

Sin Series Discussion Guides

February - April 2021

Week 1 – Sin Overview

Church of the City New York
2021
•
•
•

Sin series



Sin

Teaching Text

Ephesians 2:1-3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Recap

This week Pastor Suzy introduced a new series on the topic of sin: how it grabs hold of us personally, and how it embeds itself into the fabric of our society. Sin is something we are constantly surrounded by, but it is often overlooked or misidentified. Identifying sin is the first step in understanding the gravity of Jesus's sacrifice.

Sin is turning away from God, and turning toward ourselves for fulfillment. In the Genesis creation story, people lived in harmony with God, creation, and one another. The moment we started taking things for ourselves and rejecting God's plan, we disrupted that harmony. Pastor Suzy described it as if we had walked into the MET and destroyed all the artwork. The artists would be right to be angry.

Sin destroys four of our most important relationships: with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the world at large. Rejecting God's plan for our lives and turning to our own separates us from the source of all life, and cuts us off from the One whose image we're supposed to bear. Sin brings us shame as we turn inward. It numbs our conscience as we try to handle that shame, and we become less and less human. Sin also alienates us from others. By putting ourselves and our own needs first, we put all others second. Finally, in God's plan for the world, we were meant to have authority over the earth. But by our sin, we have conceded that authority to Satan and made him, as Paul describes, the "prince" of our world.

Sin is multi-dimensional in its nature and consequences. Sin creates ripples through our world that can echo through society and time. Pastor Suzy gave the Holocaust and slavery as examples of collective sins that will still have a traumatic impact on future generations. Sin is so ingrained in our desires, beliefs, and attitudes, that it has become second nature to us. Through sin we have become children of wrath, and sons of disobedience.

Because of our inability to turn back toward God on our own, Jesus needed to suffer the cross for our sins. By doing so, He took on Himself all the pain we have inflicted on others through sin, and took on Himself all the pain others have inflicted on us through sin. Through His brutal death, we can be healed.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

1. If you could choose an age to remain forever, which age would you choose and why?

Check In

Have you had any new thoughts or revelations during this first week of Lent? What are you grappling with as we begin our 40 days of reflection and repentance?

Contemplate

Choose one or both of the following passages to dig into with your group:

- Ephesians 2:1-3 (teaching text)
- Isaiah 53

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read the passage aloud. Allow your group to sit with the verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. Which words or phrases stand out to you?
2. What is highlighted about Jesus?
3. What does this Scripture teach us about the weight of our sin?

Consider

1. Sin is a big deal because it destroys our four core relationships: 1) with God; 2) with self; 3) with others; and 4) with the world. Choose one of these relationships and consider how you've seen sin take root there and cause destruction. What are some specific examples, from either your own life or society in general?

2. Sin is multidimensional in nature, and it also has multi-dimensional consequences, not only for those who sin but also for those who bear the trauma of someone else's sin. What are some examples of generational or institutional sin you see today? Why is "inherited" sin such a big deal?

Create

Pastor Suzy presented two exercises we can try out this week to confront sin. Choose one or both of the following to do together as a group:

1. Sin Observation & Mapping: This week, pay attention to where you see people or yourself sinning, and how it compounds and multiplies. Where is sin being ignored? Where is it being celebrated? In which specific spaces do you see sin playing out? Consider our teaching text (Ephesians 2:1-3).

2. Sin Diagnostic & Confession: This week, pray Psalm 139:23-24 three times a day and ask God to reveal your own sin. How do you need to repent? What are your ingrained sin patterns? Do you need to ask someone for forgiveness? Where have you become addicted or enslaved?

Cover

Together, confess to God some of the specific sins brought up during discussion. Ask God to help us confront sin head-on and grow in confession and repentance. Ask Him to bring to light any sins we might not be aware of. Thank Jesus for physically bearing our sins and praise Him that by His wounds we are healed.

CHURCH OF THE CITY^{NY}

Week 2 – Rebellion

Church of the city
2021
⋮
⋮
⋮

Sin series
Rebellion

Rebellion

Teaching Text

Genesis 3:1-24

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock

and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel."

