in reality that spans time, space, and multiple dimensions and timelines. We don't have time to explain it all, but what's important to know is a tiny bit of Loki's backstory.
 - Loki is known in the Marvel universe as toeing the line between good and evil. Sometimes he's simply mischievous, but other times he's kind of a monster.
 - Just before the series begins, Loki had been on a rampage where he nearly destroyed New York City and could've destroyed the entire world. This wasn't the only problematic decision of Loki's life, but up to this point in his life it was definitely the one with the most extreme consequences.
- As the series gets started, we see Loki meeting with a guy named Mobius, agent of the Time Variance Agency. In this conversation, Loki gets honest — and Mobius says something surprising.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip [like this one](#) (0:14-0:56) from Loki where Mobius tells Loki he doesn't see him as a villain. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- It may have been shocking to see this supposed "villain" be so honest about himself. But I imagine it was even more shocking for Loki to hear someone say, after all he had done, that they didn't see him as a bad guy.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **What are some of the ways we can mess up in ways that hurt others? What about ways that hurt God?**
 - ★ **When you mess up, how much do you think it matters if you did it on purpose or not? Why do you think that?**

SCRIPTURE | John 21:15-19

- For the last few weeks, we've been following the stories of Jesus' last days here on Earth.
 - A few weeks ago, we shared the story of Judas betraying Jesus, along with the crowd of people who demanded his execution. But there was actually a third betrayal that night.
 - It was one thing for Jesus to be betrayed by a crowd of people who barely know him. It was worse to be betrayed by Judas, one of his friends who he had invested in for years. But this third betrayal came from one of Jesus' very best friends — a disciple named Peter.
- While this might seem like a plot twist to us, it wasn't surprising to Jesus. Shortly before Jesus was arrested, he predicted Peter would walk away from him in his darkest hour.
 - Jesus told Peter this to his face and, of course, Peter rejected this prediction with his whole heart. He assured Jesus he would die before turning his back on his friend.
 - But when Jesus was arrested, Peter messed up. Three times, someone asked if he was friends with Jesus, but Peter was afraid to incriminate himself. Three times, he said, "I don't know the guy." Three times.
 - As soon as he realized what he'd done, Peter was horrified and ashamed. He must have been replaying his own words over and over again, feeling so embarrassed and defeated by his inability to stand up for his friend when he was needed.
- When Jesus was sentenced to death, Peter probably thought he had failed Jesus during his final conversation with him. But, of course, we now know the plot twist of Jesus' resurrection meant Peter had another opportunity to face his friend.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read John 21:15-19.*
- If Jesus were more like me, this is the part where he would have called Peter out for being disloyal, betraying their friendship, and leaving him hanging when he needed him most. And who would've blamed him?
- None of us have ever been in Peter's exact situation, but we all know what it's like to really mess up and let somebody we love down. We've all . . .
 - Disappointed a parent, teacher, coach, or team and knew we'd have to face them afterward.
 - Broken something valuable and knew we'd have to explain what happened.
 - Said something hurtful to a friend we really loved.
- We've felt the weight of wondering how the person we hurt will respond when they see us again. Will they be mad at us forever? Will they never speak to us again? Will they humiliate us in front of everyone?
- That might be something we humans do, but it's not something Jesus does. Instead . . .
 - Jesus shared a meal with Peter.
 - Jesus forgave Peter.
 - And Jesus gave Peter another chance.
- Jesus chose to forgive Peter in a pretty beautiful and strategic way.
 - Three times, Peter had denied knowing Jesus on the night of his execution.
 - So, three times, Jesus extended the invitation for Peter to make it right.
- Forgiving someone doesn't always mean the relationship goes back to the way it was, though. Sometimes a relationship is just too broken to go back to the way things were. Not so with Jesus, though.
 - Jesus forgave Peter.
 - Jesus picked up right where they had left off.
 - And then Jesus invited Peter to have even more of a role in Jesus' mission than he'd had before.
- Just like Jesus knew Peter would deny him, Jesus knew Peter would play a crucial role in building the Church and spreading the good news of Jesus when Jesus was gone.

