

Journey to Hope

Small Group Series

By Barbara Bruce

Introduction

Welcome to the “Journey to Hope.” You are embarking on an exciting seven-week journey to explore possibilities of what can happen when we journey with Christ and allow him to be in the “driver’s seat”. Participants will:

- *Experience Scripture* and relate it to their lives as they encounter God’s word and the actions involved in this journey to the cross.
- *Encounter “mile markers”* as they address issues that may enhance or impede the journey.
- *Explore media in the form of visual images* that will enhance and enrich their understanding of what this journey means.
- *Journal the Journey* through personal reflection and exploration of the weekly mile marker.
- *Rethink Outreach* by brainstorming and trying new outreach experiences to move them beyond the walls of the church, and their comfort zone.

The Learning Format

The learning process will be interactive and participatory. Work will be done in a small group format and then extend beyond the classroom setting into God’s world.

Encourage participants to bring their favorite Bible. Make certain that you have extras on hand in case people forget.

The Learning Environment

Begin this journey by creating a safe learning environment. Establish and review as necessary *ground rules* to ensure a faith-building experience that is both deep and comfortable for all involved. Use these sample rules as the basis for your rules. Edit them and add new ones specific to your group and context.

Sample Group Rules:

- Speak only for yourself.
- Say what is comfortable.
- Passing is permitted.

- Respect the opinions and gifts of others.
- Confidentiality is respected and expected.
- Talk *and* listen.

Pray

Begin your journey as the group leader by praying for your group and God's guidance as you lead. Ask God to help you be a catalyst in your group's faith journey. Thank God for the opportunity to draw nearer and to journey with others each week.

Session 1: Risking Adventure

Scripture Focus: Mark 8:31-37 (*The Message*)

Session Summary

In this session, participants will join each other and Jesus on a metaphorical journey that has the cross as the ultimate destination. They will consider what their Lenten journey might mean to their faith as they walk with each other and Jesus to the cross.

Opening and Prayer

Open with prayer, using this one or one of your own:

“Gracious and Loving God, you have gathered us, your children, together in this time and place. Help us as we grow to know in our minds and hearts what you want us to learn about you and your kingdom. Bless us as we make this journey together. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Prepare for the Journey

Invite participants to share the destination of a recent journey. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine that journey. Have them to consider what they needed to bring to make their journey safe and meaningful. In groups of five or six, ask them to share what they needed for their journey. After the groups share, have participants identify common needs for a successful journey.

Experience the Scripture

Teaching Tip: This experience involves verbal/linguistic intelligence. The goal is to help participants consider the meaning of the words rather than simply reading them.

Supplies:

- Bible

Ask participants to bring their minds and hearts to a different journey, one that has changed the lives of all who claim the name Christian. Ask them to open their Bibles to Mark 8:31-37 and read the passage silently. Then have a volunteer to read the

Scripture aloud from *The Message*. Ask participants if the words in their Bibles are slightly different.

- How is the meaning of the words the same or different?
- How do the actual words convey thoughts, feelings and meaning?

Invite each person to share with one or two people near them what this Scripture says to them in this time and place. Allow a few minutes for discussion. Then have participants regroup and share their thoughts and insights.

Preparing for the Journey

Teaching Tip: This experience allows the participants to reflect on their own spiritual needs.

Supplies:

- Backpack or small suitcase
- Paper for each participant
- Markers

Ask participants how they think or feel that Jesus prepared for his last journey. What were some of the spiritual resources he needed? Invite group members to write their responses on a sheet of paper. Have them mark the items they will need for their Lenten journey. Invite everyone to place his or her list in the backpack or small suitcase that is displayed.

Teaching Tip: This experience involves intrapersonal intelligence, allowing the participant to reflect on their own spiritual needs

Following Jesus on the Journey

Teaching Tip: To encourage sharing, review these rules for brainstorming: Avoid judgment; look for quantity; accept wild and crazy ideas; and build on existing ideas.

Supplies:

- Copies of *The Faith We Sing (TFWS)* or copies of the words to “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (Hymn #2129, *TFWS*)

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- Whiteboard or newsprint and easel
 - Markers

Have participants turn to “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus,” Hymn #2129 in *The Faith We Sing*. Sing the hymn once. Then ask the group to be still and consider the words in light of the beginning of their journey together. Have them think about how they can live out this hymn. What are some ways they can follow Jesus? As participants respond, record their ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard to refer to when choosing service work within or beyond the walls of the church during Lent.

Teaching Tip: To encourage sharing, follow these rules for brainstorming: avoid judgment, look for quantity, accept wild and crazy ideas, and build on existing ideas. Ask participants to think of how and where they would like to be in service and record these on a second sheet. Once the ideas are listed, have the participants place their initials next to a project they would like to do.

Journal the Journey

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 1 for each group member
- Pens or pencils

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. If time allows, have participants share their responses as they feel comfortable.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

READ:

“With the possible exception of the equator, everything begins somewhere.” *C. S. Lewis*

REFLECT:

What are your expectations as you begin this journey? At the very least, please be prepared to think, to feel, to enrich your faith and to make discoveries about who and whose you are.

