

CONNECT GROUP GUIDE

Why the Cross?

Why The Cross?

Series Overview

- LENT 1 February 18 **to be an EXAMPLE of innocent suffering**
- LENT 2 February 25 **to REDEEM us**
- LENT 3 March 3 **to win VICTORY OVER EVIL**
- LENT 4 March 10 **to be a SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE**
- LENT 5 March 17 **to RECONCILE us to God**

CONNECT GROUPS

At ACN, the primary avenue for **discipleship** is in a **Connect Group**, and we **encourage everyone** to be involved because these groups are specifically designed to help us **grow** as disciples. Connect Groups help us to **connect** with **each other**, **connect** with the **Word** and **connect** with **God** through **prayer**.

We need time to **relate** to one another by connecting personally. Depending on the members, this can be done in a variety of ways. As we get into the Word, we **examine** its **truth** and **relevance** in order to apply it to our lives. Scripture is **explored**, **explained** and **discussed**, and the goal is to minister to each other's lives through what is learned, not necessarily to finish all the material.

Prayer is a vital part of a Connect Group's time together. Leave plenty of time so your prayer is not rushed. This is not just an 'opening' or 'closing' prayer, but a time for everyone in the group to take specific requests to God, in a simple and conversational way. This is where the action is! The goal is to create a space where people feel enabled and comfortable to pray, and can see God at work.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ATONEMENT

The **Atonement** is a theological word used to describe what is happening in and through the death of Christ.

It has often been explained as "at-one-ment". Which simply means to bring together what has been apart. To make one, what has been separated. This simple break down of the word helps us to see that through the death of Christ we can be 'at one' with God again. Our relationship with God has been broken, and we are apart from him because of sin. All humanity has rebelled against God, but chiefly by not accepting him as Lord of their lives. As God's righteousness is absolute, he cannot abide sin or rebellion, so there needs to be a 'correcting' of the broken relationship.

There are several ways of looking at what Jesus did on the cross, which help us understand and explain the purpose and nature of Jesus' death - a key and central focus for Christianity. This series will be looking at some of those ways, and we hope you will find this 'multi-faceted diamond' approach helpful to further enhance your love and proclamation of Jesus, and appreciate all he has done for you!

What makes a study during Lent just that little bit different?

As a Lenten study, this is a focussed opportunity for spiritual renewal ... renewal that requires discipline, deep reflection, honesty and prayer, alongside a renewed understanding of the Scriptures.

Lent invites us to make our hearts ready for remembering Jesus' passion (his suffering, scourging and death) and celebrating his resurrection.

The practice of a forty-day preparation period began in the Christian church during the third and fourth centuries. The number forty carries Biblical significance based on the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness and Jesus' forty-day fast in the wilderness. The forty days of Lent begin on Ash Wednesday and continue to Easter Day (not counting Sundays).

During Lent many people set aside special time for self-examination, prayer and refocusing their lives on what is truly important.

Some people choose to fast, or to give something up for Lent. You may fast from a meal, or something else you enjoy. It could be anything that takes some time regularly in your days. Or you may decide to take on a new spiritual discipline and reorientate yourself with the help of the Holy Spirit to a new depth of relationship with God through Jesus. This new spiritual discipline may then result in an ongoing practice for your daily devotion time.

The purpose of this is not to show off how self-disciplined we are, it is not even to make ourselves right so we can be with God. Salvation is a gift of God through Jesus, not something we earn.

The purpose of fasting or giving something up, or taking something on, is so that we can be purposely focused on God. We free up time for prayer and reorient our lives, and our minds, towards God. And our motivation is not other people's approval; it is the infinite rewards of God in this life and eternity.

May you have a holy Lent.

LENT 1

INTRO

Apart from Jesus, who in history inspires you to be a better person?

1. What is it about the cross of Christ that motivates you to be a more loving person?

2. Why is it necessary to have a strong understanding of God's judgement on sin in order to appreciate the love of God at the cross?

The 'Example' aspect of Christ's death comes from a 'moral influence' perspective. The death of Christ is understood to be an example which inspires people to live sacrificial lives of love.

SERMON NOTES

3. Read Job 1.

How would you have responded if you were in Job's situation? Does it make any difference knowing about the cross of Christ?

5. Read Mark 10:35-45.

Why is taking the role of the servant so important in Christian understanding? How do you seek to be a servant?

4. Read Philippians 2:1-11.

In vv.1-4 Paul exhorts the Philippians to live humbly. Explain Paul's motivation (vv.5-11) for this sort of life in your own words.

6. How can Jesus as the ultimate 'innocent sufferer' help us in understanding suffering today?

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- Pray for those who suffer. Ask God to show them the cross and the help and hope it can bring
 - Pray for yourself. Ask God to use this Lenten series to give you a deeper appreciation of all that he has done through the cross. Ask him to make you a more loving person as a result.



SERMON NOTES

LENT 2

INTRO

Have you ever had to buy back something that was yours in the first place?

How did it make you feel?

The 'Redemption' aspect of Christ's death looks at Jesus paying the price of a ransom, releasing Christians from bondage to sin and death.

