

# Boundless Jesus Bible Study

An opportunity for you and your group to immerse yourselves in the stories of Jesus, explore cultures, and expand your faith.

*by Bryan Bishop*

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## Benefits of the Study



Dear Facilitator,

Congratulations on choosing to do the Boundless Jesus Bible Study with your group. You are in for a stimulating and challenging experience. The ten-session Boundless Jesus Bible Study will:

- Illuminate the life and message of Jesus.
- Stick the stories of Jesus into your mind, so that you can carry them with you and you can more easily share them with others.
- Help you and your group brainstorm about how the message of Jesus can spread beyond your church walls.
- Give you a taste of cultural practices that can enrich your faith.

Although the Bible stories used in this study might seem quite familiar to many members of your group, the methods used in this study will most likely make the stories come alive in new ways. Here are a couple of comments from previous participants:

- “It’s fun, interactive and thought provoking” (Tee L.)
- “I really enjoyed this. I have read these stories all my life and did not realize how many details I missed until I studied it this way” (Erin D.)

Thank you for offering to facilitate. Your role will enable the other members of your group to immerse themselves in the Bible story and to come away with treasures that they can bring with them into their lives.

The following guide will help you prepare for each session, facilitate each session, and handle issues that might come up.

I’m delighted that you are doing the study and I look forward to hearing how it goes.

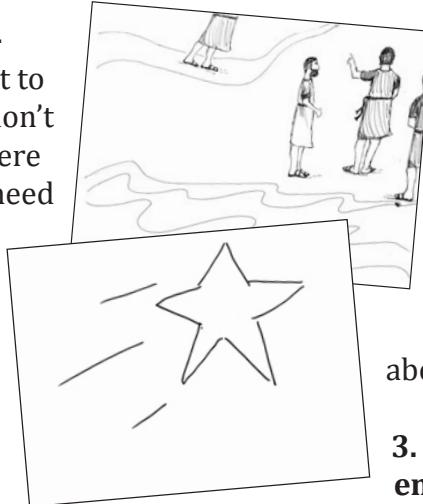
In Christ,

Bryan Bishop

## Advance Preparation for Facilitators

Before each session, please take 25 minutes to do the following:

- **Read the story and look at the discussion questions** (10 minutes). This will help you a lot as you facilitate the discussion.
- **Collect any materials needed** (5 minutes). In some cases, you will need to make practical plans, such as gathering materials needed for the session. See Materials Needed for each session.
- **Check Audio/Visual requirements** (5 minutes). If you want to do the group activity but you don't have access to the Internet where you will be meeting, you may need to send emails or print out materials in advance. See explanations under Audio/Visual Requirements for each session.
- **Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.**



them, please feel free to do so.

During each session, you will help the members of your group enter into the Bible story. Here are the general guidelines. The specific questions for each session follow later in this guide.

- 1. Include time for community-building.** Each session will take about an hour and a half. We recommend you also include time for relationship-building before or after the study. You could start with a meal or end with snacks.
- 2. Review the story from the previous week** (10 minutes). If you have a drawing of the story (see examples on this page and the next page), display it. Ask someone to retell the story. You can take turns. It works well to stand up when retelling the story. Have the person tell the story first without looking at the printed account. Then he or she can look at the printed text and add or change any details. Be sure to affirm anything that was good about the retelling—even just the attempt!
- 3. Guide the Group Cultural Experience** (10 minutes). Ask the group if they are willing to try these. If so, you can simply follow the instructions for each activity.
- 4. Tell the Bible story** (1 minute). You or someone else will begin by telling the story. Ask the participants not to look at the printed text, but just to watch and listen. It can help to stand up to tell the story. Use gestures and if the story includes emotions like anger or confusion, try to bring that out in your voice.
- 5. Silent reading** (2 minutes). Ask everyone to turn to the printed account of the story in their Bibles and look it over silently.

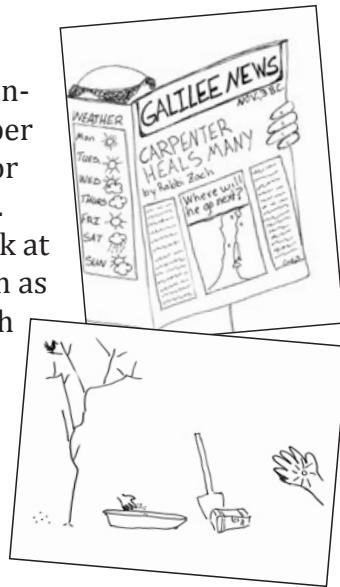
## Facilitating Each Session

The Boundless Jesus Bible Study contains three main components:

- A "storying" approach to the Bible.
- Group experiences that let you try out other cultural ways to follow Jesus (optional).
- Discussion questions that help you dialog about the book *Boundless* (optional).