RESPOND:

Journal your thoughts. Consider tweeting them, posting them on Facebook, creating a road map for your journey or sharing with someone your decision to follow Jesus as you begin this “Journey to Hope.”

Rethink Outreach

Review the list of ideas for being in service created in the Following Jesus on the Journey experience. Help participants work together and choose one project to develop. Have some agree to make initial contacts and report to the group next week.

Closing

Teaching Tip: A quick review at the end of the lesson reinforces the concepts taught and helps commit them to memory.

Supplies:

- Copies of *The Faith We Sing* or “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (Hymn #2129, TFWS)

Ask the group members to give you a one- to three-word description of what they expect this journey to be like based on Scripture and what they have experienced in this first session. Be sure to thank them for their responses.

Ask the group to read aloud verse one of “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” as their closing prayer. Close with “And all God’s people said, ‘Amen’.”

Session 2: Choosing Your Traveling Companions

Scripture Focus: Mark 10:13-16

Session Summary

In this session, participants will discover who are the children and what “pushing them away” might mean in today’s culture. They will explore previous and next steps on the “Journey to Hope.”

Prayer

Open with this prayer of one of your own:

“Accepting God, you gather us as your children. Enrich us as we continue to grow in our minds and hearts. Assist us, support us and help us to learn about you and your kingdom. Bless us as we continue this journey together. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflecting on the Journey

Teaching Tip: Reviewing the previous session prior to beginning a new session helps anchor previously learned concepts. If you have new people in your group this week, invite the rest of the group to review what they discovered in the opening session.

Invite participants to close their eyes and be still. Have each think about something that stood out in the last session and ponder what their experiences on the Lenten journey are calling them to do. Ask participants to recap the high points of the last session for any newcomers. Say items may come up in today’s session that will add more ideas for mission.

Preparing for the Journey

Supplies:

- Whiteboard or newsprint on easel
- Markers

Make a t-chart on the newsprint. On the left side of the chart, write “What is annoying about children of any age?” As participants brainstorm responses, record them on the chart.

Write “What is wonderful about children of any age?” on the right side of the chart.

Record answers as above.

Experience the Scripture

Supplies:

Bibles

Have group members open their Bibles and read Mark 10:13-16 silently. Divide the class into two groups. Invite those in Group #1 to review the list about what is annoying about children. Have them become the disciples and give reasons to support pushing/sending the children away from Jesus.

Invite participants in Group #2 to think of themselves as children of God. Ask them to look at the wonderful things about children of any age and ask how it would feel to be pushed/sent away from Jesus.

Allow a few minutes for the groups to talk independently, to summarize their thoughts in a few words and then share as a large group.

Explain that this short Scripture has a powerful message and all three of the synoptic gospels record it (Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17). Invite group members to discuss why they think each Gospel contains it.

Read the following definition of children from Wikipedia:

The legal definition of “child” generally refers to a minor, otherwise known as a person younger than the age of majority. “Child” may also describe a relationship with a parent or authority figure, or signify group membership in a clan, tribe or religion.

Have each participant discuss the following questions with a partner in their group:

- Who are “the children” to whom Jesus is referring?

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- Based on your understanding of being a child of God, to whom else might Jesus be referring?
 - Talk about what Jesus may have meant when he said, “Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in.”

Allow a few minutes for people to talk. Then ask each pair to share one of their answers. If there is time, go around again, with each pair sharing a second answer, if different from those answers already given. Ask for insights and aha's.

Encounter the Mile Marker: Relationships

Teaching Tip: This experience has two options. Choose the one that will best fit your group and your time frame.

Option #1: Assisters and Resisters

Supplies: None

Talk about how our relationships can help or hinder us on our journey. Think in terms of assisters and resisters.

Divide the large group into two smaller groups. Name one group Assisters and call the other group Resisters. Allow the groups a few minutes to brainstorm ways resisters hinder and assisters help us in our relationship with Jesus. For example, an assister might be a prayer partner. A resister might invite us to a football game during worship. After a few minutes, have groups share their answers and invite additional responses from the other group.

Take this experience a step further by having groups consider ways they can enhance the influence of assisters and diminish that of resisters to strengthen their own relationships with Jesus.

Option # 2: Relationship Continuum

Create a continuum by designating one corner of the room “Never” and a second one “Always.” Ask participants to consider what pushes them away or hinders or stops them from coming to Jesus. Then explain that, in the first round, you will read several things that might push people away or hinder them from coming to Jesus in a worship setting.

In the second round, you will read what might keep them from simply coming to Jesus. As they participate in this exercise, have participants be alert to ways that a mission opportunity might grow from their responses.

Invite everyone to stand. As you name possible hindrances from the list below, ask participants to move along the Never-Always continuum to the place best representing their answer. Then have them turn to someone near and share why they are standing in that place. Allow time for discussion and then ask for responses from the large group. Record the large group responses on newsprint as possible mission opportunities (clothing drive, transportation to church, ways to make the church handicapped accessible etc.)

