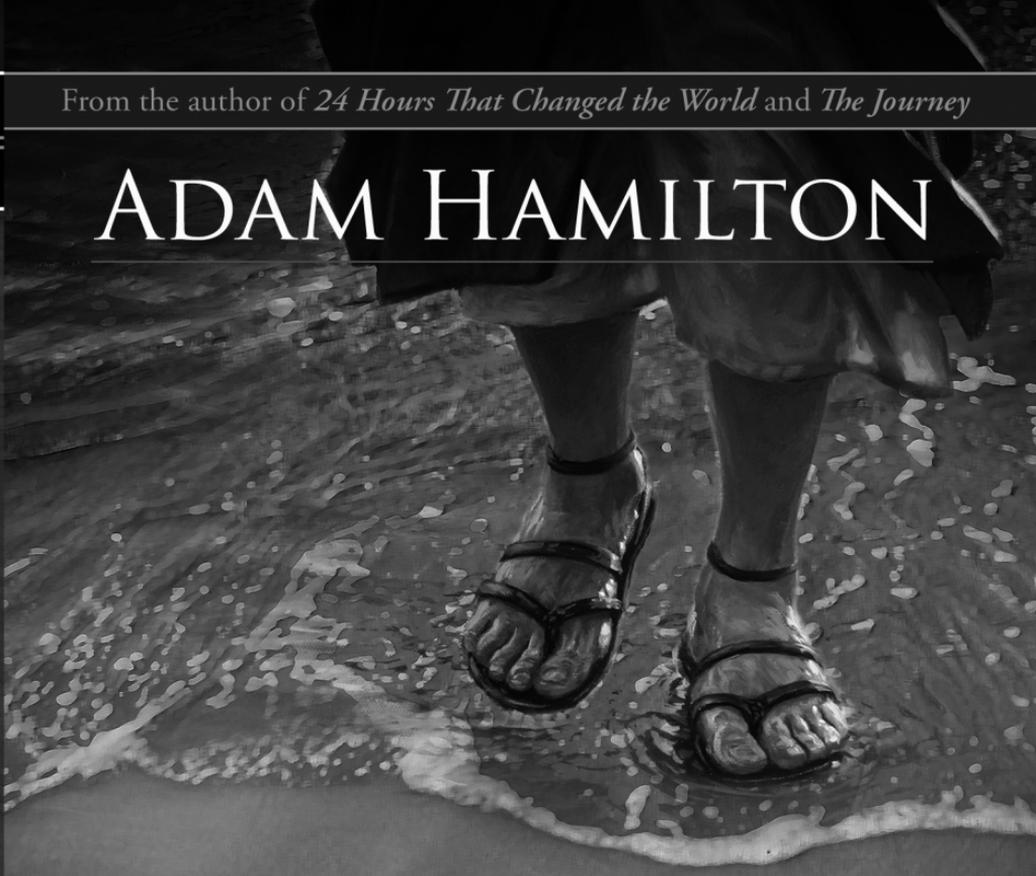


From the author of *24 Hours That Changed the World* and *The Journey*

ADAM HAMILTON



The Way

Walking in the
Footsteps of Jesus

LEADER GUIDE

The Way

Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

Book

The Way

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Devotional

The Way: 40 Days of Reflection

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Final Words From the Cross

ADAM HAMILTON

The Way

Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

LEADER GUIDE

by John P. Gilbert

Abingdon Press
Nashville

The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus
Leader Guide

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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To the Leader

Welcome to an exciting adventure!

You and your study group are embarking on a most significant journey, for you will be walking in the footsteps of Jesus during the course of his ministry. Along the way, you will listen to Jesus teach, watch him perform miracles, spend time with his friends (not always the top tier of society!), and find yourself transformed. The book and video components of this study will “put you on the ground,” seeing and experiencing the things Jesus saw as he traveled the length and breadth of Galilee and Judea.

But this is not just a study of geography or history. It is a call to discipleship. It is a journey with the Christ who still walks with us and invites us to follow his footsteps. Throughout the study, Adam Hamilton challenges us to a greater commitment to Jesus as Lord and King of our lives.

The Study

This six-session study plus epilogue is made up of several components:

- the book *The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus*;
- a devotional book, *The Way: 40 Days of Reflection*, which provides daily devotions to accompany the book;
- a DVD in which Adam Hamilton visits the Holy Land to retrace the steps Jesus took during the days of his ministry;
- this leader guide.

Participants may choose to read the book and devotional book before or after the group session. Ideally, participants should have the opportunity to receive copies of the books prior to your first group session. If this is not possible, introduce them to the books during your first group session and try to obtain copies prior to your second session.

The DVD will be shown during each group session. You'll find more information below about the use of the DVD.

Using these program components, you will lead the members of your group over the course of six sessions plus epilogue to examine the geographical, cultural, and historical setting of Christ's ministry and, ultimately, to help participants see themselves in that story.

Session Format

As group leader, your role will be to facilitate the group sessions using the books, the accompanying DVD, and this Leader Guide. Because no two groups are alike, this guide has been designed to give you flexibility and choice in tailoring the sessions for your group. You may choose one of the following format options, *or adapt these as you wish to meet the schedule and needs of your particular group*. (Note: The times indicated within parentheses are merely estimates. You may move at a faster or slower pace, making adjustments as necessary to fit your schedule.)

Basic Option: 60 minutes

Opening Prayer	(2 minutes)
Biblical Foundation	(3 minutes)
Video and Discussion	(15 minutes)
Book Study and Discussion	(15 minutes)
Bible Study and Discussion	(15 minutes)
Wrapping Up	(5 minutes)
Closing Prayer	(5 minutes)

Extended Option: 90 minutes

Opening Prayer	(2 minutes)
Biblical Foundation	(3 minutes)
Opening Activity	(10 minutes)
Video Presentation	(10 minutes)
Group Discussion	(20 minutes)
Book Study and Discussion	(15 minutes)
Bible Study and Discussion	(15 minutes)
Wrapping Up	(10 minutes)
Closing Prayer	(5 minutes)

While you should feel free to adapt any element in this leader guide to suit the needs and schedule of your group, take time to become familiar with the session elements below. Knowing the intended purpose and description of each element will help you decide which ones and what arrangement will work best in your situation.

Opening Prayer

The prayer should be read aloud at the start of the group meeting. Often it will be a prayer suggested by a particular event described in the Gospel text. You and the group can also offer your own prayers.

Biblical Foundation

Invite one of your group members to read this Bible passage aloud.

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

If you follow the 90-minute schedule, each lesson plan includes an activity designed to help participants reflect on the subject (event) highlighted in the session or make a connection between it and something in their own experience.

Video and Discussion

Each session's video segment features Adam Hamilton speaking from one of the sites in Jerusalem traditionally associated with the events of the Gospel record. Each segment runs 6–10 minutes. Plan to preview the video segment for each session prior to your group's meeting. Questions for group discussion are included in this guide. Keep in mind that you do not have to use all the questions provided, and you are free to make up your own.

Book Study and Discussion

This section highlights key excerpts from one of the book chapters and suggests discussion questions for use with the group in response to those excerpts. Preview the section in advance and select questions that will fit your time constraints.

Bible Study and Discussion

This section highlights key passages of Scripture related to the book chapter and suggests discussion questions for use with the group in response to those texts. Preview the section in advance and select questions that will fit your time constraints.

Wrapping Up

Each session concludes with your group reflecting on the people, places, and events portrayed in the video and book.

Closing Prayer

This prayer, like the opening prayer, usually comes from one of the Psalms. An individual can read it, or the whole group can offer this prayer in unison.

Some Things to Think About

Here are some ideas that may enrich your sessions. These ideas are not presented in any order of importance, but are suggestions that have been used and found to be helpful in study groups.

Recognize that you are the facilitator. You are not the answer person; you are not the authority; you are not the judge to decide if responses are right or wrong. You are the person who tries to keep the discussion on track, who poses questions for conversation, who makes sure that everyone is involved, heard, and respected.