SCRIPTURE | 1 Peter 2:23-25

- After Peter made things right with Jesus, he went on to be one of the most important leaders of the early church.
 - One of the ways Peter "[fed Jesus'] sheep" was by leading and caring for Jesus' followers through letters.
 - Like other apostles at the time, Peter wrote letters to growing communities of believers to encourage and teach them.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 1 Peter 2:23-25.
- Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep and Peter never forgot it. In this letter, Peter explained that all people, himself included, were like sheep going astray from our Shepherd, Jesus.
 - Maybe we're sheep who got distracted or made one wrong turn. Or maybe we're sheep who were feeling a little rebellious and tried to make it on our own. Either way, Peter says we're like sheep wandering in the wilderness.
 - Sheep can't really defend themselves. So a lost sheep is at risk from all sorts of threats and is in desperate need of finding the safety of their flock and their shepherd again.
- I wonder if Peter was thinking about the night when he betrayed Jesus when he wrote this. On the worst night of his life, his fear led him to make a bad decision. That one bad decision, as far as Peter knew, could have left him lost and distant from the person who had loved him and given him purpose.
- When Peter failed Jesus, he may have worried he'd never be able to get right with Jesus again. Maybe you've felt that way before too. But with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. Like Peter, **when we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **If you were Jesus, how would you have wanted to respond to Peter when you saw him again? Why do you think Jesus responded the way he did?**
 - ★ **What kind of an impact do you think that conversation with Jesus had on Peter? What impact would it have had on you?**

STORY | Talk about a time God gave you another chance.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life about a time you messed up, but God gave you another chance. You might talk about how God chose to use you even when you thought you'd blown it, or how God helped you trust you were loved no matter what.*
- Jesus always gives us more chances when we mess up. But maybe you're wondering . . .
 - Does he just hand out those chances for free?
 - Does it happen automatically or do we need to do something?
 - What do we do when we still mess up and it still feels awful?
- Just like we saw Peter do, there are some things we can say to Jesus when we realize we've messed up.
 - **ADMIT GUILT.** Feeling guilty feels bad, but it isn't necessarily a bad thing. When we feel guilty, it's a signal there may be something we need to make right. So if you're feeling guilty about something you've done, or failed to do, have a conversation with Jesus about it. He already knows everything you've ever done anyway!

- **REJECT SHAME.** If guilt says, "I messed up and I want to make it right," shame says, "I am messed up and will never get it right." Feeling guilt can move us to change, but feeling shame often keeps us stuck, feeling unworthy, unwanted, and like a failure. But this isn't what Jesus sees when he looks at us. He sees a lost sheep in need of a shepherd. He sees hope and potential. He sees someone he loves.
- **LIVE FORGIVEN.** When we've messed up, sometimes we're our own worst critics. We get so stuck on our past and imperfections that we forget to keep going. But can you imagine if Peter did that? If he got stuck in an infinite loop of telling Jesus "I love you" to make up for the times he denied him, he'd never move forward and help Jesus change the world like he did! Yes, you've messed up, and you will mess up again. But Jesus offers you not only forgiveness, but a fresh start. So go live like it!

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ✪ **Has God ever given you another chance after you messed up? What did you learn from that experience?**
 - ✪ **When you mess up, which do you struggle with most: admitting guilt, rejecting shame, or living like you've been forgiven? Tell us more!**

REFLECTION | Comic Book Hero

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 6 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. Make sure students also have access to markers, colored pencils, and crayons.*
- Every great story features characters who made mistakes and then made a choice — to grow . . . or not.
 - Usually the characters who chose not to grow end up being either tragic characters or villains.
 - But the characters who learn to work through their mistakes, embrace forgiveness, and keep going? Well, they become our heroes.
- So today, I wonder what mess-up is still unresolved in your life. I wonder what you need to bring to Jesus so you can get started on your next chance. Let's practice telling our stories of forgiveness, but in a creative way. You can use either words or pictures.
 - First, think about what life was like before your mess-up. In the first box that says, "**It was just a normal day,**" tell your origin story. What was going well?
 - In the box that says, "**Then suddenly,**" write or draw what happened. How did you mess up? What happened that made you need a second chance?
 - In the box that says, "**I felt,**" share what was going through your heart and mind afterward. Did it take you time to realize you'd messed up or did you know it instantly? What specific emotions were you feeling? What specific things were you thinking?
 - And finally in the box that says, "**But I know,**" write or draw your version of what Jesus says is true: that you're loved and have another chance.
- We've covered a lot of plot twists in the last few weeks. But isn't it great to know there is no plot twist big enough to make Jesus give up on us? Because **when we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **Read Romans 6:11-14. If Jesus is always going to forgive us, why shouldn't we just do whatever we want?**
 - **This week, what's one way you're going to either ask for, or accept, God's forgiveness?**

WEEK 6

DISCUSSION GUIDE

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.

