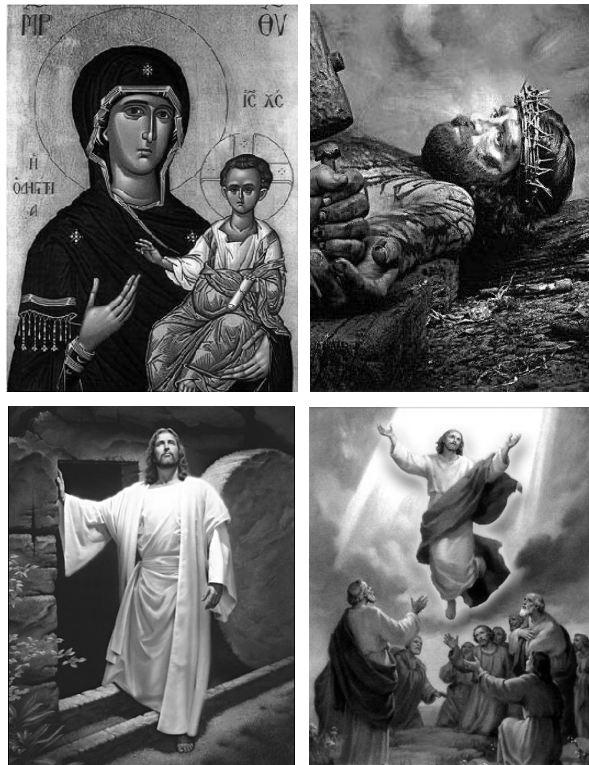


The Hope of Jesus



A curriculum for evangelistic, home-based Bible discussions

Facilitator's Guidebook

Introduction

Thanks for serving as a *FaithTalk* group facilitator. It is our prayer that your participation with Jesus in this discipling ministry will bear fruit that lasts into eternity.

FaithTalk is about “sharing God’s love & life” through informal Bible-based discussions held in your home (or other comfortable, “safe” place). Discussion participants are your non-believing and/or unchurched friends, family members, neighbors and/or co-workers. A few other church members might join you, but to have desired *evangelistic focus*, most participants in your *FaithTalk* group will be un-churched. How to start and facilitate a *FaithTalk* group is the subject of the training offered at <http://faithtalkgroups.blogspot.com/>.

This particular *FaithTalk* curriculum is titled, ***The Hope of Jesus***. Its principal author is Jim Valekis, GCI pastor in the Dayton, OH area. Jim and his wife Becky have used this curriculum in leading Bible discussions with groups of un-churched and churched seekers. Feel free to email your questions to Jim at Jim.Valekis@gci.org.

This curriculum is geared toward people with some familiarity with the Bible, and with a positive openness toward Jesus. The goal of the curriculum is to help spiritually minded non-believers and/or non-churched believers gain a clear hearing of the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus, and then take initial steps toward becoming believers; or if already believers, toward becoming committed disciples of Jesus.

The Hope of Jesus leads participants in discussing several important questions about themselves and Jesus:

- Do they sometimes feel guilty?
- Do they sometimes in these feelings of guilt feel trapped by fear and aloneness?
- Do they know that Jesus is alive—living still as a human who shares his life with all humanity. This is the doctrine of the continuing incarnation of Jesus Christ. It speaks to every person’s life.

The Hope of Jesus addresses these questions in four sessions (which may be stretched to more if needed):

- The Real Meaning of the Incarnation of Christ – *for You!*
- The Real Meaning of the Death of Christ – *for You!*
- The Real Meaning of the Resurrection of Christ – *for You!*
- The Real Meaning of the Ascension and Present Life of Christ –*for You!*

Through the course of these four discussions, we hope that participants understand more about who Jesus is, what he has done as the incarnate Son of God, and what all this means for them and all humanity.

The overarching message is simple, yet profound: ***You are included in Jesus’ love and life!***

Following are discussion guides, with facilitator notes for each session. A simplified handout for each session is provided in the *participant’s discussion guidebook*.

In the Master’s service,

Ted Johnston, FaithTalk curriculum team leader

Note: please email comments and suggestions for improvement to this curriculum to Ted.Johnston@gci.org

The Hope of Jesus
Session 1



The Real Meaning of the Incarnation of Christ – *for You!*

Goal. To help participants learn about Jesus' incarnation, through which they (along with all humanity) have been included in God's love and life. The overarching message is this: *You're included!*

Key points. Why did the eternal Son of God become human? What kind of human nature did he assume? What was his life like? What did he accomplish through his incarnation? What does "incarnation" mean? What does it mean that Jesus, through his incarnation is our "mediator"?

Scriptures to discuss.