Hindrances to Coming to Jesus

1. A professional football game pushes me away from coming to Jesus in a worship setting. (Allow time for participants to move to the appropriate place on the continuum and discuss with a partner.)
2. Sleeping in pushes me away from coming to Jesus in a worship setting.
3. Not having the right clothes or money to place in the offering plate pushes me away from coming to Jesus in a worship setting.
4. A lack of transportation to church pushes me away from coming to Jesus in a worship setting.
5. Lack of handicap access pushes me away from coming to Jesus in a worship setting.

Play another round and use the following statements:

1. Doubt keeps people from coming to Jesus. (Allow time for participants to move to the appropriate place on the continuum and discuss with a partner.)
2. Violence locally and in the world keeps people from coming to Jesus.
3. Death of a loved one keeps people from coming to Jesus.
4. Some Christians keep people from coming to Jesus.

Review the large group's responses that are recorded on the newsprint. Discuss how these ideas might become mission and outreach opportunities.

Explore Media

Supplies:

- “Journey to Hope” Multimedia DVD

Watch the video about the teen homeless ministry and explore it through these questions:

- How did the givers and receivers benefit from the relationship?
- Why was one person able to change a community?
- What might you do to make a change in your community?

Journal the Journey

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 2 for each group member
- Pens or pencils

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. Have them share their responses, as they feel comfortable.

RELATIONSHIPS

READ:

“The conscience of children is formed by the influences that surround them; their notions of good and evil are the result of the moral atmosphere they breathe.”

Jean Paul Richter

REFLECT:

As a child of God, consider this quote and find a metaphor from nature that illustrates this concept of the relationship between an object (person) and the influences that surround it.

RESPOND:

What can you do to create a faithful influence around either the children and/or the children of God in your life? Just do it!

Invite participants to journal this day’s activity and message as they have chosen.

As you begin to think about today's lesson, consider how you will add to your journal, which may take a variety of forms. If time allows, share the process or the method you are using to journal this Lenten journey.

Rethink Outreach

Invite participants to review their responses to the reasons people stay away from worship and from Jesus. What mission opportunities do these answers suggest? Ask the individuals who agreed last week to contact people for possible mission work to share their findings. Help participants to select a mission project. The class may opt for one large project (clothing drive, transportation to church, ways to make the church handicapped accessible, collecting food for the local food pantry or doing repair work on a home) or for several smaller projects from which individuals can choose.

Invite participants to create an "Action Plan" using the following guidelines:

I _____ (name) agree to work on _____ as my mission/outreach project.

In the next 24 hours, I will _____.

In the next week, I will _____.

By the end of this Lenten journey, I will _____.

Signed _____.

Ask participants to share their action plans with the class, as they are comfortable.

Closing

Supplies:

- Copies of *The Faith We Sing* or "Like a Child," (Hymn #2092, TFWS)

Close this session by reflecting on what has been experienced. Invite participants to complete this sentence: A part of this session that spoke to me today was _____.

Say Scripture tells us that Jesus said, "Don't push the children away. Don't ever come between them and me." We need to come as little children. Listen to the words of this hymn as we say it and sing it.

Invite participants to read silently through the words of “Like a Child” (Hymn #2092, *The Faith We Sing*). Sing the song; then read the words again. Invite silence. Close with “and all God’s people said, ‘Amen.’”

Session 3: Self-Esteem**Scripture Focus:** Mark 11:1-11**Session Summary**

In this session, participants will discover who they are and whose they are. They will discover how God has gifted them and explore how they might use those gifts to serve God.

Opening and Prayer

Use this prayer or one of your own:

“Calling God, we hear you as you beckon us to come and follow on this journey. We need to take a look again at who and whose we are, as we attempt to be your faithful followers. Catch us as we stumble. Support us in our failures. Rejoice with us in our success as we continue this journey. All of this we ask in the name of Jesus the Christ, amen.

Reflecting on the Journey

Invite participants to answer the questions below. If you have new people in the class explain that this exercise will both review the last session for those who were present and give them a glimpse of what took place. Assure them that they may ask questions about anything they do not understand.

1. As children of God, what are three things that might push us away from a worship setting?
2. As children of God what might push us away from a relationship with Jesus?
3. Who are “the children”?

Experience the Scripture

Supplies: Bibles

Teaching Tip: Encourage participants to imagine themselves a part of the scene and action in this passage.

Have participants close their eyes and imagine the scene as it is read. Invite someone to read Mark 11:1-11 aloud. After the Scripture reading, ask:

What did you see in your mind's eye? Have group members describe what they saw in as much detail as possible. When all responses have been shared, ask: What do you hear? Again, encourage participants to share in detail. Then ask: What do you feel?

After participants have responded, have the volunteer read the Scripture aloud again. Ask for a full minute of silence as the group experiences the Scripture again.

Encounter the Mile Marker: Self-Esteem

Teaching Tip: This experience will give group members the opportunity to think about who they are.

Supplies:

- Paper for each participant
- Pens and pencils

Read the "I Am" statements of Jesus as found in the Gospel of John to the group.

