



**Seven studies for small groups on the way of the cross  
Includes short text/video introductions plus a reflection for  
Good Friday (to be published Easter week)**

<b>Planned</b>	<b>John 3:14-15</b>
<b>Peace</b>	<b>Isaiah 53:4-5</b>
<b>Follow</b>	<b>Luke 9:23</b>
<b>Surrender</b>	<b>Galatians 2:20</b>
<b>Save us</b>	<b>Matthew 21:9</b>
<b>Defeated</b>	<b>Good Friday reflection (Easter week)</b>
<b>Raised</b>	<b>John 2:19</b>
<b>Co-Mission</b>	<b>Matthew 28:19</b>

## **Notes for homegroup leaders**

These notes are a guide and resource. As preparation, please read the bible passage, the notes and most importantly, pray. Then lead the group using the notes where they are helpful.

Each session has a text introduction that you could read to the group. There will also be a video version available online that you could play to the group.

Some things to remember when leading a group:

- Less is more. For each session there are only a few questions. Better a few good questions than a school comprehension exercise.
- Your aim is to get the group talking to each other, not having a one way conversation with you.
- Don't correct a person's way out ideas too quickly. Come back with another question or ask the group, "what do you think?"
- Silence is ok - people will be thinking - let them.
- Remember most people don't need more information, they need more revelation.
- Follow the Holy Spirit - not the notes.

# Planned

# John 3:14-15

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## Introduction

How do you respond to surprises? Of course there are unwelcome surprises, none of us want those. I'm talking about the kind of surprise when someone has planned something in advance for you. They have taken the time to think about you, about what would be helpful, kind and encouraging. Then without your knowledge they've acted on it, and put in place a plan that will be a blessing to you.

When thinking about the Christian faith we can often be focused on the present moment. But a helpful way of looking at the bible is to see that it was God's intention right from the beginning to send his son to the cross to die in our place. We made a mess of things but he had a plan to set things right. We see the first promise of this in Genesis 3:15 when God says that Eve's offspring will crush the serpent's head. Then almost immediately the first signs of his grace, when God clothes Adam and Eve with the skin of animals to cover their shame.

Whenever someone plans something for us, we do have a choice about how we respond. We can be blasé or even ungrateful, or we can be invested and respond with gratitude.

A man called Nicodemus comes to see Jesus. He has a view about how things work with God, and comes to question Jesus. But Jesus sets him on a different course, and in the process makes a link between what will happen to him and the very first parts of the old Testament. Nicodemus has a choice as to how he will respond and so do we.

### **John 3:14–15 (NIV):**

***“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”***

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## Read

John 3:1-20

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## Head

Why do you think Nicodemus comes to talk with Jesus?

Read Numbers 21:4-9. How does the story of Moses and the snake relate to Jesus?

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## Heart

How do you respond when someone plans a surprise for you?

What difference does it make, that God planned to send Jesus in your place, even before you were born?

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## Hands

What does it mean to be “born of the Spirit” v5-9?

How can you live in the light of what God has done every day?

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## Ideas/group activity

Place a large bit of paper on a table in the middle of the room (or sellotape several a4 sheets together). Invite people to come and write down their thanks for what God has done for them. End with prayer.

# Peace

# Isaiah 53:4-5

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## Introduction

“This is the worst week of Danny Johnson’s life. Danny scored seven own goals at his school football final...” This is the opening line from a fun set of adverts for a travel company called On the Beach. Each one tells the same story. Something has gone wrong in the person’s life, but they are completely relaxed and having the best time, because they have booked an amazing holiday. If only it were this easy to find peace! Holidays come to an end and soon enough the harsh realities we have tried to escape come and find us. Peace paid for in cash does not last. But there is another kind of peace.

We know that the world is broken and often the way we live contributes to that brokenness. We try so many ways to escape, yet we always land back in the same place. This is not how God intended us to live. Because he made us and loves us, he came into the broken world and took all of the brokenness on himself. Isaiah says that he was pierced for our transgressions, that our brokenness was laid on him. But more than that, he purchased life and peace for us. Not the kind of temporary peace you find on a beach holiday. But a lasting, freely given peace that transcends our understanding. Are you striving to find this peace yourself or are you ready to receive it as a gift that has been completely paid for in person?

### Isaiah 53:4–5 (NIV):

***Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.***

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## Read

Isaiah 53:1-12

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## Head

What verse or phrase jumps out for you? How do you understand the transaction of the cross? (If people need a prompt... pierced for us, crushed for us, punishment etc)

*Leaders note: it may be worth having a conversation with the group about the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. It is too easy to dismiss the cross as just an act of love - but the bible is clear that Jesus pays the price for our sins.*

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## Heart

What difference does the cross make to your daily life?

How do you experience the peace that Jesus has won for you?

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## Hands

Imagine that the things that we have done wrong carried physical weight. What difference does it make that our sin has been laid on Jesus?

How can you make space this week to receive the peace that Jesus purchased for you?

