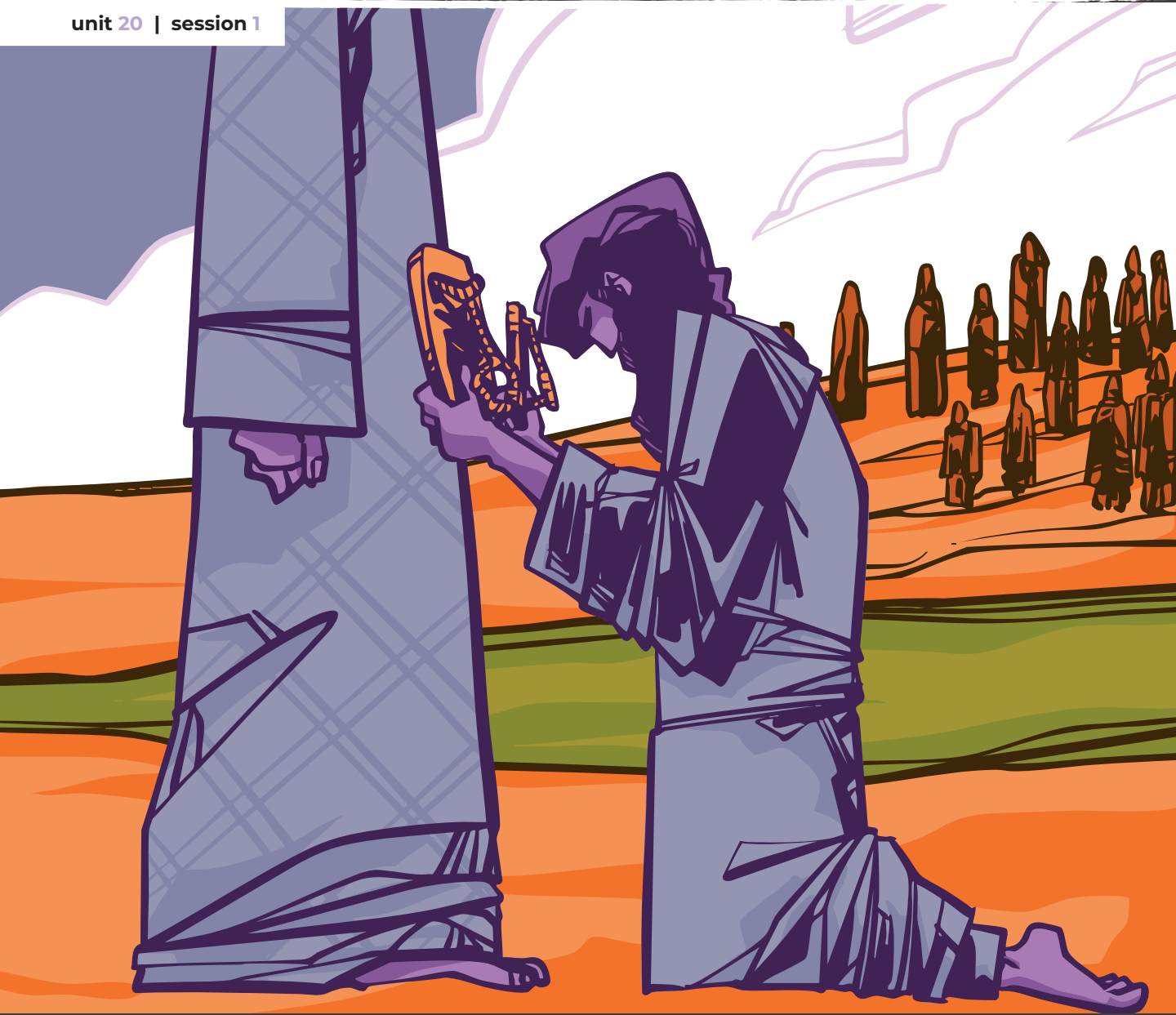


ONE WHO IS MORE POWERFUL

unit 20 | session 1



CHRIST CONNECTION

John the Baptist said he wasn't the groom; he was the friend of the groom. As the friend, it was his responsibility to decrease in status and to elevate Jesus. Jesus is the Groom from above who came to give His life for His bride—those who receive His Word and believe in Him.

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Matthew 3:1-12

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE REPENT

MATTHEW 3:1-6

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" 3 For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight! 4 Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE'RE AUTHENTIC

MATTHEW 3:7-12

7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. 9 And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out."