To the woman he said,

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;

with painful labor you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you."

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat food from it

all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow

*you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”*

Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Recap

This week Pastor Jon continued our series on sin, specifically identifying sin as rebellion against God. Sin is believing that we are at the center of the universe and that our own self is sovereign. In our modern context, there has been a revision and reduction of the destructive nature of sin, leading us to an improper diagnosis of what really plagues us.

We can look to Genesis 3 to learn how Satan first lied to Adam and Eve about God, and see that these lies still haunt us today. First, lies about sin attack the character of God and makes us question His care and goodness. Just as the serpent asked, "Did God really say...?", this same question still reverberates in our own minds today. The enemy always exaggerates the morality of God and minimizes the relational pull of God. Second, we believe lies about autonomy and flourishing. We desire the freedom to live however we want, but after the relief and joy of throwing off all restraint subsides, we are left with disillusionment, heartache, and death. Third, we have believed lies about the destructive consequences of sin, echoing the serpent's claim that Adam and Eve would "not certainly die" by disobeying.

Sin manifests in many ways, but it is always vertical in its orientation. It is before God first and foremost that we have sinned. When we experience shame resulting from our affronts to God, we try to cover ourselves up with "modern fig leaves," such as hiding or even image management. The fruit of this is separation from God. We need divine mercy in light of our rebellion. Just as God pursues, covers, and promises full restoration to Adam and Eve after their rebellion, He does the same for us. Our story began with Adam, a garden, and a tree, and is completely redeemed through Jesus, a different garden, and a different tree (the cross). Christ alone is our full salvation, and because of Him, we can be more than conquerors over our sin.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

1. If you had one acre to tend to as a garden, what would you plant? Everything you touch would grow, regardless of climate, and any animals you desire would come to roost/nest within it. What does your personal Garden of Eden look like?

Check In

It has been nearly a year since the pandemic and lockdown began here in the United States. How has your concept of normalcy changed? What positive changes in your life, no matter how small, have come out of this dramatic upheaval?

Contemplate

This week's sermon focused on a single, longer passage from Genesis 3:1-24. Ask someone (or multiple people) to read the passage aloud. Allow your group to sit with the verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What do we learn about the tactics of the enemy from the language he used to tempt Eve into sin?

2. Even after Adam and Eve disobeyed and hid from Him, God pursues them, clothes them, and promises to redeem them. Where is God calling out to meet you in the place of fellowship in your life? How has God covered your shame?

Consider

1. What does it mean to make ourselves "the reference point of the universe"? How do you see people do this (either yourself or society in general)?

2. As mentioned in the sermon, St. Augustine said, "Wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to [God], it is fixed in sorrows, even if it is fixed upon beautiful things." What are some "beautiful things" that turn our gazes from God?

3. When Adam and Eve's eyes were opened to their sin, they immediately sewed fig leaves together and covered their nakedness. What "fig leaves" do you cover yourself with when faced with your sin (or to avoid facing your sin)?

Create

James K.A. Smith says, "After the thrill of independence and experiments in self-actualization ... when the exhaustion starts to set in and then eventually morphs into a kind of self-disgust, you can reach a point where you know you want a different life but are enchained to the one you've made."

Take some time to think of modern narratives that explore this "thrill of independence" but stop short of telling the full story. As a group, brainstorm some possible true endings to these modern myths of independence and self-reliance. Encourage one another with the truth that Jesus tells a better story and is always the better ending.

Cover

Take the last few minutes to collect praises and prayer requests for the group and intercede for each other before the Lord, inviting His presence into your space. Encourage your group to consider how they have rebelled, in both big and small ways, and to confess before God in prayer.

Week 3 – Idolatry

Church of the city
2021
■
■
■

Sin series
Idolatry

Idolatry

Teaching Text

Exodus 32: 1-16

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce

anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'"

Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

Recap

This week, Pastor Olivia continued our Lent sermon series and taught on how idolatry can creep deep into our hearts without us even knowing something has become an idol until we actually sin.

