



FREE INDEED II

40 Days of "Cross Examination"

*"For I resolved to know nothing
while I was with you
except Christ and him crucified."*

1 Corinthians 2:2



PART 1: THE HIGH PRICE OF FREEDOM

Freedom is wonderful gift! As we know, especially around Veterans Day or Memorial Day, our freedom is not without cost. Many died for us to enjoy what we do in the free world today. This section will help us grow in our appreciation of the true cost of spiritual freedom given to us by God. And that is the precious blood of his Son.

✓ each day when done

___ **Day 1** Reflect on this passage – **I Peter 1:17-21**. As we walk in freedom, what are some ways we can manage our attitudes to be sure we are pleasing God?

In verse 18, it mentions our former “empty way of life.” How does it describe things that are valuable in the world’s eyes? _____

In verse 19, it says that people are redeemed by the **precious** blood of Christ. How does scripture describe Christ? _____

How should that make Jesus’ blood more valuable to us? _____

Looking at verse 20, why do you think the blood of Christ is precious to God the Father as well? Also consider verse 19. _____

___ **Day 2** Read the descriptions of heaven in **Revelation 21:1-27**. As you read through the whole chapter, think about the fact that all of this was purchased for us by the precious blood of Christ. Write down some of your feelings and reflections:

Look specifically at **Revelation 21:11**. How does it describe the glory of God emanating from the New Jerusalem?

What else is precious in these passages? _____

___ **Day 3** Read about the **first time** God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are mentioned in scripture together in **Matthew 3:16-17**.

How does the Father describe his heart toward the Son? _____

Does this help you see how precious the shed blood of Jesus must be to God? _____

- The Blood of Christ is inherently valuable and unique
- Something to meditate on: **Why is the blood of Christ precious?** Jesus' blood is precious to God the Father because it is his Son's blood - who is united with him eternally. How precious would your child's blood be to you?

___ **Day 4** Let's see some other ways the blood of Christ is ultra-precious. Compare these two scriptures where Abel is mentioned. Meditate between **Genesis 4:8-10** and **Hebrews 12:22-24**.

What would Abel's blood be saying to the Lord from the bloody ground it was soaking into? _____

When you see the glorious description of the church of Christ in Hebrews 12, what could be "the better word than Abel's" (Hebrews 12:24) that Jesus's blood is saying to God? _____

Abel's blood was costly. And Cain paid for it with a lifelong curse. Christ's precious blood was divinely priceless. Yet, instead of believers paying for it with a lifelong curse or eternal condemnation, what are some things Jesus' blood purchased for us according to the passage in Hebrews? _____

___ **Day 5** Not only is the blood of Christ inestimably valuable to us, it is precious to God as well because it demonstrates the weight of God's righteousness and justice. We ought to be cursed, yet God chose to let the curse stay on Christ for us and our forgiveness – to free us from the empty way of life handed down to us by the world. For more on this, see **Galatians 3:13**

How do we know what justice really is? And what it costs to satisfy it? We know by looking at the cross. In light of what you studied yesterday, reflect on the “great exchange” noted in **II Corinthians 5:21**. What does it mean in your mind, as you reflect, that Jesus “became sin”? _____

Look at **I Peter 2:24** as well. What do you see there? What is a little different? _____

Think about your life and how much, or maybe how much MORE you ought to appreciate the blood of Christ. In both of today’s passages, what is God hoping to see in all of us as we deepen our understanding of this? _____

What are you going to do differently going forward? _____

Does it help you see how precious you are to God? _____

You are so precious that God bought you back with his own Son’s blood. You have been set free to live for righteousness! The blood of Christ is precious, because it gives us a fresh start! Tell a close believer your thoughts and plans.

___ **Day 6** As we touched on yesterday, the blood of Christ also expresses the beauty and power of God’s love. Look at **Psalms 72:13-14**. How do we know that we are loved? _____

How does the blood of Christ make that happen for eternity? _____

The blood of Christ paid for us to be blessed spiritually in every way. See **Hebrews 9:14** and **II Peter 1:3**. Go back over one or two of the days this week and savor God’s grace – as shown by the gift of the precious blood of Christ. What is the most meaningful to you? _____

To the degree that we grasp the preciousness of Jesus' blood reveals the depth of our relationship with God. See **Leviticus 17:11** for more perspective.

___ **Day 7** Journal your thoughts about the precious blood of Christ from reflecting on these 3 verses: **Ephesians 2:13**, **Romans 5:9** and **Revelation 1:5** Write out some of your heart's longings and hopes. (Prayers)_____

PART 2: THE CROSS: WHAT IF YOU WERE PETER?

Peter has a special connection to the cross that many do not reflect on. Historical tradition has noted that after he watched his wife be crucified for her faith, he would have the same fate. In a final act of humility before his death, Peter brought glory to God by requesting to be nailed to his cross upside down, stating he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus himself. This section will look briefly at the ups and downs of Peter – he had many – to help us see how he made it through to the end. The cross was a key part of it. And it is for all of us! What if you were Peter? Would you make it? The truth is, as human beings, we are all LIKE Peter in many ways!