MAIN POINT.

Our lives must elevate Jesus instead of ourselves.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION




REPENTANCE

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). This is the human response to God's salvation, in other words, how we turn to Him and accept what He's done for us.

DISCUSSION


WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE REPENT

MATTHEW 3:1-6

-  • What was John's first word to the crowds? Would his message attract crowds today? What messages attract people now?
-  • Describe John's lifestyle. Why did he live this way? Should we?
-  • What is the kingdom of heaven? Where is it? How did it "come near" (v. 2)?

WE ELEVATE JESUS WHEN WE'RE AUTHENTIC

MATTHEW 3:7-12

- What is John's attitude toward the religious leaders? Does it surprise you? Explain.
- What does John mean in verse 8? How can our lives contradict that we follow Jesus? Why has this become "normal" for believers?
-  • What does John say won't make people right with God (v. 9)? What kinds of things do people point to today to say they're right with God?



IN WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE HAVE YOU LET IT BECOME NORMAL TO LIVE LIKE THE WORLD? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE SO THAT YOU LIVE AS A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN?

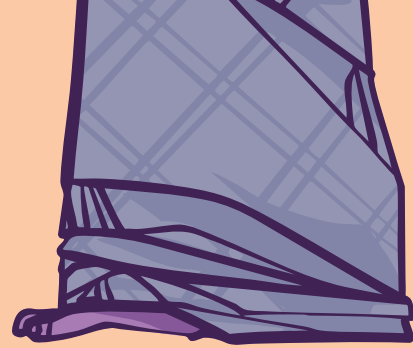
CULTURAL CONNECTION

Do any of us strive to be fake? Do any of us want people to look at us and see a hypocrite, an impostor? Probably not. We want people to see who we really are—to be known. At the same time, we fear being known because people will see the worst parts of us—qualities and insecurities we so desperately try to hide. Want a little hope? Actually, a lot of hope? God knows you (Ps. 139:1). He knows every single part. He has always known you—your failures, your sin, your fears, your questions, your worries, your insecurities, your shame. He doesn't want you to pretend or to hide any of it from Him. God calls you to bring what He already knows and lay it all down in exchange for abundant, authentic life. How? Confess and repent of your sin, throw off all the things that hinder you (Heb. 12:1), be transparent with the Lord, and walk in the joy of being known by Him.



DAY ONE

LUKE 3:4-14



Today's passage begins with a quote from Isaiah 40, foretelling John the Baptist's ministry hundreds of years earlier. John the Baptist clearly understood his role to "prepare the way for the Lord" (v. 4), meaning he was called by God to tell others about Jesus coming to earth and how they needed to prepare their hearts to follow Him. How would they prepare their hearts to follow Jesus? By repentance. Repentance is the act of turning from sin, turning to God, and seeking Him wholeheartedly. As John the Baptist spoke to the people coming to be baptized, he explained that salvation and repentance are an individual's decision. Every single person must personally surrender his or her life to Jesus and turn from sin in order to be saved.

Repentance absolutely happens in that moment where we surrender our lives to Jesus and receive God's gift of salvation; that is a one-time decision. Repentance, though, does not stop there! John told the crowd to "produce fruit consistent with repentance" (v. 8). In other words, he urged them to live in such a way that their actions proved their faith to be real—repenting from sin, obeying God, and living for Him day after day. Those who do not produce good fruit of a real faith will be cut down and burned (John 15:2-6). May we be like the crowds of people, the tax collectors, and the soldiers who asked what they should do in response to this call to repentance (vv. 10-14). And may we also be people who follow the command to obey God and care deeply for others.

- **WHERE IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU NEED TO REPENT? WRITE OUT A PRAYER TO GOD, CONFESSING SPECIFIC SINS YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH, ASKING GOD FOR FORGIVENESS, AND TURNING BACK TO HIM WITH YOUR HEART AND MIND.**
- **HOW CAN YOU ALLOW GOD TO PRODUCE GOOD FRUIT THIS WEEK THROUGH SERVING OTHERS AND POINTING THEM TO JESUS?**

PRAY

GOD, I WANT THE ACTIONS OF MY LIFE TO BE CONSISTENT WITH THE FAITH I CLAIM. HELP ME TO LIVE OUT THE DAILY PRACTICE OF REPENTANCE, WHERE I KEEP TURNING FROM MY SIN AND KEEP TURNING BACK TO YOU.



