

SESSION 1: JESUS AND PETER

BIBLE REFERENCES

QUESTIONS

1. How do the events of Holy Week remind you of God's faithfulness to us?
2. What does it mean to be humble? What does it mean to be humble before God?
3. At first, Peter did not understand Jesus' decision to wash the disciples' feet. Why is it sometimes hard for us to see the lessons that Jesus wants to teach us?
4. Peter needed to grow in His understanding of why Jesus acted in the ways He did. Growing in our understanding of Jesus is crucial to our lives as His disciples. How are you working to grow in your understanding of Jesus?
5. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you should be humble, but didn't feel like it was authentic? Is it possible to learn humility? How have you learned to be humble?
6. The video asks the question: Do I accept God's will and teachings before I understand what they mean, or after? Perhaps a better question would be, am I in a place to demand any explanations at all from God? How do I know when to seek understanding of His actions, and when to accept them with faith and patience? When God acts in our lives, is it necessary for us to always understand why?

SESSION 2: JESUS AND MARY

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Mark 14:1-9, John 12:4-8

QUESTIONS

1. How can we stay “tuned-in” to Jesus’ teachings on a daily basis?
2. Are you working to internalize Jesus’ teachings? How are your actions evidence of what you have captured in your heart?
3. Who has the greatest influence on your life? How difficult has it been for you to turn away from earthly influences in order to follow Jesus?
4. The video says that Mary turned her understanding of Jesus’ teachings into action. Can you think of a time you have done that, or do you usually do what others tell you to do? What does that tell you about the personal responsibility that Mary took for her faith?
5. What has God’s forgiveness rescued you from?
6. What planning, preparation, and sacrifice can we make to intimately experience communion with the Lord?
7. Martin Luther wrote in his first thesis notes that, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent’, He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” How can you make repentance a daily practice?

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SESSION 3: JESUS AND PONTIUS PILATE

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 22:70-71, John 18:33-38,
John 19:8-11

QUESTIONS

1. What lessons have you learned from the trials of Jesus?
2. Have you ever been wrongly accused at any time in your life? Perhaps by a sibling when you were a child. How did you react?
3. What is the difference between responding to a situation with human wisdom versus responding with godly wisdom?
4. How can you grow in godly wisdom?
5. What is the “bigger picture” that you focus on when injustice or distress are present in your life? How can you seize the opportunity to fulfill God’s will in these moments?
6. Have you ever considered that your silence could contain more wisdom than a verbal response could?
7. It’s in our human nature to justify ourselves when faced with unfairness. Jesus overcame this. How can we control this disposition, and rather, see what God’s will is in that moment?
8. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Arm yourself with the answers to these questions, which you can turn to in moments of injustice: Who does my Heavenly Father say I am? What purpose has He given me? What promises has He placed in my heart?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: JESUS AND PETER

Welcome to the midweek experience for March. During this month, we are in the midst of Passiontide. God's faithfulness is clearly evident in the Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

In connection with our motto for this year – "Faithful to Christ" – we'll explore the ways that our faithfulness to Christ can be seen in how we act, serve, and live. This month, we'll look at interactions that Jesus had during Passiontide that demonstrate how we can:

- act in humbleness and love as Christ did,
- dedicate ourselves to Jesus, regardless of whether or not this is accepted by those around us, and
- decidedly act with Godly wisdom, and not human wisdom.

Jesus Christ's whole life demonstrated humbleness, even starting with His birth in a stable. We can look at His interaction with the disciples at the Last Supper – specifically Peter – to see how Jesus exemplified humility.

In John 13, we read the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, which was a common practice in those days as people traveled mostly by foot. This was undertaken by servants, as washing feet was a dirty task. However, this time, out of pure love and humility, Jesus offered Himself as the One to wash His disciples' feet. This act was an example of how low Christ was willing to make Himself out of His love for others and His dedication to His Father's will.

At first, Peter's response to Jesus washing his feet appears to be one of love and humility. He declares that Jesus shall never wash his feet (John 13:8). After all, why would Peter want his Teacher to take on such a demeaning task meant for a servant? Surely, Jesus Christ, God's own Son, was above such things! Peter responded immediately to Jesus's actions, without taking the time to understand His intent. When Jesus acts in our lives – especially when the action is out of the ordinary – we should take notice and try to understand what He is teaching us.

