

WHO ARE YOU?



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Nickolas H., Crossroads student



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

Who Are You? explores the big questions that all people have about life: **Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?** We all look for answers to these questions. We search for them in many places.

The Bible offers answers to those questions. It also offers hope for a new and better life. And it tells us that the first step toward discovering that life is knowing God.

Crossroads uses learning objectives to guide course creation and to measure student learning. *Who Are You?* was created so that students will:

1. discover their need for God,
2. understand God's desire for a relationship with each of us and
3. recognize the importance of knowing Jesus as their Savior.

As a mentor, you play a role in guiding your students toward these learning objectives. As you share what God has taught you, answer questions and engage with the material alongside your students, you and your students will learn about each other while learning about God together.

We challenge you to share openly with your students. When possible, provide examples from your life. Find ways to connect with them through shared experiences, expectations, hopes and dreams. Most of the questions are open-ended and have been written with the intention of encouraging students to share their personal thoughts, which will also help you to better understand where each student is on their faith journey.

We have included blank spaces throughout this answer key so that you can add your own answers to the questions. As you think through your own spiritual journey, it may help you give insight to your students. You can also use these spaces to write things you learn from students about life in prison/jail or their reflections on Scriptures that you can share with future students.

You may notice that the questions in the lessons avoid using Christian vocabulary or direct Scripture quotations. The lessons are designed to allow students who are not familiar with the Bible or God to engage with the material and begin learning about spiritual and biblical topics without becoming intimidated or frustrated. We want to help students learn how God sees them: as men and women made in His image and worthy of His love. By the end of the course, we hope that students who are not Christians will be interested in learning more about God.

STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can use these boxes to write questions and thoughts they have about the lesson or about life. You can also respond to a student in any space that the student has not filled.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.



Crossroads provides NIV Bibles, upon request, to students who need them to complete the lessons (if allowed by their facility).

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Contentment – A feeling of being happy and satisfied. In the Bible, it is a supernatural peace that comes from knowing and obeying God.

Ecclesiastes – A book in the Bible. It was likely written by Solomon (see “**Solomon**”).

Faith – Trust in something or someone that cannot be seen.

Forgiven – A word used to describe a person after God has removed the sin from their life (see “**sin**”). When God forgives us, He no longer blames us for our past and He cancels any debt we owed Him for sins we committed.

God-Shaped Hole – A concept talked about by theologians (see “**theologian**”). It refers to a deep longing. It is a sense that you lack something meaningful in your life.

Gospel – The good news about Jesus Christ found in the Bible. The word can also be used to describe the first four books of the New Testament in the Bible, which are written about Jesus’ life and ministry.

Israel – The name of the kingdom that God established for His people. It was located approximately where the nation of Israel is located today in the Middle East region of Asia.

Prodigal – Someone who wastes a lot of money and time and does not value what they have.

Scripture – Another way to refer to the words in the Bible. All Scripture was given to us by God and written down by men.

Shame – A result of sin (see “**sin**”); closely related to guilt. It is an awareness that we will never live up to God’s expectations.

Sin – An action, thought or spoken word that goes against God’s divine plan. When we commit sins, we do things that are wrong and break God’s laws. Sins are the things that we do—or fail to do—that make us less than perfect. Sins keep us from growing closer to Jesus.

Solomon – A king of Israel (see “**Israel**”). He was the most powerful king in the Bible. He had great riches. God gave him the gift of wisdom.

Theologian – Someone who studies who God is. They study the Bible, the nature of God and other elements of Christianity. Theologians often write books about God and faith.

LESSON 1

LESSON 1: The **BIG** Questions

Lesson Focus:

God wants us to know Him.

Humans, by nature, have a desire to find purpose for their lives. They are looking for direction. They are looking for meaning. They want to know why they are here. They want to know who they are supposed to be.

We can't find answers to these questions by buying more, doing more or learning more. Knowledge, possessions and experiences do not make us feel whole. The richest people in the world keep trying to earn more money because it does not satisfy them. The smartest people in the world admit there is so much that they do not know or understand.

When we search for meaning, we are often limited by our past experiences. We think about who we want to be based on ideas about ourselves that may not be true. This may cause us to miss out on the real meaning of life. This course has been created to help you think about these things in a different way.

1. What are some of the ways you've seen people look for meaning and purpose in the past?

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Strength | <input type="checkbox"/> Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Body Image | <input type="checkbox"/> Success |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Status | <input type="checkbox"/> Approval | <input type="checkbox"/> Money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs/Alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> Fame | <input type="checkbox"/> Sex |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | | |

Students will choose a variety of answers. Their responses will give you your first glance into their lives and backgrounds on a very basic level.

2. How do people look for meaning and purpose inside prison or jail?

You may read that people get involved in gangs, relationships or drugs; become a shop guy (black-market salesman); seek to control others; take classes; spend all their time exercising or read the Bible all day long. Some answers you read may be shocking. Do not shy away from what the student has written. We are trying to meet students where they are, not demand they clean up their lives or language before learning about Jesus or beginning to follow Him in earnest.

