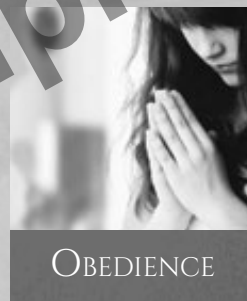
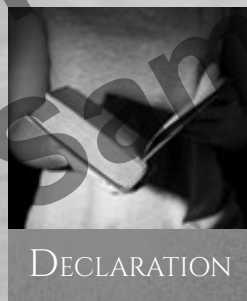
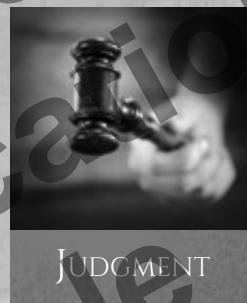
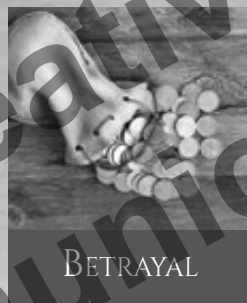
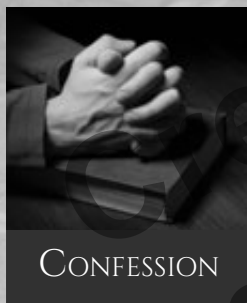


— AT THE —
CROSSROADS

A SIX WEEK BIBLE STUDY
FOR LENT



Leader's Guide

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FOR LENT

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INTRODUCTION

Crossroads. They are there for all of us, especially during Lent. A choice point. Which way? Right? Left? Straight? What waits down each of those choices? Which way does our heart call us to go? Which makes sense? Which way is the way of Christ the Crucified?

Many of those involved in the story of the Passion of Christ came to a crossroads and had to decide which way to go. Some chose well, some did not, and the stories of each of these experiences at various crossroads help us to know what to do and what not to do when we encounter similar crossroads in our own lives. In the end, each story in the series reveals in some way how Christ and his cross lead us to follow the path of God's will for us.

Creative
Communications
Sample

TIPS FOR USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand each of them with prayer concerns from the group.
2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.
3. You will need Bibles to look up the verses listed in each session.
4. As you work through the material in this study guide, be sure to write down in the margins any questions that come to mind or any thoughts that arise in the course of the discussion and your contemplation of each session's Scripture verses.
5. Throughout each session, think about specific ways you can apply the themes of the study to your life this Lenten season.
6. If you are using this guide in a group setting, consider assigning the Bible verses to various people in the class to read aloud at the appropriate time. This will move the session along more efficiently.

Note that some of the questions ask for facts. Typically, the answers to these questions will come from the Scripture verses just read. Other questions are more subjective, asking for your opinion or an example from your own experience. Since your life experiences are different from anyone else's, answers to these questions are neither right nor wrong. A Leader's Guide that accompanies this material is available from Creative Communications for the Parish (Code CRDL).

SESSION 1

CONFESSION

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Psalm 51:1



OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, by the power of your Spirit, bless our study of your holy Word. As we follow Jesus' path through Lent, lead us to walk in repentance, knowing that he died on the cross for us. As we receive your forgiveness, help us by your Spirit to forgive those who sin against us so that we might more fully reflect your love and mercy. Hear our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What examples of sin and forgiveness do you see and hear in the news? How does our society today understand the concepts of sin and forgiveness?

Leader's Guide For Session 1

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Read through the Bible readings listed and become acquainted with them. If you plan on having members of the group read any of the Bible readings, assign them prior to class.

READ: Have a member of the group read the Introduction (on p. 4) aloud.

READ: Have someone read the Opening Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

DISCUSS: Discuss examples of sin and forgiveness in news reports.

READ: Read or have someone read the introduction.

Confessing

1. David confesses that he is in need of cleansing. He is always aware of his transgressions and he has sinned only against God. God is blameless and justified in the judgment he brings against David. He has done evil in the sight of God. David's sins against Uriah and Bathsheba were sins against God's commandments against murder and adultery. In disobeying God in these areas, David is also disobeying the first commandment. He set up his own needs and desires as "god" in place of the God of Israel. Sin took hold of David from the moment of his conception. David knows that God shows steadfast love and abundant mercy; he is confident that the God who delights in truth will hear his prayer of repentance and forgive him. • David asks God to restore him and renew him with a right spirit. He asks that the joy of salvation be restored to him. Answers will vary, but in the forgiveness of sins our relationship to God is restored. We are renewed and cleansed.
2. David says that his bones wasted away, he groaned all day long and his strength was dried up. If we say we have no sins to confess, we deceive ourselves. David begins his prayer with confidence as he announces the blessedness of those who are forgiven, the blessedness of those whose sin is not counted against them by the Lord. • David encourages others to pray to God because he knows that God will help and save his people. God is a hiding place who preserves David from trouble and delivers him. The steadfast love of the Lord surrounds him. Answers will vary.
3. Godly grief is true sorrow over sin that leads to repentance and salvation. The Corinthian Christians are eager to clear themselves of wrongdoing. They are indignant over sins committed and mourn over those sins. They fear God and they long to please him. Paul had given them instructions (1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 12) to judge the evil among them and remove it. It appears that they had done so. Paul knew that his letter had grieved them, but he rejoiced to see that their grief led to repentance. Worldly grief may be only an outward demonstration of sorrow without true repentance. It may be a form of regret that involves no inward change of heart or desire to please God. Worldly grief may simply involve regret that one has been "caught" doing wrong. Answers will vary, but we may express such outward grief merely to impress others (or to convince ourselves that we really are not such terrible sinners).