✓ off each day when done

___ **Day 1** Read the final, recorded, personal words of Jesus to Peter in **John 21:18-19** and notice the reference to Peter's former youth and Peter's future death. If you knew that you would die for Christ in the future, how would Christ's death sustain you until that final day? _____

Why do you think Jesus mentioned Peter's earlier time in life when he was growing independent, could dress himself and go anywhere he wanted to? _____

Doesn't it show God's love to us, by having the freedom to do what we want? He doesn't force us to "follow him"! Just as Jesus emphatically told Peter "FOLLOW

ME,” we have the same call. How does our free will show our love to God? _____

Reflect on **II Corinthians 5:14-15** and thank Christ for leading the way. Also, take a moment to reflect back on times you were possibly angry at someone in the church, or hurt, or sorely tempted to leave God for some reason. How can you deepen your resolve to stay true to Jesus, like Peter, by remembering Jesus’ death? _____

Day 2 Read **Matthew 16:13-19**. This is a high point in Peter’s life. Jesus said Peter has a reason to feel completely happy! He had received God’s revelation to confess “You are the Christ.” (See **I Corinthians 12:3**) That statement became the Rock on which Christ builds his church – even to this day! Imagine Peter pulling you aside and telling you how excited and awesome he felt. What would he share with you? _____

What else did Jesus promise Peter? _____

How would you feel if Christ chose YOU to open the doors of God’s kingdom for people? _____

See **Acts 2:36-38** and **Acts 10:47-48**. Peter used the keys first for the Jews to be added into the church of Christ, and then later for the Gentiles! The message of the cross is for all people, all nations, all cultures and all ethnicities. Take time to reflect on your purpose in life and how the cross is for everyone. Who can you reach out to so they can be added to God’s family? _____

Maybe you don’t feel excited like Peter did, but you still have a reason to! What are some reasons to be excited and feel awesome about following Jesus? _____

Day 3 Read **Matthew 16:21-28**. Peter's great experience of joy that Christ shared with him, was followed shortly thereafter with a great experience of painful embarrassment and a blistering rebuke. What did Peter not understand that caused Christ to get so upset with him? _____

Peter had a soft heart, and certainly didn't intend to sin, but he did! Perhaps you have seen yourself in a similar situation with God – or maybe not. This was one of the first times Peter was introduced to the cross. Why do you think he did not understand it at this point? _____

How can a person avoid missing some big points within God's will today? _____

Look again at verses **21 and 24**. Imagine you were there, and Christ's words rang loud and clear in your ears. What would you be thinking? And what ought your response be? _____

Also look at **Luke 9:23**. God's nature embraces suffering for others – from love.

Day 4 Let's look at another time where Peter meant well, but fell short. Read the account in **Luke 22:24-34**. What did Peter say in **verse 33**? _____

And what did Christ say in **verse 34**? _____

Of course, Jesus knew the truth! Think back to Matthew 16 when Christ mentioned that Satan was in the details even at that time. Satan was still working on getting to Peter! What can we learn from this warning about the devil? See **Ephesians 6:10-17** and also **Luke 4:13**. _____

Satan lurked and tempted Peter at least two more times -once with misplaced boldness and another time with cowardice. Look at **Luke 22:49-50**. Jesus had to

rebuke him again for trying to kill the man. And read **John 18:10-11**. What was “the cup” Jesus mentioned in **verse 11**? _____ If we miss the cross, we can easily miss God’s will in our lives. For more on “the cup”, see **Revelation 14:10, Psalm 75:8, Obadiah 1:15-17 and Habakkuk 2:15**.

___ **Day 5** Peter’s bad evening wasn’t over! Look at **Luke 22:54-62**. As you look closely at Peter’s responses in verses **57, 58 & 60**, try to describe what Peter actually is saying.... **Verse 57:** _____

Verse 58: _____

Verse 60: _____

Then look again at verses **61 & 62**. After being rebuked earlier for standing up for Jesus, now Christ witnessed him denying the Lord! What types of feelings and temptations must have Peter been feeling that he wept bitterly? _____

If you have ever messed up badly in your walk with God, take heart. It’s not OK to sin, yet it is 100% inevitable- even for the best of God’s people. How does the cross give us hope and freedom from our sins? _____

___ **Day 6** Going back to Day 1 of this section, let’s look at John 21 after Christ was crucified. Read **John 21:1-14**. How was Peter leading the group activities in most everything? _____

Jesus saw Peter’s potential and chose him to lead. Did you know that his real name was “SIMON” – which means shifting sand. But Jesus dubbed Simon as “PETER” which means rock. (Go back over Day 2 in this section and you’ll see it)

In spite of any sense of being unworthy, what gifts do you have that God can use in you to serve others and bring Him glory? _____

Continue reading **John 21:15-19**. Jesus was challenging Peter's love for him. Why do think Christ asked him 3 times? _____


And why do you think Jesus was focusing on Peter's love as the motivation? _____


How did Christ direct Peter to show his love for Him? _____


Who can you serve in the church today, tomorrow and later in the week? Write down some ideas. Include non-church friends too! _____


This is a great way to show your love to Christ! He shared that with Peter.


