



SESSION FOUR

The All-Access Cross

Key Verse

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”

1 PETER 2:24

LEADER PREPARATION

It is recommended that you read chapter 12, “Tender Love, Tough Love, True Love,” in *He Chose You* by Max Lucado before you teach so you will be well acquainted with the stories and principles this lesson is based on.

Materials Needed:

- Bible app with several Bible translations or Bibles in different translations
- Student Handouts (1 per student)
- Pens (1 per student)

SESSION FOUR OUTLINE

Large Group Lesson: He Chose to Love Us Forever 20 minutes

Introduction

Teaching

Pair Up: Measure Up

Application

Small Group Discussion 20 minutes

Questions about John 3:16

Questions about John 3:17–21

Activity: Tell Your Story



LARGE GROUP LESSON: He Chose to Love Us Forever

I. Introduction

- A. Ah, the cross. Can you turn any direction without seeing one? Perched on top of a chapel. Carved into a graveyard headstone. Engraved in a ring or suspended on a chain. The cross is the universal symbol of Christianity. But it's an odd choice.
- B. The symbols of other faiths are more positive. The six-pointed star of David. The crescent moon of Islam. A lotus blossom for Buddhism. But for Christianity, it's an instrument of execution.
- C. Imagine if Jesus had been executed in our time. Would we be wearing electric chairs on chains around our necks?
- D. Let's think about the cross of Jesus Christ as his gift to us. A cross is made of two crude boards nailed together. Yet it is also a beautiful work of art—a gift that declares God's love for the world.

II. Teaching

- A. Why is the cross the symbol of our faith? To find the answer we have to look no further than the cross itself.
- B. The center beam reaches up, like God's holiness. The height of God's holiness demands a punishment for everything that doesn't measure up to his perfection.

PAIR UP: Measure Up

Have you ever not measured up? Turn to the person next to you and share a time when you were excluded from something because you didn't measure up.

- C. Universities exclude you if you aren't smart enough. Teams exclude you if you aren't skilled enough. Music groups exclude you if you're not talented enough. And, sadly,

some religions exclude you if you aren't good enough. God's holiness demands that you be excluded from his heaven, because you can never measure up.

- D. But the cross also has a crossbeam. The crossbeam reaches out like God's love. When asked to describe the width of his love, Jesus stretched one hand to the right and the other to the left. They were nailed in that position so we would know he died reaching out to love every one of us. The cross is all-access—everyone can access all of the benefits of the cross. Jesus doesn't exclude anyone.
 - E. The cross is the intersection. The cross is where God forgave us without lowering his standards.
 - F. The cross is the place where the most important exchange of all time took place.
 - 1. Picture God, on his throne, who punishes sin, releasing his wrath on our mistakes.
 - 2. Jesus, the righteous one, is carrying our mistakes on himself, and he took our place on the cross and received the punishment of God (see 1 John 2:1–2).

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”
- 1 Peter 2:24
- 3. The sin is punished, but we are safe—because Jesus hung between God and us and intercepted our punishment. Jesus took the blow; we receive the gift.

III. Application

- A. The cross was the Roman Empire's means of execution. It was intended to be a cruel and bloody instrument of death. It is startling, therefore, that the cross has become a symbol of the Christian faith.
- B. Jesus' death on the cross transformed it and made it a symbol of God's deep, sacrificial love for you and me—for the whole world.
- C. Jesus' blood poured out at the cross means we are forgiven (see Hebrews 9:22). His death signals eternal life for all who receive him (see Romans 6:23).
- D. We love God because he first loved us (see 1 John 4:19). Will you respond to the love of God demonstrated at the cross? Will you see the cross as a gift to you? I urge you to receive Christ as your Savior today.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

At this time, if your group is larger than 10 students, break up into discussion groups of 4 to 6, with an adult facilitator or student leader. Pass out the student handouts, pens, and Bibles.

Materials Needed:

- Student Handouts (1 per student)
- Pens (1 per student)
- Bible app with several Bible translations or Bibles in different translations

Sometimes a famous verse can become so familiar that it loses some of its punch. John 3:16 may well fit into that category. *Have students look up John 3:16 in different translations, either in the provided Bibles or in their Bible app, and read it out loud.*

Questions about John 3:16:

1. What strikes you when reading John 3:16 in these different translations?
Is there anything new you heard?
2. Why did God send his Son to earth, according to this verse?
3. According to this passage, who may gain eternal life? How is this done?

Questions about John 3:17-21:

Have students read the John 3:17-21 to discover what follows the famous John 3:16.

1. What didn't God send his Son to earth to do, according to verse 17?
2. Who is not condemned, according to verse 18? Who is condemned, according to the same verse? To which group do you belong? Explain.
3. The next time you're watching a sporting event on television and you see the "John 3:16 guy," how could you start a discussion about the meaning behind the verse? Brainstorm some good ways to start a spiritual conversation with your friends.

Activity: Tell Your Story

We all come to God in unique ways—some as children, others later on; some as a response to a problem or crisis, others because they just knew something was missing; some at a specific point in time, others more gradually over a long period of time. How would you describe the journey that brought you to God?

Have several students share, as you have time.

Pray Together:

Say something like: We are going to pray together now and thank God for the journey that brought each of us to God.

Easter/Lent Focus:

We are challenging all our students to join with the rest of the church and read *He Chose You* in the weeks leading up to Easter. This week's readings will help us understand the dilemma of holiness versus love. Please read chapters 10–12 in *He Chose You*.