

# RADICAL JESUS STUDY GUIDE

## RADICAL GOSPEL

### SESSION 1, PP. 9 23

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**TEXTS USED IN THESE PAGES:** Matthew 3; Luke 3:1-22; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-12; Matthew 4:12-22; Matthew 5:1-11; Matthew 5:43-48; Matthew 7:24-27; Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 10:38-42; Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 18:15-17; Luke 10:25-37

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Jesus' life and teachings fascinate many people. Throughout Jesus' life, and the years since, many have tried to live their lives based on his words. *Radical Jesus* highlights some of these important stories.

When Jesus was baptized, God spoke and told the crowd that Jesus is the Son of God. With this authority, Jesus taught people how to live as those who love and want to follow God. Some of the teachings seem fairly basic, while others seem countercultural and radical. Read pages 9–23.

- Which teachings are you familiar with?
- Which teachings are new to you?

Read two of the portrayed teachings in the Bible: Matthew 5:1-11 and Luke 10:25-37.

- How are these actions different from what one may normally want to do?
- What does it mean to show mercy? Give an example.
- Who are the neighbors you see or hear about to whom you could demonstrate love? Why might your neighbors near and far need your care and concern?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind: and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

- If you love something or someone with your whole heart, soul, strength, and mind, how does it shape your life?
- How might you live life differently if you loved God that much?

Think about the ways Jesus' teachings can be put into practice today. Go online to a news website, or find a newspaper or magazine, and read or listen to a current news story. Think about the story through the lens of showing mercy, loving enemies, and loving God.

- How would the news stories end if these teachings of Jesus were followed? Would they remain the same or would they be different?

Pray that God will help you live a life that follows Jesus.

# RADICAL GOSPEL

## SESSION 2, PP. 24 43

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**TEXTS USED IN THESE PAGES:** Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 12:22-31; Luke 12:13-21; Matthew 19:16-26; Luke 18:18-25; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 19:28-47; Luke 20:45-47; Luke 21:1; Matthew 24:1-2; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 26:3-4; Matthew 26:36-39; Luke 23:27-46; Mark 15:34; Luke 24:1-5; Luke 24:13-31; Matthew 28:18-20

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Jesus taught many things during his time on earth. In addition to loving God and loving your neighbor as noted in the last session, Jesus had plenty to say about money. He challenged people to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. He gave examples of what it means to have treasures in heaven—sell possessions and give to the poor. Jesus continued by telling a story about a rich man dining on lots of food while ignoring a poor man on the street. After both die, the rich man went to Hades and was in torment. He noticed that the poor man, though miserable during his earthly life, was comfortable after death.

This story (and others) is surprising in that it ends differently than one might expect—the rich man was tormented while the poor man was comfortable. The stories show that those who follow Jesus have different values than the world around them. Read pages 24–43.

- Which of the stories most surprises you?
- How are the values in these stories radically different from what we see around us?
- Consider the stories alongside Jesus' teachings in the first session when he taught that we are to love God and love each other. How do the stories illustrate that?

Because so many of Jesus' teachings were countercultural, some people got angry and wanted to kill him. Read Matthew 26:3-4 and Luke 23:27-46. It's hard to imagine that someone who taught love and peace was killed violently in a public crucifixion. Yet Jesus, the Son of God, did not stay buried in the tomb! Instead, he was raised from the dead and walked among those who followed him. At first, they did not recognize Jesus. But Jesus said that those who follow him should go all over the world and tell others the many things he taught. Read Matthew 28:18-20.

- What are some of Jesus' teachings that caused people to be angry with him? Why did they make people angry?
- Give examples of spoken (words) and unspoken (actions) ways that preach Jesus' teachings.

Pray that God will give you courage to teach about Jesus' way, using both your words and your actions.

# RADICAL HISTORY

## SESSION 3, PP. 46 74

Those who met Jesus and listened to his teachings moved from place to place. They told stories and wrote letters to communicate their love of God and desire to follow Jesus. Christianity spread. Churches were formed and people worshiped together. However, centuries later, people became unsettled with some of the things happening in the church. For example, they were upset about taxes the church imposed. People also wanted the Bible to be translated into a language they could understand rather than reading it in Latin. Read pages 46–74.

- Go online and learn more about John Wycliffe and the important work he did translating the Bible. Why did he think this work was important? Why was he opposed?
- Which Bible translation do you use? Do some research and find out when it was translated.

John Wycliffe and others were concerned about the church and wanted to make some changes, or reforms. The concerns in the fourteenth century led to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Those who joined the Reformation movement were passionate about their faith in God and their desire to follow Jesus. This zeal led one group to take issue with the practice of baptizing babies. Instead, they had the radical idea that people should be baptized only when they are old enough to make their own decision to follow Jesus and join the church. Though church and government authorities hunted for the “rebaptizers,” the movement spread throughout Europe.

- Many people were killed for their faith during the Reformation. What do you think compelled people to follow what they believed Jesus taught even though they might be martyred?
- Look again at the story of Dirk Willems on pages 71–72. Which teachings of Jesus did he follow? Why do you think he rescued his pursuer, knowing that he would likely be killed?

The Reformation was a tumultuous time in European and church history. Yet because of it, people were able to read the Bible and worship with those who interpreted the Bible similarly to themselves.

- Read page 15 and the first section of page 16. Compare these teachings of Jesus to the actions during the Reformation. Which actions depart from Jesus’ teachings? Which actions coincide with Jesus’ teachings?
- Read Matthew 5:43–48. Which stories that you have read so far in *Radical Jesus* illustrate these verses? How did people in the stories demonstrate love for their enemies?

Pray that God will be with you as you try to follow Jesus’ teachings every day.