Give some attention to your room setting. A table is fine, especially if the chairs are moveable, or you may prefer sitting in a circle. At various times suggest group members gather in teams of two, three, or four; and it is important to have enough space for these groups. Hint: This study may not work as well if you meet in rigid pews in the nave of your church! Folks like to look at one another as they share their thoughts and feelings.

This study can certainly be used by Sunday school classes, but recognize that Sunday morning time in many churches is relatively short. Thus, the study lends itself very well to midweek times at the church or in the homes of members.

Session length is variable. Ideally you should allow at least an hour per session. If you have 90 minutes or 2 hours, all the better! For longer sessions, take a quick refreshment break in the middle, but keep refreshments simple.

Session content is also variable. Most groups will study one chapter per week over a six- to seven-week period, but you are by no

means locked into that format. You may discover that one chapter takes three or four sessions; other chapters may require a couple of sessions. The key is group interest and involvement, not the calendar.

Equipment to Bring

Your study will be enriched if you provide some simple equipment.

Bring writing tools. For yourself and other group leaders, you'll want a chalkboard, whiteboard, or large easel with paper. Don't forget a good supply of chalk or markers and a couple of erasers! For individual group members, bring paper or index cards, along with pencils or pens.

Large maps of the Holy Land will be very useful. You might consider bringing a map showing the geography and geology of the Holy Land, a map of the Sea of Galilee region, and a map of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. Where do you get such maps? Your church may have a supply. Large map books of the Holy Land may also be available. Especially useful are maps that you can project on a screen or wall, using an overhead projector or computer. If larger maps are not available, you can refer to the maps in the back of Bibles.

Speaking of Bibles, if possible bring a stack of these for group members who don't have their own. Any translation is fine, and multiple translations are perfectly okay. Some popular translations are the Common English Bible, the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, Today's English Version, and the New English Bible. Of course, the King James Version is still widely used, though its English style reflects the time of its creation four hundred years ago. Reading the same passage in several translations invariably sheds new light on the passage. But don't get into debates or arguments with group members over which translation is "right" or "wrong"; few of us know biblical Hebrew or classical Greek well enough to bicker about translations.

What Group Members Can Bring

If possible, group members should bring their own copies of the Bible, again in any translation. Members should feel free to highlight and make notes in the margins. Thankfully, the day when Bibles should not be marked up is long past.

Group members will want to bring their copies of the study book, *The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus*. As with the Bibles, members should feel free to jot marginal notes and to underline or highlight portions of the text.

The Bible forces us to think and feel; the study book also stimulates our thoughts and feelings. Just as you, the leader, aren't the ultimate authority for the group, neither is the book. Encourage group members to disagree with the book and dialogue with the biblical passages. Get into them; don't be afraid to disagree, to raise questions, and to say, "I don't get it!" These are the times when real learning takes place.

Conducting Group Sessions

If you are not sure that all the members of your group know each other, try this: Have a "get-acquainted" session before your first group study session. Use nametags and some get-acquainted activities. Let folks introduce themselves in an informal setting. Have plenty of refreshments and make the time casual. Such a session should not take more than an hour; you might even arrange this following a morning worship service.

Start sessions right at the announced time. Don't worry if some participants walk in late; they will discover that you start on time and may be earlier next time. If you wait until everyone or most are present, you may discover that you are beginning later and later each session.

Be sure to end at the announced time. However, if a discussion is progressing well and the closing time is drawing near, you can

ask if the group would like to extend for an extra 10 minutes. Make the extension a group decision, not your decision.

Begin and end every session with prayer. Opening and closing prayers are included in this Leader Guide. You can also offer other prayers, extemporaneous or written, if you think they would better suit the moment.

You as leader need to pay close attention to the goals that begin each session in this guide. The goals are listed sequentially; this means that they build on one another. Therefore, try to pay attention to these goals in order. You will develop a good sense of when one goal has been achieved and you can move on to the next. Of course, the activities in this guide are based on the learning goals listed.

Many of the teaching-learning activities described in this guide call for group members to read aloud. Invite people in advance to be prepared to read aloud at the first couple of sessions; later you'll be able to call on participants without advance notice. But be very careful: Some folks do not like to read aloud in a group. Some are unsure of their reading ability; some are frightened about pronunciation; and some simply prefer not to read aloud in front of others. Respect these feelings and don't try to coax people to read when they say they would rather not do so.

You will notice that the learning activities described in this guide often call for dividing into pairs or teams of three or four. Doing this is important, because some people won't participate vocally in a large group but are willing to share in a small group. Dividing into teams gives everyone a chance to speak, share, and participate fully. Keep in mind that you do not need a full report of the discussions following each activity; know that learning has gone on within the team. However, always ask for any especially new insights or burning questions following the small team work.

Other hints about teams: When inviting the group to work in teams of two or three, suggest that spouses join different teams, and

mix up the teams. Don't let the same people form a team each time! A few ways to mix up the teams are by counting off, asking for volunteers, or choosing them yourself. Team membership is not nearly as important as the team conversations.

Finally, deal creatively and constructively with group members who dominate conversation. In some cases, a group member may challenge your leadership by being overly critical, or by what is sometimes called "sharpshooting." You'll notice that this person often sits across from you if the group gathers around a table. One solution: Wait until the group is seated, then sit down next to the person. It's hard to sharpshoot when seated next to the leader.

Some group members may also wander off the subject or always want to discuss their own pet ideas. Some call this practice "chasing rabbits." To avoid it, tell the group about the importance of staying on the subject, and give them permission to point out rabbit chasing by simply raising two fingers (rabbit ears) and moving the hand in a hopping motion. Be sure to tell the group this includes permission to point out when you chase rabbits!

Finally, and always, surround your own preparation with prayer—pray before you read the study book, as you look at the guide, and before you open the session; then offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's guidance when the session is over.

Remember: You are not alone. God is with you. Thanks be to God!

1.

Baptism and Temptation

The Jordan River and the Wilderness

Getting Started

Session Goals

As a result of conversations and activities during this session, group members should begin to

- gain an understanding of the geography of the Holy Land;
- comprehend the several meanings of baptism, including why Jesus was baptized by John;
- remember and celebrate their own baptisms (or those of friends) and demonstrate an eagerness to participate in rituals remembering baptisms;
- develop a concept of wilderness—not only geographical but personal and societal;
- acknowledge temptations in all of life and recognize the presence of God as a way of overcoming temptation;
- begin to fill out a portrait of Jesus that includes the temptations and the forty days of suffering he endured;
- celebrate each victory over temptation as evidence of God's presence in our lives.

Opening Prayer

As the group prepares to discuss baptism and temptation, invite them to join with you in this prayer by the fifteenth-century reformer, Girolama Savonarola. You might write this prayer on the board or copy it onto cards that you can distribute to group members.

*Lord, we pray not for tranquility,
nor that our tribulations may cease;
we pray for thy spirit and thy love,
that thou grant us strength and grace to overcome
adversity;
through Jesus Christ. Amen.¹*

Biblical Foundation

The story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John and the subsequent temptations in the wilderness is told in Matthew 3:1 through 4:11, in Mark 1:1-13, and in Luke 3:1-22 and 4:1-13. While these accounts may differ in some details (Mark does not include the dialogue with Satan), the general thrust of the stories is the same. John's Gospel describes the baptism of Jesus in John 1:19-34, but does not relate the temptation in the same ways as the synoptic Gospels. Remember that the Gospels were written at least a generation after the events they describe. Recall also that the Gospel writers were not attempting to write history; instead, they were writing theology—that is, an account of Jesus' teachings and actions and the meaning of these for people everywhere.