She mentioned how the typical pattern of idolatry can start off as impatience with the Lord. Like the Israelites in Exodus, sometimes we can't wait for what we cannot see and so we create other gods in our hearts to replace our one true God.

Some familiar gods of our culture include: possessions, pleasure, power, people, and patriotism. However, we can also easily fall into the idols of Church and Ministry. Community, denominations, leaders, spiritual gifts, knowledge, music, and calling are all amazing gifts from the Lord, but can become a snare for us if we prioritize them over an encounter with the Lord's presence *through* them. One way to determine our idols is by asking ourselves, "If _____ is gone would I still worship Jesus?".

Our impatience with the Lord can lead us into idolatry, which can in turn guide us incorrectly towards immorality. One helpful acrostic to remember this can be SIN—Symptoms of Idolatry Not Repented Of. In recent church history, we have unfortunately seen church leaders such as Carl Lentz and Ravi Zacharias fall deep into sin. These are powerful reminders for us that we all have idolatry in our hearts even when we believe ourselves to be steadfast in our faith.

In idolizing other gods we break our covenant and become independent of God, opening up ourselves to more and more suffering. While we may have independence, we should take care to remember that idols are never there for us when we are suffering. One way we can keep ourselves from these idols is by keeping ourselves in God's love. When we see someone turning away from God's love for them, let us intercede on their behalf just as Moses interceded for his people in front of God.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

When is a moment where you truly felt as if you were laughing with the Lord? (Maybe over an inside joke, or just a happy circumstance?)

Check In

If you could rate this past week on a scale of 0-10 (0 feeling distant from the Lord, 10 being super close to the Lord) what would you rate it, and why?

Contemplate

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read one or two of the scriptures from this week's sermon aloud.

- Exodus 32: 1-16
- Isaiah 44:18-20
- Psalms 115:4-8
- Judges 10:13-14

Allow your group to sit with the verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images stand out to you from the passage?

2. What comes to mind when you read about how God responds regarding idolatry and worship of false gods?

3. Have you experienced any of the consequences of idolatry in these passages?

Consider

The Israelites gave themselves to idolatry in a time of impatience, when it seemed like the Lord was too far off or too slow to answer.

1. What area of your life right now do you feel the temptation of impatience? Where does it seem like God has been slow to answer where you feel tempted to move forward without Him?

In Pastor Olivia's sermon, she points out that idolatry leads to immorality, which leads to independence from God...but blessed are we, who have an intercessor! As Moses did for the Israelites in the desert, so Jesus did for our souls today.

2. As we become more reflective of our sin patterns through this sermon series, have there been time periods in your life where you've sat in immorality, and independence from God as a result of idolatry? Can you trace any of those states of being back to the original idol that became the root of that immorality/independence from God?

Pastor Olivia also touched on idols that are inside of Christianity such as: community, denomination, leaders, spiritual gifts, knowledge, music, and calling.

3. Have you ever thought/considered these as types of idols? Which of these, if any, do you struggle with the most and why do you think that is?

Create

Take some time to worship (with a song that the whole group can listen to) and ask the Lord to put on their hearts any idols of theirs that have not yet been revealed to them. After a few minutes, if people feel led to share their thoughts/ revelations, do so and allow for an open discussion, a few moments to repent if desired by anyone.

Cover

Break out into smaller groups of 2-3 people. If comfortable, pray over each other's confessed idols and assign one person for each person in the group, to pray and intercede for their idol until the next time you meet. Anyone who desires to be prayed for can feel covered this coming week and know that they are being interceded for in the name of the Lord!

Week 4 – Adultery

Church of the city
2021



Sin series
Adultery

Adultery

Teaching Text

Hosea 6:4-10

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth— then my judgments go forth like the sun. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. As at Adam, they have broken the covenant; they were unfaithful to me there. Gilead is a city of evildoers, stained with footprints of blood. As marauders lie in ambush for a victim, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, carrying out their wicked schemes. I have seen a horrible thing in Israel: There Ephraim is given to prostitution, Israel is defiled.