- "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35)
- "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12)
- "I am the gate." (John 10:9)
- "I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11)
- "I am the Resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

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- “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6)
 - “I am the true vine.” (John 15:11)

Invite participants to write “I am” 10 times down one side of their paper. Then ask them to complete each line with a statement about who they are. Tell them this is not a time to be modest. Have them consider who and whose they are. Encourage them to ponder how God has gifted them and how they are using those gifts. Allow a few minutes for reflection and writing. Then have participants share their statements with a partner.

Ask for insights or surprises. Encourage partners to share something they discovered about themselves or their partner.

Explore Media

Supplies:

- “Journey to Hope” Multimedia DVD

Watch the video “Second Chance after Prison.” Explore the story using these questions:

- What expressions of positive feelings, signs of hope and evidence of new self-esteem did Stacy develop?
- Why do you think Karen committed herself to the relationship with Stacy?
- How could you mentor someone and help that person develop more positive self-esteem?

Journal the Journey

Teaching Tip: Remind group members that journaling is another way to reinforce the concepts explored during the lesson.

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 3 for each group member

- Pens or pencils

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. If time allows, have participants share their responses, as they feel comfortable.

SELF ESTEEM

READ:

“To wish you were someone else is to waste the person you are.” *Sven Goran Eriksson*

REFLECT:

Have you ever wished you were someone else? Why? Consider the quote above. What would be wasted if you were not you? Go back over your list of “I am” statements and give thanks to God for creating you just the way you are.

RESPOND:

Create a statement that conveys the heart of who you are...in 35-seconds or less. Be concise and precise. Give it your best shot and practice it next time you are introducing yourself.

Rethink Outreach

If your group has chosen an ongoing mission project or projects, ask for a progress report from each person, each small group or the entire group. Be appreciative and encouraging as you hear the reports. Have participants consider how they might inform and involve the rest of the congregation in their endeavors. Invite people to brainstorm names of particular people to invite and set a goal to talk to those individuals during the upcoming week.

If you want to add something to your mission/outreach possibilities based on enhancing self-esteem, consider how your group could serve a Big Brother/Big Sister or other mentoring program, a tutoring program to help children who are having trouble in school or an afterschool program that provides a safe place for children of working parents.

Closing:

Have each person find a partner and exchange their “I am” papers. Have the pairs take turns affirming one another by saying the partner’s name and reading their partner’s “I am” paper, changing the “I am” to “you are.” After all the “you are” statements have been read, have pairs close the “you are” statements with “and God loves you.”

Session 4: Work and Time**Scripture Focus:** Mark 10:35-44**Opening and Prayer**

In this session, participants will explore what it means to work for God and how they can work for God in all areas of their lives. Welcome your group and open with this prayer or one of your own:

“Ever present God, you have gathered your workers together in this time and place. Help us as we grow to know in our minds and hearts to what work you have called us. Guide us as we use the gifts you have bestowed upon us to better your kingdom. Bless us as we continue this journey together. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflecting on the Journey

Have participants close their eyes and be still. Ask them to think of a word or phrase that connects with the last session and share it with a partner. After the sharing, take some responses for the large group to hear. Explain briefly what was experienced last week for anyone who might have missed the session.

Introduce work as the mile marker for this week. Ask participants how they might connect their work and ministry.

Preparing for the Journey**Supplies:**

- Computer, phone, blueprints, calendar and planner placed on a table in the front of the room.
- Bibles

Point out the display. Invite each person to find a partner with whom to look at the display and discuss what these items might represent. Allow a few minutes, then have some people share what they discussed.

If it is not mentioned, note that all of the items can be tools for work. Have people think of other items to add that represent work today or are tools for work. Invite discussion. After a few minutes, have participants consider how any of the items might also be used for ministry. Encourage each person to share their thoughts with two other people and then with the total group.

Experience the Scripture

Supplies:

Bible

Divide the participants into three groups. Assign one group to be Zebedee's sons, one to be Jesus and the third to be the other disciples. Ask each group to listen to the Scripture with the ears of their assigned character(s). Invite a volunteer to read the Scripture aloud. Give each group a few minutes to discuss their response in their role. Have a spokesperson for each group voice the thoughts, feelings and insights of the character(s).

Encounter the Mile Marker: Work

Ask participants how Jesus' response, "Whoever wants to be first among you must become a servant," might relate to their work today. Then say that each person has the opportunity right now to design his or her perfect job. Ask each to think what his or her perfect job would look like. Have participants discuss how best to use their gifts and talents. How might they include a sense of ministry or servant hood in their work? Invite participants to create a business plan for this job that emphasizes including Christian servant hood, values and ministry. To set the stage, have them consider these five questions:

- What business are you in?
- Who is your audience?
- What is your most important product?
- Who is your competition?

- How do you advertise?

Allow about 10 minutes for this task. When the time is up, have everyone stop and share the business plan for their perfect job with one other person.

Debrief this experience by asking how the process of designing a business plan based on your gifts, talents, Christian values and mission is like or unlike the process of developing a typical business plan. Invite people to brainstorm how their plan might actually be created and lived. Have them consider how to overcome whatever obstacles they might encounter.

