

# ENCOUNTERS

HOW GOD'S STORY CONNECTS WITH OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

## PRONE TO WANDER

### FACILITATOR GUIDE

## OVERVIEW

Well-suited for Good Friday, this lesson will help students understand the gravity of Christ's death and consider their responses. From studying Isaiah's vivid description of the Crucifixion, students will learn that Christ's death was a necessary part of God's plan to save us from our sin and demonstrates his love. Two real-life examples will help students identify areas of doubt or wandering, redirecting students to remember God's love and rely on him for guidance.

## TEACHING

## OPENING QUESTIONS

- What's the biggest sacrifice you've ever made for someone you love?

## WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT

If Jesus' crucifixion happened today, we'd all get a front-row seat. Jesus' trial would be broadcast, and we'd watch the events unfold in real time. The beatings might even be filmed—if not officially then by bystanders who would post the videos online. Drones and zoom lenses would catch close-ups of the nails piercing Jesus' hands and feet, the spear piercing his side, the anguish on his face, the blood and tears. The horror show would come across our screens, big and small, for all to see.

Somehow almost 700 years *before* Jesus' crucifixion, the prophet Isaiah was able to "see" what was coming and even describe vividly how it would happen. As he went to the cross, Jesus physically carried all of our pain and sin. Every wound inflicted was meant for us, but he bore them so that we could receive God's healing and wholeness. Isaiah could foresee Jesus' horrific pain, suffered on our behalf.

But there was more to Isaiah's prophecy than what Jesus did; Isaiah also saw what everyone else did—how they rejected Jesus, assumed the worst about him, and despised him. The sad thing is that even now we still respond to Jesus the same way, turning away because we have a better idea of how to live our lives. Like headstrong sheep, we constantly reject and wander away from God. Whether 700 years before or 2000 years after Christ, we are all sinners in need of a Savior. But we can thank God for his love and mercy: he's already saved us through his Son's wounds.

**Read Isaiah 53:3–6.**

**FACILITATOR'S NOTE:** God had made a covenant with the Israelites—a promise to rescue them and make them his people as long as they obeyed his law. He created the system of sacrifice so his people would have a way to make up for it when they broke his laws. Unlike the animal sacrifices that were just a temporary covering of sin, Jesus' sacrifice was a once-and-for-all removal of sin that restores our relationships with God. That's because Jesus was the perfect sacrifice—fully human (capable of sin) but fully God (perfectly capable of overcoming sin). \*Go deeper by checking out the Facilitator's Note at the end of this lesson or consider studying *Fulfilled—Encounters' four-lesson set about the law and covenants*.

## A SECOND LOOK | *Pick one of these illustrations to bring the topic to life:*

### Option 1: Gracia's Story<sup>1</sup>

Gracia and Martin Burnham moved to the Philippines right out of college. Martin was a missionary pilot. Gracia manned the radio. They faithfully served the Lord with their three children. But everything changed when they visited a small resort for their 18th wedding anniversary. That night, radical terrorist group Abu Sayyaf took 20 guests captive, including the Burnhams. Over the next year, they were chained to trees and starved, endured gun battles, and lived on the run in primitive conditions. After a few months, only the Burnhams and third hostage were left.

During her captivity, Gracia wrestled with God and questioned his love. But by clinging to simple verses like John 3:16 and with Martin's encouragement, Gracia was reminded of God's love and goodness shown on the cross.<sup>2</sup> During their rescue, a gun battle broke out, and all three hostages were shot—only Gracia survived.

Years later, Gracia has shared about God's goodness all over the world. After she contacted them in prison, four of her former captors have put their faith in Jesus. While she would not have chosen this ordeal to bring Jesus to her captors, Gracia remembers what Martin said when money had been paid for their ransom, but the terrorists wanted more: "Jesus paid a ransom for us, and it was enough."

### **DISCUSS:**

- Could you forgive your captors if this happened to you?
- How would you have felt if you thought you were living your life for Christ but something like this happened?
- We may never experience an ordeal like Gracia's, but we do experience crises of faith when we question God's love and goodness during difficult times.
  - When are you most tempted to question God's love?
  - How can you remind yourself of God's goodness in these times of doubt?

### Option 2: Shepherd's Stones

The Bible often uses shepherd and sheep imagery to describe the relationship God has with his people because these were familiar parts of the culture at the time. But for modern readers who aren't as familiar, it can be helpful to find out more about ancient shepherding practices.

In biblical times, shepherds would guide and protect their flock. They were responsible for leading the sheep to food and water and for fending off attacks from predators like mountain lions and bears. In a time before gunpowder, many shepherds actually used slingshots with deadly accuracy to defend their sheep from wild animals.

But did you know that shepherds also used these slingshots to guide their sheep? If a sheep was wandering off, lagging behind, or getting too close to something dangerous, the shepherd would throw a stone to land on the ground in a way that would startle and guide the sheep to return to the fold.<sup>3</sup>

In the same way, Christ often drops "stones" in our paths to help guide us. We are like sheep, prone to wander off and reject Christ despite all he's done for us and how he loves us. Thankfully, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lovingly directs us to the safety of his presence.

### **DISCUSS:**

- Ask if anyone is willing to share an area where he or she is prone to wander?
- How does knowing that Christ died and rose on your behalf motivate you to rely on his guidance?
- In what area of your life do you need more of your Shepherd's guidance?

**FACILITATOR'S NOTE:** This is an extremely abbreviated version of the Burnhams' story. It is interesting to note that Gracia still writes letters to one of her captors. She also tells the story of how she feels like God used this experience to make her a more patient and loving spouse and parent. Make sure to point out that the average person does not end up a hostage in the jungle. But many times, we may think we are living a good life for God and unknowingly expecting him to fulfill his end of the "bargain" by blessing us materially and protecting us from suffering. It's hard to see our spiritual blind spots because, just like Isaiah said 700 years before Christ's death, we are still all like sheep who want life our own way.

