



grow. pray. study.

November 24, 2019 “What About Jesus?” by Jim Wallis

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46, Acts 4:1-20

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Jesus laid out his “agenda”

MONDAY 11.25.19 Isaiah 61:1-3, Luke 4:16-21

Jesus went home to the village synagogue where he had grown up. He read from Isaiah 61, in which God’s servant said he had a mission to “preach good news to the poor...to liberate the oppressed.” Then Jesus said, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled,” claiming that mission as his own. Rev. Jim Wallis has said, “Followers of Jesus Christ must understand that every person who walks this earth possesses the image of God. For this reason, racism, sexism and homophobia are an assault on that very image of God.” *

- Jesus quoted from (and adapted) Isaiah 61:1-3 in Nazareth to define his mission. “To preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor” has a nice poetic ring. What can you do each day to live into the meaning of those words in life’s gritty, unpoetic, day-to-day realities?
- After Jesus spoke, his hometown hearers tried to kill him for reciting times when God reached far beyond Israel’s national and ethnic borders ([Luke 4:24-28](#)). Scholar N. T. Wright described Jesus’ message: “The servant-Messiah has not come to inflict punishment, but to bring the nations God’s love and mercy. That was a central theme in Israel’s own scriptures, yet...Jesus’ claim to be reaching out with healing to all people...was not what most first-century Jews wanted or expected.” ** Does it inspire or frustrate you that Jesus loves and invites all people, not just those of your denomination, country or race?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Cory Asbury’s song “Reckless Love” *** says, “There’s no wall you won’t kick down, lie you won’t tear down coming after me.” Grow me into your partner in kicking down walls and tearing down lies that keep people from you. Amen.

* From an online video at <https://www.facebook.com/SojournersMagazine/videos/510587169792795/>.

** N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 48-49.)

*** “Reckless Love,” written by Cory Asbury, Caleb Culver, Ran Jackson. © 2017 Bethel Music Publishing (ASCAP) / Watershed Publishing Group (ASCAP) (adm. by Watershed Music Group) / Richmond Park Publishing (BMI). All Rights Reserved.

Praise to the God who “gives justice”

TUESDAY 11.26.19 Psalm 146:5-10

Jim Wallis, our guest speaker last weekend, captured the spirit of Psalm 146 well in this comment: “Instead of politicizing faith with a religious right or a religious left, how can faith trump politics and help people find the moral center that could challenge partisan politics on all sides? Instead of what’s right or left, how do we discern what is right and wrong, and especially what will protect the most vulnerable people in our society whom our God calls us to defend?” *

- The great hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote a hymn based on Psalm 146. The second stanza included the words, “Happy are they whose hopes rely on Israel’s God...whose truth for ever stands secure, who saves th’oppressed and feeds the poor, for none shall find God’s promise vain.” Does God’s promise to give justice to the oppressed make you “truly happy”? Why or why not?
- The prophet Isaiah faced a social structure in Israel that struggled (as much of our world does today) with the gap between a relatively few affluent, influential people and lots of relatively poor, oppressed people. In [Isaiah 29:18-21](#), he promised that “in that day” (the future when God sets right all that’s gone wrong) “the poor” and “the neediest” would rejoice, while “the tyrant” and “the mocker” would be no more. How can you, as one of God’s people today, work toward that ultimate godly goal, and not against it?

Prayer: God of all creation, guide my thinking and my actions so that I may be one of your earthly helpers as you faithfully move our world toward your goal of justice for everyone. Amen.

* Jim Wallis quoted in a Sojourners email message on Sept. 29, 2017.

Thanks forever, whether “comfortable” or “terrified”

WEDNESDAY 11.27.19 Psalm 30:5-12

Psalm 30 reflected a time of severe trouble that threatened life itself (verse 9). “The psalmist may have been healed from a life-threatening illness, but the language could be metaphorical.” * Whatever the specific circumstances, the psalmist’s focus was on how God had driven away the threat and restored joy to life. Most individuals, as well as Israel as a nation, could remember situations when mourning (which seemed to last forever) had turned to joy.

- Scholar Donald Williams wrote, “In [the psalmist’s] illness there has been weeping, the sense of God’s absence, and mourning. Now...the healing of God has turned sorrow into joy.” ** Difficult times can make God feel absent even for people of faith. (Don’t forget Jesus quoting [Psalm 22:1](#) on the cross.) We sometimes use the phrase “God showed up” to describe times of recovery and restoration. How does joy in our lives grow from God’s presence with us?
- This psalm fits larger contexts, too. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “I read these words: ‘The United States Supreme Court today unanimously ruled bus segregation unconstitutional in Montgomery, Alabama’...The dawn will come....’Weeping may endure for a night,’ says the Psalmist, ‘but joy cometh in the morning.’ This faith adjourns the assemblies of hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism.” *** Can you think of “dawn” times in world history? In what parts of life do you look forward to God bringing a joyous morning to our world?

Prayer: Lord, when I face hard times where “weeping may stay all night,” I thank you that the worst thing is never the last thing. In the end you always have and always will turn sorrow into joy. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 30:2 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 870 OT.

** Donald Williams, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 13: Psalms 1–72*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986, p. 239.