Day 7 Imagine you are the Apostle Peter. Think about the studies this week and then read "your thoughts" in **I Peter 5:1-10**. As you remember back, make note in the passage where you were when you learned the lessons you are sharing in **I Peter 5**.


 Verse 1 _____


 Verse 2 _____

 Verses 3-4 _____

 Verses 5-6 _____

 Verse 7 _____

 Verses 8-9 _____

 Verse 10 _____

Pray over these and share your heart with another believer about the things you've learned. What do you want to grow the most in? _____

PART 3: THE CROSS: FREE TO FEEL FORSAKEN

Have you ever asked God, “Where are you?” Have you ever felt like the world was against you and God was distant and silent? If so, what was it like for you to endure that particular storm in your life? This section will explore how Jesus experienced forsaken hopelessness on the cross. In Christ, we are free to **feel** hopeless, yet we still have **GREAT** hope.

✓ off each day when done

___ **Day 1** Read **Psalm 22:1-2** and **Mark 15:33-34** In these passages, we see Christ repeating the words from Psalm 22 – a Messianic Psalm. The cross shows us how to follow Jesus when we go through the toughest of times. Our freedom begins and ends at the cross. On the cross, what separated Christ from God?

_____ (See **1 Peter 2:24**)

Why would that separation from God be so heart wrenching for Jesus?

Jesus’ words on the cross, strike a chord deep within our souls. The feelings of being forsaken, rejected and forgotten were inextricably woven into us when Adam and Eve fell in Eden. We can read these words and think “If even Jesus felt forsaken, then there’s no hope for me.” We can know that the Bible says God is always with us, yet, at times, we can feel He has abandoned us. It’s easy for us to identify with these feelings and with David’s words in the Psalms. We can rationalize that God has indeed forsaken us...but has He? Satan would like us to think so, but the scriptures testify otherwise. The images of being forsaken in Psalm 22:1-2, and in Mark 15: 33-34 seem overwhelmingly hopeless, and they would be if that was the end of the story. However, the story never ends on a hopeless note with God.

___ **Day 2** When you are struggling to feel close to God or in those times when God seems to be silent, read these scriptures and write down what you know to be absolutely true about God:

 Lamentations 3:21-23 _____

 1 Peter 1:3-4 _____

 Psalm 22: 23-24 _____

 Hebrews 5:7-9 _____

 Isaiah 49:15-16 _____

 Romans 8:31-38 _____

✍ Joshua 1:9 _____

✍ 1 Peter 5:6-7 _____

✍ Matthew 28:20b _____

___ **Day 3** Dietrich Bonhoeffer once reflected on Jesus' question as it is phrased in **Psalm 42:9 "Why have you forgotten me?"**

Meditate on what he said: *"This question comes from the lips of all Christians when everything stands against them, when all earthly hope has been shattered, when in the course of great world events they feel totally lost, when all of life's goals seem unattainable and everything appears pointless... When I fall into doubt God remains solid as a rock, when I waver God remains unshakable, when I become unfaithful God becomes faithful.... When in deepest need I believe in God's goodness. When in guilt I believe in forgiveness. When in death I believe in life. When in defeat I believe in victory. When in desolation I believe in God's gracious presence. Those who have found God in the cross of Jesus Christ know how wonderfully God hides himself in this world and how he is closest precisely when we believe him to be most distant."*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: God Is on the Cross- Meditations for Lent and Easter

Describe any disconnect you experience between what you know to be true about God and how you feel? _____

What did Jesus do on the cross when he felt separated from the Father?

What do you do when you feel distant from God? _____

Pray about how you will deal with this in the future.

___ **Day 4** If Jesus were to emphasize one phrase or word in his "atonement cry" from Psalm 22, write down how the meaning would be sculpted by capturing his tone and the feelings he expressed in these possible variations. Each one has a different inflection. Imagine Christ agonizing in these different ways:

My God! My God! **Why** have you forsaken me? _____

My God! My God! Why have **you** forsaken me? _____


My God! My God! Why have you forsaken **me**? _____


When you go through trials, which one of the above matches your focus when you cry out to God in pain? _____ Why? _____


Perhaps Jesus emphasized all three of these words and had deep feelings in every way as the perfect human being. What an amazing Savior!


Get a hymnbook and read the lyrics to "Hallelujah! What a Savior!"


Day 5 Read all of **Psalm 22**. This psalm sounds like it was written at the foot of the cross. How do its verses point to the cross of Jesus and describe what he endured?

 Psalm 22:1 (Mark 15:33-34) _____


 Psalm 22:7 (Mark 15:29) _____

 Psalm 22:8 (Matthew 27:41-43) _____

 Psalm 22:14 (John 19:28) _____

 Psalm 22:16 (John 21:24-27) _____

 Psalm 22:17 (John 19:36) _____

 Psalm 22:18 (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-24) _____

 Psalm 22:31 (John 19:30) _____

When you are feeling abandoned, even by God, how does it help to know that Jesus also experienced despair and abandonment? _____

And what does this fact give you the freedom to do? _____

Day 6 Read **Psalm 22:3-5**. In spite of such hopeless feelings of being forgotten, forsaken and fractured, what do these verses show the person doing in spite of everything? _____

Read **Habakkuk 3:17-19** What parallels do you see here to Psalm 22? _____

How important is praising God in the storms of life? _____

How can you prepare for tough times now in your worship? _____

Get a hymn book and sing or reflect upon “O Sacred Head” [Listen to a recording](#)

___ **Day 7** Read **Psalm 22:22-31** and **1 Corinthians 15:54**. How do these scriptures portray the victory that was won from Christ crucified? _____

“Why have You forsaken me?” We can ask, wonder, and call out to God in times of trouble like any overwhelmed child would cry out. But we can be assured that He has never left our side. He is a loving, perfect Father. And through the blood of our brother Jesus, we will never be forsaken.