We're All Looking for the Same Thing

We all want to know the answers to the three big questions in life: **Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?**

In his book *An Anchor for the Soul*, Ray Pritchard said it this way:

It is the same in every country and every culture. On the surface we are very different in our appearance, background, language and customs. But dig a little deeper and you discover that basically, we are all the same. . . . Everywhere we are the same—with the same longings, regrets, dreams and hopes; with the same need to love and be loved; with the same desire to be remembered after we die. ¹

Everyone you'll ever meet has the same desire to know the answers to these big questions.

3. What are some things you think everyone might have in common?

Students' answers may include: we all need food and shelter; we experience pain and loss; we want to be loved; we want to belong; we have feelings, hopes and desires; we want there to be more to life than our present circumstances. If the student mentions only tangible or superficial things, suggest to them that we all need love and we all long for a purpose and meaning for our lives.



1. Ray Pritchard, *An Anchor for the Soul*, 19

The Three Big Questions

Our answers to the three big questions reveal what we think about ourselves. We often respond to the question “Who are you?” by sharing facts about ourselves: what our job is, whether we are married or divorced or single, our favorite hobbies, etc. We might answer the question “Why are you here?” by telling people about our past or about events that led to our current situation. We may respond to the question “Where are you going?” by mentioning a jail or prison sentence, a place we will go after we are released or nowhere at all.

4. How would you answer the three big questions? Take a few minutes to think about the questions below before you answer them.

Please share your own answers to the questions below in response to the student’s answers. You can respond in the lesson or in your letter. The Scripture passages listed below offer examples of biblical answers to these questions that you can share with students when appropriate.

a. Who am I?

Genesis 1:26–27, Genesis 2:7, Genesis 2:15–17, 2 Corinthians 5:16–17, John 1:12, Ephesians 2:19–22, Psalm 8, Psalm 139

b. Why am I here?

Matthew 28:18–20, Ephesians 2:10, 1 John 4:10–11, Jeremiah 29:11

c. Where am I going?

John 3:16, Titus 3:4–7, Ephesians 1:3–14

Our answers to these questions can also have a deeper meaning. They can reflect who we want to be. They can reveal who we really are when no one is looking. They can define our purpose—why we are alive or here on the earth.



5. Which of the big questions seems most important for you to answer right now? Why?

If you are comfortable, share your own answer to this question with your student.

When you ask people these questions, you find out two things. We all think that asking these questions is important. We also think there is something more to life.

A King's Answer

King Solomon* was one of the richest and most powerful kings of Israel.* He is believed to be the writer of Ecclesiastes,* one of the wisdom books in the Bible. In Ecclesiastes, he wrote about where he looked for answers to the big questions. He tried relationships. He tried parties. He tried wealth and power. He tried everything there was to try. None of those things answered the questions for him. He still felt empty. It was all meaningless. Solomon reported what he found in three short words: "I hated life" (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

6. What do you think Solomon meant when he said he "hated life"?

Solomon chased after material things and experiences, but he discovered that none of those things brought true meaning and purpose to his life.

* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on page 6.

Solomon was tired of trying to find things that would give his life meaning. What can you do when you've truly tried it all, but you have not found any answers? This is the way Solomon felt.

7. Have you ever felt that way? What brought you to that point?

If the student answers yes, they may write about searching for meaning in relationships, money, drugs, etc. Some students may say that they are still struggling with a particular issue. If so, please indicate your sympathy for their situation and encourage them to believe that change is possible.

Solomon felt empty, even though he had tried almost everything in his search for meaning. He decided that there had to be something more to life: knowing God and following Him (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

8. How would you describe yourself when it comes to knowing God? Are you skeptical? Are you a believer? Are you still trying to find the truth?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm searching for answers | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a lot of doubts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I believe in God | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm skeptical about God |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I used to believe in God | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure about religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel lost and confused | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

This question is designed to help you understand your student's faith. They may be a Christian, or they may have just begun their search for God. They also might be Muslim, agnostic, Jehovah's Witness, etc. No matter what their faith is, it is great that they are taking the course. Please keep in mind that it is not our job to convince the student to follow Christ—that is the Holy Spirit's job.

Knowing God

Like Solomon, most of us long for something more from life. We want to be loved. We want our life to have meaning and purpose. And, like Solomon, we have the same sense that there must be a God of some kind who made us.



There is a phrase that describes that longing inside us for something more: a “God-shaped hole.”* Theologians* like St. Augustine, C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton all wrote about this “hole” in each of us. It is not a literal hole. The “God-shaped hole” is a longing for a perfect connection to God.

That longing drives us to seek meaning outside ourselves. It makes us feel like things will never get any better. It makes us afraid that we will never be good enough. It makes us feel abandoned, forgotten and alone.

God is the answer to that longing inside us. The longing causes us to keep looking for more until we come home to Him. St. Augustine said it this way: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you” (*The Confessions*).

God created us to have a relationship with Him. He designed us to want to know Him. We will not find true happiness and contentment* until we find Him. God fills the “hole” in us.