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

Divide the group into teams of four each; if team members can pull their chairs together to provide a sense of closeness within a team, encourage them to do so. Then, ask the group members to discuss these questions within their teams:

- Have you been baptized? If so, do you know when and where? If you haven't, have you thought about doing so?
- Do you remember your baptism? If you were baptized as an infant, what have you been told about it?
- In what ways, if any, does your congregation celebrate the baptism of Jesus? Does your church hold a service of reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant?
- What do baptism and the reaffirmation of baptism mean to you?

Shift to an emphasis on the temptation narrative. Ask group members, still in teams of four, to reflect silently on times when they have faced temptation.

- What was the source of the temptation?
- How did they respond?
- Did their Christian faith come into play as they faced the temptation? If so, how?

Following this silent activity, invite anyone who wants to share their thoughts or experiences with the team. Don't pressure anyone to share. Remind the entire group that anything and everything discussed in the teams is to be held in strictest confidence.

Learning Together

Video and Discussion

Show the video, reminding group members that it was made at the very sites where Jesus lived. The geography of the Holy Land has often been called the fifth Gospel, because the land played such an important part in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Following the video, pose these questions:

- What surprised you about anything you saw in this video?

- Consider the Jordan River; is this the way you had pictured it in your mind's eye?
- What are some of the characteristics of the Jordan River as you saw it in the video?
- If any group members have visited the Holy Land, invite them to share their experiences of the Jordan River.

Pose the same kinds of questions regarding the wilderness.

- Did the video depiction of the wilderness match your expectations? How was the video different?
- How would you describe the wilderness as you saw it on the video?
- What do group members conclude about the reality of the wilderness?

Book Study and Discussion

Focus first on the baptism of Jesus. In the large group, review the sequence of events in the baptism narrative. You might jot these on the board as group members name them. Also, ask the group to recall the background of John the Baptist and to identify some other biblical personages who had backgrounds similar to John the Baptist. (The commonality here is children born by the grace of God to elderly parents or childless couples.) Discuss as a group:

- Adam Hamilton writes that the baptism of Jesus was a way of identifying with sinners. What does Jesus' baptism mean for us today? Does Jesus still identify with us as sinners?
- What is the meaning of baptism for an infant who has not yet sinned in ways that we are aware? In what ways is God affirming love for each person even before a person is aware of that love?
- What must we do in order to become God's beloved children?
- Can we lose our status as God's beloved children? How?

- What does it mean for contemporary Christians that we are all God's beloved children?
- If you were baptized, in what ways was it a defining act for you? How can you make it a defining act in your life from now on?

Point out that the baptism of Jesus was not for Jesus' sake but for ours. This is why Martin Luther continually reminded himself that he was baptized—that is, a beloved child of God—not because of what he, Luther, had done but because of what God had done. This is why frequent reaffirmation of baptism is so important for contemporary Christians.

Move now to a discussion of Jesus' wilderness experience. During the discussion, don't allow the group to get sidetracked on discussions of the reality, appearance, and nature of the Devil. Focus instead on Jesus' experience and our own temptation experiences.

Work in teams of four to review the story. Ask the teams to consider:

- Why was Jesus' experience of temptation important for his ministry? Why is his temptation important for us today?
- Could Jesus have been the Christ without this temptation experience? (Recall that the Gospel of John does not relate this story in any way.)
- What does the temptation story add to the reality of Jesus Christ for us today?

Still working in the teams of four, explore the possible meanings of the temptations as described by Adam Hamilton in the book, found in chapter 1. Assign one of these meanings to each of three people in the teams of four and challenge the fourth team member to consider any other possible meanings.

After allowing the team members a few moments to review their assignments, encourage each team to have its members describe and discuss their assigned meanings, leaving the fourth member for last. Then, direct the members of the teams to complete this sentence: “The meaning of the temptation story that means the most to me is _____ because _____.”

Now move to temptation in the contemporary world. In new teams of four, discuss some of the ways in which people today are tempted.

- What forms do temptations take in our culture? In what ways are we tempted by television advertisements? by our neighbors’ success? by the statement that “everybody’s doing it”?
- Are all temptations equal in seriousness? Is the temptation to have a second doughnut as serious as the temptation to pass on gossip that you know will harm another person? Is the temptation to cheat on your income tax as serious as the temptation to say nothing when the sales clerk gives you too much change? Give examples and reasons for your answers.
- Is resisting temptation easier when the consequences, such as being caught, are obvious?

Hear brief reports from any of the teams who would like to comment on their discussions. Then, discuss as a whole group:

- Adam Hamilton asserts that we are tempted not to do the right thing as often as we are tempted to do the wrong thing. Is this true for you? Share some examples.
- Is failing to do the right thing as serious as doing the wrong thing? Give reasons for your response.

Bible Study and Discussion

The Bible passages for this session (see Biblical Foundation) provide an excellent opportunity for role-play. A good one to use is Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism and temptation in Matthew 3:13 through 4:11.

One of the frustrations many have with the Gospel accounts is that they do not include expression or inflection in their narratives. Here's your chance to add it! Invite your role players to read with as much feeling and emotion as they think appropriate.

Invite a good reader to narrate, another to take the part of Jesus, another to be John the Baptist, and still another to be the devil. Keep in mind that any of these parts can be read either by women or men. The rest of the group might take the parts of those being baptized by John or of the angels who ministered to Jesus. Following are a few hints to improve your role-play.

Narrator: Don't read the "he said," as these distract from the action. Jesus reader: When Christ spoke with the tempter, he was probably weak from fasting and going without water. Tempter reader: Don't be afraid to appear cunning and conniving. John the Baptist reader: You are in awe of Jesus; let your voice and inflections show it.

Now, role-play the two scenes. If space permits, let "Jesus" move across the room to show his journey into the wilderness. Have the "tempter" meet Jesus there.

You may want to role-play the passage several times, using different readers. Afterward, in the large group, discuss these questions:

- What new insights into the baptism and temptation of Jesus did you gain from seeing these enacted?
- What insights did you gain into the nature of the John the Baptist, Jesus, and the tempter by the readers' expressions and inflections?

- If you had been reading one of these parts—or a part other than the one you read—what inflections and expressions would you have used?
- If these two incidents took place today in your community, how might they have been the same? different?

Wrapping Up

Adam Hamilton writes that both the baptism and the temptation were defining incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus. For us, baptism and the struggle with temptation can also be defining moments. As you close the session, leave these questions for the group to ponder in silence: Does baptism define me as beloved by God in such a way that I live out that love? Does my response to temptation define me as one who trusts in God and seeks to express God's love in all that I am and all that I do?

Closing Prayer

Invite group members to a time of silent prayer. Ask them to reflect in silence on a time when they have surrendered to temptation, either by doing the wrong thing or by failing to do the right thing. Remind the group that they are beloved by God and always surrounded by God's grace and forgiveness. After the silent prayer, join together in reciting the Lord's Prayer.

2.

The Healing Ministry

Capernaum

Getting Started

Session Goals

As a result of conversations and activities in this session, group members should begin to

- understand the role of Capernaum in the life and ministry of Jesus;
- reflect on the healing miracles of Jesus, especially miracles over paralysis and demon possession;
- contemplate demons at the time of Jesus and demons in our day and age;
- perceive how faith in Jesus Christ can play a role in dealing with demons of any sort;
- recognize possible connections between spiritual maladies, such as guilt and shame, and physical maladies;
- understand the ministry of what Adam Hamilton calls “stretcher-bearers,” both in the time of Jesus and in our time.

Opening Prayer

Invite the group to pray silently, calling to mind as they do so the kinds of “demons” that have tormented them—demons such as anger, laziness, worry, prejudice, envy, guilt, and jealousy. Then offer this prayer for the whole group:

Lord God,

We seem so surrounded by demons.

Some are demons over which we have no control.

Others we have brought upon ourselves by choices we have made.

But we know, Lord, that no demons can affect us without your knowledge. And we know, Lord, that all demons of every sort are subject to your power and love.

Forgive us, Lord, for dwelling upon the demons rather than upon you, the answer to the demons that seem to torment us.