Reflect on **Isaiah 49:15-16** and thank God it’s OK to **feel** forsaken and **know** we really are **not** forsaken!

PART 4: “IT IS FINISHED” – FREEDOM HAS BEEN PROVIDED

✓ off each day when done

___ **Day 1** Read Christ’s last words on the cross in **John 19:29-30**. Take some time to think about the answers to these questions: What did Jesus finish? How does that statement impact your life? Write down your thoughts before we study this out.

Do you live as though it is finished, or do you live as though Jesus cried out, “It is mostly done. The rest is up to you!”? In other words, do you live as if it’s now your turn to add something to the work of Jesus – THEN it will be complete, finished?

In this part of the Quiet Time Series we will see how we can and ought to live in the freedom of “IT IS FINISHED.” It will help us grasp what this means.

Pray now that over the next few days you will understand this phrase more deeply and can remember daily to live that way.

Get a dictionary, online or from your bookcase, and write out two or three relevant definitions of the word "FINISHED": _____

Also, go to a thesaurus and write out a few synonyms for "FINISHED" _____

In the Greek New Testament, "FINISHED" is in the perfect tense (*Tetelestai*). And that means that **the result is ongoing** and with **full effect**. Jesus is saying, "It is fully and completely finished, and it will ALWAYS be fully and completely finished!"

Simply put, "It is finished," **NEVER** comes to an end!

___ **Day 2** Read **Hebrews 4:15**. What does Jesus have in common with us, and what radically separates him from us? _____

When Jesus died, he succeeded in living his whole natural life in sinless perfection. Like a sculptor putting the final touches on a masterpiece that has taken years to complete, Jesus finished his life's work.

Can you imagine yourself living even one day without sin? Christ did it for 33 years or over 12,000 days straight. And He wants to share that victory with us!

Christ was the only person in history to accomplish such a thing. He stands alone as champion and victor – Lord and Savior!


When Jesus said, "It is finished," he was referring to the fact that he had fulfilled ALL the requirements of the law. He had always perfectly loved God and his neighbor. He had never violated any of God's commands, in letter or spirit. He was both sinless (totally free from sin) AND completely righteous (positively obedient to every command).


Reflect on these verses asking "How did Jesus live and offer himself to God?"

 John 8:46 _____

 Hebrews 9:14 _____

 I Corinthians 15:45-49 _____

 Hebrews 7:16 _____

 I Peter 1:19 _____

Pray to grasp the beauty and glory of Christ's perfect righteousness. He was an undefiled, unblemished, indestructible and sinless "Son of Man."

"It is finished" meant he lived a perfect life all the way until that final breath cleared from his weary tortured lungs on the cross.

___ **Day 3** Read **2 Corinthians 5:21** and **Isaiah 53:4-5** with reflection. What does Christ's righteousness create for his disciples – for his believers, his church?

Meditate on Paul's spiritual desires in **Philippians 3:7-9**. What are some of his goals in Christ and how does the cross make it possible? _____

Jesus lived the perfect, sinless life so that he could give that righteousness to his church!

Look closely at **Hebrews 10:14**. What makes us "perfect forever"? _____

What describes the lifelong process we are experiencing in Christ? _____

"It is finished" means that in his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus provided a way for him to share his righteousness with us – because he loves us dearly. It is the only way we could ever think about becoming acceptable to approach our Holy God.

Remember, it is **ongoing** and has **full effect**.

Say this next sentence out loud a few times "**It is finished' means Christ's flawless righteousness is mine!**" Write it out: _____

Pray to comprehend this. Finish by singing "How Deep the Father's Love For Us"

___ **Day 4** Open your Bible and read **Ecclesiastes 3:14**. How does it describe the things God has done? _____

What can be added to or taken away from what God has done? _____

This can never be truer when it comes to the cross. You can't add to what Jesus did on the cross. It would be like going to the Art Museum with a paint brush and adding a few brush strokes to a Van Gogh or Picasso masterpiece!

Read **Galatians 1:6-8** and see a group of Christians trying to add to Christ's work by requiring circumcision. How does Paul feel about it? _____

When you have sinned, can you think of things you have done to try to add to Christ's finished work? What are they? Can they produce better results than the cross? _____

How might Jesus or God feel when we try to add to his perfect masterpiece? _____

Anything beyond the cross for salvation is legalism and is a serious affront to God. It's a strong teaching, but how can that be freeing? _____

We are absolutely forbidden from trying to tack anything onto the righteousness of Christ. This is actually an incredibly freeing truth. When we feel discouraged by our sin, the solution isn't to resolve to do better, but to repent and make a beeline for the cross and find mercy at God's throne.

