

# The Pull of Jesus

Where is Jesus Drawing You?



## 2026 GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS: LENTEN SERIES

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*"The Pull of Jesus: Where is Jesus Drawing You?"*

Welcome to Bethany's Lenten Groups Study Guide designed for groups or individuals to follow our Lenten Sermon Series, "*The Pull of Jesus: Where is Jesus Drawing You?*" The questions below are designed for small group engagement. Each Study Guide moves from personal reflection on the theme (story-focused) to interaction with the content (text and sermon-focused) and finally to our response (insight and response-focused).

For group leaders and participants, you are encouraged to begin with a brief time of welcome and opening prayer, followed by a reading of the scripture text for each week and then discussion questions. Close by praying for each other.

### FIRST WEEK OF LENT: *Wilderness Testing*

#### SCRIPTURE TEXT: Matthew 4:1-11

**Story-focused:** Many biblical stories take place in the wilderness. *Wilderness* likely functions as a symbol which highlights an important theme or idea in the Bible story. Has wilderness functioned as a symbol in your life? Have you had wilderness experiences physically? Socially? Spiritually? If you have, share about it and share what made it a *wilderness* experience.

**Text-focused:** What connections do you see between the wilderness/desert setting and temptations Jesus faced? Could they have happened anywhere, or is the wilderness setting essential to the temptations? What themes emerge from this wilderness story?

**Text-focused:** Matthew places Jesus' wilderness testing immediately prior to Jesus beginning his public ministry. In what ways might Jesus' testing *prepare* him for ministry?

**Sermon-focused:** What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a particular point that resonated with you?

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**Insight-focused:** While Jesus' three temptations were specific, many interpreters believe they represent three general *human* temptations: misplaced priorities (bread more important than God's word); seeking success on our own (acting independently from God); and distorted desire for power (worldly kingdoms rather than God's kingdom). Which temptation of these three is particularly challenging for you?

**Response-focused:** Jesus *anchors* his response to the devil by quoting Scripture. Share with your group a verse/passage of Scripture that helps *anchor* your life. If you have trouble identifying one, use Proverbs 3:5-6. Resolve to memorize and repeat your verse/passage every day this week.

## SECOND WEEK OF LENT: *The Spirit Unencumbered*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** John 3:1-17

**Story-focused:** Most Christians enter the Christian journey through a conversion experience (usually remembered as an "event") or by being on the journey since birth (usually remembered as "always a Christian"). Share the origin story of your Christian journey...even if your journey began at birth!

**Text-focused:** Nicodemus is a religious person, yet this encounter with Jesus suggests something important is missing from his life. Based on the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, what seems to be missing?

**Sermon-focused:** What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a particular point that resonated with you?

**Insight-focused:** This well-known story has many difficult sayings. With fresh eyes, share any new insights about these difficult sayings:

- You cannot see the kingdom of God without being born anew" (vs. 3, 7)
- "...what is born of the Spirit is spirit." (vs. 6)
- "The wind blows where it chooses...So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (vs. 8)

**Response-focused:** Being "open to the surprise of God" is one way to understand Jesus' point comparing the Holy Spirit's work to the unpredictable nature of wind. Has God surprised you in some important way? How did that happen? Since the Spirit works through us, what is one way you can be the *surprising work of God* in someone's life this week? Ask someone in the group to keep you accountable for doing it.

## THIRD WEEK OF LENT: *Costly Love*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Romans 5:1-11

**Story-focused:** This passage contains an “assembly line production” sequence: *suffering* produces *endurance* which produces *character* which produces *hope*. A difficult beginning produces a promising outcome. Share a story of moving through something difficult to something promising in your life. What character qualities were required in the process?

**Text-focused:** This passage makes very, very dense theological claims! What is one phrase/claim you would like “unpacked?” Write it on a piece of paper and place it in a container. As your group has time, draw them one by one and unpack the phrase as a group.

**Sermon-focused:** What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a particular point that resonated with you?

**Insight-focused:** We are generally inclined to see acts of love in positive ways, yet love also may come at a cost. For Paul, the cost Christ bore in his death provided proof of God’s love for us. What experiences assure you of God’s love?