*** *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986, p. 504.

Living as “thankful people”

THURSDAY 11.28.19 Colossians 3:15-17

It’s easy, especially on Thanksgiving Day, to read today’s passage and think, “What lovely, uplifting devotional words.” But remember: the apostle Paul was not writing abstract devotional thoughts. He and the early Christians lived in a world as cruel and unfair as ours—he was in prison as he wrote

(cf. [Colossians 4:10, 18](#)). His counsel about peace, praise and being “thankful people” was a survival manual for a spiritual combat zone, not just nice, stirring pleasantries.

- How many times, in these three verses, did Paul mention gratitude or thanks? Where is your heart on a “gratitude meter” this Thanksgiving day? Without pretending that any painful or frustrating situations you face don’t exist, what inner choices can you make that would move you higher on the scale today?
- Verse 17 took in a lot of ground: “Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.” In the coming holiday season, with all its hectic feelings and stresses, how can you “give thanks to God the Father” as you work, shop, drive the freeway or fight lines at the airport, react to the news, cheer for the Chiefs (Jayhawks, Tigers or Wildcats) or keep up with all your kid’s school activities?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of this day. Thank you that whatever happens today, you will be with me. Thank you for clearing my vision so that I can see reasons to say “thank you.” Amen.

“Jesus, faith’s pioneer and perfecter”

FRIDAY 11.29.19 Hebrews 12:1-3

The writer to the Hebrews found courage in the Old Testament stories of faithful witnesses to God, many of which [Hebrews 11](#) recited. It was an amazing catalog of faith and loyalty. In today’s reading, it was as though the writer said, “Now it’s our turn.” He called us, surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, to not grow weary and lose heart. God calls us, too, to bear witness to the new life Jesus brings.

- Hebrews 12:2 seems to be the only verse in the Bible in which the words “cross” and “joy” occurred together. It reminds us that God’s gift of inner joy (closely linked to hope as well as the memory of God’s great actions in the past) is much deeper and more enduring than the surface happiness that grows out of cheerful circumstances. How does Jesus’ model help you refuse discouragement and stay rooted in the joy of God’s presence with you in all circumstances?
- This passage called us to live our lives by “fixing our eyes on Jesus, faith’s pioneer and perfecter.” What ways have you found of “fixing your eyes on Jesus” amid all the demands of everyday life? What is one change you could make during the rest of 2019 that you believe would keep Jesus in clearer focus for you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you live in my heart through the Holy Spirit and say, “You be my witness.” That approach works—someone shared your love and life with me. Now live in me and make me a faithful, true witness to you. Amen.

Mary: from “low status” to “highly favored”

SATURDAY 11.30.19 Luke 1:46-55

We’ll return to this passage during Advent. Mary’s poetic praise fit the theme we’ve looked at this week: gratitude for God’s concern for justice. Mary said God had “looked with favor on the low status of his servant.” The second part of Mary’s song showed that the effects of John’s and Jesus’ births went far beyond two happy rural families. Pastor Adam Hamilton wrote that many of us “fail to realize how subversive, even revolutionary, Mary’s song really was....Mary’s words should make us uncomfortable. They point to a concern God has for the poor, and a sense that the rich have received theirs already....We have the obligation and calling to be used by God to ‘fill the hungry with good things.’” * Or as Jim Wallis said, “Jesus tells us that the most important people are the ones he called ‘the least of these,’ even while they are the least important ones in our politics today.” **

- Elizabeth and Mary rejoiced that God had blessed them. That meant more than we often think. Pastor Ginger Gaines-Cirelli wrote, “It was a blessing of purpose....of participation in what God was doing in

the world. Her blessing brought hardship, confusion and grief, but it was still a blessing.” *** Have you ever received a blessing that led to hardship, confusion or grief? Are you willing to receive that kind of blessing? Mary was glad, not just to be a mother, but that through her son God would make real the promise of ultimately ending the world’s tyranny and evil. As we await evil’s final destruction, what are some ways in which Mary’s child’s life helped (and helps) reverse evil and oppression? Does Mary’s song make you uncomfortable enough to actively use the ways you are rich and/or powerful to lift the burdens of those who are lowly and hungry?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me how to keep my mind and heart open to your more challenging blessings. Give me the wisdom to share what I have, not to hoard it just for myself. Amen.

Family Activity: Don’t let giving thanks end with just one November day. Encourage your family to give thanks daily to God for your many blessings. Read Psalm 100. Create a gratitude collage. Gather a piece of colored poster board, some magazines, a few markers and some glue or tape. Invite everyone to draw pictures and write words representing what they are thankful for on the poster board. Add some cut-outs from magazines, too. Consider leaving some blank spaces so family members can add onto it through the week. Write a verse or two of Psalm 100 on the poster board. Each day take time to give thanks to God for all your blessings and celebrate every moment!

* Adam Hamilton, *The Journey: A Season of Reflections*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011, pp. 87-90.

** From online video at <https://www.facebook.com/SojournersMagazine/videos/510587169792795/>.

*** Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, study note on “Blessed” in *The CEB Women’s Bible*. Nashville: Common English Bible, 2016, p. 1288.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Virgil Reichle and family following the death of Ralph Reichle (brother), 11/14/2019

Jodie Iams and family following the death of Austin Iams (son), 11/15/2019

Brenda Sanders and family following the death of Margie Mills (mother), 11/16/2019

Kathy Carter and family following the death of Donna Carter (mother-in-Law), 11/20/2019