"It is finished" means we can't (and shouldn't try to) add a single thing to what Jesus has already done for us at Calvary.

___ **Day 5** Today, review your notes from the start of this section - Day One through Day Four. Where do you need faith to believe that "It is finished?"

Write out your heart's desires to grasp these vital truths. Express your thoughts to God on where you are with his masterpiece on the cross. _____

“It is finished” is also expressed in other ways in the Bible with reference to the cross. Read these verses and note how the Holy Spirit recorded it:

- ✎ Psalm 22:31 _____
- ✎ Zechariah 3:9 _____
- ✎ Colossians 1:19-20 _____
- ✎ 1 Peter 1:10-11 _____
- ✎ Genesis 3:15 _____
- ✎ Haggai 2:7 _____
- ✎ Ephesians 3:10-12 _____
- ✎ Isaiah 11:8-10 _____
- ✎ Daniel 7:13-14 _____

Which descriptions help your faith and understating the most? _____

Thank God for the specific blessings you’ve seen. Share your findings with two or three others and how you feel about Christ’s work for you.

___ **Day 6** If “It is finished” is true, and we know it is, look at these verses below and match them up to correct responses also noted...

Our response to the cross should be:

- **CONFIDENCE** – That Jesus did what we could not!
- **GRATITUDE** - That Jesus has given this victory to us!
- **JOY** – That we have received the greatest gift anyone could ever give us!
- **PEACE** – We don’t have to suffer trying to do the impossible: Live a perfect, sinless life!
- **GRACE** – We can forgive others, even when they do not merit it, because God has forgiven us!
- **EVANGELISM** – We have the freedom from the gospel to give to others freely!
- **SELFLESS LIVING** – We are no longer condemned, and we have a purpose in life!

Write the matching response(s) next to the scriptures below:

- I Peter 1:8-9 _____
- II Corinthians 2:14 _____
- I Corinthians 15:57-58 _____
- I John 4:19 _____
- Romans 5:1 _____
- Ephesians 5:1 _____
- II Corinthians 5:14-21 _____

Which of these is God seeing clearly in your life? _____

Which are you sensing the Spirit calling you to go higher in? _____

Pray for God to help you in your response to his glorious work – It is finished!

___ **Day 7** Pray over your notes from the start of this section: Day One through Day Six. How can “It is finished” be displayed more in your thinking and behavior on a daily basis? _____

Write out your heart’s desires to grasp these vital truths. Express your thoughts to God on where you are with his masterpiece on the cross. _____

PART 5: JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION: FACT OR FICTION?

✓ off each day when done

___ **Day 1** What does your faith hinge on? JJ Keller once told this account:

A man once said to a pastor that he would be happy to believe in Christianity if the cleric could only give him a watertight argument for its truth. The pastor replied, “What if God hasn’t given us a watertight argument, but rather a watertight person?”

(Keller, TRFG, 142)

Our Christian faith is based on whether Jesus lived, performed miracles, was crucified, and most importantly that He rose from the dead. How confident are you that these Biblical events are true? Do you have any doubt at all? As theologian Paul Tillich says, *“doubt isn’t the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.”*

Since the fall in Eden we have been wired to have doubt. It is what you do with that doubt that matters. If we are doubtful of something, we have to put in the time to examine the facts. This week we will shore up your certainty in the evidence for

Christ. Even if you are strong in faith, this knowledge will better equip you for sharing with non-believers. And it will help shield your faith from the inevitable attacks of the world. The media and schools bombard us with the falsified message that the fields of science, evolution, and history have explained away God and the Bible. They are wrong. But even if you struggle understanding certain Biblical stories involving creation, miracles, God's decisions, etc., you can't ever lose sight of what matters most... Was Jesus resurrected? If He was, you have to follow! If He didn't, we're all wasting our time. This is the most important field of apologetics, "Did Jesus raise from the dead?" In fact, if this is true, this is the most important matter in the history of earth.

Read **1 Corinthians 15:16-19, 29-32** What do you see so clearly noted in this passage? _____

___ **Day 2** Jesus Lived and Performed Miracles

Jesus lived. This is indisputable. The archaeological evidence is now too strong for any skeptic to claim Jesus is a made-up fictional character. There are multiple non-Christian sources that write about Jesus. The records of these Jewish and Roman writers are overall very reliable. There is no reason they would have written about such a controversial figure if He didn't exist. Jesus' teachings were in opposition to their own beliefs. Why would they add fuel to the fire, and acknowledge this man's existence if they weren't sure He lived?

- **Flavius Josephus** is the most well-known Jewish historian from the first century AD. In *Antiquities* (published 94 AD), Josephus writes that Jesus *"was a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ."*
- **The Talmud** is a vast composition of Rabbinic literature. It is clear in the language that the writers detested Jesus and His theology, but they actually help prove His existence, His miracles, and His crucifixion. The Talmud says that Jesus *"practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray."*

Read **John 21:24-25**

-Is there anything in John's writing that suggests he is not genuine? In the Gospels and throughout the New Testament the apostles openly proclaimed that Jesus

worked a great variety of miracles. Why would they lie about this? Would anyone preach about something false when the consequences of doing so are persecution and martyrdom?