9. Have you ever felt a longing for something that was missing from your life? If so, what did you do to try to fulfill that longing? Did it work?

Many students will acknowledge that they have felt that longing, but it is okay if they answer no. Some people may not be fully aware of the longing or pain that exists in their lives. If the student answers no, read the rest of their lesson to get a better sense of where they are on their spiritual journey. Then, if you are comfortable doing so, share reflections about your own life and ask questions that might lead them to think more deeply about the idea of their need for God.

The whole Bible shows us that God wants us to know Him—in a sense, that is the theme of the Bible. God loves us, we rebel against Him and He comes to our rescue. The God of the Bible is interested in our lives and cares deeply about us. God cares deeply about *you*.

10. What do you think of the idea of a God who cares deeply about you? Do you believe it?

If the student answers yes, encourage them to continue to rely on God’s love for them. If they answer no, acknowledge their doubt and let them know that God loves them regardless (John 3:16–17, John 10:10–11, Ephesians 2:4–5).

In the Beginning

The very first story in the Bible about God and humanity tells us that God created a perfect world. God created humans “in his own image . . . male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). We are made in God’s image, which means there is something in us that reflects who God is. We are designed to know God and take care of the world in which God placed us.

But something went terribly wrong.

God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was a perfect place. The garden provided shelter, food and a purpose for them. They knew God and they knew who God



Artwork by Earl E., Crossroads student



created them to be. God made just one thing off-limits. He told them not to eat the fruit of one specific tree: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

A serpent deceived Eve, who ate some of the fruit and then offered some to Adam. Even though Adam had not been deceived, he ate the fruit anyway. This was the “fall” of humankind. It was through this one simple act, this deliberate choice, that sin* entered the world.

Sin is anything we say, do, plan, think or imagine that does not meet God’s standard of perfection. It is something we do that we know is wrong. After we’ve done it, that voice in the back of our heads asks, “Why did I do that?” Adam and Eve sinned. They did what God asked them not to do. Then they experienced guilt and fear. They sinned against God—and they *knew* they sinned.

The Bible tells us that, in their shame,* they tried to cover themselves and they hid from God. They were terrified of God’s reaction.

Then the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking in the garden. It was during the coolest time of the day. They hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called out to the man. “Where are you?” he asked. (Genesis 3:8–9)

You might think that God would have destroyed Adam and Eve and started over. But He didn't.

God went looking for them.

He simply walked through the garden and called out to them. God knew where they were. God knew what they had done. But He came with a question, not an accusation. "Where are you?"

11. How would you expect God to have reacted when Adam and Eve did the one thing He asked them not to do?

The student's answer will reflect their understanding of who God is and may also reveal how they feel about themselves.

12. Based on what you have read, how did God show His love to Adam and Eve despite what they did?

Students may write that God did not destroy them or that God went looking for them. Remind them that God also comes looking for us (Ezekiel 34:11–16, Matthew 18:12–14, Luke 19:10).

What Happens Next

God looked for Adam and Eve. He wanted them to talk to Him. He still wanted a relationship with them.

However, there were consequences for what Adam and Eve did. Eve felt pain when having children. Her relationship with Adam was damaged. Adam had to work hard to find food. Both of them experienced death. We have inherited all of those things. We still feel those consequences today. Sin is now in the world.

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, we do not know God the way we should. We continually do things we know we should not do. We see the pain, death and violence in the world—some of it that we create ourselves—and we feel powerless to fight it. We feel the result

of other people's sins when they hurt us. We commit sins in response. We hurt others. We hurt ourselves. But God tells us things do not need to stay that way. We are sinners, but God is still looking for each of us. The Bible tells us:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)

He knows what has happened to us. He knows what we have done. But despite all of that, He still sent His Son, Jesus, to the earth to die for our sins so that we may have a relationship with Him. He still loves us. He still asks each of us, "Where are you?"

13. Read John 3:16–17 again. What do these verses say about God?

Students' answers may include: God loved the world; God gave His only Son; God sent His Son to save the world, not to judge it.

14. According to John 3:16–17, how does God feel about you?

Some students may say that God loves them. Others may not make this connection. Do your best to encourage them to continue studying to learn more about who God is and how much He loves them. Affirm their worth in God's eyes (Deuteronomy 7:9, Zephaniah 3:17, John 15:9–17, Romans 5:8, Romans 8:38–39, 1 John 4:7–11).



ACTION STEP

Memorizing Bible verses is a spiritual discipline that will help you grow in your walk with Jesus. Choose a few of the verses in this lesson and begin making a list of memory verses that are meaningful to you. As you memorize the verses, you will find that the Word of God will guide and encourage you as you go through each day.

WANT TO DO MORE?

Read **Psalm 139**. The book of Psalms is found near the middle of most Bibles (check your Bible's index for the exact page number). When you are done reading the chapter, use the space below to write some of the things that God knows about us, according to the author. What do you find the most surprising or interesting?