DAY TWO

GALATIANS 5:22-25

If you think about it, our lives are a lot like clay. We are all being shaped by someone or something. The question is: Who or what is shaping you? If you are consistently choosing to walk in sin, then the ways of the world are shaping your life. If you are consistently choosing to repent of sin and turn to God, then you're allowing God to shape you and produce good fruit in you! Producing fruit consistent with repentance leads to a life of true freedom and godly living. This true freedom invites us to follow the example of Jesus and serve others through love; it calls us away from sin and works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). When we are in Christ, sin does not have the final say in our lives; by God's power, we can run from sin and run to Him. This is very good news!

Godly living is about loving God and obeying Him. Today's passage explores the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that "fruit" is singular, not plural. Yes, we read a whole list of things that we want to show up in our lives, but they all make up one fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is the evidence, or result, of God's work in our lives, and the proof of it is whether or not love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control show up in our lives. Verse 25 explains what we can do for this fruit to grow in our lives: "Keep in step with the Spirit"—step by step, over and over again. Keep walking with the Lord. Keep being transformed. Keep trusting Him to do the work.

- **WHICH FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT STANDS OUT AS SOMETHING THAT YOU NEED TO GROW IN? ASK GOD TO HELP YOU CHANGE.**
- **WHAT IS SHAPING YOU: GOD OR THE WORLD? WHAT HABITS CAN YOU PUT IN PLACE THIS WEEK TO HELP ENSURE YOU'RE BEING SHAPED BY GOD INSTEAD OF BY THE WORLD?**

PRAY

GOD, ONLY BY YOUR POWER AND PRESENCE IN MY LIFE CAN I LIVE FOR YOU INSTEAD OF FOR THE WORLD. HELP ME TO KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT AND LET YOU BE THE ONE WHO SHAPES ME.



DAY THREE

PROVERBS 28:13

Have you ever done less actual cleaning of your room and more shoving your things into the closet (or under your bed or into any spot where you can find space)? Your room might appear cleaner, but the mess is still very much there. Whether or not you can relate to ever fake cleaning your room, we all do something similar with our sins. Instead of confessing our sin, we can sometimes turn to hiding our sins or pretending like they don't exist. (Humanity has done this from the very beginning, starting with Adam and Eve in Genesis.) Do we ever successfully hide our sins from God? Nope! He sees and knows everything about us, and He wants more for us than frantically hiding our sin. God invites us into a better way—out of hiding our sins from Him and into confessing our sins to Him.

Covering up or hiding sin might feel like the comfortable or safe thing to do in the moment to avoid feelings like guilt, fear, and embarrassment, but this verse reminds us that in the long run, we will never prosper from it. It may feel good at first to cover up our sins, but when we do that, we miss out on God's forgiveness and true freedom. In fact, according to God's Word, fear, shame, or duty will never lead us to true repentance; only God's goodness and kindness actually compel us to run from our sin and instead run to Him (Rom. 2:4). When we confess and repent of our sins, we find God's rich mercy and total forgiveness. He is patient and faithful to forgive, so let's run to God and repent!

- **WHAT IS HARD FOR YOU ABOUT CONFESSING YOUR SINS TO GOD INSTEAD OF TRYING TO HIDE THEM?**
- **WE ARE SAFEST WHEN WE RUN TO GOD WITH OUR SINS AND CONFESS EVERYTHING. TAKE SOME TIME TO WRITE OUT A PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE, EVEN IF IT FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE.**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR SHOWING ME MERCY AND FOR BEING FAITHFUL TO FORGIVE. HELP ME TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO STOP TRYING TO HIDE MY SINS FROM YOU AND INSTEAD RUN TO YOU IN REPENTANCE SO THAT I CAN FIND TRUE FREEDOM.