Explore Media

Supplies:

- “Journey to Hope” Multimedia DVD

Have the group watch the video “Church Welcomes Job Seekers” and look for signs of hope. Explore the story with these questions:

- Where did you see signs of hope in this story?
- How can you identify unemployed or underemployed individuals in your congregation?
- How could a ministry like the one in the video help these individuals?
- How might you create a ministry to assist in finding work in your congregation and community?
- What kinds of work and ministry are most needed in your congregation?

Journal the Journey

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 4 for each group member
- Pens or pencils

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. If time allows, have participants share their responses, as they feel comfortable.

WORK

READ:

"The kind of work God usually calls you to . . . is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." *Frederick Buechner*

REFLECT:

Reflect on what you think Buechner means by your gladness and a deep hunger in the world meeting. Write the quote in your own words. If you could do something that would bring you great joy, what would it be? If you could meet a great hunger in the world, where would you begin? How might you connect the two? What might it look like?

RESPOND:

Close your eyes. Imagine the meeting of your gladness and a deep hunger of the world. What does it look like? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? Draw a picture, an icon, an image, a brand of what you see. Art ability does not count. What is in your heart is what counts.

Rethink Outreach

This week offers many possibilities for outreach/ministry. Guide your group in a discussion about how they can tie their work to your mission outreach efforts. For example, a group member may be an editor or a human resources professional and could use that work to help people develop resumés.

Create a list of ways people might help those in your community with finding jobs, creating resumes and providing training to meet needs in your community. Think about

how business people could mentor an unemployed congregant. Invite an organization such as SCORE (Service Core of Retired Entrepreneurs) to come and speak.

Closing

Supplies:

- Copies of *The Faith We Sing* or “For One Great Peace” (Hymn #2185, *TFWS*)

Invite participants to reflect on all of the possibilities that arose during today’s session.

Ask them to identify the one thing that was most memorable and discuss what made it so. Ask them to consider what work as ministry might be. Give it a name. Make certain everyone has a songbook or a copy of the words to “For One Great Peace.”

Ask someone to read the words to the song, and then, as a group, sing them as a closing prayer. End by saying, “And all God’s people said, ‘Amen.’”

Session 5: Temptation and Sabbath

Scripture Focus: Mark 14:32-40

Participants will discover what temptation is and explore ways to deal with it in their lives. They will discover that when they are tempted, they can always turn to God for help.

Opening and Prayer

Welcome the group and ask how their week went and how they are progressing on their mission/outreach plans. Ask for some insights on how their work, ministry and mission are coming together. Invite anyone to share an “aha” moment or a decision they have made about work and ministry. Ask how they might share their mission plans with the congregation.

Open with this prayer or one of your own:

“Forgiving God, you gather us into your loving arms when we succumb to temptation. Help us to grow stronger in our faith as we ask for guidance and that your will be done. Bless us as we continue this journey together. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflecting on the Journey

Have everyone close their eyes and be still. Lead them through the following reflective questions:

- What resonates with you from last week’s session?
- What has helped you on the journey for this week?
- What comes to mind when you hear the word “temptation?”

Preparing for the Journey

Supplies:

- Whiteboard or newsprint and easel
- Markers

Teaching Tip: A mind map is a visual representation of ideas and concepts. To draw a mind map, position a blank piece of newsprint in landscape orientation (long side at the top and bottom). In the center, draw or write the idea you want develop. Develop the related subtopics around this central topic, connecting each of them to the center with a line. Repeat the process for the subtopics, generating lower-level subtopics as you see fit, connecting each of those to the corresponding subtopic.

Introduce the theme of temptation. Explain that when we claim the name Christian, people expect us to act in certain ways. They watch to see if we walk our talk. Most of the time, we do OK. However, sometimes, especially when we are tired, stressed, hungry or frazzled, we are tempted to buy too much, to eat too much or to play instead of work. It is tough to stay on the right path.

Next, have participants find a partner nearby and talk about a time when they were tempted. Have them consider these questions to guide their conversations:

- What were your thought processes?
- What were your actions?

After a few minutes, have the pairs compare their individual thoughts and actions to those of Jesus as he went aside to pray. Some people may have no idea why/when Jesus went aside to pray. Spend more time on this Scripture if needed, since some readers may see temptation reflected in a variety of ways. Offer these questions for consideration:

- How were your thoughts and actions like or unlike what Jesus thought and did?
- Why do you think they were different or similar?

After a few minutes of discussion, write the word “temptation” in large letters in the center of the whiteboard or newsprint. Create a “mind map” by drawing a circle around the word “temptation” and adding spokes radiating from the circle. Have participants

name words or phrases related to temptation. Examples might be eating too much or purchasing unnecessary items. Write one response at the end of each spoke and circle it. When you have several spokes with words circled, start a second round and add something that might radiate from some of the word(s). For example, from the circle “eating too much” might come “weight gain.” As the words in the circles are expanded, participants see where temptation might lead them. Invite observations and discussion about the process of using the mind map.