Recap

This week, Pastor Ashley continued our Lent sermon series on sin, specifically focusing on sin as adultery. Adultery is not just breaking a law, but breaching a relationship. It is having multiple lovers living under the same roof. Just like Gomer, the prostitute who married the prophet Hosea and left him for other lovers, we violate our covenant with God and break His heart when we turn to other loves. The Bible is filled with stories of God's pain as His people, the Israelites, break His covenant time and time again.

There is a pattern that runs through Scripture and is helpful in understanding God's response to our unfaithfulness: Covenant, Adultery, and Restoration. Covenant is a chosen, binding relationship between people with a shared goal. Just like marriage, God makes a covenant with His people and welds Himself to them, becoming one with them. We are meant to keep our covenant with God because it provides a clear image of Him to the world. Adultery is heartbreaking because it breaks that image. When we sin, it's a big deal because we are a

big deal to God. He will not stand to see us give away even a little part of our hearts to other idols.

Israel sinned in specific ways that we can also examine to see how these sins take root in our own lives. First, Israel didn't trust God. They didn't rest in a deep and abiding *shalom*. They failed to trust that God would fulfill their calling and be with them as He shaped them into a people and nation. Second, Israel didn't share in God's purpose. They were callous to the needs of their brothers and sisters, making sacrifices to God on the altar but then clenching their fists around their own gifts and resources, neglecting to love their neighbor. Lastly, Israel forgot God's faithfulness. They lived without the hope and belief that God would fulfill His promises. Despite their sinning, Israel is invited into repentance. Through the life of Jesus, who paid the ultimate price to buy us back from adultery, God paves a path of restoration and calls us to come back home to Him.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

1. If you were a talk show host and could choose your first three guests, who would they be and why?

Check In

What is one thing you can't get off your mind this week?

Contemplate

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read one or two of the scriptures from this week's sermon:

- Hosea 6:4-10
- Deuteronomy 7:9
- Jeremiah 31:3
- Isaiah 54:10

Allow your group to sit with these verses for a bit. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images stand out to you from the passage?
2. What do these verses tell us about God's character? About His position toward us?

Consider

1. Often, adultery is only associated with infidelity in marriage. Pastor Ashley expanded the definition to include anything that causes a relational fracture with God. What are some examples of adultery from our own lives?
2. Sin can look like misplaced trust. In times of trouble, who is the trusted voice you most need to hear? When you face rejection or loss, who or what do you trust to heal you?
3. Sin can be defined as "meeting a legitimate need in an illegitimate way." What are some examples of legitimate needs and examples of the different ways we try to meet them?

Create

Take a moment for silent reflection and ask your group to consider where they have forgotten God's faithfulness. Encourage them to consider how they do this in both big and small ways. Open the floor for confession if anyone feels led to share, and remind each other of the truth that God is always faithful and loves us with an everlasting love.

Cover

Play worship music and spend time worshiping and adoring God together, praising Him and asking for grace to return to our first Love. End your group time with prayer requests and popcorn pray for each other.

Week 5 – Lawlessness

Church of the city
2021
■
■
■

Sin series
Adultery

Lawlessness

Teaching Text

1 John 3:1-10

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon preached about the apostle John's appeal to those who are attempting to walk away from their faith (1 John 3:1-10). John writes about his personal intimacy with God and the danger, deception, and destruction of lawlessness. Lawlessness is from the Greek word "anomia" which means an utter disregard for God and His laws. When we accept the Holy Spirit in our hearts and come to know Jesus, we go through

regeneration, where our dead spirits are made alive in God. But this does not mean we can simply continue living for ourselves and in sin. Instead, we must resist and run from our selfish culture and rampant sin. This resistance of sin must be rooted in the reality of the beauty of our salvation. If we don't think salvation is that good, we won't fight against sin.

No one who claims to be a child of God will run toward lawlessness and gratify the desires of the flesh. (To be clear, the apostle John is not referring to Christians who are deeply aware of their sin, hate it, and are actively pleading with God to eliminate it while making clear steps to avoid it. Instead, he is referring to people who simply do not care that they are sinning and live entirely for themselves.) This war for our obedience can lead us to be apostles of love, with greater intimacy with God, and a heart for hope-based holiness, or it can lead us to lawless rebellion, religion (Matthew 23:27), deception, and destruction. May we be transformed into apostles of love by fleeing from lawlessness and clinging to hope-based holiness.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

1. What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Check In

Are there any areas of your life where you've seen restoration and healing over the past few weeks, diving into this series on sin?