**Insight-focused:** Many of our relationships are *contractual* or *transactional* in nature. We want equal exchanges, clear boundaries, and limits to others’ expectations. Paul describes God’s love in this passage as *covenant* love: unequal, unbounded, and abundant. How would you assess the current state of your relationships with others: family, coworkers, neighbors, friends? More *transactional* or more *covenantal*?

**Response-focused:** When we genuinely experience someone's costly love, gratitude is the proper response. When we extend ourselves for the sake of others, we follow Christ’s example. Resolve to express gratitude to someone who has shown you costly love. Resolve to express costly love to someone this week.

## FOURTH WEEK OF LENT: *Climb Out of Your Coffins*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Ephesians 5:8-14

**Story-focused:** These days being “woke” may be used as a compliment or a criticism. This passage commands us to *wake up*, so Paul must see it as positive and desirable. With that perspective in mind, what darkness have you woken up to recently? Share what helped you wake up to that darkness.

**Text-focused:** In 5:14 Paul seems to blend texts from Isaiah 26:19 and 60:1-2. Read those verses in Isaiah. What light (no pun intended!) might the Isaiah verses shed on Paul’s message in Ephesians 5:8-14?

**Sermon-focused:** What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?

**Insight-focused:** While the contrast of light and darkness seems stark and obvious, verse 10 suggests otherwise. Paul wants the Ephesians (and us!) to *examine/test/discern* what pleases God and constitutes the fruit of light: what is good, right, and true (vs. 10). What is the leading edge of your growth in pleasing God?

**Response-focused:** Offer prayers of gratitude for the “fruit of light” in your life... some specific way you are experiencing what is good, right, and/or true.

## FIFTH WEEK OF LENT: *Resurrection and Life*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** John 11:1-45

**Story-focused:** There are plenty of confused people and confusing ideas in this story of Lazarus dying and being raised. Following the Godly Play approach, share an “I wonder...” you carry about death and the afterlife. (if Godly Play is new to you, see: <https://godlyplayblog.blogspot.com/p/our-wondering.html>)

**Text-focused:** This story involves characters experiencing very human emotions and thoughts (Jesus, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, disciples, neighbors). Choose one person/group and try to live this story in his/her/their shoes. Tell the story from your chosen character(s) perspective. Be sure to include something they might have wondered about.

**Sermon-focused:** What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a particular point that resonated with you?

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**Insight-focused:** Jesus confronts Martha's focus on a future resurrection with a focus on resurrection in the present (vs. 24-25). Do you have a more "last day" belief or a "present day" belief about resurrection life? What challenges you about Jesus' present tense focus: "I *am* the resurrection and the life?"

**Response-focused:** Lazarus is raised from the dead, yet is still bound. If his experience is symbolic, we can be raised to new life as Christians, yet still feel *bound*? What would you hear if Jesus said, "Unbind her/him" about you?

## STUDY GUIDE FOR PALM SUNDAY: A Humble Triumph

### SCRIPTURE TEXT: Matthew 2:1-11

**Story-focused:** The "Palm Sunday" gospel story seems important, since it is one of only a few that appears in all four Gospels (also Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; and John 12:12-19). Palm Sunday also seems important in most churches' worship calendars. How do churches you know celebrate Palm Sunday? What worship elements do you enjoy? What does Palm Sunday mean to you?

**Text-focused:** Matthew's account of Palm Sunday is the only one which records Jesus' triumphal entry coming with humility (vs. 7). Jesus' life and teachings emphasized the virtue of *humility*. Come to your small group prepared to share a story from Jesus' life or a teaching that illustrates the importance Jesus placed on humility.

**Sermon-focused:** What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a particular point that resonated with you?

**Insight-focused:** As noted, Matthew's account is the only one that emphasizes Jesus' "triumphal entry" coming with humility. How do *triumph* and *humility* inform and shape each other? In what ways might there be tension between the two?

**Response-focused:** Seems like *triumph* and its ilk (power, success, superiority...) have squeezed out *humility* as an important value these days. If so, how might we increase the role of humility: in our own personal lives; in our roles as parents, teachers, or leaders; in our communities?

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