Forgive us, Lord, for trying every other means of overcoming our demons before we learn to trust you and rely upon prayer.

Forgive us, Lord, for daring to think that some demons may be beyond your control.

We offer this prayer in the name of the one who cast out demons and who will rid us of our demons if we only rely upon him, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Biblical Foundation

They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and

come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee (Mark 1:21-28).

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

On a large historical map of Galilee, dated at the time of Jesus, point out the town of Capernaum. It is located at the northern part of the Sea of Galilee, amidst a number of small towns and villages around the lake. As Adam Hamilton points out, Capernaum was a fishing village but also served as a center for processing agricultural products. Grain milling and olive pressing (for olive oil) were important activities in the town; millstones are still visible in Capernaum. Ask the whole group to speculate as to why Jesus may have chosen Capernaum as his “headquarters,” rather than one of the other towns around the Sea of Galilee (but realize that we have no definite answer).

If any group members have visited the Holy Land, invite them to share their memories of Capernaum.

Learning Together

Video and Discussion

Show the video for this session, then raise these questions for discussion by the whole group:

- Did the town of Capernaum on the video look like you expected a town in biblical times to look? Explain your answer.
- What surprised you about what you saw of the town of Capernaum?

- Think about the shots of the synagogue. What did you notice about the way it was built?
- What ideas does the construction suggest? If group members stumble a bit here, ask them to think about the massive stones that were placed so carefully together to form the walls of the synagogue.

Pose this question for discussion in teams of four: Adam Hamilton says that he feels close to Jesus as he walks through Capernaum; what places in your life give you a feeling of closeness to Christ?

Bible Study and Discussion

Focus on the story of Jesus and the man with the unclean spirit, through a role-play of our Scripture passage above in Mark 1.

Invite a good reader to read the background of this passage from Mark 1 (verses 21-23) and another good reader—one who can recite with passion and expression—to read the reaction of the unclean spirit (verse 24). Ask a third reader to take the part of Jesus (verse 25) and a fourth to be the narrator (verses 26-27). Ask the whole group to read together the quotation (verse 27), after which the narrator will conclude (verse 28).

After the reading, remind the group that Jesus was in the synagogue, where any man could address the congregation. Thus, Jesus was teaching. Ask:

- Why do you think the people of Capernaum were astounded at the teachings of Jesus?
- Do you think they were positively astounded or negatively astounded? Why?

Tell the group that, just as those who were less than whole could not enter the Temple in Jerusalem, so they were prohibited from entering the local synagogue. We can probably assume that this man

was a local resident, known by the men of Capernaum, and believed to have mental problems. Ask:

- Why did the man risk his life by going into the synagogue, where he was not welcome because of his malady?
- How do you think the men in the synagogue responded when the man walked in?
- How might a congregation of our day react if a person known to be mentally ill wandered into the middle of a worship service and started a commotion?
- How did the evil spirit, the demon, recognize Jesus?
- Why and how did the evil spirit acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ, the Holy One of God, when this was not apparent to anyone else at the time?
- What does this say about Jesus and demons? What does it say about the demons that torment people in our day and age, and about Jesus in our time?
- Do you think Jesus' demand on the demon destroyed the demon, or did it just remove the demon from this one person, leaving it to inflict itself on others? Give reasons for your answers, and realize that there are no clear answers to the question.

Book Study and Discussion

As Adam Hamilton points out, demons still assault us today. Some are of our own making; some are not. Split up into teams of three and discuss these questions:

- What kinds of demons infect us today?
- Which of these demons are of our own creation and which are demons over which we have no control and never had any control?
- Do demons only infect us individually, or do demons infect whole groups of people, perhaps even nations? Give reasons and examples for your answers.

- How do you think Jesus would react to the demons that infect us today? Does he still say, “Come out?” Do the demons of today depart at Jesus’ word? Again, give reasons and examples of your answers.

In discussing this incident, Hamilton writes, “Each of us hears voices at times calling us—the voice of the Spirit calling us to do right, the voice of darkness seeking to defeat us, destroy us, or simply lure us toward the darkness. . . . Following the voices on the dark side . . . leads only to pain.” Still in teams of three, recall examples of people listening to the dark side and discovering it only leads to pain.

- Can you attest to this in your own life? If you feel comfortable doing so, share the experience, recognizing that the team is committed to absolute confidentiality.
- Can whole groups of people, including nations, listen to the dark side and experience the pain that comes with doing so? Again, give examples.

In this chapter, Hamilton takes readers through another unique healing miracle that took place in Capernaum. But this healing miracle was unlike many other miracles. Usually when people came to Jesus and were healed, he would say, “Your faith has made you well.” But in this case, Jesus did not say that he had healed the person or even that God had effected the healing. Instead, Jesus gave credit for the healing to the person’s friends and their faith in Christ. Ask:

- Who besides Jesus is the hero of this story?
- Who do you know who seems paralyzed—not necessarily physically, but emotionally, spiritually, or economically? How can you be a stretcher-bearer for this person and others?

Wrapping Up

Clearly, while Jesus sought to relieve suffering of every kind—mental, emotional, and spiritual as well as physical—he took every opportunity doing so to teach people about the Kingdom of God. Reading the miracle stories and being amazed at the compassion of Jesus is not the end in itself; the task to which Jesus calls us is learning to be disciples who live out that same kind of compassion. Each one of us must be a stretcher-bearer for others. For in so doing, we will love as Jesus first loved us.

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to a time of silent reflection on their call to be disciples. Then, close by reading aloud this familiar prayer of Saint Francis:

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.²*

3.

Proclaiming the Kingdom

The Mountains

Getting Started

Session Goals

As a result of participating in this session, group members should

- develop an understanding of the place and role of mountains in the biblical narratives;
- identify and give examples of several of the ways Jesus taught his followers;
- be able to define in their own words the Kingdom of God;
- be able to define and identify examples of hypocrisy in our culture;
- understand Jesus' Great Commandment and recognize how it is being lived out in their own lives;
- recognize ways in which their deeds reflect their basic life values;
- identify factors that are keeping them from trusting God completely;
- consider whether their lives are built on rock or sand.

Opening Prayer

Invite the group to read together Psalm 121 as this session's opening prayer. Ask group members to pray in silence for a moment following the reading.

Biblical Foundation

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them (Matthew 5:1-2).

[Jesus said] "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be as a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes (Matthew 7:24-29).

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

If possible, secure a large map of the Holy Land, preferably one showing geographic and geological features more than cities and towns. Post the map where all can see it, then comment on the importance of mountains in the Holy Land.

Point out the relatively flat coastal plain along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, then the range of mountains and hills that runs north and south just to the east of this coastal plain. Note the deep Jordan River Valley running from north of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, then point out the ridge of mountains that runs north and south again just to the east of this river valley. Discuss:

- In what ways might these mountain ranges have been a barrier to travel and commerce in biblical times?
- How might the climate and weather on the mountains differ from that in the deep river valley?
- Why might the ancient Jews have visited the mountains even though climbing them may have been difficult?
- Why might the Israelites, including Jesus, have sought the mountains as places to pray and be alone with God?

Remind the group that the ancient Hebrews did not believe God dwelt only on the mountains but rather understood God as omnipresent—that is, everywhere. By contrast, many of the Canaanite religions imagined their gods to live on the mountaintops. So, scholars tell us that when the psalmist in Psalm 121 speaks of lifting up his eyes to the mountains, it is not that he believes God lives only there (as did the Canaanites); rather, the psalmist knows that God is with us (the literal meaning of *Immanuel*) wherever we might be, and it is this awareness that provides the help that the psalmist praises.

Learning Together

Video and Discussion

Play the video, then in teams of four consider these questions:

- Are you a seaside, mountain, desert, forest, or city person? Why?
- Is the locale that you find special in your life related to early events in your life? If so, how?
- What was your first reaction when you saw the mountains in this video? Do the mountains of the Holy Land coincide with your mental image of mountains? Why or why not?