Peter did not understand the reason behind Jesus' decision to wash the disciples' feet, and, under the guise of humility, tried to stop Him. Do you ever see

God intervening in your life in a way you cannot understand? In order to practice true humility, we have to let go of how we think things should be or how we think Jesus should act in our lives. Sometimes, in ignorance, we may even try to prevent His plans from happening. In these instances, we must push down our pride and our assumptions, and instead allow humility to take their place. This means that we put God's will before our own, even if we do not understand His ways. And, it also means that we are willing to learn in times when He wants to teach us. Genuine humility is essential in our relationship with God.

After Peter tried to stop Jesus from washing his feet, Jesus told him, *If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me* (John 13:8). We now see the reason behind Jesus' action, a reason that Peter did not understand at first. Jesus was doing more than washing away the dirt of the road; this was a metaphor for washing away the dirt of sin, a cleansing which is necessary in order for us to be with Christ. How Peter's mind changed when he understood this lesson! Now he was ready to accept Jesus' offer to wash his feet.

Learning from Peter's example, we can ask ourselves: Do I accept God's will and teachings before I understand what they mean, or only after? It's a natural human tendency to seek answers and understanding. But when we have faith in God, the One who has all the answers, we only need to know and trust that everything is in His hands. Approaching God's teachings with humility allows us to more easily accept the wisdom that He wishes to share with us.

From Jesus, our example in all things, we learn how to be a servant. Jesus' humility and desire to follow His Father's will inspired Him to be a servant to others. He was willing to wash His disciples' feet and, just one day later, He was willing to lay down His life for the salvation of all souls. There was a cost to His serving, in the form of great pain and suffering, but nonetheless He accomplished what was needed in order to meet the needs of all people. As servants, let's be careful that our pride doesn't inhibit us from meeting the needs of those around us and, instead, be willing to serve in whatever situations God puts us in.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: JESUS AND MARY

Welcome back! We have been exploring the Lord's interactions and conversations with various individuals during His Passion. These interactions represent aspects of His faithfulness towards us, and illustrate ways that we can demonstrate our faithfulness to Him.

Today, we'll study Jesus' visit to the house of Simon the leper. Let's first consider the context of this visit. In the first verses of Mark 14, we read that Jesus' enemies wanted to capture and kill Him. However, they delayed because it was the Passover and they didn't want to upset the Jewish people during this celebration. As true God, Jesus surely knew their intentions. But He didn't hide or run away. Instead, He continued to do His work by visiting those gathered in Simon's house. Jesus lived in the assurance that all things are in His Father's hands, and that His enemies would only be able to act if and when the Father allowed it.

In verses three and four, we read about a woman who anointed the Lord with oil of spikenard, which was contained in an alabaster flask. This event is also recorded in John 12:4-8, where the woman is identified as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The value of this oil, in an alabaster flask, was equal to a full year's wages – possibly the most valuable thing that Mary had. As a follower of Jesus, it's likely that Mary would have known His teachings that alluded to His sacrifice. Her actions demonstrate three special characteristics of faithfulness to Christ.

First, consider Jesus' response to Mary's actions in verse 8 of Mark 14 – *She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.* Mary was aware of what the Lord would face because she paid close attention to His teaching. She was then prompted to turn that understanding into action. In order to sustain our faithfulness to Christ, it's fundamental that we're tuned-in to His teachings, found in the Bible and the Spirit-inspired word in divine services. Our church provides additional resources in print and online, which can further deepen our understanding of the Lord's plans and His expectations of us. Just as Mary had to make Jesus' teaching her own, we also need to pursue a personal and ever-deeper understanding of Him, and allow our encounters with Him to motivate us to action.

Second, given the costly nature of the oil of spikenard in an alabaster container, we can assume that Mary's actions were not spur of the moment; planning, preparation, and sacrifice were required. The most profound interaction that we can have with the Lord on a regular basis is to share communion with Him. We often find ourselves surrounded by the culture of instant gratification, where many tasks can be done "in the moment," with very little or no planning. But if we are not properly prepared, our interaction with the Lord will be superficial and it will lack weight and meaning. Worthy partaking of Holy Communion is preceded by forgiveness, and to be forgiven requires much more than hearing the proclamation of the absolution. An intentional investment of time, thought, and sacrifice is required if we are to benefit from the forgiveness that God offers, and thereby be prepared to share in communion with Christ.