Some students may write direct quotes from the passage; others may summarize it. Either way, the answer should reflect the fact that God knows us completely. God knows our hearts, where we are, what we think and what we do. He knows the words we will speak before we speak them. He knows every single part of each one of us—down to the smallest detail. He knows what the future holds for us.

- Do you need a Bible?** Crossroads provides free NIV Bibles to students who need them (if allowed by their facility). Mark this box if you would like us to send you one.

If a student has marked this box and you see a stamp that says "Thanks, Crossroads" by this note, that means we have sent a Bible to the student.

LESSON 2

LESSON 2: Who Am I?

Lesson Focus:

When we know who we are in God's eyes, we find purpose and meaning for our lives.

In the first lesson of this course, we learned about the three big questions in life: **Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?** Let's think about the first question, "Who am I?" The way we answer that question affects how we make choices, and it affects what we think we can do. The way we answer that question can also be affected by people around us. Society, culture and our friends and family have a huge impact on how we see ourselves.

So, who are you? Most of us think of ourselves as a combination of our family and our experiences. What people, experiences and choices do you let define who you are?

1. How would you describe yourself?

Students may share many personal details, or they may share very little. Both extremes are possible when people in prison are asked to share information about themselves. They are rarely asked for personal responses; they may write a lengthy response out of excitement, or they may be suspicious of such requests and reluctant to be vulnerable. If a student's answer indicates that they struggle to see their value, consider sharing the following verses: 2 Corinthians 5:17, Matthew 10:29–31, Psalm 139:13–16.

2. How would your best friend describe you?

This may be the most positive answer you read from your student, or it might reflect a broken relationship or the view of someone who knows all the worst things the student has ever done. Be sure to respond gently if they share a negative image of themselves. (Verses that describe good friendships: Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, Proverbs 27:17.)

3. How would your family describe you? (Thinking about family can be hard. It is okay to leave this question blank.)

Even if a student does not write anything here, they will have thought about the question. Please do not push them to answer it if they have left it blank. People in prison have varying relationships with their family members. Some have contact with loved ones on the outside, but many have not heard from friends or family for years. Family can be a difficult subject, but we want students to think about it because our relationships with our family often have a dramatic effect on who we become.

Would it surprise you to hear that you are more than the list of things you just wrote down? The Bible tells us that we are made in God’s image. That means that we are capable of creating things. We are capable of giving and receiving love. God made us to take care of His creation, to take care of each other and to have an impact on the future. God loves us. He wants to welcome us home as part of His family. He sees value in us, regardless of how we feel about ourselves.

Jesus told a story that explains God’s love for us. It also describes God’s desire to be back in a relationship with us, despite what we’ve done. The story is called “The Parable of the Prodigal* Son” (found in Luke 15:11–24). It goes like this:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger son spoke to his father. He said, “Father, give me my share of the family property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons.

Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away. There he wasted his money on wild living. He spent everything he had.

While the son was there, the country had a famine. Crops did not grow. There was no food. The son had to get a job. He took a job on a farm

NOTE: The younger son asked the father to give him his inheritance. Essentially, he was saying, “You’re no good to me alive. I wish you were dead so I could have your money.” The father still gave him the money.

* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on page 6.



Artwork by Randy C., Crossroads student



feeding pigs. He was so hungry. He wished he could eat what the pigs ate. No one gave him anything to eat.