Experience the Scripture

Supplies:

- Extra Bibles
- Whiteboard or newsprint on an easel
- Markers

Before you begin, write these questions on the whiteboard or newsprint:

- Why do you think Jesus took Peter, James and John with him?
- What do you think Jesus was asking of God?
- What was Jesus’ temptation?
- What was his prayer?
- How will your answers to the previous question alter your prayers?

To begin, have everyone silently read Mark 14:32-40. Ask the questions on the newsprint and have participants answer them in their heads as they listen to the same passage read aloud. Invite silence after the Scripture is read, encouraging participants to continue pondering the questions on the newsprint. Have people form groups of four and discuss their answers to the questions. Remind them that they should say only what is comfortable and it is OK to pass.

Encounter the Mile Marker: Temptation

Supplies: None

Begin by asking the question, “Will anyone who has not experienced temptation please raise your hand?” Explain that most, if not all, of us have experienced temptation.

Have participants share their physical, mental and spiritual state when they are most likely to be tempted. Invite people to think about how and why their physical, mental and spiritual state might have been like or unlike Jesus’ state during that awful night.

Explore Media

Supplies:

- “Journey to Hope” Multimedia DVD

Have your group watch “Homeless Addict Turned Advocate.” Direct participants to look for where John went when he was tempted. After viewing the video, explore it with these questions:

- What kept John from returning to old street habits?
- Describe the ministry that developed because of John’s temptation and healing.
- What temptations do people face in your community? How could your church help people who struggle with those temptations?

Journal the Journey

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 5 for each group member
- Pens or pencils

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. If time allows, have participants share their responses, as they feel comfortable.

TEMPTATION

READ:

“Every conquering temptation represents a new fund of moral energy. Every trial endured and weathered in the right spirit makes a soul nobler and stronger than it was before.” *William Butler Yeats*

REFLECT:

Think about this statement and how it applies to you.

RESPOND:

Create an acrostic. Write a word about your thoughts/feelings about temptation for each of the letters. The word or phrase must begin with that letter. For example, next to the letter T, you might write “tough.”

T
E
M
P
T
A
T
I
O
N

Rethink Outreach

Ask for status reports on the mission/ministry efforts. Ask if anyone needs help. Rejoice in each other’s progress. Have people plan a way to celebrate the ministry happening in God’s name.

To consider additional mission/outreach opportunities, have group members investigate beginning a support group for any number of situations. Find out if your community

needs a meeting place for AA or Al-Anon or Overeaters Anonymous. Discover what the criteria are for hosting various sorts of support groups.

Closing

Ask participants to stand in a circle and hold hands. Explain that you will go around the circle, giving each person the opportunity to offer a word of prayer and then squeeze the hand of the person to their right. If someone is uncomfortable praying aloud, she/he may offer a silent prayer and then squeeze the hand of the person on the right. When everyone has prayed or passed, close with “And all of God’s people said, ‘Amen.’”

Session 6: Money**Scripture Focus:** Mark 12:41-44 and Mark 10:17-22**Session Summary**

Participants will explore biblical principles for dealing with money. They will be challenged to find ways to serve individuals who are experiencing financial hardship.

Opening and Prayer

Welcome participants and lead them in this prayer or one of your own:

“Generous God, you provide for our most basic needs. Like the lilies of the field, you care for each of us. Help us to understand that all we have is a generous gift from you. Guide us as we return a portion of your gifts to your world. Bless us as we continue this journey together. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name, amen.”

Reflecting on the Journey

Ask participants to talk with a neighbor about one thing they recall from last week’s session on temptation. If someone were absent, ask a participant near him/her to share the highlights.

Preparing for the Journey**Supplies:**

- Tax form, checkbook, bills, piggy bank placed on a small table

Display the tax form, checkbook, bills and piggy bank on the table in the front of your meeting place. Have participants note the items and ask how they might relate to the topic of the lesson. Then pose the this question: “On a scale of one to 10, with one being “not today, thank you” and 10 being “sure, why not?,” how comfortable are you discussing money? Have group members share their response and discuss why they

chose their answer with a nearby partner. Explain that money is a touchy subject and people often feel uncomfortable discussing it.

Experience the Scripture

Supplies:

- Bible
- Pen and paper for each person

Divide your class into at least four groups of no more than four people each. Assign each group one of the Scripture passages below. If you have more than four groups, assign more than one group the same passage.

Explain that the Gospel of Mark addresses the subject of money several times. Assign each of these Scriptures to at least one group:

- Mark 10:17-22
- Mark 12:13-17
- Mark 12:41-44
- Mark 14:3-9

Ask participants to read their passage and ponder the following question: “What is the underlying teaching of this Scripture in relation to money?” Have participants in each group work together to write a brief synopsis of the message in their own words. Allow five minutes.

Ask one person from each group to read the Scripture verses and that group’s brief interpretation of Jesus’ teaching on money. Compare and contrast the messages.

Encounter the Mile Marker: Money

Briefly review participants’ interpretation of the passages about money in the Gospel of Mark. Explain that the next activity will have two parts and will help them explore more of their personal feelings about money.

Part 1: Remain in your group and answer this question: “If you inherited \$1million, what would *you* do with it?” Give the groups five minutes to discuss and have a few groups share their responses with the entire class.