- We must take the time to consider how we have sinned and sincerely confess in prayer.
- We need to sacrifice our own self-righteousness and seek reconciliation.
- We must repent, and commit to give up the desires of our old nature.

Just as Mary prepared for her encounter with Christ, we can gain the maximum benefit from our encounters with Him by investing and preparing.

The third point we'll consider is that Mary did not allow the opinions of those around her to influence her service to the Lord. Has it ever happened to you, as has been my experience too many times, that you have a thought to reach out to someone in need or do something in the congregation – only to second-guess yourself? What will others think? How will the individual react? Will this put me in a bad light or cause me to look foolish in front of others? In these moments, we must recognize that the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we give this gift room, we will be prompted to act. Let's make use of the opportunities that the Spirit shows us to demonstrate our love for the Lord and for our neighbor.

Through Mary's example, we see how to make better use of our interactions with the Lord and thereby grow in our faithfulness to Him.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 3: JESUS AND PONTIUS PILATE

As we complete our midweek sessions for March, let's prepare ourselves for Passion Week by focusing on the interaction between Jesus and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. What can we learn from Jesus' limited responses to the questions of Pilate? How do we respond when being falsely accused? By following Jesus' example, we can respond consistently at all times with godly wisdom, instead of our own human wisdom.

During the hours between Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, He endured a multistage trial that took Him from the Jewish religious council, to His first hearing before Pontius Pilate, to the court of Herod, and then finally back to Pilate, where He received His sentence. Note that Jesus' prosecution began with the Jewish courts and was then turned over to the Roman courts. The events had to unfold this way because the Jews lacked the authority to impose the death penalty. Therefore, after Jesus had been questioned, tried, and condemned by the Jewish authorities, they sent Him to Pilate to be sentenced with the penalty they desired.

The Jewish leaders were outraged by Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God (Luke 22:70-71). Driven by those emotions, they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate and laid out three accusations against Him that framed Jesus as a threat to Roman authority. They accused Jesus of disturbing the peace and stirring up civil unrest, telling the people not to pay their taxes to Caesar, and declaring Himself to be the king over Israel. With these accusations in mind, let's examine the interaction between Jesus and Pilate as recorded in the Gospel of John.

Starting at John 18:33, the Bible says: *Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a King then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this*

cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."

Let's unpack this part of their conversation. Pilate's first question was an attempt to determine whether Jesus was truly a threat to Roman rule, which would have been regarded by the Romans as treason and punishable by death. Jesus did not reply with a proclamation of His innocence or with defiance. He simply responded with a question to see if Pilate was asking whether He was king in a Roman sense or in a Jewish sense. Jesus explained that His kingdom was not of this world, pointing out that He was indeed a king, but of no threat to Rome because His kingdom would not come by a worldly revolution. Jesus then turns the conversation to the subject of truth: if Pilate wants to know the truth, then he needs to understand what Jesus is saying. Pilate asks, "What is truth?" but doesn't seem interested in the answer, as he leaves Jesus to report to the Jews that He finds no reason to condemn Him.

In this first conversation, Jesus doesn't respond like many of us would when being accused of an offense. An accusation usually prompts a passionate response, but Jesus responds calmly and with godly wisdom. Why? Perhaps because He could see the big picture and knew that these accusations were a part of His journey to fulfill the will of God. Are we able to see the big picture when injustice or distress is present in our lives? Do we recognize an opportunity to fulfill God's will in these moments?

Following this conversation, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod in an attempt to remove himself from making the final decision. He was able to do this because Jesus was from Galilee and Herod was the ruler of that region. But Jesus was silent when questioned by Herod. So, after being mocked by Herod and his men, Jesus was sent back to Pilate. After hearing the Jewish people cry out, "Crucify Him," once again Pilate speaks to Jesus. This short conversation is recorded in John 19:8-11: *Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where*