1. What do you think of when you hear the word redemption?
2. Read 1 Peter 1:17-21.
How does Peter describe the life from which we were rescued?
3. What does Peter mean by the term redeemed/ransomed?
(depending on translation)

SERMON NOTES

4. Look up these verses to help you unpack the theological significance of the term 'redeemed'.

Titus 2:14

Romans 3:24

Ephesians 1:7

5. How does the 'redemption' and 'ransom' picture help you understand the meaning of the cross?

6. Where have you experienced the redeeming love of Christ in your life?

Perhaps a time of struggle, pain, job loss, bereavement etc. How did God redeem the circumstance?

7. How does knowing that God has redeemed you and paid your ransom change the way you live your life?

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- Give thanks for this wonderful aspect of the cross, and ask God to help you comprehend it more deeply
 - Pray that more people will see how much God loves them, and ask Him to give you the courage to share that good news



SERMON NOTES

Why the Cross? ... to win Victory over evil

LENT 3

INTRO

Share a story of good triumphing over evil.

Think about most fairy tales, or some of the fantasy movies of recent decades - Superman, Star Wars etc. What do they all have in common?

The 'Victory over evil' aspect of Christ's death emphasises that Jesus' death and resurrection triumphed over the powers of evil, including sin, death and the devil. Jesus is the victorious King.

1. The theological term to describe Jesus winning victory over evil is 'Christus Victor'.
What do you think this term might mean?
2. Read Genesis 3:1-19.
How did Satan triumph, and why does he need defeating?
3. Read John 12:20-36.
Reflect together on what it means for God to be glorified.
What part does judgement play in this?

SERMON NOTES

4. Get different people to look up John 14:30, John 16:11, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2, 1 John 4:4 and 1 John 5:19. Where do you see the 'prince of this world' at work today?

6. Read Colossians 2:9-15
Jesus not only claims power for himself, but also removes power from others.
How does Jesus achieve this victory?

5. Read Matthew 4:1-11
What did Jesus do to defeat Satan in the wilderness?

7. What do you think Jesus meant by his final words 'It is finished'? John 19:30
What do those words mean for you?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rmv1PmL6q0>

Copy this link into a browser [or click if you're using a soft copy] to watch a scene from **Passion of the Christ** in the Garden of Gethsemane.
(apologies for the quality)

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- Give grateful thanks that through his death on the cross Jesus has won the victory over Satan! What a triumph!
 - Pray that more and more people will see the amazing breadth of truth there is in all that Jesus achieved on the cross



SERMON NOTES

LENT 4

INTRO

Have you ever taken the rap (by choice or not) for something that someone else has done?
How did you feel?

Has there been a time when someone else took the blame for something you did? Would you like to share about that?

The 'Substitution' aspect of Christ's death focusses on the consequences of sin, and that it cannot be ignored. When Jesus died, he acted as a substitute in place of, and on behalf of, sinful humanity. This has made it possible for us to be declared righteous based on faith.

1. Read Genesis 22:1-19.
What is your first impression of this story?
Why do you think it makes you feel that way?
2. Take some time to look up the word '*propitiation*'.
Describe it in your own words.
3. Take some time to look up the word '*expiation*'.
Describe it in your own words.

SERMON NOTES

3. What is the difference between the two words?

6. Read Mark 15:33-39.

What role did the curtain serve in the Temple?

What does the curtain tearing in two tell us about who Jesus is, and what he has done?

4. Read Romans 3:21-26.

Why was Jesus the only one who could be a substitute?

7. What does it mean to you that your sin was transferred to Jesus who then took the penalty that should have been yours?

• Move straight into prayer following Q7 and bring your gratefulness to God through Jesus.

• Ask God to help you embrace all that forgiveness means, and to give you a new boldness to share the gift of grace with others



SERMON NOTES

Why the Cross? ... to Reconcile us to God

LENT 5

INTRO

Have you experienced a significant reconciliation in a relationship?

If you feel comfortable, share with your group.

1. How would you describe the breakdown in the relationship between God and human beings?
2. Who takes the initiative in reconciliation with God?
3. What is the means by which God reconciles us to himself?

The 'Reconciliation' aspect of Christ's death shows that there is a restoration of the relationship between us and God. We were dead in trespass and sin. Now we are alive in Christ in a renewed relationship with God.

SERMON NOTES

4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.
How does v.21 help us better understand reconciliation?

5. In practical terms what does it mean for you to be Christ's ambassador with a message of reconciliation?

6. How does John 3:16 preach the message of reconciliation?
Refer to the verses around it to help you with your answer.

7. How does the reconciliation with God found at the cross help you to reconcile at a human level?

8. Of the five understandings of the cross we have explored through Lent, share with the group which one is the most significant for you and why?

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- Express your gratitude to God for the cross
 - Pray for the message of reconciliation to be known in our world and especially in situations you are particularly aware of
 - Ask God to give you wisdom to be his ambassador with the message of reconciliation.



SERMON NOTES

**IDEAS, THOUGHTS, OR SOMETHING TO MAKE HAPPEN
AS YOU PREPARE FOR HOLY WEEK,
GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER DAY**

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