- **Genesis 1:1-3.** Note here who God is revealed to be (Creator). And note the subtle presence of the Trinity: God, Spirit, and *Creative Word* ("God said ...").
- **John 1:1-3, 14.** Here is another "in the beginning" Scripture. Note that the Word is not just a spoken Word, but now a Person! This Word (who is with God) becomes "flesh". God and man are now one!
- **Philippians 2:5-8.** Note how these verses say that Christ "made himself nothing." Discuss the significance of this—God taking on our humanity, remaining God, but living and ministering as a human.
- **Hebrews 4:15.** What kind of nature did Jesus have? A "neutral nature" or a "fallen nature" that is fully subject to temptation. Discuss some of the ways Jesus was tempted (e.g., hunger, extreme weariness in the desert, prostitute kissing his feet, discouragement, feeling abandoned, etc.)
- **1 Timothy 2:5.** Note here that Jesus is called the "one mediator." Some faith traditions say the Virgin Mary is a mediator, and for that reason was "immaculately conceived." Why do you think this doctrine developed? (Answer: to ensure that Jesus did not have a fallen human nature). But Scripture records: "He was tempted in every way as we are...yet without sin."
- **Hebrews 2:14-18.** Were Christ's temptations real? What does Scripture say that Christ is able to do because of his experience as a human? What does that tell us about the real meaning of the Incarnation for us? The Incarnation is God's permanent union with us, by which God shares deeply in our human condition. Note the following from Elmer Colyer concerning this truth on page 36 of *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Savior* edited by Gerrit Scott Dawson:

"[The] personal union between the divine nature and our actual sinful human nature in the incarnation is a *reconciling union*. In it, the incarnate Son condemns sin in our sinful humanity and overcomes the estrangement, sin, guilt and death entrenched in our humanity through an atoning and transforming relation between the divine and human natures... [This] atoning reconciliation takes place from Jesus birth throughout his life and ministry....The incarnate savior shared all our human experience... He withstood the strain of human sin and God's judgment upon it, especially on the cross".



The Hope of Jesus
Session 2

The Real Meaning of the Death of Christ—*for You!*

Goal. To help participants come to know more about the death of Christ, and how all humanity is included in that death.

Key points. Start by inviting participants to share their understanding of what Jesus' death accomplished. When discussing the issue of the forgiveness of sin, make reference to the thief on the cross next to Christ, and how he could "do" nothing—yet, in his mercy, Jesus forgave him (and all sinners). Cover "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Cover that we are included in Christ's death – what happens to Christ happens to all of us.

Scriptures to discuss.

- **Matthew chapters 26 and 27.** Read portions as appropriate to get the group into key scenes related to Jesus' death. The goal is to help them appreciate that Jesus suffered terribly on our behalf.
- **John 13:1-12.** Discuss here how Jesus "made himself nothing" (Phil 2)—taking on the nature of a servant. What does God reveal himself to be in this act of service? As Calvin notes, Jesus' whole life was a "cross."
- **Matthew 27:46.** What is happening in this scene? Torrance believes Jesus took on the "perilous" condition of our corrupt and sinful humanity, "standing under the utter real judgment of God." Christ entered into the depths of our corruption—penetrating those depths with his personal union with the Father and the Spirit. His human struggle in this was horrendous. We often give in to sin before temptation reaches its full and horrible extreme. Not so, Jesus—he carried our corruption fully—crying out to God, sweating blood in doing so. In one sense, he faced here the worst temptation a human can face—a world without God, a world in which we stand utterly alone! But notice the next scripture:
- **Luke 23:46.** In the midst of Jesus' sense of horrific darkness and alienation, he "bent back" our corrupt human nature to the perfect will of God. He enabled us to see and respond positively to God in the depths of our corruption.
- **2 Corinthians 5:14.** Who died when Jesus died? All of us! What then are the implications of Jesus death for all humanity?



The Hope of Jesus
Session 3

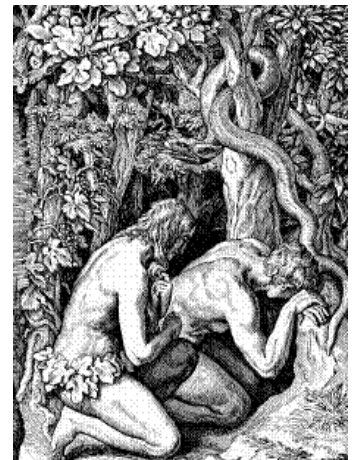
The Real Meaning of the Resurrection of Christ— *for You!*