## THE TAKEAWAY

God's grace is greater than any doubt or temptation we may face.

## APPLICATION

### DISCOVER

- What does it mean to you when you hear that God loves you?

### THE BIBLE IN YOUR LIFE

In this prophetic passage, Isaiah gave a vivid description of the suffering Christ would endure on the cross, telling how Christ would die to save us from our sins and give us new life. He also described how people would react to Christ—by rejecting and dismissing him. Over 2,500 years have passed, and what Isaiah wrote about human nature hasn't changed. Like sheep who are prone to wander off, we often choose to doubt or reject our Savior. Thankfully, God's love for us and his gift of salvation also hasn't changed.

Read Isaiah 53:3–6, then answer the following questions.

### DISCUSS:

- How does it affect you, personally, that Jesus carried your sin and grief to the cross?
- Why was it necessary for Jesus to be beaten, dying horribly to take all of our sin?
- What does the Crucifixion tell/show you about God's love?
- When and how are you most prone to wander from God?

### APPLY IT

When you're tempted or doubting, how can you remind yourself of the love God showed you on the cross?

#### BE SPECIFIC:

What are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?

Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

### PRAYER

Take time to let your students pray for each other's applications in the upcoming weeks.

### A QUOTE TO THINK ABOUT

"God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.'"  
— Billy Graham<sup>4</sup>

## THE TAKEAWAY

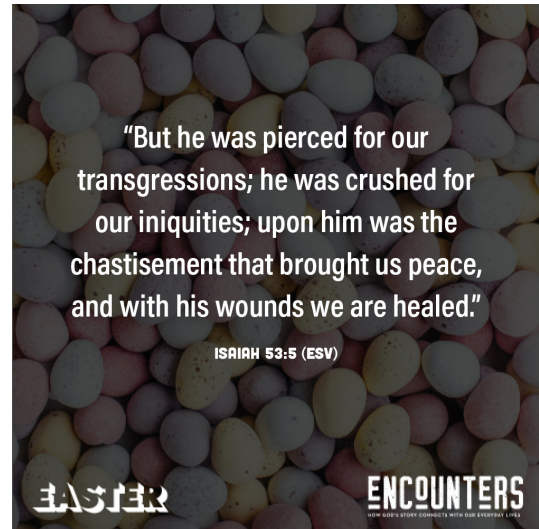
God's grace is greater than any doubt or temptation we may face.

## WAYS TO FOLLOW UP

*Here are some tools that you can use to follow up with your students throughout the week. For example, send any of the graphics included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.*

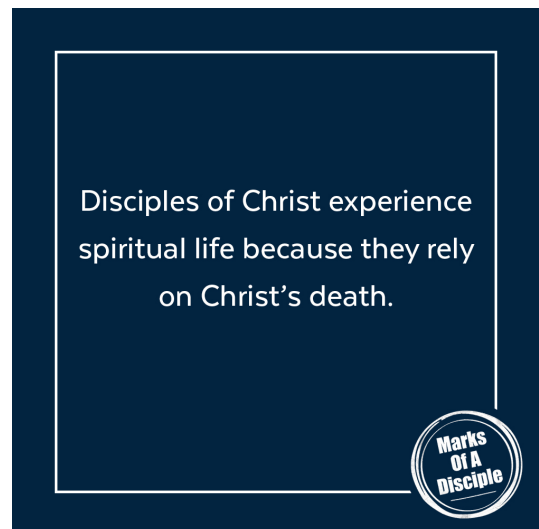
### MEMORY VERSE

"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."  
Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)



### MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Marks of a Disciple are a great way to figure out whether your students are growing in their understanding of God's story and how to connect it to their daily lives. As Scripture impacts your students' hearts, they'll begin to live differently and these Marks of a Disciple are a great guidepost to help them grow more Christ-like. Periodically check in with your students about one or two of these Marks of a Disciple that seem to be speaking to them specifically in this season.



**FACILITATOR'S NOTE:** If you have students who don't know why Jesus had to die or the problem of sin, here are some basics of the Gospel message and verses you can share with them:

- The Problem of Sin (our separation from God): Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23
- The Consequence of Sin (death): Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1
- The Need for a Savior (a way to reconnect with God): John 17:3
- Jesus is God's Son (completely untainted by sin; able to be our savior): 2 Corinthians 5:21
- The Sacrifice of Jesus (he died on the cross, covering our sin and bridging the gap between us and God): Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 3:18
- Jesus Rose from the Dead (defeating the power of sin and death): Romans 1:4; 4:25
- Jesus Shows Us Grace (available to everyone who believes and follows him): John 1:12; 3:16–18
- Jesus Calls Us to a Great Mission (The Great Commission): Matthew 28:18–20

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. May not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible.

Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.

<sup>1</sup> "Stephanie Graves, "The Gracia Burnham Story of Love in the Time of Terror," *Mannaexpressonline.com*, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.mannaexpressonline.com/the-gracia-burnham-story-of-love-in-the-time-of-terror/>.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Wooding, "Trial by Fire: How Gracia Burnham Saw God's Amazing Grace," *ChristianMessenger.in*, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.christianmessenger.in/trial-by-fire-how-gracia-burnham-saw-gods-amazing-grace/>.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), 150.

<sup>4</sup> Billy Graham, quoted by Kirk Cameron, Ray Comfort, *The School of Biblical Evangelism: 101 Lessons : How to Share Your Faith* (Alachua, FL: Bridge Logos Foundation, 2004), 385.