Contemplate

Choose a couple of the passages below to read and study with your group:

- 1 John 3: 1-10 (teaching text)
- Matthew 23:27-28
- Matthew 7:21-23 '
- Matthew 24:10-13
- 2 Timothy 3:1-5
- 1 Corinthians 5:14-15
- Titus 2:11-15

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read the passage aloud. Allow your group to sit with the verses. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. Which words or phrases stand out to you?
2. What is highlighted about God's heart for us versus the world's expectation?
3. What does the scripture teach us about the danger of lawlessness?

Consider

1. Pastor Jon shared a quote by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, "Sin is an unwillingness to trust that what God wants is our deepest happiness." Because of this, we often turn to a self-centeredness which drives lawlessness. This is one tactic of Satan to distract from God's glory and tempt us with lies. Take a minute to think about your own life. Are there any areas of your life where you don't trust God or trust that He cares deeply for you? How does believing that lie take Jesus out of the center of your life?

2. Through the apostle John's message to the churches in Asia Minor, we are able to remind our hearts of the beauty of our salvation. How does regeneration (being born of God) and our adoption into God's family through Jesus give us a hope-based holiness?

3. Consider the religious lawlessness Pastor Jon mentions in his sermon. In Matthew 23:27-28 and Matthew 7:21-23, we see Jesus condemn this practice of making religion and spirituality whatever we want for our own gain. Have you ever experienced this within the church or society in general?

Create

Play a worship song and take a few moments to sit and reflect on the beauty of salvation. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of self-centeredness or lawlessness that might not yet be revealed to you. If people feel led to share, do so and spend time in a posture of repentance.

Cover

Together, celebrate our hope-based holiness through the person of Jesus. Thank God for adopting us, giving us a new identity as children of God, and making us new creations in Him. Spend time praising Him as a group!

CHURCH OF THE CITY^{NY}

Week 6 – Falling Short

Church of the city
2021

Sin series

Falling Short

Teaching Text

Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Recap

This Sunday, as we enter into Holy Week, Pastor Suzy preached on sin as falling short of God's perfection by reflecting on Jesus's suffering in the garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. While many of us may want to skip from Palm Sunday straight to the victory of Easter, Holy Week is an invitation for us to look at our sin, recognize everything it cost Jesus to forgive and redeem us, and enter into his suffering with him.

Every single one of us has fallen short of the glory of God. As we move through Holy Week, we see how Jesus was tempted and tested in various ways to sin, and how he did not give in. In examining his perfection, we are given the chance to put ourselves into the narrative and ask ourselves how we have fallen short. We are reminded that because Jesus was perfect and never gave in to sin, he was able to offer himself as a sacrifice for us and to fulfill the mission God gave him--to seek and save the lost.

We are also prompted to ask ourselves, "What would it take for us to become the kinds of people who suffer with Jesus?" In the garden at Gethsemane, Jesus cried out to God in pain, asking of his disciples only that they "stay awake" and "keep watch" with him--and yet they failed to do this, as we so often do in our own lives. It is costly and difficult to walk toward the pain and suffering of others and to mourn with those who mourn, but this is what it means to be like Jesus.

The world is in desperate need right now. To those of us who are mourning and suffering: we can go and be with Jesus. As we see from Gethsemane, he knows our pain and suffered like we suffer. To those of us who are being called to mourn alongside those who mourn: may we remember that as we do so, we are not only being the hands and feet of Jesus to others but also ministering to Jesus himself. Let us learn to stay awake and keep watch as He weeps.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

What's the greatest celebration you've ever been a part of?

Check In

What's something that's been weighing on your heart this past week?

Contemplate

This week's sermon touched on Matthew 25:34-40, in which God separates the sheep from the goats, based on how they treated those around them in their suffering.