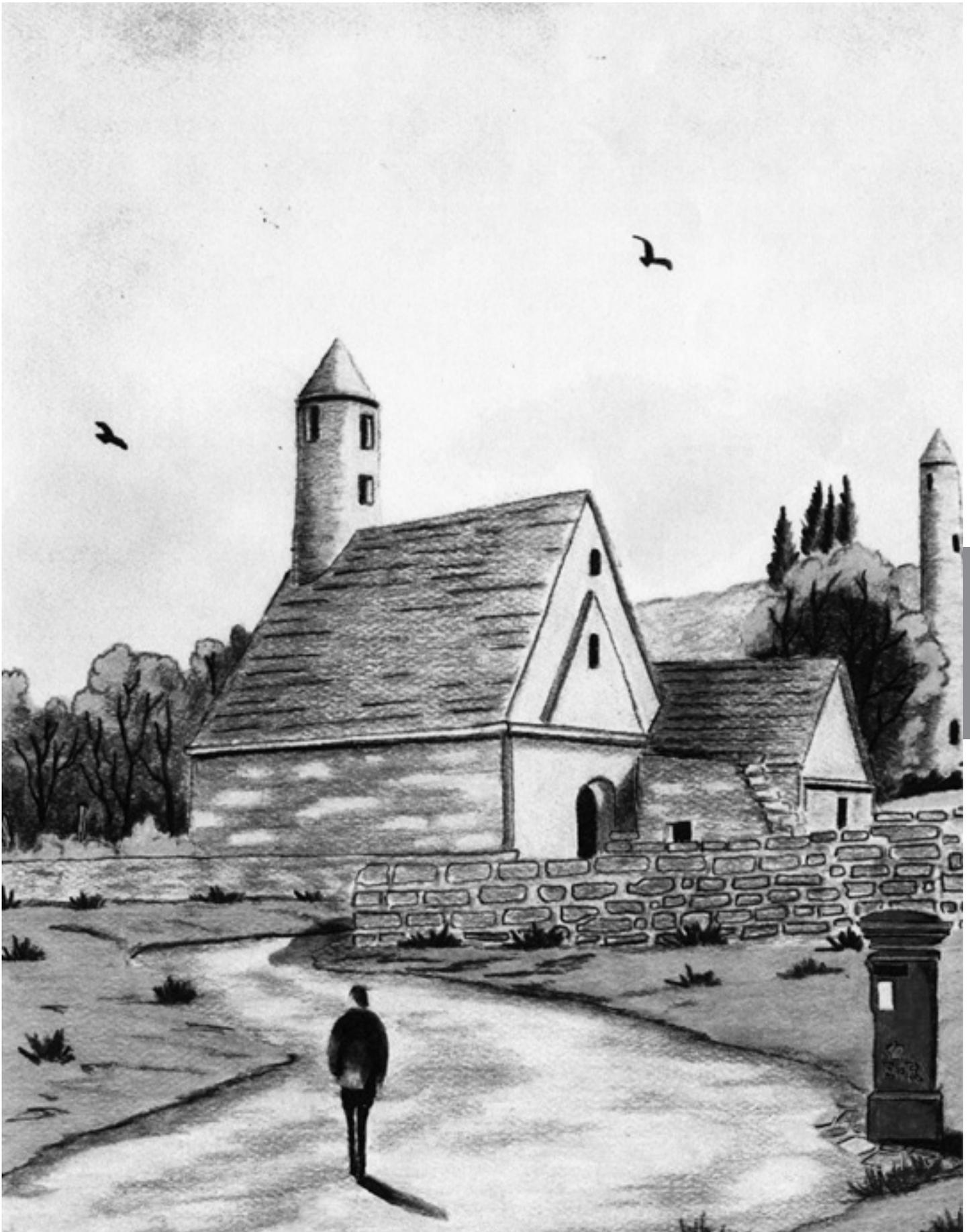
Then he began to think clearly again. He said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough food! But here I am dying from hunger! I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" So he got up and went to his father.

While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son. He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found."

NOTE: In Jesus' day, older men did not run. If you were an older guy and you were running, you were at war, crazy or dealing with an emergency. Old guys did not run. Yet the father in the story ran to his son. What do you think about that?



Artwork by Gary F., Crossroads student

4. How did the young man describe himself as he prepared to go back home?

The passage indicates that the son saw himself as a sinner, no longer worthy of being called a son, only worthy of working as his father's servant. Students may quote the story: "Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18–19).

5. How did the father describe the son when he came home? Write down the father's words at the end of the story:

Some students may include the entire last paragraph of the story, but the part we want them to focus on is the last four sentences: "This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found." The father was overjoyed to have his son home—he was entirely focused on his son's return, not where he had been or what he had done. Jesus tells us that this is God's reaction to us when we choose to follow Him.

The father in the story gives us a picture of God waiting for us to come home. God is the father scanning the horizon, looking for us. He is ready to run out to meet us and tell the world that we are home. God is the father waiting for us to realize that there is more to life than pain. He is waiting for us to realize that there is more to life than money, power and popularity. He is waiting for us to realize that we can finally stop being tired of being tired all the time.

God is the father running to greet us and throwing a party because we have come home.

6. Based on this story, how do you think God would describe you? Circle all that apply:

Useless Loved Child Lost Found Alive Important

This answer will reflect the student's perception and understanding of God, and it may also reveal the way they view themselves on a deeper level. If a student circles "useless" or "lost," share an encouraging Scripture passage (for example: Romans 8:38–39, 1 John 4:9, Ephesians 2:10).

Why Am I Here?

The second of the three big questions is “Why am I here?” This question can have two different meanings. It can mean “How did I get here?” But it can also mean “Why is it important that I exist?” Think about both of these meanings as you read this story about a Crossroads student:

Tairone’s grandparents raised him to go to church every Sunday. But the other six days of the week, he ran the streets. While his grandparents taught him Scripture*, his uncles taught him the drug game. It didn’t take long for Tairone to choose who he wanted to be. It started with selling marijuana in junior high. It grew into a career of selling crack cocaine as a young man. Tairone became the main drug dealer in his community.

“With that lifestyle, I lied, cheated, gambled and had many women. This became a way of life that drove my ego,” Tairone said. But one day, Tairone was arrested. He was taken to jail and sentenced. Just like that, Tairone’s fast life of hustling, clubbing and running the streets was over.

November 18, 1998—it’s a date Tairone will never forget. It was the day he says he heard God’s voice more clearly than ever. He was lying on his bed in his cell. His mind was racing, thinking about the family and friends he had let down and the promises he had broken. Tairone tried to come to terms with the inevitable—a long prison sentence. Was life even worth living?





In the middle of the chaos in his mind, Tairone heard God say to him: “Tairone, I am a jealous God.” God wanted Tairone’s attention.