BIBLE

John 21:15-19; 1 Peter 2:23-25;
Romans 6:11-14

QUESTIONS

- Tell us your most embarrassing story — or make one up. We'll try to guess if it's true or not.
- When you mess up, what do you think the difference is between feeling embarrassed and feeling guilty?
- What are some of the ways we can mess up in ways that hurt others? What about ways that hurt God?
- When you mess up, how much do you think it matters if you did it on purpose or not? Why do you think that?
- If you were Jesus, how would you have wanted to respond to Peter when you saw him again? Why do you think Jesus responded the way he did?
- What kind of an impact do you think that conversation with Jesus had on Peter? What impact would it have had on you?
- Has God ever given you another chance after you messed up? What did you learn from that experience?
- When you mess up, which do you struggle with most: admitting guilt, rejecting shame, or living like you've been forgiven? Tell us more!
- Read Romans 6:11-14. If Jesus is always going to forgive us, why shouldn't we just do whatever we want?
- This week, what's one way you're going to either ask for, or accept, God's forgiveness?

WEEK 6

DISCUSSION GUIDE for middle schoolers

PLOT TWIST

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history — Jesus' death and resurrection. In this six-week series, we'll look at six surprising stories from Jesus' death, resurrection, and last days on earth. These stories will show us that, when life takes unexpected turns, **God gives us help**. And even when we've messed up or are ready to give up, **Jesus never turns away from us**, but **gives us life, gives us hope, is with us**, and **gives us another chance**.

THIS WEEK

BIG IDEA

When we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.

BIBLE

John 21:15-19; 1 Peter 2:23-25;
Romans 6:11-14

QUESTIONS

- Tell us your most embarrassing story — or make one up. We'll try to guess if it's true or not.
- When you mess up, what do you think the difference is between feeling embarrassed and feeling guilty?
- What are some of the ways we can mess up in ways that hurt others? What about ways that hurt God?
- If you were Jesus, how would you have wanted to respond to Peter when you saw him again? Why do you think Jesus responded the way he did?
- Read Romans 6:11-14. If Jesus is always going to forgive us, why shouldn't we just do whatever we want?
- This week, what's one way you're going to either ask for, or accept, God's forgiveness?

ONE-MINUTE SERMON SCRIPTS

PLOT TWIST

ONE-MINUTE SERMONS

After you teach each week, we recommend **filming a video of yourself re-teaching your message in one minute or less**. Then post it on social media! We've written the beginnings of a script for you each week, and we've also filmed complete [One-Minute Sermon Videos](#) for you too, in partnership with [Rescue a Generation](#). Make your own or post ours – whatever you want!

WEEK 1

Whether it's your favorite movie, book, or reality show, you know there's nothing like a good plot twist! Those storytelling surprises can keep us entertained, but they can do a lot more than that too. A good plot twist can make us rethink everything we thought we knew, see things in a brand new light, and get excited about what might happen next. That's never more true than in the most surprising and significant plot twist in history – the life of Jesus. When Jesus was here on earth, his followers were convinced he was going to change the world. They were right, but also wrong. They pictured Jesus taking power like a king or emperor and ruling the world with justice and love. But then – plot twist. Jesus' enemies began plotting to have him killed. For both Jesus and his followers, trouble began to follow them. But Scripture shows us, with Jesus, there's always one more plot twist in the works. Because **when we're in trouble**, we're not alone. **God gives us help.**

WEEK 2

If you've ever seen a movie with a major plot twist, you know there are several moments that lead up to the pivotal moment. Even when a plot twist seems like it happens out of nowhere, it doesn't take long to realize the storyteller was giving us clues all along. When Jesus was arrested and eventually sentenced to death, his disciples saw that moment as a major plot twist. They weren't prepared at all. But the truth is, Jesus had been leaving his friends clues all along – not only that he would be arrested, but that some of them would betray him in the process. Jesus knew Judas, one of his twelve disciples, would sell him out, exchanging Jesus' life for a few silver coins. Jesus also knew Peter, one of his closest friends, would deny he ever knew Jesus three times, in order to protect himself. None of this surprised Jesus, but here's the truth that surprised Jesus' followers: **when we**, like Judas and Peter, **turn away from Jesus, he doesn't turn away from us.**