1. What does this say about the relationship between people and God?
2. We find out in this story that neither the righteous nor the unrighteous realized they were encountering God in those moments of need. What does that say about how we should live our lives?
3. What does it mean to sit with someone in their suffering?

Consider

1. Would you have stayed awake with Jesus in the garden?
2. How do you typically react to a friend who is in pain? What about a stranger?
3. What does it mean to "actively do the opposite of of sin" or to engage in costly discipleship?

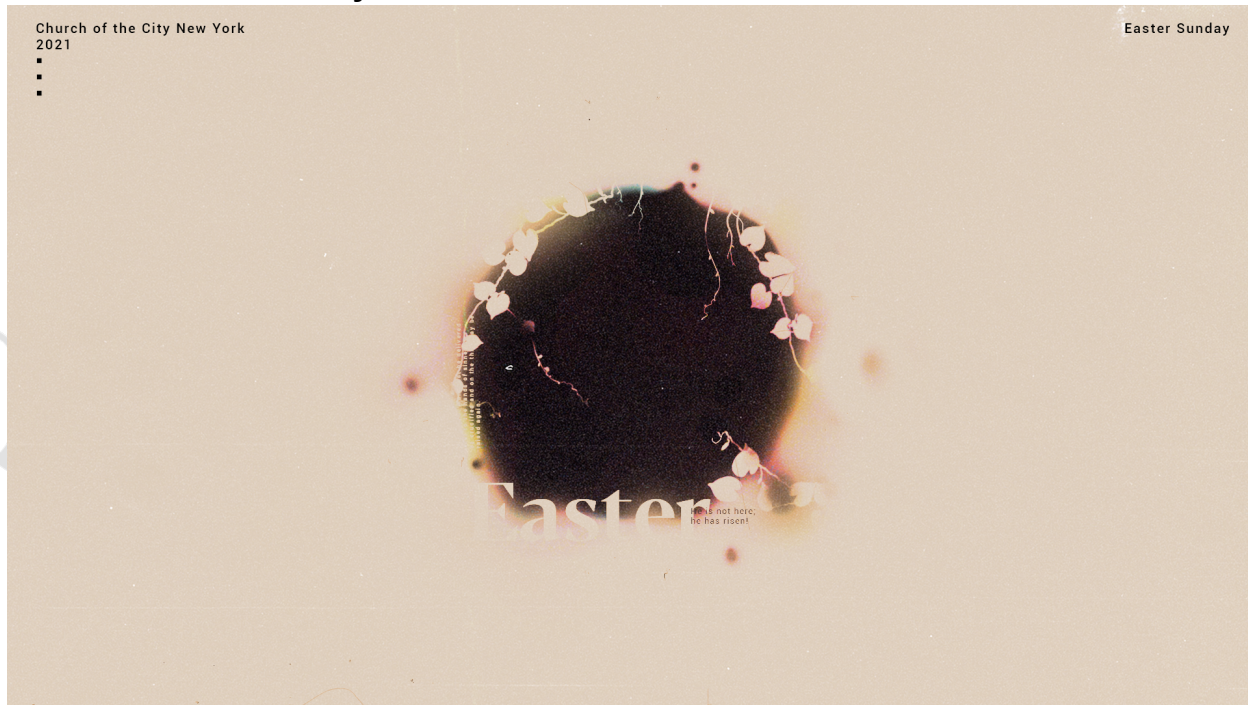
Create

Take a moment to turn off all electronic media and contemplate the things that people around you have lost in this season. Also think about the things that you have lost. Can you stay awake in the garden with those people this week? Can you draw near to Jesus with your own needs? What does that look like? A gift? A phone call? A letter? An invitation to Alpha or the Easter service? If you feel moved to an action, ask the others in your group to help you carry it out this week.

Cover

In your prayer groups, thank God for the great sacrifice of Jesus. Pray for ways to draw near and support each other, just as he has done for us. And ask for the ability to see the needs around us so that we might actively oppose sin in the world.