- What aspects or features of the mountains, the stones and boulders, and the vistas of the Holy Land may have shaped the message of Jesus, and in what ways?

Adam Hamilton challenges us to take a long walk, to visit the mountains or seashore or forests, and to pray as we do so. Ask each member of the group to consider making a private and serious commitment to find a special place of prayer, and to use that special place often.

Book Study and Discussion

In the book, Adam Hamilton describes the three devices Jesus used when he taught: similes, or comparing spiritual truths to everyday life (“The Kingdom of God is like . . .”); parables or stories (the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son); and what Hamilton calls “prophetic hyperbole,” speaking in bold and exaggerated terms to make his point (“If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out”).

Divide the group into teams of three, and invite them to think of at least one more example of each device. Ask the teams:

- Why did Jesus use these devices rather than just saying what he wanted to teach?
- What effect do the devices have on the listener?
- How are the devices used today, if at all? Give examples.
- Who uses the devices, and why? What effect do they have on an audience?

Ask each group member to take paper and pencil and to write a definition of the phrase “the Kingdom of God.” Ask group members to pair up and share their definitions. Ask each pair to join another pair and share definitions in teams of four. Ask the teams to discuss:

- What do their definitions have in common? How do they differ? Why?

- Are the definitions “this worldly,” or do they describe the ultimate Kingdom of God—that is, heaven, or the time of Jesus’ return? What do you think this shows?
- Jesus told us the Kingdom of God is near, and he said it two thousand years ago. What did the phrase mean then? What does it mean now?
- How, if at all, do your answers to these questions change your definition of the Kingdom of God? Give reasons for your answer.
- How can you and I, living in a sinful and often godless world, also live in the Kingdom of God?
- How, if at all, does our culture interfere with our attempts to live in the Kingdom of God?
- What can we do to overcome the culture’s interference with our living in the Kingdom of God?

In this chapter, Adam Hamilton suggests that most of us, himself included, are hypocrites. Discuss in the large group the meaning of hypocrisy.

- The church has sometimes been called “Hypocrites Unanimous.” Why? Do you feel that there is hypocrisy in your church? Give reasons why or why not.
- Is there a “cure” for hypocrisy, and if so, what is it?
- Can we live in today’s world without sometimes being hypocritical? Give reasons for your answers and cite factors in our culture that tend to cause hypocrisy.
- Is our great concern for financial security hypocritical? In what ways?
- Do you think God forgives our occasional and continued hypocrisy? What biblical evidence can you cite for your response?

Bible Study and Discussion

Ask the group to turn in their Bibles to the Great Commandment, as given in Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 22:34-40. If group mem-

bers have various translations of the Bible available, ask them to read several of the versions aloud. Then, ask teams of three to paraphrase—put into their own words—one of these passages. Invite the teams of three to share their paraphrases. Then, ask these questions for discussion by the whole group:

- What might living with the constant awareness of God’s presence mean for those who heard Jesus? What might it mean for us today?
- How aware are we each moment of each day of the presence and power of God?

After giving the Great Commandment, Jesus adds a second commandment that is implied in the first, so that it emerges directly from the commandment to love God. What is that commandment? Discuss:

- Who is the neighbor I am to love as I love myself? (If the group struggles with this, refer them to Luke 10:25-37.)
- What, if anything, is necessary to be one’s neighbor? Must we know the neighbor personally? Must the neighbor live close by?
- Must the neighbor love me in return?
- Is it possible in this day and age to love God and to love neighbor as Jesus directs? If it is possible, why do you think that sometimes we don’t do it?

Invite a good reader to read aloud Matthew 5:1-11, which we know today as the Beatitudes. Adam Hamilton declares that the Beatitudes turn the world’s values on their head. As a whole group, discuss what he means.

- How do the Beatitudes contrast with the cultural norms of our day? Specifically, what values are being turned upside down by Jesus in this list of Beatitudes?

- Is Jesus telling us that we should seek to be poor in spirit, that we should seek mourning, that we should seek persecution, or that we should seek being reviled? If so, why? If not, then what does he mean by these radical statements?
- How do the Beatitudes reflect the Kingdom of God and the love of God and neighbor?

Ask another reader to read aloud Matthew 7:1-5, in which Jesus talks about judging others. Many would say that this passage teaches us that we are not to judge one another, but is that true? Read the passage aloud again and listen carefully. Then, ask the whole group these questions:

- According to Jesus in this passage, when is it appropriate to judge another person?
- What does Jesus say about the criteria we use to judge others?

As part of the discussion, invite the group to paraphrase this idea in a contemporary idiom. (Example: Clean up your own act before you start telling others how to clean up theirs!)

Wrapping Up

Ask group members to read Matthew 7:24-27 silently. Then, in pairs, consider these questions:

- How does this passage summarize or “wrap up” what we’ve been discussing today?
- How can we know if our house is built on rock or on sand?
- If a house built on sand will be destroyed, and if that house represents our lives, then is Jesus saying that our lives will be destroyed—that is, are we ever beyond redemption? What Scriptures cause you to respond as you do?

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to a time of silent prayer and reflection. Then offer this prayer aloud:

Lord, you never said that following you would be easy, but you have promised us again and again that you will be with us every step of the way. Lord, you know we are trying to live your way, the way described in your Sermon on the Mount, but our own interests and the ways of the world keep getting in our way. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to use the courage you have given us to live as Christ would have us live. In His name we pray. Amen.

4.

Calming the Storm

The Sea of Galilee

Getting Started

Session Goals

As a result of participating in this session, group members should begin to

- develop an understanding of and appreciation for the Sea of Galilee and the part it played in the ministry of Jesus;
- recognize the significance of fishing and fishermen in the world of Jesus;
- contemplate their own response to Jesus' call to discipleship and service;
- feel Jesus' presence in their daily lives and recognize the everyday as a mission field to which they have been called;
- acknowledge the storms they have faced and are facing in their daily lives;
- become sensitive to the presence of Christ in all the storms of life;
- believe that with Christ, all things are possible.

Opening Prayer

In this chapter of his book, Adam Hamilton includes three verses of what is sometimes called the Navy Hymn, “Eternal Father, Strong to Save.” Divide the group into three teams, and assign each team to read one verse aloud as a prayer. Remind the group that the last line of each verse refers not only to the literal sea, but also to any who are facing what seems to be a sea of troubles, anxiety, or fear. Invite the group into an attitude of prayer. Then, ask the teams to read their verses aloud in order. Suggest that the teams pause briefly between verses; then all the teams can say “Amen” in unison.

Biblical Foundation

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:35-41).

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

On a large map of the Holy Land, point out the Sea of Galilee. Note the mountains just to the east of the sea. Tell the group that these mountains hold back winds that come out of the eastern deserts. When the winds, unpredictable in intensity, duration, and timing, finally whip through some of the valleys that lead to the seashores, they cause terrible storms on the Sea of Galilee.

Pose this question for discussion by the whole group: Why might fishing have been so important during the time of Christ?

After the discussion, point out that fish, both freshwater and salt-water, were a primary source of protein for the people of the time. While the people did raise sheep and goats, the meats of these animals were used for special occasions; fish, often salted and dried, was the everyday food for the people of the time. You might point out as well that the sidewalk stalls and markets of Caesarea, the major city on the southwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, are filled to this day with fish of every description, indicating a continued dependence on fish as a food source.

Learning Together

Video and Discussion

Adam Hamilton talks in the video about the role of water, especially the Sea of Galilee, in biblical times. Discuss as a group:

- As you watched the video, what images or insights into the Sea of Galilee did you glean?
- How would you describe the shoreline? What characterizes the plants and vegetation around the lake?
- Did you notice anything about the action of the water on the lake? (Point out that because of the landforms around the Sea of Galilee, the water of the lake is never still.)