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## Ideas/group activity

Make a simple cross out of something you have around the house (old cardboard or a few sticks). Give everyone some paper and ask them to consider something specific that Jesus died for and write it down/make a mark on the paper (some things should not be written down!). Then invite everyone to place their papers on or around the cross. Spend some time in prayer together.

# Follow

# Luke 9:23

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## Introduction

We live in a world of cheap likes, subs and follows. For everything that we are interested in online, there is a button to click so we can become a follower. Whether it's the latest news, fashions or celebrities, we are just one low commitment click away from becoming their newest fan. We express our likes, hearts and swipes with just a moment's thought.

Following Jesus is not so easy. In this passage it sounds like he is trying to put people off. If you want to follow, you have to deny yourself and pick up your cross daily. Sounds a bit harsh, maybe if he lowered the bar, more people would follow him.

The problem with cheap likes and follows is that your popularity can disintegrate overnight. It just takes one mis-tweet and suddenly the world has turned against you.

This passage where Jesus sets the bar so high is preceded by Peter declaring that Jesus is the Messiah - God's promised one. It is followed by Jesus being shown in all his glory and light. Then strangely in the middle he talks about his death. But Jesus comes to turn everything on its head. The promised Messiah who is shown in all his Glory comes as servant and dies on a cross. He then invites us to follow, not an easy path, but one where we deny ourselves and choose daily to follow the way of the cross. The way that leads to everlasting life.

### **Luke 9:23 (NIV):**

***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."***

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## Read

Luke 9:18-27

*Also ask people to scan ahead to the transfiguration (v28-36)*

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## Head

The passage is framed by Peter identifying Jesus as the Messiah and then God's voice from heaven saying "this is my son". Who do you say Jesus is?  
What does Jesus mean when he says "pick up your cross daily"?

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## Heart

Who or what else in your life do you follow and what does it look like?  
What does it mean for you to follow Jesus?

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## Hands

What could you stop/start so that you can follow Jesus more closely?

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## Ideas/group activity

Agree a time as a group each day for the coming week when you will reflect on Luke 9:23 and how you are living it that day. Maybe set an alarm on your phone for 9.23am.

# Surrender Galatians 2:20

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## Introduction

One of my favourite things to do is to prepare people who have recently decided to follow Jesus for their baptisms. Whether they have a story of transformation or of faithfulness, I always ask them the same question. We put a big piece of paper in the middle of the room with a thick blue line horizontally across the middle. We talk about how one of the images of baptism is of the old self being killed off and you being raised to life in Christ. We then write down things that we want to leave in the water - things from our old self. This is a transformational moment for many people as they realise that God really does want them to live differently. Then we write things above the water line that we pray that we will grow into.

One of the challenges of the Christian faith is the centrality of the cross. Over history (especially recently) there have been attempts to water down the harsh reality of the cross and the identity of Jesus as God. It is quite possible to argue from scripture for a gentler more loving version of the good news. You take verses like John 3:16 (for God so loved the world) and you make the cross just an act of love with the physical events just being an accident of history. But in trying to bypass the images of payment, penalty, sacrifice and ransom, we remove all of the power and purpose from the event that sits at the heart of Christianity. The reality is that God loved us by giving his only Son to die on a cross in our place.

But here is the difficult bit, the cross demands a response. One of the questions at a baptism is "do you submit to Christ?" To submit is to surrender, to die, to be crucified with Christ, so that he can live in us. It is only in surrender that we get to switch sides and join Jesus' team in pursuit of life in all its fullness.

## **Galatians 2:20 (NIV):**

***I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.***

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## Read

Galatians 2:19-21

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## Head

How would you describe what happened on the cross to someone who had never heard? The Galatians were being tempted to return to the old ways of the law, rather than to rely on grace. What is the difference between the law and grace?

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## Heart

What does it mean to you to be crucified with Christ?  
What does it mean to you to have Christ living in you?

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## Hands

How would this coming week be different if you fully allowed Jesus to live in you?

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## Ideas/Action

Do the baptism exercise in the introduction. What do you want to leave in the water and what do you want to grow into? Use a large piece of paper or use post it notes and a bit of string to symbolise the water. However you set it up, make sure everyone can see - it's powerful to see it all.

## Introduction

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” We have probably all had this said to us at some point in our lives, usually by someone older or wiser. When I was thinking about training to be an actor, I was very strongly advised to do a course that gave me a degree. Then I would have something to fall back on later when things did not work out. Just the other day I heard of another person who’s parents had told them to get a teaching qualification because then they would be ready for anything. The received wisdom is that it’s dangerous to not give yourself options.

I grew up with the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem firmly fixed in my head. Partly because my Good News Bible had classic images of stick people waving palm branches at Jesus to welcome him to the city. It’s only a small thing, but nowhere does it say that the people waved the branches. The gospels tell us that the people laid their cloaks and the palm branches on the road before Jesus. In the Roman world palm branches represented victory and your cloak was one of your most prized and important possessions. If you were poor it kept you warm at night, if you were rich it was a symbol of your high position.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, people put all their hope and trust in him. They lay down their security and position. Then reaching up they pull branches that represent victory from the trees and lay them at his feet. They are surrendering everything, but more than that they are investing all their hope in him. They cry out “Hosanna” or “save us”. All the hopes and dreams of freedom for a nation rest on one man riding on a donkey. But by the end of the week, with dreams shattered, the cries have turned to “crucify”.

