

THE4POINTS COURSE

MESSAGE IN PRISONS
LESSON PLANS

SELF STUDY GUIDE





Session 1

GOD LOVES ME

Welcome to the4points study guide. Throughout this guide, we will be learning and unpacking some of the basics of the Christian faith. Our hope is that by journeying through these pages, you'll gain a greater understanding not only of what Christians believe, but why too.

With these sessions, you'll get out what you put in so please make notes, record your thoughts in the spaces provided, and take time to reflect on what you've read and heard.

The four points are:

1. God loves me
2. I have made mistakes
3. Jesus died and rose again
4. I have a choice to make

Throughout this session we will be unpacking this statement and figuring out what that really means for each of us personally. Grab yourself a pen and let's get started.

Before we can begin to understand the statement, 'God loves me', let's first think about who God actually is. Use the space below to write down your thoughts.

Who is God? Who do you understand God to be?

What does the Bible say about who God is? Read the following Bible passages and write down what you think they are saying about the character of God.

Genesis 1:1-3 (including the entirety of Genesis 1)

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light.'

Psalm 47:7-8

'For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.'

Ephesians 4:6

'...One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all'

In these passages, we read about God as the creator of all things, the King over the earth, and as our Father. We see that God is far greater than we can ever comprehend, and yet he is close to us and watches over each of us. Many people struggle with the idea of God as a father, largely because of their own experiences of earthly fathers, but in the Bible we read that God is the perfect, heavenly Father who loves us completely and knows what's best for us. He is the Father who will never let us down.

Now we know a little more about the biblical descriptions of who God is, we need to start thinking about what his love really looks like. There are many different types of love, and it can be understood in many different ways.

In your own words write an answer to this question: What is love?

Write down some examples of love in your life: What are some things/people that you love? What type of love is that?

We all have different experiences of love and it can be a very subjective thing that changes from person to person, but God's love isn't like that. God's love is a constant – his love never changes.

So, what makes God's love different?

Remember that the Bible has been translated to English from much older languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) and this is really important when we're thinking about the way that love is spoken about in it. In the same way that we would use the word 'love' to mean very different things, for example 'I love my wife' should mean something very different to 'I love pizza' – when the Bible uses the word 'love' it can mean something very different depending on the context.

There are four different types of love that are talked about in the Bible.

Below are the Greek words for them and what they would've been talking about:

- Eros:** Romantic or sensual love
- Philia:** 'Brotherly' love seen in friendships; love that unites community
- Storge:** Familial love
- Agape:** God's love for humankind

The first three types of love listed here are loves that we, as humans, can experience for those around us and can also be reciprocated. As much as we may not want to admit it, these loves can be flawed – we're only human and therefore we aren't capable of loving perfectly all the time!

That's where God's love stands out from the rest.

God's love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and passionate.

Read the following verses about God's love and write down what stands out to you. How do they make you feel? What do they tell you about how God loves?

Romans 8:38–39

'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

John 3:16

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

It's all well and good to read about God's love in a general sense, but how can we know and experience this on a personal level?

1. He made you

We've already learned that God is the creator of the entire universe, and let's not forget that if he created everything, then he has also created us. When we make something and see that it is good, automatically we feel a sense of pride and joy in that creation. God has created you uniquely; you are an individual with

a distinct image, a specific set of skills, and a distinct personality. He looks at you, as his creation, and says that you are 'very good'.

Psalm 139:13-14 says this:

'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.'

These verses are talking about you, how does that make you feel?

2. He promises to provide for you

The Bible promises time and time again that if we trust in God, he will provide for us. This doesn't necessarily look like getting everything we want because remember, sometimes we want things that would be really bad for us and God knows what's best. What this looks like is God watching over us and providing for our needs.

Luke 12:24 says this:

'Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!'

This verse reminds us of the value God places on us. This is so important, especially in our world today which so often seeks to make us doubt ourselves and our purpose.

