

Jesus' Crucifixion

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 27:11-66

MAIN POINT: Jesus was crucified on the cross.

KEY PASSAGE: Ephesians 2:8-9

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus die on the cross? Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and came back to life to show we are forgiven.

INTRODUCE THE STORY

(10–15 MINUTES)

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection are the center of the gospel. Jesus accomplished the plan God had been working out throughout the Old Testament to bring salvation to sinners, and it happened in such an unlikely way.

In the Book of Acts, Peter testified to the Israelites about Jesus' death: "Though He was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail Him to a cross and kill Him" (Acts 2:23). Crucifixion was a horrific way to die. As you teach kids, rather than focus on the graphic details of how Jesus died, emphasize why He died. Two primary reasons stand out:

God is loving, and God is just.

First, God is loving. He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world because He loves us. (See John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10.) Jesus submitted to the Father's will; He humbled Himself and came to earth as a man, and He laid down His life because He loves us. (Eph. 5:2)

Jesus lived the perfect life we failed to live and died the guilty death we don't want to die. Those who trust in Him receive forgiveness and eternal life.

Second, God is just. God's law for the people was plain. (See Deuteronomy 6:5.) But God's people, and all people, broke the law. We have loved other things more than we love God. That is sin. So why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn't He just say, "You are forgiven"? Because God is just, He requires due payment for sin. To simply forgive sin without requiring a payment would be unjust.

Jesus was our substitute, taking our place on the cross and absorbing God's wrath on our behalf so we can be forgiven and declared righteous. (See Rom. 3:25-26; Col. 2:13-15.) Jesus died to release sinners from slavery to sin, and when we trust in Him, we are free indeed.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Act it out:** Select two volunteers. Identify one as Barabbas and the other as Jesus. When telling the story, stand behind or next to the volunteers. Move between the two and point to them when referring to Jesus or Barabbas.
- **Use props:** As you tell the story, one adult helper should dress another leader to portray Jesus with a crown of thorns, purple robe, and sign that says “KING OF THE JEWS” as you describe these story details.

Jesus’ Crucifixion

Matthew 27:11-66

Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor. Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Yes, that’s right.” Then the religious leaders made accusations against Jesus, but Jesus did not say anything. Pilate was surprised that Jesus was silent.

Every year at Passover, the governor would free a prisoner—whichever prisoner the people chose. At that time, there was a prisoner named Barabbas (buh RAB uhs) who was very bad. So Pilate asked the crowd, “Who do you want me to set free? Barabbas or Jesus, who is called the Messiah?”

The crowd answered, “Barabbas!”

Pilate asked, “Then what should I do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah?”

The crowd answered, “Crucify Him!”

Pilate asked, “Why? What has He done wrong?”

But the crowd kept shouting, “Crucify Him!”

Pilate’s soldiers took Jesus to the governor’s palace and gathered around Him. They took off His clothes and put a scarlet robe on Him. They made a crown of thorns and put it on His head. Then they hit Jesus and mocked Him. “Hail, King of the Jews!” they said.

The soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross. Then they cast lots to decide who would get His clothes. **They put a sign above His head that said: THIS IS JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Two criminals were crucified next to Him.**

As Jesus was on the cross, people mocked Him. “He saved others, but He cannot save Himself!” they said.

From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness covered the land. Then Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Jesus shouted again with a loud voice, “It is finished!” Then Jesus died.

Suddenly, the curtain in the temple sanctuary split in two, from top to bottom, and there was an earthquake. One of the men near the cross said, “This man really was God’s Son!”

Jesus was buried in a rich man’s tomb cut into a rock. A stone was sealed in front of the tomb and Roman soldiers stood guard so that no one could steal Jesus’ body.

Christ Connection: We deserve to die because of our sin, but God loves us and kept His promise to send a Savior. Jesus never sinned, but He died in our place. He was the blood sacrifice made once and for all for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and those who trust in Him have forgiveness and eternal life.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover how God’s Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Introduce THE STORY

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BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 27:11-66

MAIN POINT: Jesus was crucified on the cross.

KEY PASSAGE: Ephesians 2:8-9

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus die on the cross? Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and came back to life to show we are forgiven.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them to share with you the greatest gift they have ever received.

SAY • We have all received wonderful gifts at some point. Some gifts are large; others are small. Some have a lot of meaning, and others are silly and fun. Today we're going to learn about an incredible gift that God has given us, the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ!