Work in teams of three to discuss:

- How is the water of a large lake, such as the Sea of Galilee, both something to praise God for and at the same time something to fear?
- What does water represent? (Recall the waters of birth and the water we drink every day; the terrible storms on lakes and over oceans; and the fact that water can claim lives, such as by drowning.)

- What do you think is the prevailing image of water in the Scriptures? (Recall the Red Sea, the River Jabbok, Jonah and his voyage on the waters, Paul's shipwreck, Naaman and his immersion in the Jordan River, and other examples.)

When the teams finish their discussions, invite them to share their ideas with another team of three.

Bible Study and Discussion

Invite group members to turn to Luke 5:1-11, in which Jesus calls Simon and others to discipleship at the Sea of Galilee. Select two good readers, one to read the words of Jesus aloud and the other to read the words of Simon. You might assign another person to read the narrator's part, or you could invite the entire group to read it. Ask those who are reading the Jesus and Simon parts to stand before the group and read with gestures, expression, and feeling. After the reading, pose these questions:

- How do you think Simon, a working fisherman, felt when this wandering rabbi got into his boat and told him to anchor offshore so he could talk to the crowd? Remember, Simon was trying to fish!
- Are there any people in your group who fish? How do they feel when someone on the shore tells them how to catch fish?
- In verse 8, why do you think Simon refers to himself as a sinful man, and why does he want Jesus to leave him? Is he frightened by the presence of Jesus? Why?
- If you encountered Jesus, would you be frightened? Why or why not? Would you acknowledge yourself to be sinful? Why or why not?

A second story on the Sea of Galilee is related in Mark 4:35-41, shown above in the Biblical Foundation, in which Jesus calms the wind and waves. Together read the story aloud, in a couple of different translations if available.

The result—truly a miracle—was the calming of the storm. It demonstrated the power of Jesus Christ, that even creation obeys him, for he is God (see John 1:1). Time and again Jesus showed his power over creation by healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, and making the lame walk. Nothing in the universe is beyond the dominion of Jesus Christ. Discuss as a group:

- What storms do you see in today's world and in your own life? What does it mean when we say that Jesus has dominion over them?
- Do the storms always disappear? When they don't, what do you think it means? How do you think we should respond? How does God respond?
- Would a group member like to relate a personal experience with a "storm"? Remind the group that personal information learned in the group is strictly confidential.

A third story at the Sea of Galilee is related in Matthew 14:22-33, in which Jesus walks on water. Read the story aloud and then, working as a group, list the major characters in this story. (Hint: While only Jesus and Peter have speaking parts, all the apostles are present.) Next, list the events of the story, in the order in which they took place. (These include Jesus' asking the apostles to go to the other side of the lake, his retreat to a mountain to pray, the sudden storm and high waves, Jesus' reaction, and the disciples' response.)

After listing the characters and events, divide into teams of three to discuss the story, using questions such as the following:

- Why, after teaching the multitudes and feeding them with loaves and fish, did Jesus seek time alone with God

in prayer? What does this tell us about Jesus? What might it say to us?

- What were the apostles doing in the boat after dark? How would you feel if your boat was being battered by the waves in the black of night?
- Since there probably were no lights on the boat, is it surprising that as Jesus approached, the apostles thought they were seeing a ghost? How would you have felt in their place?
- What three things does Jesus say to the apostles as he approached them during the storm?
- What does it mean to “take heart”?
- Why do you think Jesus said, “It is I,” and didn’t identify himself further?
- What effect do you think Jesus’ counsel had on the apostles? What effect would it have had on you?

Book Study and Discussion

In his book, Adam Hamilton writes that the story of the disciples’ calling is the story of our calling, too, to “fish for people.” We feel a nudge from God, and it won’t leave us alone.

- What are some simple ways that you have fished for people? What are some ways you haven’t yet attempted but could try?
- What does the selection of fisherman as disciples tell us about whom Jesus is calling and why?
- What are some barriers in your own life that get in the way of following Jesus? What are some ways you could overcome those barriers?

Hamilton points out that the story of the wind and the waves shows that the disciples, though they had chosen to follow Jesus, still didn’t fully grasp who he was.

- What do you think it means to say that Jesus was both human and divine?
- What do you think it means for a person to be God? Besides this story, what other Bible passages demonstrate this mysterious truth?
- What does it mean to move from fear to faith? Is that always possible? Whether it is possible or not, what does God offer us?

Wrapping Up

Help group members recognize that these well-loved and familiar stories are not just for children's Sunday school class; in fact, they touch our lives to the depths of our being. Each of us has a choice: We can trust and believe that Jesus comes to us in our need, calling us to serve him; we can trust and believe that Jesus directs us to life abundant and life everlasting; and we can trust and believe that Jesus knows the storms of life that we encounter and that his peace can dissipate those storms. Or we can continue in doubt, anxiety, and fear.

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to a time of silent prayer, then pray aloud:

Lord, as the man said to Jesus, so we say to you: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

Close by reciting together the Lord's Prayer.

5.

Sinners, Outcasts, and the Poor

Samaria

Getting Started

Session Goals

Through the conversations and activities at this session, group members should

- come to a deeper understanding of Jesus' ministry with the least, the last, and the lost;
- recognize the prejudices that made people outcasts in the first century and identify some prejudices that make people outcasts today;
- identify ways in which Jesus ministered to and with the outcasts and his reasons for doing so;
- become aware of their own tendencies to label certain groups as outcasts and the reasons for such labeling;
- begin to overcome prejudices against those who are different in various ways;
- recognize ways in which they may have passed on their prejudices to their children and to others.

Opening Prayer

Ask a good reader to read aloud Matthew 25:34-40. Then, invite group members to a time of silent prayer, encouraging them to

recognize honestly when and how they have turned their backs on others in need. Close by offering this prayer:

God, be merciful to each one of us, for we are sinners. Amen.

Biblical Foundation

[Jesus] left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:3-10).

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

On a large map of the Holy Land, point out the four areas that Adam Hamilton mentions in this chapter:

To the east of the Sea of Galilee is basically Gentile land. Jesus visited and performed miracles there.

To the south is Judea, with the capital city of Jerusalem high on a hill. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not far from Jerusalem, and he visited Jerusalem several times, although the Gospels are not clear about exactly how often Jesus was in Jerusalem.

On the north and west side of the Sea of Galilee is the region known as Galilee, primarily rural and Jewish. If we liken Jerusalem to New York City in our day, Galilee might be something like Iowa or Kansas, populated mostly by rural folks.

West of the Jordan River, wedged between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south, was Samaria, an area that good Jews would avoid at all costs. Indeed, pious Jews traveling between Galilee and Judea would most often cross to the eastern side of the Jordan River, travel on that eastern side for a long distance, and then cross back over the Jordan to their destination. This would often double the length and duration of their journey, and yet they would still do it to avoid the land of the hated Samaritans. Sound strange? Are there neighborhoods, parts of town, or geographical areas where you live that you would go around to avoid having to go through?

Learning Together

Video and Discussion

Adam Hamilton takes us to the town of Kursi, where Jesus traveled after calming the wind and waves. Hamilton recounts the story from Mark 5 about Jesus' encounter with a man said to be possessed of demons.

- Where was the man living? How had the townspeople treated him? Why?
- The first thing Jesus said to the man was, "What is your name?" Why do you think Jesus began the conversation in this way? What was the man's response?
- When Jesus cast the demons into the swine and the swine ran into the Sea of Galilee, how did the townspeople respond? Why? Have you ever responded that way to God?
- At Jesus' urging, the man who had been freed of demons became the first missionary to the Gentiles. What can we learn from this episode?

Hamilton interviews a Samaritan priest.

- What were your impressions of the priest?

- Based on the interview, describe some aspects of Samaritan life today.

We visit a beautiful church built over Jacob's Well in the city that at one time was known as Sychar, and Hamilton tells the story of Jesus and the woman at the well.

- What struck you about the church? How is it set up to accommodate visitors?
- What do we learn about Jesus by seeing him minister to the woman at the well?