WEEK 3

It doesn't happen often, but have you ever seen a movie or read a book where the main character, the person who the whole story was about, suddenly . . . dies? Maybe the reason it doesn't happen often is because, without the main character, the whole story feels over. I imagine that's exactly how it felt to Jesus' friends and followers when he, the guy who had been the main character in their story for years, was suddenly gone. One day, crowds were celebrating Jesus — but just a few days later, they were celebrating his death. And why did Jesus die? In short, because of sin. "Sin" is a word that describes the brokenness that exists in us, and in the whole world. Jesus always knew sin would lead to his death, even if it seemed like a plot twist to his followers. But Jesus willingly chose death because he knew another plot twist was on the way. He knew his death would mean life for everyone else. Because **when sin brings death, Jesus gives life.**

WEEK 4

Is it just me, or is the word "trauma" being used pretty casually lately? Like, "Oh wow, that exam was so hard I'm traumatized," or, "No! My crush is dating someone. How am I going to process this trauma?" And hey, I understand the desire to laugh about difficult things. I do. But sometimes, traumatic things really do happen to us. We lose people we love. We see horrible things happen. We're treated cruelly or unjustly. When that happens, hope can seem lost. When Jesus died, the people who loved him (and watched him die) were almost certainly experiencing trauma. I think Jesus knew that too, because when he showed up again after miraculously rising from the dead, he gently showed his friends his scarred (but now living) hands and told them to be at peace. I don't know what kind of difficult things you're experiencing right now, or what you'll experience in the future. But when you do experience a painful plot twist or two, I hope you remember, **when all seems lost, Jesus is our hope.**

WEEK 5

Everyone knows what it's like to feel lonely. Maybe you've felt it when you're home alone, or maybe for other reasons too. Like when you're surrounded by people, but don't really feel connected with any of them. Or a friendship changes and you miss what you used to have. Or it feels like no one understands the difficult thing you're experiencing. There are a lot of reasons we might feel lonely. So I wonder if Jesus' friends were feeling it too, after Jesus died, before they knew he had come back to life. There's this story in Luke 24, where two of Jesus' friends were walking to a town called Emmaus. It was about a seven mile walk. On the way, a man showed up and walked with them nearly the entire way. Just before they arrived at their destination, they suddenly realized — "Wait! Jesus? Is that you?" And it was. In their grief, Jesus had been there the whole time. What a plot twist, right? And that's true for us too. **When we feel alone, Jesus is present.**

WEEK 6

Plot twists happen just about every day, don't they? You think everything is going well, but then you realize you left all your assignments at home. You attempt to make dinner, but the simple task of heating up ramen becomes a microwave disaster. Hey, mistakes happen. And they happen to all of us. In the days before and after Jesus' death and resurrection, there's a story about one of his friends who messed up in a big way. When Jesus was arrested and on his way to being killed, Peter panicked. Instead of being there for Jesus, he denied he ever knew him. Three whole times. So when Jesus came back after his death, you can imagine Peter was probably feeling a little uncomfortable. But here's what's amazing. Jesus didn't yell at or shame Peter. Instead, he asked, "Hey Peter, do you love me?" And Peter said "yes." Three whole times. Jesus didn't just forgive Peter — Jesus even proved he still trusted him by giving Peter a whole new assignment. Because **when we mess up, Jesus gives us another chance.**

MARKETING CHECKLIST

PLOT TWIST

BEFORE THE SERIES

✓ TO DO

	Print your Series Promo Poster and Series Promo Cards and display them where families and volunteers can see them.
	Customize your Volunteer Hub and Parent Hub web pages for this series.
	Customize and send the Parent Email for this series.
	Send the Volunteer Email for Week 1 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.
	Review the suggested Social Media Posts and Captions for this series.
	Post the Bumper Video on social media with this caption: To get us ready for Easter, we're starting a new series called <i>Plot Twist!</i> See you there!

AFTER WEEK 1

✓ TO DO

	Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 1 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, this week we looked at a pretty big plot twist in Jesus' story – when a bunch of people started plotting to kill him. Here's a recap!
	Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 1 on social media and/or send with this caption: Trouble finds all of us eventually (sometimes through no fault of our own and sometimes because of our poor choices). So when you're in trouble, remember: needing help doesn't make you weak. It makes you human.
	Send the Volunteer Email for Week 2 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.