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Mystery Picture" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the "Mystery Picture" color-by-number on the activity page. When complete, the phrase "Crucify Him!" will be revealed.

SAY • Today we are going to hear the story of God's great rescue plan, a plan that involved Jesus' dying on the cross.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Impossible task

Give the kids an impossible task to do, such as picking up a lot of confetti off the floor in thirty seconds or wrapping 10 boxes in wrapping paper in one minute.

SAY • How did you feel when you were unable to complete the task? [*Invite responses.*] Have there ever been other things that were impossible for you to do? Just like it was impossible for you to pick up all that confetti [*or other task*], it's also impossible for us to save ourselves from our sin. Only Jesus Christ can do that! Today we're going to learn that Jesus saved us by dying on the cross for us.



- confetti (optional)
- boxes (optional)
- gift wrap (optional)
- stopwatch (optional)

OPTION 2: Role play

Choose three kids to act out a scene. Two kids will play the part of siblings and one will be the parent. In the skit, the younger sibling breaks the toy of the older one, and the parent must decide what to do.

SAY • Imagine that your younger brother or sister broke your favorite toy. How would you feel? What would you want your parents to do? When we do something wrong we get punished, right? That's how it is with our sin. Sin is when we disobey God, and we deserve to be punished. But instead of punishing us, God sent Jesus to take the punishment for us! It was all part of God's rescue plan that we'll hear about today.

Transition to teach the story

Teach THE STORY

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- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Create a forest scene with trees using construction paper or large sheets of paper. These can be taped to the walls. Arrange various rescue equipment around on the stage: climbing ropes and carabiners, helmets, and a stretcher. You may also display the theme background slide.

Countdown

- countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire

[Leader enters wearing khaki shorts, a bright orange shirt, and a helmet.]

LEADER • Good morning, boys and girls. My name is [*your name*], and it's great to see you all here today. Today is my first day on the wilderness rescue squad. Any time people are lost in the woods, our team gathers our gear and heads out to find them. Can you imagine being lost all alone in the woods? It could be really scary, not to mention dangerous, so our team has to work quickly!

Imagine that you are on our rescue team and we're about to go out to find someone who is lost in the woods. Do you think it would be important for us to have a plan? Absolutely! We have to know where we're going and what supplies we need. Without a plan, we wouldn't be able to work quickly to rescue the person who is lost! That reminds me of the Bible story we'll hear today. Did you know that God also made a rescue plan? He did! We are going to learn that **Jesus was crucified on the cross**, which was part of God's plan to rescue the world from sin!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • That might sound like a strange rescue plan, but as we hear the story I want you to think about our big picture question: *Why did Jesus die on the cross?* After the Bible story, we'll see if we can figure out the answer together.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Jesus had been teaching, preaching, and healing people for about three years. His disciples had been following Him and learning from Him. Throughout their time together, Jesus had told them that He was going to die and come back to life. The disciples didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. One night after the Passover meal, while Jesus was walking in the garden with His disciples, a group of soldiers came and arrested Him! That's where today's story begins.

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

- Bibles
- “Jesus’ Crucifixion” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Matthew 27:11-66. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Jesus’ Crucifixion.”

LEADER • Jesus was crucified on the cross even though

He was innocent! *Innocent* means Jesus never did anything wrong. Even Pilate said Jesus had done nothing wrong! Pilate gave the people a choice between freeing Barabbas—a criminal who had done bad things—or freeing Jesus. The people chose to let Barabbas go and punish Jesus by putting Him on a cross to die.

Was Jesus’ death a surprise to God? [*Invite responses.*] Of course not! It was all part of God’s rescue plan that He had made from the very beginning. God had even told His people what Jesus would suffer to rescue them, and everything that happened to Jesus—even the people making fun of Him—showed that He was the Messiah whom God promised to send.

Does anyone think they know the answer to our big picture question? ***Why did Jesus die on the cross? Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and came back to life to show we are forgiven.***

Christ connection

LEADER • We deserve to die because of our sin, but God loves us and kept His promise to send a Savior. Jesus never sinned, but He died in our place. He was the blood sacrifice made once and for all for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and those who trust in Him have

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

forgiveness and eternal life.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Ephesians 2:8-9. Go around the room pointing to kids randomly to say a word of the key passage until they have said the whole thing. Repeat several times until the kids are more familiar with the passage.