### **Matthew 21:9 (NIV):**

***“Hosanna to the Son of David!”***

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## Read

Matthew 21:1-11

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## Head

What strikes you about the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem?  
What's significant about Jesus riding on a donkey?

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## Heart

The people cried out, “Hosanna!” or “save us!”. What is your heart’s cry to Jesus?  
The bible says that we are saved and being saved. In what areas of your life are you currently being saved?

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## Hands

What do you most need to pray over this coming week? Save me, bless you Lord or who are you Lord?

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## Ideas/Actions

Take the thing that you most need to pray for in the coming week and agree to allocate some time every day this week to do it. Even if it’s just two minutes. Start now by praying briefly for each person in turn.

# Raised

# John 2:19

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## Introduction

The disciples' minds must have been going crazy. A week ago Jesus had entered Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd. Then their hopes were destroyed as Jesus has a mock trial and is crucified. The adventure is over. They huddle together, afraid that they might be rounded up too. Unwilling to disperse yet, it's too early, they still have to observe the sabbath and then anoint Jesus' dead body.

But something does not sit right. They were sure it was him. That he was the Messiah, the promised one. Yet he kept on talking about his death. "Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds." What had Jesus been talking about, it made no sense. There was even that stuff about him destroying the temple and rebuilding it - none of it made sense.

Then early in the morning on the Sunday, while it was still dark. The women head to Jesus' tomb, to anoint his body, to grieve, to face the reality of their crucified hope. Then, too soon, Mary Magdalene bursts back through the door. "He is alive, we have seen him, he spoke to us, he told us to come and tell you, he is going up, ascending, to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." What on earth is she talking about? "Who is alive?" "Jesus, Jesus is alive" says Mary.

Now their minds are really spinning. A million thoughts and connections start to surface, old scriptures reinterpreted. The words of Jesus start to be recalled. How can the dead be raised up? The army in Ezekiel, the Psalms saying that he will not see decay.... This changes everything and everything will be changed.

### **John 2:19 (NIV):**

***Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."***

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## Read

John 20:1-18

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## Head

The disciples had questions about the resurrection - what questions do you have?

*(Leaders note: give people space to voice their doubts and fears, if we don't grasp the resurrection than how can we receive new life from him?)*

If you have been there on that Sunday, how would you have responded?

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## Heart

What is the significance of the resurrection for you?

Mary was called by name (v16). How does it feel to know that Jesus died and rose again and is also calling your name?

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## Hands

What difference does the resurrection make to your everyday life?

How does the resurrection change your view of the future?

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## Ideas/action

Spend some time in prayer and thanksgiving for the new life that Jesus has given you.

Pray specifically for all areas of your life that you would know his resurrection in those places.

# Co-Mission    Matthew 28

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## Introduction

Instructions come in all sorts of formats. If you have ever bought things from Ikea then you will know that a picture can speak a thousand words - most of the time. But if you have ordered something from a smaller company, where the instructions have been translated by someone who's first language is not English then they can be quite confusing.

As Jesus gets ready to leave his friends, he gives them clear instructions about how they are to carry on the work. It begins with an almighty claim, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The one who is giving the instructions is speaking clearly and with authority. He gives them instructions to go and make disciples and teach them to obey everything that has been commanded. This is one of those great, far-reaching parts of the gospel, it is not just for the original disciples, but it is for us. We are co-missioned just like them. It is an active, on-the-go sort of co-mission. But crucially not one that we have to complete alone.

I recently bought a winter sun lamp. You know the ones that are supposed to cheer you up and help you feel like you have been in the daylight. The instructions were quite good, but one of them seemed to have a richer significance. It simply read, "if you are not feeling the effects of the light, move closer." Brilliant and simple. The great co-mission that Jesus has given us to share his good news with the world is not a task that we complete by ourselves. Instead he promises to be with us, even to the very end of the age. If we feel alone and out on a limb, then we simply need to move closer so we can feel the light of his presence. We have an almighty task to do. But the Almighty God promises to go with us.

### **Matthew 28:19 (NIV):**

***Therefore go and make disciples of all nations***

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## Read

Matthew 28:16-20

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## Head

What is your understanding of the great co-mission?  
How is the great co-mission for all followers of Jesus?

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## Heart

The "go" is an on-the-road, active going. How are you making disciples as you go about your daily life?  
Jesus promises to be with us always. How do you experience the Holy Spirit going with you on this co-mission?

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## Hands

Who could you be praying for that that would become a disciple of Jesus?

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## Ideas/action

Share the names of people that you are praying for and pray for them as a group. Commit to asking each other how this is going in the future.