INTRODUCTION

It is a crossroads of confession. A guilty suspect must decide. Will he confess his crime and throw himself on the mercy of the court or will he plead "not guilty," hoping the evidence will not betray him? We stand at that same crossroads, during Lent and each day of our lives. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we confess our sins, acknowledging our guilt and shame before God. With confidence we throw ourselves on the mercy of the heavenly court, knowing that Christ Jesus our Lord has already paid in full the debt we owe.

CONFESSING

1. After David was convicted—by the Spirit through the words of the prophet Nathan—of his sins of murder and adultery, the repentant king asks for God's forgiveness in the words of Psalm 51. **Read Psalm 51:1-9.** In these verses, what does David confess about himself? Why would he say to God, "Against you, you only, have I sinned"? He clearly sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba! When did sin first take hold of his life? What does David confess about God? How does the repentant king express his confidence in God? **Read Psalm 51:10-12.** Confident of God's mercy, what does David ask of God? Are forgiveness and restoration "two sides of the same coin"? Why or why not?
2. **Read Psalm 32:1-4.** In his refusal to repent, David "kept silent" and did not acknowledge his sins. How was David's unrepentant heart reflected in his physical health? How does a lack of repentance involve a deceitful spirit? (verse 2; see also 1 John 1:8) How does David begin his prayer of repentance with confidence? **Read Psalm 32:6-11.** How does the psalmist express his confidence in God in these verses? Would you, outside of formal worship, use psalms such as these to confess your own sins? Why or why not?
3. **Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-13.** According to the apostle Paul, what is "godly grief"? What attitudes had such godly grief produced in the hearts of the Corinthian Christians? Why was Paul relieved

to know that his previous letter had produced such grief? What is “worldly grief” and why would it produce death? When are we tempted to express worldly grief instead of godly grief?

4. **Read Mark 1:14-15.** The baptism of John the Baptist was a baptism of repentance. It was for people a public acknowledgement of sin and of their need for the coming Savior (see Acts 19:4). After John was arrested by King Herod, Jesus taught in Galilee. What are the four parts of Jesus’ proclamation? What does he mean by saying, “The time is fulfilled”? Jesus calls for repentance. How does his proclamation express confidence in God’s mercy, as David expressed in his psalms?
5. **Read Romans 10:8-10.** To confess is to acknowledge one’s sins. What is the different meaning of confession in these verses? How are both meanings of confession reflected in Jesus’ proclamation in Mark’s Gospel and in the psalms read in this lesson?
6. **Read Matthew 3:4-10.** People came to hear John preach. Many believed in the promise of the Messiah to come and repented of their sins. Not everyone believed. Some refused John’s baptism (see Luke 7:29-30). Why is John’s warning for them so serious? According to John, what excuses have the Pharisees and Sadducees made for themselves? What does it mean to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance”? What would such fruit-bearing look like in your life today?

FORGIVEN

1. How would you define forgiveness? Does it involve only forgetting about the sins committed, or is it more than that? Scripture uses different word pictures to describe God’s forgiveness for us. **Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.** God made a covenant with Israel (Exodus 19:4-6), but they did not obey the Lord and keep his covenant. How will the new covenant differ from that broken covenant? **Read Malachi 3:1-4.** The prophet talks about the arrival of the “messenger of the covenant.” In this new covenant God will forgive the sins of his people. How is that forgiveness described by

describes the forgiveness as a refiner’s fire and fuller’s soap (a fuller cleaned wool cloth; fuller’s soap might be thought of as bleach). Answers will vary, but Malachi asks, “Who can endure the day of his coming?” That sounds like a warning.

2. The first covenant was inaugurated in the blood of animal sacrifices that were offered up by the people of Israel. There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. The old covenant sacrifices were offered repeatedly. Jesus’ sacrifice of himself was offered once, for all. He shed his own blood, entering into heaven to plead for us.

4. Jesus proclaims that the time is fulfilled and that the kingdom of God is at hand, the reign of God is present in Jesus. It is time to repent and it is time to believe the gospel, the good news of forgiveness and life in his name. The time is fulfilled, the Old Testament promises of God are now revealed in Christ Jesus. Jesus calls on those who repent to also believe the Gospel.
5. Here confession means to state one’s trust or belief in Jesus. According to Jesus’ proclamation and the psalms, we are to confess, or acknowledge, our sins before God and we also confess, or state our trust, in God’s unfailing love and forgiveness.
6. John warns the people about the wrath of God that is coming, the judgment that will fall on them on the Last Day if they do not repent and believe. John’s warning concerns eternity, and not just the earthly life of those who hear him. The Pharisees and Sadducees, instead of repenting, depend on being descendants of Abraham. God is able to raise up new offspring for Abraham (Galatians 3:29). To bear fruit in keeping with repentance is to live outwardly in a way that reflects your inward attitude of repentance as you seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live a God-pleasing life. Answers will vary.

Forgiven

1. The new covenant is one-sided; God will establish the covenant and he will fulfill it in the hearts of his people, writing his law on their hearts and forgiving their sins. • Malachi



— AT THE —
CROSSROADS

A SIX WEEK BIBLE STUDY
FOR LENT

This six session Bible study for Lent follows the themes of the At the Crossroads worship series: Confession, Betrayal, Judgment, Compassion, Declaration and Obedience. Each session in the study includes Scripture readings, questions for discussion, prayers and suggested activities for devotion and service as you follow the road to the cross during Lent.