Part 2: Tell each group to come to a consensus about what they would do with the money. Explain that they may not use this money collectively unless they all agree to do so. Allow another five minutes for groups to work. Have each group share their consensus with the total group.

Offer the following questions to debrief the experience:

- How did your personal feeling about money affect your ability to reach consensus within the group?
- How did your interpretation of the passage in Mark’s Gospel affect your group’s decision?
- When do you follow biblical principles when it comes to money?

Explore Media

Supplies:

- “Journey to Hope” Multimedia DVD

Have your group watch Meals for the Foreclosed. As they watch, encourage them to look for attitudes of gratitude from the recipients.

After the video, discuss:

- How can the church serve individuals in the community who are burdened financially?
- What can we do to make a child of God feel happy inside?

Journal the Journey

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 6 for each group member
- Pens or pencils

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. If time allows, have participants share their responses, as they feel comfortable.

MONEY

READ:

One of the most misquoted statements in the Bible is “Money is the root of all evil.” The Scripture actually reads, “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Timothy 6:10) Contrast the two statements. Which holds the most truth? Why?

REFLECT:

Read these quotes about money and choose the one that best describes your understanding of how money and ministry are connected.

1. “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.” *Martin Luther King Jr.*
2. “Let us more and more insist on raising funds of love, of kindness, of understanding, of peace. Money will come if we seek first the kingdom of God – the rest will be given.” *Mother Teresa*
3. “My favorite things in life don't cost any money. It's really clear that the most precious resource we all have is time.” *Steve Jobs*
4. “Of the billionaires I have known, money just brings out the basic traits in them. If they were jerks before they had *money*, *they are* simply jerks with a billion dollars.” *Warren Buffett*
5. “You reach a point where you don't *work for money*.” *Walt Disney*
6. “Money often costs too much.” *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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7. "Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul." *Henry David Thoreau*
 8. "Money without brains is always dangerous." *Napoleon Hill*
 9. "Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons." *Woody Allen*
 10. "A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business." *Henry Ford*
 11. "A man with money is no match against a man on a mission." *Doyle Brunson*

RESPOND:

After reading and reflecting on these quotes about money, choose one and design a logo that conveys its message. Create a slogan that complements the logo. Share your logo and slogan with the members of your group.

Rethink Outreach

Have the group give an update on the current outreach endeavors. Ask how money might be hindering their progress.

Have members brainstorm unique and creative ways to generate more funds for the group's mission project or a ministry of the church. How can you also use those ideas to help members of your community deal with money issues? Consider inviting a financial advisor to speak with people or sponsoring a community workshop on good financial management. Investigate ways for people to give money that will help people to use it to earn money, such as [Kiva](#).

Closing

Supplies:

- Colored construction paper
- Markers
- Tape

Give each person three pieces of construction paper. Invite them to respond to today's session in three words, recording one word on each piece of paper. Post the papers

around the room. Invite a volunteer to read each posting. End by saying, “And all God’s people said, ‘Amen.’”

Session 7: Suffering

Scripture Focus: Psalm 31

Session Summary

Participants will discover that God is present in the midst of suffering. They will be challenged to be present with those who are suffering and to offer help.

Opening and Prayer

Welcome participants. Open with this prayer or one of your own:

“Astounding God, you continue to amaze us with your presence even in the darkest nights of our soul. Bidden or unbidden you are there with us and for us. Bless us as we continue this journey together. All of this we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Reflecting on the Journey

Ask participants to consider if they have changed any of their thoughts about how they use their money since last week’s session. Invite them to talk with someone near them about their thoughts surrounding money. If there is anyone who missed last week’s session, ask others to fill them in.

Preparing for the Journey

Supplies:

- Newsprint and easel or whiteboard
- Markers
- A copy of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold Kushner

Hold up the copy of Kushner’s book and ask: Why do bad things happen to good people? Ask your group how many have read or heard of this book. Explain that while Rabbi Harold Kushner’s best selling book addressed this issue many years ago, it is still one of life’s great questions. Share how we all have experienced times of suffering – illness or the death of a loved one, personal illness, a family member in crisis, struggling

with addiction, world disasters, famine and so forth. The list is endless. Explain that our own suffering or suffering we witness may result in what some call the “dark night of the soul.” This is usually described as a sense that God is distant or even absent. There is little sense of God being with us. We may feel abandoned by God.

Ask participants to focus on a time of suffering that caused them to walk through a dark night of their soul. Invite them to share single words that capture that feeling. Record these on the newsprint.

Ask again “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Remind the participants that when the twin towers were hit in 2001, many asked the question, “Where was God?” In that instance, God was present in those who went into the towers, risking their own lives as they helped to get people out. God was present in the people who cared for children and connected others with missing loved ones. The bottom line: God was present. This truth is not always seen, particularly when suffering is intense, close or personal. Bidden or unbidden, though, God is there.

Have participants turn to a partner and share how God was present in suffering they have experienced. Record the responses on the newsprint next to the words people shared in the first part of the exercise. Remind people to share as little or as much as they feel comfortable. It is also OK to pass.

