

DAY 1 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What food do you have trouble saying "no!" to, and why?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked." "Who told you that you were naked?" the LORD God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"

The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?" "The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. **[This was a prophecy about Jesus]** He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." **Genesis 3:1–15 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

When do you remember being tricked or deceived?

God himself promised that Jesus would come to redeem us from our broken state. Does it surprise you that God himself participates in our pain?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, thank you for sending Jesus to a broken world and saving and forgiving me despite my sin. Help me listen to you rather than disregard your commands, kindness or wisdom.

DAY 2 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Give an example from your life of the truth that "Hindsight is 20/20."

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

From the Holy Spirit through the prophet Isaiah (hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth): ...the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). **Isaiah 7:14 NLT**

The Apostle Matthew would later record: This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. **Matthew 1:18–25 NLT**

The Apostle Paul would later explain: But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. **Galatians 4:4–5 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Do you think Mary and Joseph were confused, even as God's will was happening right before their eyes? How does that encourage you when you are uncertain about what God is doing?

Someone once said that God only shines light on the step that you are on. Is that true in your life?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, thank you for being completely faithful. Help me to trust even when I cannot see what's next.

DAY 3 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Thinking of people as "gifts," who has been the greatest "gift" in your life?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

From the Old Testament prophet Micah hundreds of years before Jesus: Mobilize! Marshal your troops! The enemy is laying siege to Jerusalem. They will strike Israel's leader in the face with a rod. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf. **Micah 5:1–2 NLT**

The account of Jesus' birth from Luke: At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. **Luke 2:1–7 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Many assume that if God is all powerful, he would naturally force all things to go his way: righting every wrong and healing every sickness. That's not the way God works. Instead, God specializes in working out his special plan in the middle of brokenness, uncertainty, and even despair. How has God shown himself faithful in the middle of storms in your life?

Jesus, *the Son of God*, was born in very humble circumstances. He knows what it is to be poor, to be an outcast, and to be marginalized because of his heritage and ethnicity. Have you ever been tempted to think that God "doesn't know what I'm going through"?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, the account of your birth into history, and into a very difficult situation, is extraordinary. Thank you for participating in our broken world and choosing to respond to sinners like me with love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

DAY 4 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

When you get something really good, are you eager to share it with others or careful to retain it for yourself?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

From the Old Testament prophet Malachi: "Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

"But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD. Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

"At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

"I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

Malachi 3:1–7 NLT

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

While the Jewish leaders looked eagerly forward to the "Messiah," they did not realize that his task was not to increase their power or establish their kingdom but to make a new Kingdom of the repentant sinners, the outcasts, and the nobodies.

How has Jesus shown you truth, love and acceptance?

Are you following Jesus by showing the same truth, love, and acceptance to others?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, forgive me of my sin—that which I am aware of, and that which I am not. You never fail, and you never change. Thank you for being trustworthy and full of grace and love.

DAY 5 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Are you good at reconciliation, making lasting peace between yourself and others?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul." **Luke 2:25–35 NLT**

There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. **1 Timothy 2:5–6 NLT**

Sermon Insights:

Fulfilled prophecy points to a God who is sovereign, a God who specializes in accomplishing what seems to be impossible, a God who loves us, and a God who we can trust. All of Scripture and all of history is about Jesus.

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Simeon said that God prepared salvation, through Jesus, for *all people*. For the Jews, this was jaw-dropping news. In what ways is God opening your heart to show love to those outside of your comfortable network?

How are you using the freedom Jesus purchased, with his blood, for you?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, it is a true privilege to be reconciled to you through Jesus. I do not deserve it, but I gladly accept your offer of forgiveness!