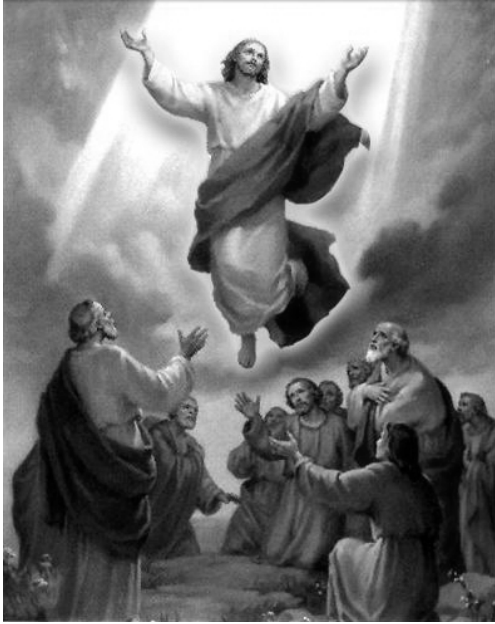
Goal. To help participants come to know more about the resurrection of Christ, and how we were all included in that resurrection.

Key points. Have an open discussion in the beginning to discuss what those in attendance feel are the main points of Christ's resurrection. When discussing the resurrection, be sure to address the transformation of Christ's physical body to his humanoid, spirit-powered body. A body that is "real" and not just ghost like. Cover the "resuscitation" of Lazarus or others in the Scripture, and contrast a resuscitation from a resurrection. Explain how we are included in Christ's resurrection – what happens to Christ happens to all of us – although it has not been fully played out from our objective perspective. That should all lead to a healthy discussion.

Scriptures to discuss.

- **2 Corinthians 5:14-15.** When Christ died, who died? (All of us!). What does that imply about "who lives now that Christ lives?"
- **Acts 17:28.** Where does our existence reside? (In Jesus).
- **Colossians 1:17.** What holds all existence together? (Jesus who is both Creator and Sustainer of all)
- **Romans 5:12-19.** What does it mean that Christ is the "new Adam"? What are some similarities between the old Adam and the new Adam? To which Adam are we now related? What are some of the implications of Christ's resurrection for us (since all humanity is "in Christ")? What does this say about the permanency of our existence? What does it say about what it means to "be saved"? ("Being saved" in this context, means not just forgiven but being saved permanently as an "eternal image of God").





The Hope of Jesus
Session 4

The Real Meaning of the Ascension and Present Life of Christ—*for You!*

Goal. To help participants come to know more about the continuing life and ministry of the ascended, incarnate Son of God, and how we were all included in that life and ministry.

Key points. Define “ascension” (relate it to the word “ascend”). Invite participants to share their understanding of the meaning of Christ’s ascension. As we saw with Jesus’ representative, substitutionary death and resurrection, so too, when Jesus ascended, we all ascended. Remember, what happens to Christ, happens to us all. Even though we may not feel like we are seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father that is where (what) we truly are! Ask participants to share their views of concerning the ongoing life and ministry of Christ. In your comments, note that we are included in that life and ministry. He is the High Priest, now ministering on earth through the Spirit. His ministry is one of intercession, worship, healing, loving—all on our behalf. Ask participants to comment on how we now participate in that life (which leads to discussing the role of the Holy Spirit, and the church as the body of Christ).

Scriptures to discuss.

- **Acts 1:1-9.** Describe the ascension, and the 40 days prior to it. Where did Christ go? (Refer to Mark 16:19 and Daniel 7:13).
- **Ephesians 2:6.** What does it mean to “be seated in heavenly places”?
- **Ephesians 1:3, 20.** What blessings are ours as a result?
- **Colossians 3:3-4.** Where are we now? What does this imply about our existence?
- **Hebrews 7:25.** What else is Christ now doing?
- **2 Peter 1:4.** How are we united to Christ? Discuss baptism (Romans 6) at this point, if applicable.
- **Colossians 3:2-12.** What will our lives look like? What will we “put on?”



Supplemental Handout

This handout summarizes the theology that undergirds this curriculum. It presents key Scriptural points that tell us how God has included all humankind in his love and life in and through the representative, substitutionary (vicarious) life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. For additional detail, see the booklet, *A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology* posted online at www.wcg.org/lit/booklets/theology.htm.

1. The Triune God created all people to participate through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ in the love relationship enjoyed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2. The Son became human, the man Jesus Christ, to reconcile all humanity to God through his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.
3. The crucified, resurrected and glorified Jesus is the representative and the substitute for humanity at the right hand of God, and he draws all people to himself by the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. In Christ, humanity is loved and accepted by the Father.
5. Jesus Christ paid for all our sins – past, present and future – and there is no longer any debt to pay.
6. The Father has in Christ forgiven all our sins, and he eagerly desires that we turn to him.
7. We can enjoy his love only when we believe that he loves us. We can enjoy his forgiveness only when we believe he has forgiven us.
8. When we respond to the Spirit by turning to God, believing the good news and picking up our cross and following Jesus, the Spirit leads us into the transformed life of the kingdom of God.