# RADICAL HISTORY

## SESSION 4, PP. 75 86

Some of the Christians in Europe left to settle in North America. As Christians continued to try to live according to what Jesus taught, they encountered difficult situations. The stories in this section take place in what would eventually become the United States, and they focus on relationships with Native Americans and how to handle the issue of slavery.

Quakers, along with the Brethren and Mennonites, are an historic peace church. This means that since the beginning of their existence they tried to live Jesus' words of peace in their daily lives. Instead of fighting, they desired to love their enemies as Jesus taught. This was a radical way to live. Read pages 75–86.

- In what ways did Quakers and the other characters in these stories try to love their enemies?
- From where did Jacob get the idea that to kill is a sin (page 75)?

Conrad Weiser was a unique person because he knew both Native and immigrant cultures and language. He and the Oneida leader, Shikellamy, were able to negotiate between the groups. Peace lasted in the area until immigrant squatters built communities in places where the treaties had assured Native people they would be able to live.

Conrad Weiser eventually left his negotiating position, and the Quakers resigned from the general assembly so that they would not have to vote for unpeaceful actions.

- Shikellamy is mentioned in the story but not much is said about him. Do an Internet search to find out more about his life and legacy. How is his presence felt today?
- The end of the story points toward what was lost when peace policies broke down. How do you imagine the region would be different if the peace policies continued to be followed? In what ways would your life be different than it is now?

The Quakers were some of the first to speak out against slavery. In 1754 John Woolman published an important antislavery document, and in 1836 Angelina Grimke wrote an antislavery pamphlet. These were not the first, or only, documents that protested slavery but they were important ones.

- Return to the first section of *Radical Jesus*. Though Jesus did not directly address slavery, which of his words could be understood to say that slavery is wrong?
- Describe how the actions of Woolman and Grimke were radical in their time. What do you think motivated their antislavery writing?

Pray and thank God for people throughout history who have shown us how to follow the words of Jesus.

# RADICAL RESISTANCE

## SESSION 5, PP. 88 104

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**TEXTS USED IN THESE PAGES:** Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; Luke 13:29-30; Hebrews 11:1; Genesis 39; Acts 16:16-40; Matthew 27:11–28:10

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Christians around the world do their best to live according to Jesus' teaching. They meet together to discern how to apply his teachings in their context. The Bible says that "he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" and "to proclaim liberty to the captives" (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18). Christians discuss these texts and others as they desire to understand what they are called to do as followers of Jesus. Read pages 88–104.

Christians live in various contexts.

- How might a Christian who owns a house and two cars, and has plenty of food to eat, interpret Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18?
- How might a Christian who is homeless and owns nothing but the clothes he or she is wearing interpret Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18?
- What are the differences between these situations and their interpretations?

Slavery and the civil rights movement are two issues that some Christians addressed because of their faith. Some denominations opposed slavery (see page 92). They wrote letters and pamphlets and spoke out against the practice. Others helped with the Underground Railroad to free slaves. Sojourner Truth was a gifted speaker who traveled and gave impassioned speeches against slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 proclaimed slaves to be free.

- What do you know about American politics and culture during the time that Truth lived (1797–1883)? If you need ideas, search the Internet for more background. How were Truth's antislavery and women's rights speeches radical for their time?
- Are there things about Truth's message that apply today?

The civil rights movement was an important time in the United States.

- Many people helped advance the rights of African-Americans; some are named on page 99. Which names do you recognize? If there are names that you don't know, take the time to look them up on the Internet. How did they contribute to the movement?
- Martin Luther King Jr. was a leader. Where did he get the courage to do the things he did? Take a look at page 102.
- How are the words and actions of Jesus reflected in the stories on pages 102–3?

Pray that God will give you attitudes and words that demonstrate Jesus' teachings.

# RADICAL RESISTANCE

## SESSION 6, PP. 105-27

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**TEXTS USED IN THESE PAGES:** Matthew 25:35; John 20:19-20; Luke 1:51-53; Luke 9:41-44; James 2:15-17

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**T**his section focuses on those who listened to Jesus' message of love and believed that war does not demonstrate this message. The Catholic Worker Movement and Christian Peacemaker Teams are two agencies that speak out and take action against war. Some people have even gone to prison for their demonstrations. Read pages 105–27.

There are many stories told in this section and they take place all over the world.

- Are you familiar with any of the stories?
- Take the time to make a list of questions you have about the stories. What do you wonder about? Which ones would you like to learn more about?
- Name two radical actions that people did to demonstrate their belief that war is wrong. What did their demonstrations accomplish?
- There are many groups that also believe in peace because of their understanding of Jesus' teachings. Do an Internet search and see how many you can find.

Several of the Scriptures mentioned in this section talk about peace. Read John 20:19; Luke 19:41-42; and James 2:15-17. Pay attention to the way peace is referred to in these verses.

- Do the verses present different meanings of peace? The same meanings?
- What things make for peace (Luke 19:41-42)? Describe what the world would be like if everyone tried to make peace.
- We can tell people to live in peace, but the verses in James suggest that we also need to do more than use words. Compare this with Matthew 25:35-40, part of which is also mentioned in this section. What do these verses tell us about making peace?

A lot of stories and information are presented in *Radical Jesus*. It covers stories of peace and radical living from the time of Jesus until today, suggesting that making peace is an ongoing activity. Find a copy of today's newspaper or go online to a news website. Find one story that illustrates peacemaking. Find one story in which peacemaking is needed.

- Compare the two stories. How are they the same? How are they different?
- Think back over the characters and actions portrayed in *Radical Jesus*. Would any of them have words of advice or praise for the news stories?

Pray that God will bless peacemakers everywhere.