Book Study and Discussion

As a group, discuss briefly the concept of *am ha-aretz*, the Hebrew term that Adam Hamilton uses for those who were considered undesirable in first-century Judea and Galilee. List some reasons why such people were considered undesirable and were avoided. Divide into teams of three and discuss:

- Who are the undesirables in our day and age? Before answering that question, recall that we live in a global society, not just within our own community. Are the undesirables in our time global and international? Give reasons for your answers.
- Who are the undesirables in terms of politics? in terms of socio-economic status? in terms of religion and faith? in terms of customs and culture? in terms of actions and activities? in terms of lifestyle choices?
- Where and how did we get the idea that these people are undesirable? Were we born with prejudices toward people not like ourselves? Were we taught them? How?
- Are there ways in which we are passing prejudices on to the next generations?
- Are there groups we legitimately should avoid? Be careful with your responses, and be ready to defend them.

In the large group, consider:

- What was Jesus' response to the undesirables of his day? Did he have to deal with some of the undesirables that we have to face? Give reasons for your answer.
- If Jesus were among us today, how would he deal with some of our undesirables? Would he expect us to do the same? Why or why not?
- Can we be and do all that Jesus was and did?

Bible Study and Discussion

John 4:4-29, the incident of the woman at the well, is a wonderful story of Jesus dealing with someone who was undesirable in a multitude of ways.

Select two good readers, one to read the part of Jesus and one to read the part of the Samaritan woman. You or another good reader might read the part of the narrator, basically to set the stage.

Be sure the group recognizes that Jews considered the woman undesirable ethnically, as a Samaritan; morally, for she was clearly an adulteress; and socially, for she had been ostracized by her own people. (She came to the well at noon, when no one else was there, and spoke with a strange man, and a Jew at that.) Ask the group to discuss these questions:

- How did the woman respond to Jesus' request for a drink of water? Why do you think she responded this way?
- What did Jesus offer the woman?
- What was the woman's final response to her conversation with Jesus?

Wrapping Up

Few of us succeed in being as open to undesirables as Jesus was. We can't "flip a switch" and move from prejudice to the kind of genuine openness that Jesus displayed. But we can and must grow in that direction. Thus, we recognize the gift that God has given us, namely the sanctifying grace that enables us, prejudiced sinners,

to grow incrementally toward Christ-likeness in all that we are and all that we do.

Ultimately we are as undesirable as the woman at the well, yet Christ offers us, as he offered her, life abundant and everlasting as we seek to grow and become more like him in every way.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we are surrounded by so much need, yet you have blessed us with such abundance. We can comprehend neither your graciousness to us nor the needs of those around us. But we know that those in need are our sisters and brothers, for we have but a common parent in you. Therefore, Almighty God, make us ever mindful of our responsibility to those who have less, to those who are forgotten and neglected, to those we do not even know, to those whom we have considered our enemies. And help us to use the strengths, compassion, and love that you have given us to provide for them in every way we can. We pray in the name of the one who endlessly provides for us, even Christ our Lord. Amen.

6.

The Final Week

Jerusalem

Getting Started

Session Goals

By engaging in the discussions and activities during this session, group members should begin to

- develop a working knowledge of the last week of Jesus' life before the Crucifixion;
- gain a renewed understanding of some factors that led to Jesus' crucifixion;
- identify participants in the various events that took place during Jesus' last week before the Crucifixion;
- understand why Jesus did some of the things he did during his last week in Jerusalem;
- suggest answers for the people of Jesus' time and our own time to the question, "What kind of King is this?"

Opening Prayer

Invite group members to read silently Philippians 2:5-11 and to pray in silence in response to the words. Then, ask the group members to read the passage of Scripture aloud together, then to pray in silence again, seeking God's direction for an appropriate response to this passage.

Biblical Foundation

They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then, those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Mark 11:7-10).

Opening Activity (90-minute option)

Before beginning a discussion of Jesus’ final week, use a map of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus to show some important sites.

Remind your group that Jerusalem sits atop a large hill and is surrounded on three sides by deep valleys. Across one of these valleys, the Kidron Valley, is the Mount of Olives. This hilltop prominence made Jerusalem very defensible and was one of the reasons why King David chose this ancient Jebusite site as his capital city.

Point out the location of the Temple Mount and the site of the Temple in the northeast corner of the city. Note too the Antonio Fortress, the Roman fort built just to the north of Temple Mount. The Romans were very much aware that the Temple Mount was the center of Jewish life and culture and could become the center of protests and even armed uprisings; consequently, the Romans kept a strong garrison of soldiers close by.

Show the Mount of Olives, perhaps a quarter mile as the crow flies from the Golden Gate on the east side of the Temple Mount, but a walking distance perhaps twice that far because of the trek down into the valley and up the other side. (Thus, the apostles and Jesus easily could have seen the crowd carrying torches coming toward them, first down from Temple Mount then up the Mount of Olives, on that Thursday night after Jesus shared his final supper with his apostles before the Crucifixion.)

As further background, you might also share this information

with your group members: The four Gospel writers do not agree on all the details of Jesus' last week before the Crucifixion. There are good reasons for this. First, the Gospel writers were not writing history or news stories; they were writing theologically, describing how God came into human life in Jesus Christ. The reality and message of Jesus were far more important to the Gospel writers than details of time and geography. Second, the Gospels were written many years after Jesus lived. Mark, often thought to be the earliest Gospel written, is usually dated about twenty years after the Resurrection; John, thought to be the most recent of the four, may have been written as long as sixty years after the Resurrection. Thus, reading the Gospels for minor details may be an exercise in frustration, as is trying to combine or reconcile them.

Learning Together

Video and Discussion

Before you play this video, remind the group that they will be seeing scenes connected with the last week of Jesus' life before the Resurrection. In addition to natural landscapes such as the group has seen in previous videos, they will see in this video a number of human-made—and human-destroyed—structures. As the group watches this video, invite them to reflect on the structures they see, such as the thick, heavy walls of Jerusalem and especially of the Temple Mount; the beautiful churches built to commemorate events in this last week of Jesus' life before the Resurrection; and the traditional site of both Calvary and the tomb in which the body of Jesus was placed.

- What do the structures in the video say about building practices in the time of Jesus and before?
- What do the massive size and workmanship of the stones suggest?

- In what ways does this style of architecture make Jerusalem an eternal city, one that even the Roman army could not destroy?

If your group includes people who have been to Jerusalem, invite them to share their memories of the Mount of Olives, the walk down into the valley and up to the gates of the city, and especially their recollections of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Bible Study and Discussion

Read the passage again from Mark 11 (see Biblical Foundation). Then, divide your group into teams of four and invite the members of each team to recall childhood experiences of Palm Sunday. Were they given palms at Sunday School? Asked to wave them at appropriate times during the worship service? Do they recall any Palm Sunday hymns or songs? Hear very brief reports from several of the teams, then discuss:

- How did Palm Sunday set the stage for all that followed during Jesus' final week?
- Do you think the arrest, trial, and crucifixion could have taken place without Palm Sunday? Give reasons for your answers.
- What did the Palm Sunday events communicate to both the Jewish religious establishment and the Roman authorities?
- Recall that the Romans were an occupying force that taxed the local population heavily. How do you think the Romans and the local religious authorities would have responded to large crowds greeting a stranger as a king, with shouts of "Save us, save us!"

Book Study and Discussion

Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers, saying they had made the temple a “den of thieves.” And Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites, like “whitewashed tombs.” These are examples of what some people have called “bad religion.”

- What examples of bad religion do you see in our world? Do you think there is more bad religion now than there was in Jesus’ time? Why or why not?
- Hamilton asserts that Jesus’ actions on Monday sealed his fate. What does he mean by this statement? What does it tell us about Jesus’ ministry and message?

On Friday, Jesus was forced to carry his cross to Calvary, a hill-top beside a garden along the main roadway. There he was crucified, dying a long, painful death.