It is so vital that when lies and negative thoughts about who we are go through our minds, we remember who God says we truly are. Read through these two verses again (from Psalms and Luke) and take them in as personal statements written just for you. Write down some 'I am' statements about who God says you are and use these as a reminder next time you doubt your value.

e.g. 'I am created'

3. The third way we see God's love displayed for us personally in the Bible is the most important. In the books of the Bible called

the *gospels* (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we read accounts of Jesus' life. We read that he was God's Son, and part of God himself; he lived a perfect life, helped and healed many people, and ultimately, as we read earlier in John 3:16, he died on a cross and rose again to rescue each one of us. This is where we see God's agape (sacrificial, unconditional) love in action. He sacrificed his precious son so that we could know him.

You might be wondering what we needed saving from. You might be looking at your life and thinking that you don't need rescuing from anything. The reason we needed saving is because we are sinners. Now, this might sound a little drastic or harsh to you, but essentially what it means is that we make mistakes, we get things wrong, we intentionally hurt others – even the nicest people in the world still aren't perfect! We all mess up! We were never going to be good enough to measure up to the perfection of God, but he didn't want that to mean that we could never know him fully, and so Jesus came and died for us.

Jesus took the punishment that we deserved and he died for our sins on the cross. Three days later, he rose from the dead and had made a way for us to be in relationship and right standing with the Father.

Romans 5:8 says

'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

We didn't do anything to deserve this forgiveness, in fact we were still sinners who kept messing up, and yet God sees us as valuable enough to die for! Think about that for a minute. Take some time to let that sink in: God says that you are worth dying for. Whatever we've done, whoever we think we are, God still sees us as his valued children.

Why not write down any reflections you have here.

We've only scratched the surface on what all this means for us, but stick with us and we'll be unpacking all of this further over the next couple of studies.

Hopefully, at the end of this first study, you understand more about how God's love is distinct and are beginning to accept that whatever your past, background, or present circumstances, this perfect love extends to you.

In the next study session, we will be looking at the second of the four points: I have made mistakes – don't worry, it's not all doom and gloom but will, we hope, help you to further understand how verses like **John 3:16** and **Romans 5:8** relate to each of us directly.

Thanks for journeying through this first study session with us.



Session 2

I HAVE MADE MISTAKES

Welcome back to the 4points study guide. Throughout this guide, we will be learning and unpacking some of the basics of the Christian faith. Our hope is that by journeying through these pages, you'll gain a greater understanding not only of what Christians believe, but why too.

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In the last study, we touched briefly on the 'sin problem'; the fact that we keep choosing to do our own thing rather than obeying what God asks of us. Remember that God wants what's best for us – when we disobey someone who wants and knows what's best for us, that's when we get ourselves into trouble!

But really, what's the problem with sin?

Because God is perfect and we're not, our connection with him had been broken and this leads to separation from him. We were, and are, unworthy to be in the presence of God... that's the 'sin problem'.

It's pretty clear that the morality standard set is impossible for those of us who aren't God because we have a sinful nature. Throughout the Bible we can see the standard that's asked of us: the 10 commandments, Jesus' teachings, his example, the moral standards set out in the Old Testament and the letters in the New Testament – the standard is high!

Can you remember any of the Ten Commandments? Write them here. If you need help, you can find them in **Exodus 20:1-17**.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus build upon these commandments and set the bar even higher. In what is arguably the most famous preach ever, The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes many of the commandments and says that simply following them and avoiding doing 'bad things' isn't enough anymore. He sets a challenge that we should be holding our actions account to a higher standard.

Matthew 5:27-29

'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.'

These are strong words! What do Jesus' words here stir in you? What is your response to them?

It's clear from what we've read that God hates sin and what it does to his people, but you may be sitting here and thinking, 'but I'd never murder anyone' or 'I'm a pretty good person, I only lie sometimes'. You might not consider yourself to have a 'sinful nature'.

So, we have to ask the question, are some sins worse than others?

Based on the biblical standard of sin, here is a list of different 'sins' that we see happening in our societies today. Read through the list and then rank the offences in order from best to worst (1 being the least offensive and 10 the most). Consider your personal opinion in this exercise, rather than what might carry a heavier charge in court or what the old lady around the corner might think.