“I knew it was God,” Tairone said. “I knew I had to stop playing games. I surrendered my life to Him.”

Tairone was granted clemency and released in 2016. He has not taken his second chance lightly. He found a good job and a strong home church. He has a passion for reaching the youth of his community with the message of the Gospel.* Now he drives a van for his church on Sunday mornings, picking up teenagers to bring them to the church service. On the way, he shares his story with them. He is changing lives for the better—helping kids avoid the mistakes he made.

7. When Tairone first went to prison, how do you think he may have answered the question “Why am I here?”

Students will most likely list Tairone’s crimes and reference his lifestyle. Be careful not to comment negatively on Tairone’s past, as students may be able to identify with Tairone and his choices. If you have a similar past, this may be a great place for you to share your experiences and how God has impacted your life since that time.

8. How do you think Tairone would answer the question “Why am I here?” now? (Think about the second meaning of the question: “Why is it important that I exist?”)

Students may answer factually and talk about Tairone’s participation in his church’s van ministry. If they do, point them back to his larger purpose of reaching youth with the Gospel and sharing his story in order to change their futures, so that they do not make the same mistakes he made.

The story of the prodigal son hints at something we might miss when reading it. The son was fully restored when he came home. He had planned on taking care of his father’s animals. But he did not become a servant. He was not forced to work in the field. Instead, he was given a robe and a ring as a sign that he had a place of honor in the family. It was a sign that he could make decisions and help lead his household.

God does the same thing for us. God wants us to come home to Him and to be a part of His family. And He also has a plan for each of us when we choose to follow Him. He does more than ask us, “Why are you here?” He already knows the answer to that, and He will use our past to shape a new future.

He helps us answer the question “Why am I here?” in ways we never would have thought possible.

Here are just a few examples found in the Bible:

Moses was a murderer. Moses killed a man and ran to the desert to hide. But God still used Moses to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 2:1–3:22).

Rahab was a prostitute. God used her to help the Israelites start a new kingdom. She was included as part of Jesus’ royal family history and used as an example of faith* (Joshua 2, Joshua 6:17–25, Matthew 1:5, James 2:25–26).

Esther was an orphaned teenager who was forced to compete to marry a king. God used her to save her people when a king threatened to kill them (Esther 2:1–18, Esther 8:1–17).

David was an important earthly king in the Bible. He abused his authority. He took a man’s wife for his own while the man was fighting in David’s army. Then David had the man killed to cover up what he did. David asked God for forgiveness and was still considered “a man dear to [God’s] heart” (Acts 13:16–23). He wrote whole chapters of the Bible (2 Samuel 11:1–27, 2 Samuel 12:1–13, Psalm 51).

Paul helped hunt and kill Christians before he became a Christian himself. He eventually wrote multiple books in the Bible. He wrote them from a prison cell while on trial for preaching about Jesus (Acts 9:1–22, Acts 13–28 and the following books: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon).

And there are many more stories like these in the Bible.

9. Is there one person on this list whose story interested you more than the others? Put a check mark in the blank next to their name below.

_____ Moses _____ Rahab _____ Esther
_____ David _____ Paul

Why did you choose that person?

The student’s answer will help you learn more about their interests. The student may also have chosen the answer because they identify with that biblical character or story in some way. Share with the student which character interests you the most and the reason for your answer.



Artwork by Jerry G., Crossroads student

This is the beauty of the story of the Bible. It's not filled with perfect people. People in the Bible did very imperfect things. Jesus was the only one who was perfect in God's eyes. Yet He still spent time on death row and was executed, even though He was innocent. All of the other people in the Bible were guilty and unworthy. But God still used them. He still did incredible things through them.

10. Based on your past, do you think God could use you to achieve great things? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. If the student answers yes, encourage them to think of ways to impact others right now. If they answer no, recognize that they may not yet trust that God wants to use them, or they may not even believe in God. In those instances, encourage them to keep studying and let them know that God loves them and sees potential in them.



ACTION STEP

Sometime this week, go out of your way to connect with someone who has had a positive impact on your life. Write that person a letter or give them a call to thank them. If you can't do that, find a way to "pay it forward" by helping and encouraging someone else.

WANT TO DO MORE?

Choose one of the people listed on pages 13 and 14. Read the underlined Bible passages listed in that person's description. Then answer the following questions: Who was this person? What did they do? What impact did they have on other people's lives?

Students may choose any of the following people:

Moses: He was a murderer. Moses killed a man and ran to the desert to hide. But God still used Moses to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Rahab: She was a prostitute. God used her to help the Israelites start a new kingdom. She was included as part of Jesus' royal family history and used as an example of faith.

Esther: She was an orphaned teenager who was forced to compete to marry a king. God used her to save her people when a king threatened to kill them.

David: He was an important earthly king in the Bible. He abused his authority. He took a man's wife for his own while the man was fighting in David's army. Then David had the man killed to cover up what he did. David asked God for forgiveness and was still considered "a man dear to [God's] heart." He wrote whole chapters of the Bible.