Continue the discussion with these questions:

- Was it easier to see God in the midst of your suffering or after it? Why?
- How does suffering draw us closer to God and others?

Experience the Scripture

Teaching Tip: Antiphonal reading is powerful. To be certain people hear the words, give each person a copy of Psalm 31.

Supplies:

A copy of Psalm 31 from *The Message* for each person.

Give a copy of Psalm 31 to each person and have them read it silently. Then read the psalm aloud antiphonally as follows:

Men: Verses 1-5

Women: Verses 6-8

Everyone: Verses 9-10

Women: Verses 11-13

Men: Verses 14-18

Women: Verses 19-22

Everyone: Verses 23-24

Debrief this experience by asking how the participants felt the words speaking to them.

Use these questions to deepen the discussion:

- Circle the verses that are most powerful to you. Why are they powerful?
- How could this psalm comfort you in times of suffering?
- How could it comfort a friend or family member who is suffering? How could you share it with them? How would they receive it?

Encounter the Mile Marker: Suffering

Teaching Tip: It may be very difficult for some people to write the reverse paraphrases.

Encourage your group members to try at least one sentence. If it is too difficult, have the individual draw an image that represents the opposite of what the Scripture means.

Supplies:

- Paper and pens

Explain that Psalm 31 addresses suffering and comfort. It is a wonderfully assuring way to end this segment of our faith journey. Encourage participants to think and reflect about what the psalm says about suffering and where we need to turn during the dark nights of our soul. Then ask them to select one of the sections just read (verses 1-5, 6-8, 9-10, 11-13, 14-18, 19-22 or 23-24) and write a “reverse paraphrase.” Ask them to rewrite the words so they reverse what is said. For example, “I run to you, God; I run for dear life” (Psalm 31:1, *The Message*) might be reversed to read, “I run from you, God, because you always let me down.” After a few minutes, have people share their reverse paraphrases. Invite discussion using the following questions:

- How did you feel as you reversed and rewrote the words?
- How would times of suffering in your life be different if what you wrote were actually true?
- How did rewriting the words affect your appreciation of God's hand in your life?
- What can you do to remember God's promises in times of suffering?

Explore Media

Supplies:

- "Journey to Hope" Multimedia DVD

Watch the video "Tornado Losses, Lessons." Instruct your group to look for three ways people can be God's hands and feet during suffering. After the video, ask participants to share ways they can be God's hands and feet in times and places of suffering. Then have people share personal stories about how they have helped someone or been helped through suffering.

Journal the Journey

Supplies:

- Copy of Journal Page for Session 7 for each group member
- Paper and envelope for each person
- Stamps (Purchase enough for everyone, and sell them to your group members.)

Give each participant a journal page and invite them to reflect on the questions and experiences there. If time allows, have participants share their responses, as they feel comfortable.

SUFFERING

READ:

“In the final analysis, the questions of why bad things happen to good people transmutes itself into some very different questions, no longer asking why something happened, but asking how we will respond, what we intend to do now that it happened.”

Harold S. Kushner

REFLECT:

Examine the quote from Rabbi Kushner in light of this journey. Bad things happen all the time. How we react is a measure of our relationship with Jesus.

RESPOND:

This is the first day of the rest of your life. Write a letter to yourself with today's date. Tell yourself what you intend to do to continue this journey with Jesus in the driver's seat. List aha's about you and your relationship with Jesus discovered during this journey. Make a promise to yourself to walk the talk and live as though people are watching your behavior as you claim the name Christian. The letter becomes a covenant, your personal commitment to living a more God-centered life.

Seal the letter in an envelope. Address it to yourself. Place a stamp on it and give it to the leader of the class. This letter will be mailed to you three months from today. When you receive your letter, you can do a reality check to see if you indeed have made changes in your life with Christ.

Rethink Outreach

Have group members share where they are in their chosen outreach ministry. Ask what will happen now that this Lenten journey is over. Encourage participants to think how they will continue the project or end it. Have them consider what new projects they could start. Ask participants share stories about the “Journey to Hope,” particularly

about the mission or ministry that came out of this experience. If time allows, videotape people as they share their stories and show the videos during worship.

If your group did not choose a joint mission project, visit the website for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and provide cleaning buckets or other specific items for victims of disaster. For another ministry option, research NOMADS (Nomads on Mission as Divine Service) where groups of five or six people travel in vans to rebuild schools or refurbish homes. Consider ways your group could join with them to relieve suffering in your community.

Closing

Supplies:

- Newsprint and easel or whiteboard
- Markers

Ask group members to focus on what they have learned about suffering. Then, have them find words of hope to help relieve the suffering they encounter.

Print the words to the first verse of “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” on the newsprint or whiteboard. Invite participants to read it aloud several times. Each time have them emphasize a different word:

I have decided to follow Jesus
I **HAVE** decided to follow Jesus
I have **DECIDED** to follow Jesus
I have decided **TO** follow Jesus
I have decided to **FOLLOW** Jesus
I have decided to follow **JESUS**.
And all God’s people said, “**Amen.**”