AFTER WEEK 2

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 2 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, this week we looked at two major betrayals Jesus experienced right before he was killed. Here's a recap.</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 2 on social media with this caption: Remember, there is nothing you can do to get Jesus to turn his back on you. But maybe today you need to turn back toward him.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 3 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 3

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 3 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, this week we talked about Jesus' death — but we also talked about the good news of his resurrection. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 3 on social media with this caption: Remember, Easter Sunday isn't about wishful thinking that everything will be okay. It's not about ignoring what's wrong. It's about trusting that Jesus can take what seems beyond repair and make it brand new.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 4 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 4

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 4 on social media with this caption: In case you missed it, this week we talked about how Jesus took care of his disciples when they were grieving and afraid after his death. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 4 on social media with this caption: Remember, Jesus offers hope by offering his presence. When his disciples were afraid and in need, Jesus was right there with them. And we have the same ability to be in Jesus' presence today.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 5 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 5

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 5 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>In case you missed it, this week we talked about a sort of strange story where some of Jesus closest friends didn't recognize him for hours — and what that story can teach us. Here's a recap!</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 5 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>Remember, Jesus probably won't appear by your side as you're walking to school this week, but he's just as close to you as he was to his disciples on the road to Emmaus that day so long ago.</p>
	<p>Send the Volunteer Email for Week 6 of this series. Then text your volunteers a link to the email.</p>

AFTER WEEK 6

✓ TO DO

	<p>Post the 1-Minute Sermon Video for Week 6 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>In case you missed it, this week we talked about how Peter betrayed Jesus, but Jesus forgave him — and even asked him to be a leader in the early Church! Here's a recap.</p>
	<p>Post the Big Idea Graphic for Week 6 on social media with this caption:</p> <p>Remember, yes, you've messed up, and you will mess up again. But Jesus offers you not only forgiveness, but a fresh start. So go live like it!</p>
	<p>Get ready for the next series!</p>

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS & CAPTIONS

PLOT TWIST

Need some help deciding what to post on social media before and during this series? Here's our suggestion: each week, share the media we've provided in your Graphics and Videos folder using the captions below.

BEFORE THE SERIES



BUMPER VIDEO

To get us ready for Easter, we're starting a new series called *Plot Twist!* See you there!

AFTER WEEK 1



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 1)

In case you missed it, this week we looked at a pretty big plot twist in Jesus' story — when a bunch of people started plotting to kill him. Here's a recap!

AFTER WEEK 2



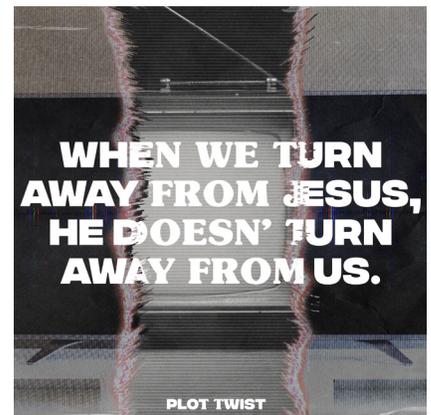
TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 2)

In case you missed it, this week we looked at two major betrayals Jesus experienced right before he was killed. Here's a recap.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 1)

Trouble finds all of us eventually (sometimes through no fault of our own and sometimes because of our poor choices). So when you're in trouble, remember: needing help doesn't make you weak. It makes you human.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 2)

Remember, there is nothing you can do to get Jesus to turn his back on you. But maybe today you need to turn back toward him.

AFTER WEEK 3



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 3)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about Jesus' death — but we also talked about the good news of his resurrection. Here's a recap!

AFTER WEEK 4



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 4)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about how Jesus took care of his disciples when they were grieving and afraid after his death. Here's a recap!

AFTER WEEK 5



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 5)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about a sort of strange story where some of Jesus' closest friends didn't recognize him for hours — and what that story can teach us. Here's a recap!



BIG IDEA (WEEK 3)

Remember, Easter Sunday isn't about wishful thinking that everything will be okay. It's not about ignoring what's wrong. It's about trusting that Jesus can take what seems beyond repair and make it brand new.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 4)

Remember, Jesus offers hope by offering his presence. When his disciples were afraid and in need, Jesus was right there with them. And we have the same ability to be in Jesus' presence today.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 5)

Remember, Jesus probably won't appear by your side as you're walking to school this week, but he's just as close to you as he was to his disciples on the road to Emmaus that day so long ago.

AFTER WEEK 6



TEACHING VIDEO (WEEK 6)

In case you missed it, this week we talked about how Peter betrayed Jesus, but Jesus forgave him — and even asked him to be a leader in the early Church! Here's a recap.



BIG IDEA (WEEK 6)

Remember, yes, you've messed up, and you will mess up again. But Jesus offers you not only forgiveness, but a fresh start. So go live like it!

what we're teaching



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