Paul: He helped hunt and kill Christians before he became a Christian himself. He eventually wrote multiple books of the Bible. He wrote them from a prison cell while on trial for preaching about Jesus.

LESSON 3

LESSON 3: Where Am I Going?

Lesson Focus:

Jesus makes it possible for our lives to change completely.

The last of the three big questions is “Where am I going?” This question is connected to our goals and aspirations. It deals with what we really want from life.

We all hope for a better life. Nicer clothes. A cellmate who does not stink. Food that tastes amazing. The freedom to make our own decisions. Spending unlimited time with family or friends—or fixing broken relationships with them.

1. What are some of the things you want right now in your life?

Students may list physical desires like better food, or they may say that they want to get out of prison or to fix broken relationships with friends or family members. If they mention family, encourage them to write a letter to a family member, even if they are not able to send it. Advise them to write things that they love or miss about their family member.

The question “Where am I going?” also addresses something deeper—something beyond day-to-day life. It refers to more than our desire for physical things like a home or financial security. It refers to the type of goals that guide us. It speaks of a longing for hope and purpose. It points to a deeper desire for our lives—a desire to be worth something.

This question also deals with the changes we want to make in our lives. Our answers to this question reveal who we want to be and who we hope we can be. Going to prison can be a sign that something needs to change. It can be a chance to stop and think about life. It can be a chance to start over and do things differently.

2. What things in your life do you wish you could change?

Students may say they wish they could change their past, their current situation or broken relationships. Other students might say they are in a good place right now and do not need to change. In either case, respond by sharing something you are working to change in your life. Consider sharing Philippians 3:13–14.

3. What have you tried to do to change your life in the past? Did it work? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Like most of us, a majority of students will acknowledge that their attempts to change have not always been successful. When you encounter that type of response, encourage them not to berate themselves, but to learn from the past. Let them know that even Paul struggled to change (see Romans 7:15), but that if we are following God, He will transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit into His image and change our lives completely. Related Scriptures: Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 1:9–10.

The Bible tells us that we can change. It tells us that God wants to give us direction and a greater purpose for our lives. We have to begin by knowing who God is and who God wants us to be. We have to begin by following Jesus. If we choose to do those things, our lives can change and we can make a positive difference in this world. Jesus said it this way:

A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so they may have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way. (John 10:10)



Artwork by Norris B., Crossroads student



4. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that He wants those who follow Him to have life in the fullest possible way?

When we follow Jesus, we begin to see the world and the people in it differently. We find purpose for our lives. We understand that everything that happens is part of God's larger plan—even difficult things. We desire to help people. We find peace about death. Our fear is minimized as we realize that God is in control. Our joy expands as we begin to produce the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. All these things help us live life to the fullest. Related Scriptures: Psalm 37:4, Jeremiah 29:10–14, Proverbs 3:5–6, Matthew 6:25–34, Mark 8:34–35, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:28, Philippians 3:7–14, 1 John 4:7–18.

We don't have to wait until we are in heaven to have the life that God wants for us. It can start right here on earth. Jesus came to earth so we can have a meaningful and purpose-filled life. Despite everything we've ever done, we can have a brand-new life through Him. We see this over and over in the ways Jesus interacted with people in the Bible. He healed the blind man by the side of the road. He offered salvation to a woman others looked down on because of her race and her past. He invited a man who stole and cheated people to be one of His disciples. He changed their lives. He gave them new goals and a new direction.

Here is another example:

At sunrise he [Jesus] arrived again in the temple courtyard. All the people gathered around him there. He sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman. She had been caught committing

adultery. They made her stand in front of the group. They said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught sleeping with a man who was not her husband. In the Law, Moses commanded us to kill such women by throwing stones at them. Now what do you say?” They were trying to trap Jesus with that question. They wanted to have a reason to bring charges against him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. They kept asking him questions. So he stood up and said to them, “Has any one of you not sinned? Then you be the first to throw a stone at her.” He bent down again and wrote on the ground.

Those who heard what he had said began to go away. They left one at a time, the older ones first. Soon only Jesus was left. The woman was still standing there. Jesus stood up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Hasn’t anyone found you guilty?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then I don’t find you guilty either,” Jesus said. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*
(John 8:2–11)

5. What do you think the woman thought was going to happen to her when the crowd grabbed her?

The factual answer is that she was facing death by stoning, but students may also reflect on possible events leading up to that situation—being judged, being shamed, etc.

* An asterisk after a word or phrase indicates that it is defined in the Glossary of Terms on page 6.



Artwork by Ngoc T., Crossroads student



6. How would you have felt if you were the woman standing in front of Jesus? Circle the words below that describe how you would have felt. Feel free to add your own words.

Scared	Angry
Frustrated	Shocked
Trapped	Hopeless
Ashamed	Surprised
Offended	Other:

Some students may identify with the woman in the story and her situation, so any additional words they write may be very personal. If they share something personal, point them to God's grace that Jesus shows in the story.