At the heart of this study are the stories from the Bible and at the heart of those stories is the person of Jesus. The group experiences and the *Boundless* discussion questions are optional. If you don't have time for them or if your group wants to skip any of

**6. Have the participants pair up to tell the story to each other** (1 minute each). Depending on the number of participants, you either join in or not so that you can get exact pairs. Ask the group members not to look at the printed text and to tell as much as they remember of the story to each other. Ask them not to comment on the story or add details to the story. Reassure them they don't need to use the exact words. They are just trying to recount as many of the details of the story as they can. If they forget a part, they can just keep going and tell everything they do remember. Remind everyone when the first minute is up and it's time to switch to the other person.



story (waves, or a water pitcher, for example) or the picture can have stick figures. These pictures will help with retelling the stories later.

**7. Ask the Bible story questions** (40 minutes). You'll notice that the Bible story questions have been divided into three sections. "Actual-Text" questions help the participants observe the details of the story. "Analysis" questions prod the group members to think more deeply about the account. Then finally the "Application" questions guide the participants to bring the message of the story into our modern world and into their own lives. Feel free to skip some of the questions. Also, feel free to add your own questions. Affirm the responses of group members. Stick to the story; try to bring group members back to the story if they go into other parts of the Bible or even into parallel versions of this story told in other places in the Bible. Mainly focus on this account.

**8. Have someone draw a picture that represents the story** (optional). During the discussion, it can help to have someone in the group draw a simple picture of the story on a piece of white paper. The artist might pick one element of the

**9. Lead the *Boundless* book discussion** (15 minutes; optional). If your group members want to discuss the book, ask the *Boundless* discussion questions listed and let the participants bring up any other comments or questions from the book.

**10. Ask for prayer requests and close with group prayer** (10 minutes).

**11. Encourage people to find an opportunity to tell the story during the week.**

## Tips for Facilitation

As you serve your group, here's how to help them with common issues that might come up.

- **How to avoid having the group think they are trying to guess the right answers.** One of the dangers of this kind of discussion is for you as the facilitator to come across as having all the right answers and the group members then try to tell you what you want to hear. Your group will benefit much more if you seek to learn from each other. If you as the facilitator genuinely want to learn from the others, and if you mostly ask open-ended questions (not yes/no), you will avoid giving this impression of knowing it all.
- **What to do if a question is asked that doesn't fit the story.** If something in the story sparks a question for a group member that threatens to take you all down a different path, you as the facilitator have to discern the importance of this question for this person and this particular mo-

ment. Perhaps the question can be talked about one-on-one later. Perhaps it can be answered fairly quickly. Or perhaps it's a question of great significance and you don't want to lose the opportunity to address it. In general, you want to stay with the events of the Bible story your group is discussing, but feel free to respond to the needs of the people in your group.

- **How to get everyone involved.** Pay attention to the less-verbal members of your group. If you can tell by their facial expression or body language that they have something to say, give them the opportunity to speak if they want to.
- **How to flex with the discussion and how to move beyond the questions.** The discussion questions listed for each session are just a guide. In general with this "storying" method, you want to observe, then analyze, then apply, but often an observation leads to an "aha" revelation and then the person makes an instant comment about what this might mean in their life. Allow this to happen all at once. But if the group gets into application without considering all the elements of the story, bring them back to more actual-text questions. Eventually, you will get the hang of these types of questions and you can come up with your own questions and you can allow for a more fluid discussion depending on what happens within your group.

## Resources to Help You

- **Before the study begins:** [Listen to a live storying session](http://simplythestory.org/downloads/pat/03MarthaMaryLive.mp3) (28 minutes long) (<http://simplythestory.org/downloads/pat/03MarthaMaryLive.mp3>). You can also [read a one-page summary](http://story4all.com/index.shtml) of why oral learning is so important in our world today (<http://story4all.com/index.shtml>).

- **During the study:** If you have questions or want more information about how to lead a storying session, consult the [Simply the Story Handbook](http://www.simplythestory.org/downloads/handbook/AA-STS%20Handbook%20Edition%206a%20July.15.pdf) (start with Contents, page 7) (<http://www.simplythestory.org/downloads/handbook/AA-STS%20Handbook%20Edition%206a%20July.15.pdf>).
- **After the study ends:** If you want to keep on going with Bible storying, you can [get a year's worth of additional stories](http://simplythestory.org/downloads/PDFs/Stories%20Workshop%201-52%20in%20Chronological%20Order10-10-10.pdf) (<http://simplythestory.org/downloads/PDFs/Stories%20Workshop%201-52%20in%20Chronological%20Order10-10-10.pdf>) or you can learn how to use storying [with a youth group](http://wearesparkhouse.org/teens/echothesstory/?domainRedirect=true) (watch the video) (<http://wearesparkhouse.org/teens/echothesstory/?domainRedirect=true>), or [with children](http://simplythestory.org/oralbiblestories/index.php/component/content/article/91-left-hm-pg-stuff/289-youth-results) (<http://simplythestory.org/oralbiblestories/index.php/component/content/article/91-left-hm-pg-stuff/289-youth-results>). Also, please go to [www.boundlessjesus.com](http://www.boundlessjesus.com) or [www.bryanbishop.net](http://www.bryanbishop.net) and let me know what you thought of the study. Please share any ideas you had for how to reach out to your community. You can also sign up for my email updates.