- Key Passage Poster
- “Saved by Grace” song

LEADER • God’s rescue plan to save us by sending Jesus to die for us is a gift. We can’t earn God’s love, and we certainly can’t do anything to make us worthy to be rescued! Our key passage reminds us of this truth. Let’s continue memorizing it this week!

Lead boys and girls in singing “Saved by Grace.”

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever had a substitute teacher at school? A *substitute* is someone who takes the place of another person. Think about that as we check out this video.

- “Unit 26, Session 1” discussion starter video

Show the “Unit 26, Session 1” discussion starter video.

Guide kids to discuss these questions:

- When did Benjamin want to take Candace’s place? What about when Nell asked for help picking up trash?
- In what way was Jesus our substitute? What did He do in our place?

LEADER • Jesus acted as our substitute when He died on the cross. ***Why did Jesus die on the cross? Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and came back to life to show we are forgiven.*** God calls us to tell others the good news about what Jesus has

done. Because of His great love for us, Jesus willingly took our punishment for sin so that we can have forgiveness and eternal life.

Show the “Unit 26, Session 1” discussion starter video.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “This Is the Moment”
song

LEADER • **Jesus was crucified on the cross** to rescue us from our sin. He took the punishment that we deserve, and we can respond with gratitude and thankfulness! Let’s stand and worship our God together now.

Sing together “This Is the Moment.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • God, thank You for Your plan to rescue us from our sin by sending Jesus to die on the cross. Your love for us is such a gift, and we are so thankful to You for all that You have done for us. Help us to live in gratitude to You this week and love You with our whole hearts. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Apply THE STORY

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- paper
- marker
- gift bag

Before class, write a word or phrase of the key passage on separate slips of paper. Place the slips of paper in a gift bag. One at a time, kids will pull out a strip of paper with a portion of the key passage written on it. Invite the kids to work together to put the passage in the correct order.

SAY • God saves us through faith in Jesus. There is nothing that we can do to earn our salvation. The Bible tells us it is a gift from God. Let's work on memorizing our key passage this week!

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Invite kids to open their Bibles to Matthew 27:11-66. Briefly review the points of the story with the class. Divide the room into groups of kids representing various aspects of the story (the trial, Jesus being mocked, Jesus being crucified between two criminals, and Jesus' death). Then retell the story in more detail, inviting the groups to freeze into a scene that represents their assigned portion of the story.

You may also ask the following review questions.

1. Who was the governor whom they brought Jesus to

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

face? (*Pilate, Matthew 27:11-13*)

2. Which prisoner did the people want Pilate to release? (*Barabbas, Matthew 27:20-21*)
3. What did the people shout for Pilate to do to Jesus? (*Crucify Him, Matthew 27:22-23*)
4. What incredible things happened as soon as Jesus died? (*The e was an earthquake, and the temple curtain tore in two from top to bottom. People who had died came out of their tombs and appeared to many in the city; Matthew 27:51-53*)
5. Where was Jesus buried? (*in a tomb cut into a rock with a stone rolled in front of the entrance, Matthew 27:59-60*)

SAY • *Why did Jesus die on the cross? Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and came back to life to show we are forgiven.*

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Jesus took our place

Divide the class into two teams and challenge each team to line up in order of birthday. The team to complete the task first wins. Explain that the losing team will have to serve the winning team a special snack. When it is time to serve snack, however, leaders will step in a serve instead of the losing team.

SAY • The losing team should have been responsible for serving snack today, but someone else took their place. In our story we learned that **Jesus was crucified on the cross**. Even though we deserved to die and be separated from God, Jesus took our place and died instead of us.



- Allergy Alert download
- special snack

- sheet, large sheet of paper, or poster board
- scissors

OPTION 2: Curtain torn in two

Display a sheet, large sheet of paper, or poster board in the front of the classroom. An adult helper will stand behind the sheet so the kids can't see him.

SAY • In the temple, there was a large, thick curtain. Behind that curtain was the ark of the covenant, where God's Presence dwelt above the mercy seat. The curtain separated people from God because we are sinful and we can't stand in front of the holy God! When **Jesus was crucified on the cross**, something strange happened. The curtain separating us from God was torn in two from top to bottom!

Guide another leader or student to cut the sheet from top to bottom, and let it fall away so the kids can see the leader behind it.

SAY • Jesus' death makes it possible for us to be near to God. We aren't separated from Him by a curtain or anything else! We can come to Him freely because our sin is forgiven when we trust Jesus!

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.