- What does it mean to you when we say that Jesus died for our sins? What could it mean?
- Hamilton writes that the cross is a mirror held up to our souls. What do you think he means? When you look in that mirror, what do you see?

Jesus’ crucifixion and subsequent resurrection serve as pivots on which the entire history of humankind rests. The Crucifixion demonstrates the absolute epitome of humankind’s inhumanity to humankind. Scholars point out that no more hideous and painful form of execution has ever been devised. In teams of four, discuss:

- What kind of king would submit to such torture?
- Why did Jesus pray that the cup might pass from him? What human emotion was he demonstrating in this prayer?
- Why did Jesus pray for the forgiveness of those who executed him? What was his relationship with them?

Wrapping Up

Ultimately and always, the Crucifixion is a mystery. We know that we are granted abundant and everlasting life through the cross and the empty tomb. Just how this takes place is not ours to comprehend; we accept it and indeed know it, through faith, as a miracle of love. We bow in grateful acknowledgment of this king whose love and compassion for us is endless. Thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift!

Closing Prayer

Ask group members to jot down on paper—for their eyes only—an answer to this question: What kind of king is Jesus for me? Encourage each group member to keep his or her answers in pocket or purse, and to refer to them often in the coming week. Invite group members to a time of silent prayer, reflecting as they do on the glory and majesty of this ultimate servant and ultimate king. Close by reciting together the Lord's Prayer.

Epilogue

Your Defining Story

Note to the Leader

The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus is a six-week study, but the study, like the book on which it is based, also includes an epilogue about the Resurrection, titled “Your Defining Story.” Groups using *The Way* as a Lenten study thus have the option of a session for Easter Sunday, and groups using the study at other times of the year have the option of extending it to seven weeks. In the book, the DVD, and this leader guide, the Epilogue uses an abbreviated format.

Opening Prayer

Invite the group to join with you in this resurrection prayer, taken from a fifth-century book of prayers and liturgies. As you have done at other sessions, you might want to write this prayer on the board or copy it on index cards to give to each group member.

*Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death
and opened to us the gate of everlasting life.
Grant that we who celebrate our Lord's resurrection,
by the renewing of your Spirit,
arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*³

Biblical Foundation

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:19-23).

Video

Do not show the video at this point. Instead, show the video at the end of this session. See “Video and Discussion” below.

Bible Study and Discussion

Invite a good reader to read John 20:19-23 aloud. Then, ask the group members to put themselves in the shoes of the disciples and discuss:

- Why were the disciples meeting behind locked doors? Who do you think they feared? What do you think the disciples might have been doing when Jesus entered the room? Might they have been talking among themselves? If so, what might they have been discussing?
- Do you think that at this point the disciples were determined to stay together or were they about to go their separate ways? Give reasons for your answer.
- Given all that had happened to them, do you think the disciples could have gone back to life as it had been before they encountered Jesus? What might they have believed the future held for them?
- When Jesus entered the room, what was the first thing he said to them? What do you think he meant?
- When Jesus says “Peace,” was he describing the absence of conflict, or was he referring to something else?

- What did Jesus give the disciples in that locked room? What conditions did he place on the gift?
- What does Jesus' gift to the disciples say about what he offers to give us?
- What does this entire episode say to us today about Jesus' relationship with us?

Book Study and Discussion

Divide your group into teams of four, giving each team member a pencil and piece of paper. Ask team members to write down a single word or phrase expressing what the Resurrection means to them. Invite them to share with their team.

Write the following words on the board: pivot, climax, defining story. Each of these words has been used to describe the Resurrection. Invite the teams to reflect on these words and discuss what they mean when used with the Resurrection.

- How is the Resurrection the pivot for world history?
- How is the Resurrection the climax of the human story, especially in relationship to and with God?
- How is the Resurrection your defining story?

Hear reports in the whole group from several of the teams. Look for common understandings and for new insights into the nature of the meaning of the Resurrection.

Video and Discussion

The video for the epilogue consists of Adam Hamilton giving some closing thoughts about his travels to the Holy Land, his discoveries along the way, and the Resurrection.

- What have been your reactions to the study?
- What are your most vivid memories of the videos shot in the Holy Land? How did you respond?
- How might you look at the Bible, the life of Christ, or your own life differently because of this study?

Closing Prayer

If hymnals are available, invite the group members to read aloud as a prayer the words of Washington Gladden's hymn, "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee" to summarize this entire consideration of the footsteps of Jesus.⁴

Churchwide Study of *The Way*

The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus explores the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Author Adam Hamilton leads readers through the places Jesus' ministry took place, explains the culture of Bible times, and explores what it means to live as followers of Jesus.

A churchwide study program for all ages will help people come to a deeper understanding of what it means to live as Jesus' followers and will invite families to learn about Jesus together. The program will offer opportunities for learning, for intergenerational projects and activities, and for reaching out in service to the community.

Resources for the Churchwide Study

Adults

The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus—Book

The Way: DVD with Leader Guide—Videos (Optional for youth)

The Way: 40 Days of Reflection—Devotional Companion

Youth

The Way: Youth Study Edition

Children

The Way: Children's Leader Guide

Schedule Suggestions

Many churches have weeknight programs that include an evening meal; an intergenerational gathering time; and classes for children, youth, and adults. The following schedule illustrates one way to organize a weeknight program.

- 5:30 p.m. Meal
- 6:00 p.m. Intergenerational gathering introducing weekly themes and places for the lesson. This time may include presentations, skits, music, and opening or closing prayers.
- 6:15 p.m.–8:15 p.m. Classes for children, youth, and adults

Alternatively, churches may want to do this study as a Sunday school program. This setting would be similar to the weeknight setting. The following schedule takes into account a shorter class time, which is the norm for Sunday morning programs.

- 10 minutes Intergenerational gathering
- 45 minutes Classes for children, youth, and adults

Choose a schedule that works best for your congregation and its Christian education programs.

Activity Suggestions

Follow Jesus by Serving! Churchwide Service Day

An important part of following Jesus is being the hands and feet of Jesus in today's world. A churchwide service day would be a good kick-off or wrap-up event. Plan multiple service opportunities for

the day, choosing some projects appropriate for each age level. If your church has a missions committee, check with them for ideas. Consult with local service agencies to see if there are projects you could do for them.

Collection Drive

In conjunction with your churchwide service day or separately, use this study as an opportunity to collect items for donation to a local service organization. Possible ideas include food for the local food pantry, monetary donations for any number of organizations, children's books for a hospital library or school, baby supplies for a shelter, or school supplies for an elementary school.

Notes

1. Girolama Savonarola, “For Overcoming Adversity,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 531.
2. Francis of Assisi, “The Prayer of Saint Francis,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 481.
3. Gelasian Sacramentary, fifth-century prayer (no title), *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 393.
4. Washington Gladden, “O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 430.

LEADER GUIDE

Based on Adam Hamilton's inspiring book
The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

In his book *The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus*, and in the book of devotions and the DVD based on it, Adam Hamilton guides readers through the journeys of Jesus' life and ministry. In this Leader Guide, discussion groups will find a helpful format for exploring the books and DVD.

The Leader Guide provides questions and exercises keyed to each session, as well as multiple format options and suggestions of ways to make the study a meaningful experience for any group.

Adam Hamilton traveled to the Holy Land to let the Spirit fire up his imagination for this study. The result is a wonder-full reflection on the words and ways of Jesus: The Way. You'll love this journey.

Rev. Rick Power

Senior Pastor, College Church of the Nazarene



Adam Hamilton is senior pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. A master at explaining difficult questions of faith in a down-to-earth fashion, he is the author of many books, including *Forgiveness*, *The Journey*, *24 Hours That Changed the World*, *Final Words From the Cross*, *Enough*, *When Christians Get It Wrong*, *Why?* and *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*, all published by Abingdon Press.



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Cover design: Marc Whitaker

Cover illustration: Mick McGinty