- Manslaughter _____
- Forgetting to pray _____
- Car theft _____
- Getting drunk _____
- Tax fraud _____
- Sex before marriage _____

Gossiping _____

Arson _____

Murder _____

Telling lies _____

How did it make you feel to have to order sins? Did you find it hard or easy?

Did it challenge anything in you?

We all know that, in the eyes of the law, some things on this list are considered far worse than others. Many things on the list wouldn't even come close to being called into question in a legal sense, and yet the Bible still labels them 'sin'. The Bible still tells us that they aren't God's best for us.

The problem we come across when we start creating hierarchies of 'which sins are worse than others' is that we can find ourselves excusing things in us that we know are wrong because we see ourselves as 'not as bad as' someone else. Of course, some sins hold much heavier consequences, such as really hurting someone, being sentenced to prison etc. but we must remember that despite this, all sin misses the mark of God's 'glorious standard'. We read about this in the book of Romans. The Bible doesn't tell us to compare our sinning to someone else's - the behaviour of other people isn't a standard we're aiming to beat.

Romans 3:23 says:

'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'

If you think of God's standard as a bullseye on a target which we are told we have to aim for and hit, it doesn't matter whether we miss it by a little or by a whole lot, we've still missed it.



Some of us are closer to the bullseye than others, but none of us have made that perfect shot. This is why the Bible can say with confidence that 'all' have sinned and fallen short of the glorious standard of God.

As pessimistic as it may sound, we only have to take a quick look at the news to see sin at work in the world. We see a lot of pain and suffering around us, often because of the self-centred nature of people.

Write down what you have seen sin lead to in the world, and in your own life.

Not only have we all sinned, but we are also all victims to sin. It's likely that you can think of specific individuals or situations that have hurt you, because the reality is we are all broken people and so at some point have felt let down, and at some other point we've probably let someone else down. Thankfully, we can trust that Jesus will never sin against us and will never let us down because he was and is the one, perfect, sinless man.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God solved the problem of sin once and for all. Jesus created a way for us to be made clean and free from sin so that we can have relationship with him and the Father.

Have you ever been forgiven by someone when you did something that hurt them? How did it make you feel to know that those 'sins' wouldn't be held against you anymore?

So how does Jesus' sacrifice impact me? In the Old Testament, we're told about the process of receiving forgiveness for our sins. Something innocent, usually a lamb, had to die to take our place and it would take the sins with it. To cover the sins of the entire world, something or someone far more powerful than a lamb had to die. Jesus was the only one powerful enough not only to remove our sin, but also destroy sin and death forever because he was the Son of God.

Sound a little confusing?

Don't worry – in our next study session, we'll begin to understand just how this whole rescue plan of God's really worked.

Thanks for journeying through this second study session with us.



Session 3

JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN

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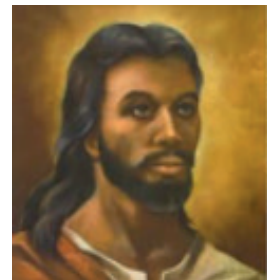
As with our first study session, to really begin to understand this statement and the relevance of it for us, we need to first establish the answer to this question: who was Jesus?

How would you answer this question? Write down some of your thoughts here.

Throughout history, we've seen many different ideas and depictions of who Jesus was. Obviously, we have a biblical account of his life but we also see him depicted in art and spoken about in many other historical writings.



1



2



3



4

Which of the above images comes into your head when you think of what Jesus would've looked like?

The first image of a white Jesus is one that has been used very often throughout the Western church for centuries and has arguably given people an inaccurate idea of what Jesus looked like. The third image was released a few years ago in an attempt to discover Jesus' true appearance based on cultural and historical factors, and the fourth image is from a recent television series which attempt to depict the biblical characters with cultural accuracy.

As hard as we may try, it's safe to say that we can't know for certain what Jesus' exact physical appearance was, but what does the Bible say about him?