___ **Day 3** Jesus Died on a Cross

Here is the non-Christian evidence that Jesus was crucified.

- **Josephus** writes in *Antiquities*: *“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man... He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease.”*
- **Cornelius Tacitus** lived from 55 to 120 AD. He was one of the most important and reliable historians of ancient Rome. *“To suppress the rumor, he (Nero) falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who are hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.”*
- **The Talmud** says *“on the eve of the Passover they hanged Yeshu.”*
- **Lucian of Samosata** (second century) was a social critic who wrote sarcastically of Christians. He writes: *“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished percentage who introduced their novel rights, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them... They deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”*
- The Gospel accounts are all in agreement that Jesus was crucified. The crucifixion is alluded to throughout the New Testament, and it was prophesied in the Old Testament as well (e.g., Isaiah 53). It is interesting to note that in ancient times, the art of fictional story telling never gave specific details. The only way Luke would have used such details would be if they were true.

Read **Luke 23:32-44**. What are three very specific details mentioned, giving credibility to the story? _____

___ **Day 4** - He Rose from the Dead

Even the non-Christian writers acknowledge that many people believed this Christ had risen from the dead.

- **Josephus'** account of Jesus in Antiquities concludes with: *"He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."*
- **Thallus** wrote a three volume treaties of world history in the 50s A.D. He mentions the darkness at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, saying there was an eclipse of the sun. Whether this claim is true or not, this account affirms that even non-Christians were aware of the crucifixion.

There is no theory that logically explains why the Resurrection story would have been made up. There are atheistic theories such as that the people who saw the Risen Jesus were hallucinating, that His body was stolen, or He never actually died on the Cross. There is no practicality to these theories.

The message of the Resurrection is consistent throughout the New Testament. Most of the writers in the New Testament mention or allude to the Resurrection of Jesus. In two days, we will look at the evidence of their authenticity.

For the Apostles and the other New Testament writers, it is clear that the Resurrection is what motivated them to radically commit their lives to Christ's teachings.

Read **Acts 4:8-20**... Write out verse 20: _____

___ **Day 5** - He Appeared and Ascended

The most important aspect about Jesus is actually not whether He rose from the dead, it's whether he ascended into Heaven. Other people have risen from the dead, but it is presumed that they all eventually died. Jesus is unique in that He died and was risen, never to die again.

The Ascension occurred 40 days after the Resurrection. The two most descriptive stories of this are both from the same writer, Luke (Luke 24 and Acts 1). Although Luke didn't personally know Jesus, of all the New Testament writers Luke had the

greatest attention to detail. He mentions 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands without error. He uses titles like tetrarch, proconsul, governor, imperial legate, asiarch, politarch, etc. In every case that the titles used by Luke can be compared to other sources, Luke is correct. Many cultural references, such as the details about the Census, have been confirmed by archaeology too. Luke writes “I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (Luke 1:3). With the noticeable caution he uses in getting the smallest of details correct, we can be confident in Luke’s account of the Ascension as well.

Read **Acts 1:1-12**. What happened to Jesus when He left the Apostles? _____

___ **Day 6** The Authenticity of the New Testament Writers

Although our faith is based on Jesus and His Resurrection and Ascension, we weren’t actually there to meet Jesus directly; therefore, our faith is predicated on the basis that the New Testament writers were telling the truth. They were either telling the truth about Jesus or they were deceitful liars exploiting others for their own gain. What does the evidence suggest? Let’s look at it...

We can look at a few examples demonstrating the authenticity of the writers, but consider the whole New Testament and ask yourself these questions....

- Do these writers seem like sincere people who sacrificially love others at their own expense, or are they selfish false teachers, seeking praise, fame, power, and riches?
- Do they seem like truth-telling, sound-minded people with solid logic or do they seem like schizophrenic hallucinators?
- Is the theme of the New Testament consistent from book to book, writer to writer?
- Do the writers all share the same beliefs, especially about Christ and the Resurrection?

Let’s look at some specifics that demonstrate their authenticity.

- Advice to die to your self is not an attractive teaching that would promote organizational number growth, which was an obvious goal of these writers. If the writers were liars, why would they make up the account of the “Rich Young Ruler” in Mark 10?

- Their teachings would bring very little gratification for themselves; it is clear that money, possessions, power, status, and self-focused praise from the people were not goals of these men. Rather, they knew that the teachings were more likely to bring persecution, loss of money, loss of status, loss of family, and martyrdom. Is it likely that many lying conspirators would hold to these unselfish teachings when faced with persecution and death for their faith?
- The New Testament acknowledges weaknesses in the followers: the believers are often rebuked by Jesus. The apostles scatter when Jesus is taken. Peter denies Jesus three times. It is not likely that a group of liars would tell stories that portray themselves in a negative light. If trying to start a movement, would it make any sense to continually point out weaknesses in that movement's leaders if they weren't true?
- There would have been very little to gain by falsely creating a religion based on the teachings of a humble servant, especially considering their goal was largely to convert Jews, including rabbis.
- On a similar note, would liars have said that women, whose testimonies meant nothing, were the first witnesses of their resurrected savior?