Week 7 – Easter Sunday



Media Recap

As we celebrated Easter this past Sunday, Pastor Jon walked us through the three stages of the Easter story: Ruin, Resurrection, and Restoration. Mary Magdalene was the first person to witness the miracle of the empty tomb, and she was one of the most unlikely disciples in her 1st century Jewish context to be entrusted with this good news. Freed from seven demons, Mary was swept up in Jesus's ministry, and followed Him with love and loyalty even after His death.

Easter begins with ruin, as we see in John 20 when Mary Magdalene weeps over Jesus's lost body. Mary is unaware that she's about to encounter a *eucatastrophe*, or a radical, unexpected inbreaking of goodness. Jesus asks Mary who she is looking for and calls her name, causing Mary to stare resurrection in the face. Jesus's resurrection was not the end of Mary's story, but rather her beginning. Similarly, in our own time, sin, death, COVID-19, injustice, violence, and despair do not have the final word--the empty tomb does. Just as Adam sinned in the first garden and brought death into the world, Jesus (a second, better Adam) came looking for Mary in a different garden, bringing life into the world through His resurrected body. Finally, Jesus brought restoration for not only Mary, but for the world to come. When Jesus speaks our name, He tells us who we really are, reminds us of the relationship we were designed for, and brings us into the calling on our lives--to join Him in restoring the world. Through the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), we can reclaim our original selves and share the good news with the world.

The world is in desperate need right now. To those of us who are mourning and suffering: we can go and be with Jesus. As we see from Gethsemane, He knows our pain and suffered

like we suffer. To those of us who are being called to mourn alongside those who mourn: may we remember that as we do so, we are not only being the hands and feet of Jesus to others but also ministering to Jesus Himself. Let us learn to stay awake and keep watch as He weeps.

Spiritual Practices

This season our Community Groups are anchoring in Spiritual Practices and the Presence of God. If you didn't do this last week, take some time in your Group to discuss this focus and introduce some of the new rhythms that you will press into as a community. If you did already introduce these practices, use this time to share a testimony.

Testimony: Each week someone will be sharing a 5 minute testimony with the Group, starting with the Leaders. This could be a 2021 testimony, a defining relationship, or story about a significant discipleship moment in their lives. Take some time to frame what this will look like (Ex: Is everyone sharing? Will you select someone each week? What kinds of stories will you ask people to share?).

Communion: Establish a rhythm of communion with your Group. Explain how often you will do it. (Weekly? Every other week? Once a month? This is up to you) Explain what they should have on hand (it doesn't have to be bread and wine, they can substitute with juice, water, tea etc or crackers, chips, etc).

Text: Let your Group know that there is a Lent reading plan for our church that you'd encourage them to join. Let them know how you'll track along together (GroupMe or WhatsApp thread to discuss learnings?) and that you'll spend more time in Group unpacking the Teaching Text during that series.

Presence of God: This season we will spend time waiting on, listening to, and blessing the presence of God. This could come up during prayer or at any point in the night when we just sense we want to pause and get a feel for what God is doing in our time.

Discussion Guide

Connect

What is your favorite "secret" spot in New York?

Check In

Did anyone go to the Easter service on Sunday? How did this Easter compare to last year's Easter?

Contemplate

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read John 20:1-16 aloud to your group:

Allow your group to sit with the verses. Then, dig into the passage with at least one of the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stand out to you from this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about Jesus?
3. Where is the *eucatastrophe* moment in this story?

Consider

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to reveal His resurrected self to Mary Magdalene first?
2. Mary's life truly begins when Jesus calls her directly by her name, giving her His full attention. When do you feel like God is giving you His full attention? How do you know that God wants a personal relationship with you?
3. Have you ever had a *eucatastrophe* moment? A time when something unexpected and radically good came from God?

Create

Continue reading the rest of John 20, specifically verses 24-29. Create a list comparing and contrasting Thomas's response to Jesus's resurrected self with Mary Magdalene's response. Then, create a list comparing and contrasting Jesus's response to both Mary and Thomas. *What's similar? What's different, and why do you think it's different?*

Cover

Even though Easter is over, pray that God keeps the story of His resurrection and our restoration at the forefront of our minds. Ask God to reveal new ways we can share the gospel this week. Pray over any other prayer requests your group members have.