First off, what did Jesus say about himself?

1. In **John 14:6**, Jesus says that he is the only way for people to have access to the Father (God).

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

2. In **Luke 22:69**, Jesus (referring to himself as the Son of Man) claims that he is King and will be seated on a throne next to the Father. At other points in the Bible, we are also told that this is where Jesus came from in the first place.

'But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.'

These are pretty big claims that Jesus makes. Many people today find these claims controversial, whereas many others recognise these passages as key to their faith – what do you think of them?

What did other people say about him?

1. One of Jesus' closest friends and followers made this statement (**Matthew 16:16**):

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

2. A Roman soldier who was present at Jesus' death said this (**Mark 15:39**):

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'

Many people were in agreement that Jesus was who he said he

was, the Son of God. This wasn't just his followers and those who were close to him but even some Romans and Jewish leaders too.

Of course, we know that not everyone believed this. Many of the Jewish community considered his claims to be blasphemy and crimes against God and they plotted how to kill him because of this.

Why did Jesus die?

Why not take some time to write what you think the answer to this question is? What have you heard? What is the Christian teaching and do you believe any of it? Take a minute to gather your thoughts and put into words where you stand on this question.

As we briefly touched on in the previous study, Jesus' death had to happen because something, or someone, had to take the punishment that we all deserved. To take the sin of the whole world at that time and the whole world to come, that someone had to be, not only powerful, but perfect.

This is what the Bible says about Jesus' death on the cross and why it had to happen:

2 Corinthians 5:21

'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

This verse is talking about Jesus and that because of his sacrifice, we can now freely come into relationship with God.

Did Jesus have to die? Did he have a choice?

Luke 22:39

Before his crucifixion, Jesus went away to pray with God the Father. He prayed, 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from me...' Jesus was scared at the prospect of his death and sought out another way to save us all... but, he chose us. He then said, '...yet not my will be done, but yours.'

Jesus chose to die for us because he sees my value, and your value, and the value of every other person, and that made it worthwhile.

Many people argue that Jesus didn't have a choice; that he was arrested and put to death and played no part in the decision making. If you go away and read **Luke 4:29**, **John 7:30** and **John 10:39**, you will see accounts of times that people tried to arrest Jesus and put him to death but they could not touch him as Jesus didn't allow them to. It wasn't time for his sacrifice. He could've

stopped his arrest and ultimate death too but he chose to humble himself and allowed it to happen.

To pay the price for sin, Jesus had to die. He modelled perfect obedience to God by showing us that even though he didn't want to die, he still went to the cross for the sake of the world. He was the only solution that could have saved mankind permanently. As we established last session, none of us are able to live a perfect life, but Jesus could so it had to be him who died. Only the Son of God himself can beat the power of sin and death.

How did Jesus die?

What do you already know about Jesus' death? Write some notes here.

Ultimately, Jesus died innocently but next to two other criminals.

He died alone. His disciples deserted him; only three remained at the foot of the cross. God the Father had to look away as Jesus had been covered and stained by the sins of the world.

Take a minute here to really consider the hardship and pain that Jesus experienced on the cross. Don't pass this moment by and move on because it feels uncomfortable. **John 19** in the Bible tells the account of Jesus' arrest, torture, and crucifixion – read through it and try to understand the magnitude of Jesus' love for you. It's hard to read but remember that he did all of that for you.

Here is some space if you want to write down any reflections, prayers, or thoughts that may arise as you read.

When Jesus died, sin and death were beaten. **2 Timothy 1:10** says:

'...it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'

This means that while sin and death still exist today, we can know freedom from them because of Jesus. He has beaten the devil and his schemes once and for all and when Jesus comes again, there will be no more sin, suffering or pain.

Even though Jesus died for each one of us, he didn't stay dead. Three days after his crucifixion, Jesus rose again. Jesus is alive! He is alive today and he calls each one of us to turn from the way we've been living, receive his forgiveness, and step into relationship with him.