The most reasonable conclusion of such details, which fly in the face of that culture's worldview, is that the events actually happened. Here are a few other examples, but there are many more: Jesus eating with tax collector, Jesus washing people's feet, Jesus being washed by a sinful woman, Jesus healing on the Sabbath.

Read **2 Corinthians 11:23-31**... What are three ways Paul was persecuted?

Is it possible that a man would endure this kind of suffering for a fake cause? The fact that Paul and the apostles all held to their faith despite such persecution, even martyrdom, deems it likely that these guys were telling the truth, and that they had experienced miracles from God.

___ Day 7 If Jesus rose from the dead, you and I have to obey

Based on the evidence, do you believe that Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension are historical events? If you answer "yes", the logical conclusion is that you have to follow Christ. If Jesus rose from the dead and was taken up into heaven, you're going to want to take His words seriously. He said that He is the only way to Heaven. You will spend eternity in heaven or hell, hence you should do everything in your power to build confidence in your salvation.

When talking about God with non-believers, drive home this point. Did Jesus raise from the dead? This is what matters. Ask people if they are willing to examine the evidence for this. Yes, faith is involved. And we can't say the evidence is 100% provable. Yet such evidence in court would instantly gain all 12 votes from the jury for an easy verdict.

If Jesus rose from the dead, no philosophical arguments against Christianity have any relevancy. If Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, then Jesus is the Son of God, and His opinion is what matters. Our opinions on philosophical matters mean nothing. If you don't believe in a certain biblical miracle, if you don't like how God treated certain people in the Old Testament, if you disagree with His rules for salvation, it doesn't matter. If Jesus rose from the dead, His word is truth, and people need to obey it.

The same principle applies to your own life. If you aren't enjoying Christianity, if it's too hard for you right now, if sin seems too tempting, you have to ask yourself, "did Jesus raise from the dead?" If He did, you need to obey. If you're struggling, or you think God is punishing you, or you had a feud with someone at church, or you don't feel like you connect with God anymore, you have to have it engrained in you that this is truth. You have to show up, you can never quit.

There may be people in your church who prefer to be loners, and they don't like coming to church events and socializing. Maybe you are one of them! Regardless of how they feel, they know that Jesus rose from the dead, and because of that He is the Lord of their lives. They come to every church event and fight through social anxieties doing their best to be loving to others, because Jesus demands that they love others as He loves them. For most parts of Christianity, the teachings are a joy to follow, but it really doesn't matter whether you feel something is a joy or not, or whether you agree with it or not. If Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified for us and He rose from the dead, and He promises us eternal life, we need to obey His commands regardless of how we feel. The cross needs to be shown by our lives through personal self-denial.

Read **Luke 9:23**, **Hebrews 5:7-8** and **2 John 1:4-9**. Write out Verse 6:

PART 6: FREE TO BE GODLY– THE CROSS AND IDENTITY

✓ off each day when done

___ **Day 1** Read **Colossians 3:5-12** and see the impact of the cross. How do verses 5-10 contrast to the intended result in verse 11? _____

The phrase “renewed in the image of its Creator” brings us back to having the indelible image of God at our core. Why is the cross so central in purging sin from our being? _____

What does it mean to you, to be created in the image of God in light of this passage? _____

Read over and reflect on a similar passage in **Ephesians 2:1-3**. Describe who you diligently followed with your old, dead identity before you became a disciple of Christ. _____ What direction were you heading in and why? _____

Reflect prayerfully and privately with God about what may be in your life that is in verses Colossians 3: 5-10. Ask Him to renew His image more and more in your inner being. Before your baptism, you were a spiritual corpse. Your new identity is alive!

___ **Day 2** Philippians 3:10-11 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

If we distance ourselves from the cross, as with all things that become distant, it loses prominence in our lives. Out on a far horizon its stature is diminished, and we can view other, worldly, structures as greater.

Yes, we can still see a vague image, but the horrific details of Christ’s crucifixion and death and the power of his resurrection are lost to us. We can take for granted what was accomplished, becoming indifferent to Christ’s sacrifice. The cross then is no longer raw and heart-wrenching, but sanitized and tamed.

If I feel distant from the Cross, how does this affect my fellowship with Christ's suffering? _____


What do I let interfere with my drawing close to the Cross? _____


What happens to me spiritually when I no longer view the Cross as "raw and heart-wrenching?" _____


___ **Day 3** Look at the description of the cross in **Revelation 13:8**. Don't get caught up in the mentioning of "The Beast" and all the non-believers following him. Look at what it says about Jesus and the cross. When was Jesus crucified for the sins of the world according to this passage? _____

Read **Genesis 1:1**. Jesus was slain before Genesis 1:1.

Read these verses and note what you see clearly:

 Ephesians 1:4 _____

 I Peter 1:20 _____

 John 17:24 _____

If Christ was crucified from before the creation began, what do you see about the image of God? _____

Are love and suffering something that we should have in our renewed image of God as we are transformed to be like Jesus Christ? _____ Why or why not?