The Hope of Jesus



Participant's Discussion Guide

Welcome to *FaithTalk*

- Do you struggle with feelings of guilt, fear and aloneness?
- Does religion only add to these bad feelings?
- Would it surprise you to hear that Jesus is alive and still human (now glorified)? And that in his glorified humanity he is sharing with you the love and life that he shares with God?



In four discussions, we'll discover in the Bible...

The Hope of Jesus

- The Real Meaning of the Incarnation of Christ—*for You!*
- The Real Meaning of the Death of Christ—*for You!*
- The Real Meaning of the Resurrection of Christ—*for You!*
- The Real Meaning of the Ascension and Present Life of Christ—*for You!*



The Hope of Jesus
Session 1

The Real Meaning of the Incarnation of Christ—*for You!*

Goal. To learn more about the incarnation of Christ, and how we are all included in that incarnation.

Scriptures to discuss.

- **Genesis 1:1-3**
- **John 1:1-3, 14**
- **Philippians 2:5-8**
- **Hebrews 4:15**
- **1 Timothy 2:5**
- **Hebrews 2:14-18**

Quote:

“[The] personal union between the divine nature and our actual sinful human nature in the incarnation is a *reconciling union*. In it, the incarnate Son condemns sin in our sinful humanity and overcomes the estrangement, sin, guilt and death entrenched in our humanity through an atoning and transforming relation between the divine and human natures... [This] atoning reconciliation takes place from Jesus birth throughout his life and ministry...The incarnate savior shared all our human experience... He withstood the strain of human sin and God’s judgment upon it, especially on the cross”.

[Elmer Colyer in *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Savior*
edited by Gerrit Scott Dawson, p. 36]

The Hope of Jesus
Session 2

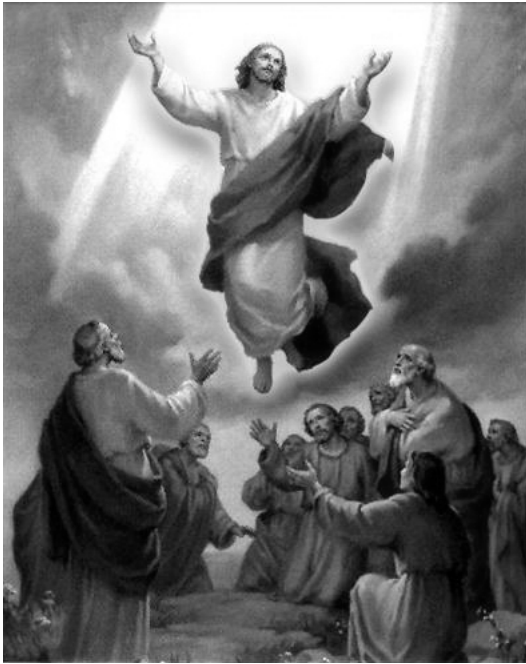


The Real Meaning of the Death of Christ—*for You!*

Goal. To learn more about the death of Christ, and how we were all included in that death.

Scriptures to discuss.

- **Matthew chapters 26 – 27**
- **John 13:1-12**
- **Matthew 27:46**
- **Luke 23:46**
- **2 Corinthians 5:14**



The Hope of Jesus

Session 4

The Real Meaning of the Ascension and Present Life of Christ—*for You!*

Goal. To learn more about the ascension and the continuing life of Christ, and how we were all included in that ascension and life.

Scriptures to discuss.

- **Acts 1:1-9**
- **Ephesians 2:6**
- **Ephesians 1:3, 20**
- **Colossians 3:3-4**
- **Hebrews 7:25**
- **2 Peter 1:4**
- **Colossians 3:2-12**



Supplemental Handout

This handout summarizes the theology that undergirds this curriculum. It presents key Scriptural points that tell us how God has included all humankind in his love and life in and through the representative, substitutionary (vicarious) life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

For additional detail, see the booklet, *A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology* posted online at www.wcg.org/lit/booklets/theology.htm.

1. The Triune God created all people to participate through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ in the love relationship enjoyed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2. The Son became human, the man Jesus Christ, to reconcile all humanity to God through his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.
3. The crucified, resurrected and glorified Jesus is the representative and the substitute for humanity at the right hand of God, and he draws all people to himself by the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. In Christ, humanity is loved and accepted by the Father.
5. Jesus Christ paid for all our sins – past, present and future – and there is no longer any debt to pay.
6. The Father has in Christ forgiven all our sins, and he eagerly desires that we turn to him.
7. We can enjoy his love only when we believe that he loves us. We can enjoy his forgiveness only when we believe he has forgiven us.
8. When we respond to the Spirit by turning to God, believing the good news and picking up our cross and following Jesus, the Spirit leads us into the transformed life of the kingdom of God.