Jesus did not react to the woman in the way we would expect. He did not react the way the crowd expected, either. They were hoping that He would command them to stone her. Instead, He asked a question: "Has any one of you not sinned?"

7. How did the crowd react to that question? Why do you think they reacted that way?

The people in the crowd walked away because they knew they were not perfect. None of them could claim they had not sinned, just like none of us can. It is important for students to realize that they are not alone in their guilt. The whole crowd walked away; all of us would have as well. Romans 3:23 is a good passage to share in response to this question.



Jesus asked the crowd if any of them had ever sinned. Remember the definition of sin we talked about in Lesson 1? We continually do things we should not do. We hurt others and we hurt ourselves. We act in ways we know are wrong. We do things that reflect the brokenness in the world. We do things that are the opposite of what God wants us to do. We do things that keep us from a real relationship with Him.

8. What would your answer be if Jesus asked you if you had never sinned? Could you have thrown a stone at the woman?

The question is intended for the student's personal reflection. Let them know how you would answer the question as well.

We learn from reading the Bible that Jesus Himself never sinned. He was the only person remaining with the woman at the end of this story. He could have thrown a stone at the woman. He could have given her the death sentence she deserved, according to the law.

But even though the woman was clearly guilty, Jesus forgave her. He told her that she was no longer guilty in God's eyes. He told her that she could have a different

life. She did not have to keep living the life that brought her in front of Him. Her life did not have to continue to be one of judgment and shame.* She could start again and do things differently.

9. How would you feel if someone told you that you were completely forgiven* for something serious that you did in your past?

Students may respond with considerable emotion. Students who are Christians often have a deep understanding of their need to be forgiven (Luke 7:47). They also comprehend more completely the freedom that forgiveness provides. Be careful not to comment on a student's crime, even if they mention it in passing.

10. If you were completely forgiven, would you think about yourself differently? Would you act differently? How would your life start to change?

Encourage students to pursue the life they have described and to take steps toward that future. Remind them that the place they live does not determine their purpose if God is in control of their lives. God used Paul to write many of the Epistles from prison. God chose Timothy from a tiny village in the middle of nowhere. John wrote the books of 1 John, 2 John and 3 John during his exile on Patmos. These individuals had a huge impact on all Christians.

The Bible tells us that a new life is possible. Christianity is built on one single radical idea: you don't have to stay the way you are.

You too can receive a verdict of "not guilty" from God and live a new life. In fact, that is the reason Jesus came to the earth. The Bible says, "God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through him" (John 3:17). Sin is a part of our life, and it messes up every part of who we are and who we try to be. Jesus came to fix that.

But how does that happen? How does knowing Jesus and following Him change our lives? Think back to what we talked about in Lesson 1. Adam and Eve sinned and brought pain, death and brokenness into the world, and that still affects the world today. But our lives don't have to stay that way. We can experience the life God wants for us now. We can begin to live the way God intended us to live when He created the Garden of Eden.

Jesus came to the earth to die on a cross and rise from the dead so that we can truly live (John 10:10). He can give us a life filled with freedom, hope and purpose, regardless of where we are or what we have done.

Remember the story of the prodigal* son? God is waiting for you to come home. He is waiting to wrap you in His arms and call you His child.

When you choose to believe in God, admit you have sinned and accept what Jesus did for you on the cross, you become a member of God's family. You can be like the men and women who are part of God's story in the Bible. God can and will use you to change the world.

11. Have you accepted God's forgiveness and God's promise of a new life? If you have, how has it changed your life? If not, are you still wondering about some things, or do you want to know more about some things that you read in the lessons?

Answers will range from "God has completely changed my life" to "I'm not interested." Others may say they are Christians but that they are not seeing a lot of change in their lives. If their life has changed, celebrate that with them. If they are still seeking or struggling, try to answer any questions they have written, share how knowing God has impacted your life and encourage them to keep reading and studying.



ACTION STEP

Look back at the list of things you wish you could change that you wrote on page 7. Which one can you start working on today? Pray about it, asking God to help you figure out what you need to do. Think about what steps you need to take in order to make that change happen. Do you need to sign up for a class? Do you need to ask a friend for help or accountability? Do you need a mentor to encourage you to start making this change? Write the steps you need to take below:

Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Congratulations! You have completed the first Crossroads course! We have enjoyed studying with you. We hope and pray that you will continue to study with us. When you return this lesson, we will send you the first lesson from the next course.



Do you want to know more about becoming a Christian? Do you have questions about how to do that? Mark this box and we will send you more information!

WANT TO DO MORE?

Read **John 4**. List the people Jesus talked to in this chapter. What did each person or group of people learn about Jesus through their conversations with Him?

The Samaritan woman: She learned that Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ) whom God promised to send.

The disciples: They learned that God provides what we truly need—the strength and ability to do His will—and that God was already beginning to accomplish what He had promised. They also learned that God valued the Samaritans as part of the “harvest”—they were included in His salvation plan.

The Samaritans in the town: They learned that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

The official from Capernaum: He learned that Jesus has power over life and death.



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