DAY FOUR

2 CORINTHIANS 7:10

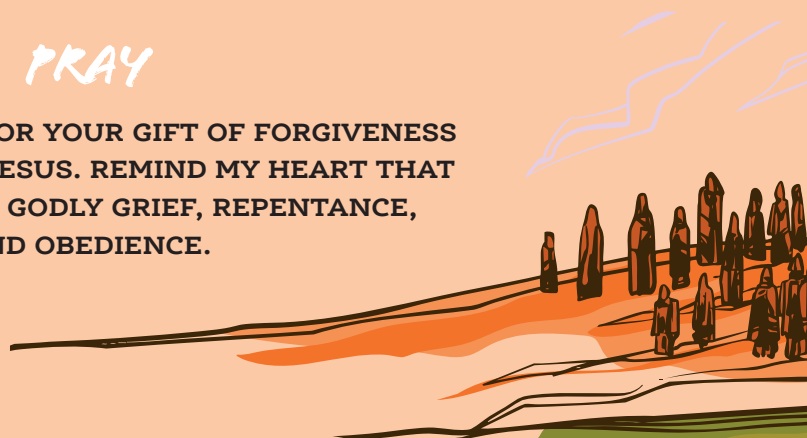
We pick up in the middle of 2 Corinthians 7 today, but in the first eight verses of the chapter, Paul addressed the letter he previously wrote to the believers in Corinth, urging them to return to God. He explained how he rejoiced when he heard that these believers grieved (yes, you read that right). The grief that Paul celebrated in these believers was what he called “godly grief.” Paul introduced the major difference between godly grief and worldly grief. Godly grief leads to repentance. Repentance is true brokenness over sinning against God—our Father, Creator, and Friend—but is not only a feeling of brokenness. True brokenness or godly grief always leads to the action of turning from our sin and returning to God in repentance. Alternatively, worldly grief leads us into a spiral of shame that we were never meant to experience. Grief must be so much more than just something we feel; it must lead to action and obedience.

Worldly grief keeps you feeling stuck in shame. Godly grief wakes you up to the reality that you are set free from the power of sin because of God’s gift of forgiveness. Worldly grief says, “I am a failure or mistake.” Godly grief says, “I have failed or made a mistake, but I am not defined by my sin. I am loved by God, forgiven, and invited to repent.” Worldly grief may lead to despair and distraction, but godly grief leads to dependence and devotion. Paul pointed out “how much diligence” this godly grief has produced in these believers (v. 11). In other words, godly grief leads believers to quickly and sincerely obey God. Great fruit always comes from godly grief, including love for God, anger towards sin, longing for God’s Word, and passion to obey.

- **WHERE DO YOU SEE WORLDLY GRIEF SHOW UP IN YOUR LIFE WHEN IT COMES TO DEALING WITH YOUR OWN SIN?**
- **WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO APPROACH YOUR SIN WITH GODLY GRIEF AND REPENTANCE? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFT OF FORGIVENESS AND FREEDOM IN JESUS. REMIND MY HEART THAT YOU CALL ME TO GODLY GRIEF, REPENTANCE, AND OBEDIENCE.





DAY FIVE

MATTHEW 3:1-3,11

We live in a world of constant winners, gold medals, championship rings, and celebrations for “The Best Whatever.” It can be tempting to live with the mindset that we must constantly compete against others, prove our worth, and be better than everyone else. In a world of people trying to become greater, John understood that the gospel of Jesus invites all believers to live differently and become less. To be clear, when John says in verse 11 that he is “not worthy to remove his sandals,” John is not contradicting the Word of God and saying that his life has no value. Being “less than” and becoming less is hugely different. John knew that he was made by God, loved by God, and chosen by God to come before Jesus to point others to Him. He was even related to Jesus, but he did not let those things lead him to live from a place of pride or false significance. Instead, those things led him to live from a place of humility and worship. John knew he was a messenger of the gospel; he was not the Messiah. John knew he was beloved by God, but not better than or equal to God.

May we adopt the same heart and mindset that John modeled for us—humbling ourselves in order to magnify God alone, making sure God’s work in us is the most important thing about us, and pointing others to Jesus instead of ourselves. This doesn’t mean that we live like we have no value. We have great value! We are made in the image of God and forever loved by Him. But we should let the good news not puff us up in pride but free us up to share His love with everyone we meet.

- **HOW DO YOU RELATE TO THE STRUGGLE TO PROVE YOUR WORTH, BE RECOGNIZED BY OTHERS, OR BE BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE?**
- **HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND BECOME LESS SO THAT EVERYONE AROUND YOU SEES MORE OF JESUS IN YOU?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR LOVING ME AND CREATING ME IN YOUR IMAGE. HELP ME FIND MY WORTH IN YOU ALONE AND FIGHT THE TEMPTATION TO BE IMPORTANT IN THE EYES OF OTHER PEOPLE. I WANT MY LIFE TO MAKE MUCH OF YOU AND ONLY YOU.