Because of what Jesus has done, anyone can talk to God now, not just the high priests and the elite. Whatever we've done, whenever we did it, Jesus' death has the power to cover it. God wants to forgive us for the wrong we've done – the question is, will we let him?

You don't have to be 'super holy' to be saved, whoever you are, you can have a relationship with God. He has given us access to himself, not just for now, but also for eternity with him in heaven.

All this means that we have a choice. We can accept His offer of forgiveness and relationship, or we can reject it. There's no 'sitting on the fence' with God. At some point, we'll find that we have to make a choice one way or the other... and that's what we'll be looking at further in our next and final study.



Session 4

I HAVE A CHOICE TO MAKE

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Throughout this session we will be unpacking this statement and figuring out what that really means for each of us personally. For the final time, grab yourself a pen and let's get started.

We all know that we make loads of choices every day. Just the decision to pick up this study and work through it was a choice, the time you've chosen to do it is a choice, the clothes you have on as you do it is another choice. We've been created to be people with free will to make our own decisions.

A question that is asked a lot is, 'why didn't God just make us love him?' Many people would argue that this would save God, and us, a lot of time! But, none of us are robots – that's not how God created us. He could've chosen to force us to love him but instead, he chose to demonstrate his love for us by giving us a choice. By giving us free will, God gave us the chance to decide for ourselves whether we choose relationship with him or not; whether we accept his forgiveness or not.

What are some reasons you can think of that a relationship could be better if built on choice?

We all have the choice to either follow Jesus or go our own way. The Bible says, in **Romans 10:9-10**:

'If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.'

So, let's think about it, what's your choice? Before you can decide, let's talk a little about what it means to accept this offer that God has given.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Let's dispel some myths about what becoming a Christian actually means.

1. MYTH: Life gets easier

Being a Christian doesn't mean that life automatically becomes problem-free. The Bible never says that accepting God into your life will mean you never have struggles again. In fact, the Bible talks about us facing more challenges (**Matthew 5:11**). Many people today in many parts of the world are still subjected to torture, oppression and persecution for their faith, but Jesus promises that we will be blessed when we go through these trials for him. He promises that when we do go through these troubles that he will be with us at every step and he will give us his strength and his peace.

If you are facing any struggles or trials right now, why not write them here alongside a simple prayer that asks God to be with you in the middle of them? Ask him to give you peace and strengthen you through this time.

2. MYTH: You will never sin again

Being a Christian doesn't mean that you will never want to, or be able to, sin again. As we talked about in our second session, we all have a 'sinful nature' and so we know that we will sin again at some point to some degree. It's been said that 'being in relationship with God doesn't make you sinless, but it makes you sin less'. The difference is that you feel convicted when you do sin and are driven to repent and do better. When you become a Christian, you know that God will always forgive you for the mistakes you make, but it's important that we don't just do whatever we want because we know that he will forgive us – God sees our heart and knows if we are truly repentant. We can't abuse his grace and cheat him into forgiving us, we have to really mean it when we say we're sorry.

1 John 1:9 says:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Are there any hidden sins in your life? Are there things you've done that you've been holding on to? Why not take this opportunity to confess them to God (write them down if that helps) and ask him to forgive you?

3. MYTH: Your faith should be something that's private

When you accept Jesus and become one of his followers, this isn't something you're supposed to keep to yourself. We, as Christians, are called to share our faith with others. Because you've been forgiven, God expects you to forgive others, in fact he says that he will only forgive you if you are not harbouring unforgiveness for someone else! The Bible says that we need to be ready to share the hope that we have found with others. Once we receive the gift of a relationship with God, why wouldn't we want others to have it too? It is good news and it's a good thing to share it with those around us.

Let's look at a story Jesus told; you may have heard this before as it's a very famous passage from the Bible. We're going to read the story of the Prodigal Son, or the Lost Son.

This story is a perfect picture of what it looks like for us to come back to God.

While you read it, feel free to make notes if anything stands out to you.

Think about how the story makes you feel. Can you relate to any of the characters? Why?

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, 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 worthy to be called your son."

"But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe



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