God chose suffering as his Plan A. The cross was not a Plan B. God never had a plan B.

Pray to wrap your mind and imagination around the fact that Jesus was crucified from eternity. Pray to see God's image more clearly – especially his loving suffering. It is notable that "patience" can be translated "longsuffering." Ask God to help you

embrace that type of suffering- even though it goes against human nature. Maybe we should embrace suffering more because human nature is more of our old nature. Our old identity avoids suffering at all cost. Now, as a “living sacrifice” we are to embrace it. For more on this, read through **Romans 12:1-2**.

___ **Day 4** Read **I Peter 4:1-4**. Christ suffered in this world and we are called to arm ourselves with this same attitude. What does the scripture say our suffering is against in verses 2 and 3? _____ Christ suffered against the temptations of sin his whole life to be able to say “It is finished” when he died. Do you see suffering as a core part of your identity? _____ Why or why not? _____

Read **I Peter 2:21-25**. What are we called to? _____

What did Christ do, and when we “follow in his footsteps”, what should we be ready to endure? _____

Are you suffering daily in this way or are you not? _____

What keeps us from experiencing this type of suffering? _____

How does verse 25 relate to being called back to the image of God? _____

Pray to embrace joyful, willing suffering as Christ did. See **Hebrews 5:7-8**

___ **Day 5** Read **I Peter 2:25** again. God is described as a Shepherd. We are his sheep. Read this quote from Charles Spurgeon, and wonderful illustrator.

“Some Christians try to go to heaven alone, in solitude. But believers are not compared to bears, or lions, or other animals that wander alone. Those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect, that they love to get together. Sheep go in flocks, and so do God's people.”

Did you know that sheep are the most mentioned animals in the Bible? There are about 200 mentions of sheep and 188 mentions of lamb in the Bible. Have you wondered why? What about this animal is so unique that God compares us to them?

Today, meditate on what “being a sheep” looks like. Here is a list of characteristics of sheep, and think about them as they apply to your life:

- Sheep are usually very quiet and gentle, holding themselves aloof from the world.

- In a herd, all the sheep tend to listen to their leaders and show esteem to them.
- They have an obedient character and a strong flock mentality.
- Sheep are prey, not predators.
- Their only defense in the face of danger is to flee.

Isn't it interesting that God tells us to "flee from sin"?

Read **Timothy 2:22**, **Romans 6:23**, and **Ecclesiastes 12:11-12**. Are you behaving like a sheep and fleeing from the danger of sin, or are you entertaining the sin in your life? Remember the cross was established for Jesus as God's plan to erase our sin! Take some time to reflect on your identity before God as a sheep. Pray to be involved with others and flee from evil – even though that is suffering.

___ Day 6 Read **John 10:1-16**.

Sheep know the voice of their shepherd and follow him when he calls. What daily habits can you build to make sure that you hear your shepherd's voice? And what are the blessings from the "Chief shepherd"?

Write down what you see in the following verses:

-  Psalm 23:1-3 _____
-  Isaiah 40:10-11 _____
-  Mark 6:34 _____
-  Revelation 7:17 _____
-  Ezekiel 34: 30-31 _____
-  Hebrews 13:20-21 _____
-  Psalm 100:3 _____
-  Psalm 79:13 _____
-  Matthew 25:32-34 _____
-  John 10:7 _____

How have you been listening God? What passages above inspire or convict your heart the most and why? _____

___ Day 7 Read **John 10:27-30**.

A shepherd's primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of the sheep in his flock; protecting and guarding them and putting himself in front of the danger. A shepherd has an undeniable commitment to his sheep, and his sheep follow him with complete trust. Do you truly trust in God like a sheep trusts its shepherd? What areas in your life are you excelling at this, and what areas can you work on letting go of control? _____

John 10:14 *"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me."*

John 10:26-28 *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

John 10:3-4 *"...the sheep recognize his voice and come to him"*

Jesus is the Lamb of God- he died for his sheep. A lamb is a baby sheep in its first year.

Why is Jesus called the Lamb of God - God's baby sheep?

Romans 8:3 gives a good insight:

"The law of the Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So, God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body, God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins."

A lamb is an animal that was used to be sacrificed at the altar in the Old Testament times. Jesus was the sacrifice that once and for all fulfilled God's need for a blood offering. Today celebrate Jesus' life and sacrifice by offering thanksgiving prayers to God for the blood that was spilled in the cross for the forgiveness of your sin.

John 10:10-11 *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."*

John 10:15 *"I sacrifice my life for the sheep."*

Matthew 15:24 *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Isaiah 53:5-7 *"All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him {Jesus} the sins of us all."*

We are created in the image of God and we see both the sheep and the shepherd in the Lord. Ask God to help mold you into his image - a humble leader.

Visit our website at [Worcesterchurch.org](https://www.worcesterchurch.org)

*“For to be sure, he was crucified in
weakness,
yet he lives by God's power.
Likewise, we are weak in him,
yet by God's power we will live with him.”
II Corinthians 13:4*

Prepared by the Worcester Church of teaching team.

See more material here: <https://www.worcesterchurch.org/resources>

©2020 The Worcester County Church of Christ