## Session One: Wise Men

### Materials Needed:

- Bibles (for this and every session, ask the group members to bring their Bibles).
- A white piece of paper and a pencil, if doing the drawing.

### Audio/Visual Requirements:

None.

### Introduction to the Bible Study (read this)

"The method we will use in this Boundless Jesus Bible Study is called 'Bible storying,' and it was developed for oral learners. An estimated 70% of the world's population either cannot read or prefers to learn orally. Even in our high-technology world, many prefer to learn not through the printed word but through the spoken word. Author Walter Ong calls this 'secondary orality.' The Bible itself was written in a way that works well for oral learners. Roughly 75% of the Bible is narrative. In Jesus' day, only an estimated 8% of people were literate. Jesus taught them verbally, and mainly through stories. Mark 4:34 says Jesus 'did not say anything to them without using a parable.' In this study, we will come to the contents of the Bible as many people have done over the centuries, as oral learners. Hopefully we will see new things in the Bible through our discussions and we will also have the opportunity to share these stories with others."

### Group Cultural Experience

Ask everyone, if they are willing, to take their shoes off. Explain:

"In almost all of the sessions of this study, we will take our shoes off as a way to identify with many of the cultures of the world. For many people who come from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or other religious backgrounds, they show spiritual respect by taking their shoes off in spiritual places. During this study, the taking off of our shoes becomes a symbol of our willingness to get beyond the normal

cultural trappings of Christianity and to become more sympathetic to the other cultures that surround us."

### The story:

Matthew 2:1–12. Read it out loud. Then two minutes of silent reading. Then pair up and each person take one minute to tell it to the other person.

### Actual-Text Questions

- What did the Magi say they came for?
- Who was disturbed?
- Who did Herod call together? What did these people tell the king?
- What did Herod ask the Magi to do?
- What happened after the wise men left the king?
- Who did they find?
- What did they do?
- How did they respond to the dream?

### Analysis Questions

- Does the story give us any clues about what caused the people of Jerusalem to feel disturbed about what the Magi said?
- What did the Magi know before they came? What qualities do you see in them?
- What else could the Magi have done when they saw the star?
- How would you contrast their actions with the behavior of the people of Jerusalem? Of Herod?
- When they reached their destination, what did

the Magi see? What did that scene probably look like? How might that scene have been different from what they expected? How did the Magi respond?

### **Application Questions**

- What is the practice of seeing signs in the stars called today? How does it make you feel that God revealed something to people like this?
- Have you heard of any stories today of God speaking to non-Christians?
- Have you heard of anyone receiving an unusual leading from God and then following that? Was it you? What happened?
- Are you sensing God leading you in some way in your life? If so, how can the qualities you see in the Magi inspire you?

### **The discussion:**

Take turns sharing observations or prayer requests, and pray for each other. Encourage group members to look for opportunities to tell the story and to come prepared to retell the story at the next meeting.

### **For *Boundless* book discussion (chapters 1 and 2):**

- Do you agree that a Western culture has grown up around faith in Jesus? What aspects of that culture do you see?
- Do you agree that the term “Christian” carries non-biblical meanings in some circles? Have you ever seen that? What did you think about the evidence in *Boundless* for how Muslims might understand the word “Christian”?
- Do you think it would ever be okay for a believer

in Jesus to not use the word “Christian” to describe himself or herself? Read Matthew 10:33. What do you think is the proper motivation not to use the term “Christian”?

- Chapter 1 begins with a story of Muslims following Jesus outside of Western Christianity. How does this story compare to the story of the wise men? How does it seem similar or different?

## Session Two: John's Disciples Follow Jesus

### Materials Required:

Candle, plate, lighter or matches.

### Audio/Visual Requirements:

Show the video for this session (see [www.boundlessjesus.com](http://www.boundlessjesus.com)). If you don't have a laptop or TV that can show the video, it will work if someone just plays it on their phone; the sounds alone will help. If you can't show the video during the session, you can email the link to group members ahead of time and ask them to watch it before coming.

### Group Cultural Experience

If you have the space for this and if group members feel comfortable doing so, ask the group members to sit in a circle on the floor. Place the candle in the middle on the plate and light it. Read this introduction:

"Today, the culture we're going to reflect on as we begin is Hinduism. About 900 million people follow Hinduism, making it the third-largest religious system in the world. A common Hindu small-group gathering is called a satsang [pronounced SUTsung], which means 'a fellowship of seekers after truth.' They might sit in a circle around a lit candle as we are doing. They might also add flowers like marigolds or burning incense in the center. They also might include traditional music, in a style called bhajan [pronounced BUHjun]. To get a feel for these sights and sounds, we will listen to this video, which is a promotional video for a school that teaches Christians more about Hinduism. The music you will hear is in the bhajan style, played by the group Aradhna. In the video, you will hear Aradhna sing 'Amrita vani teri.' These are Hindi words that mean 'Your immortal word.' The rest of the song offers praises to Father, Son, and Spirit.

First, I will read these words from a bhajan song

called Deep Jale, by Anil Dev:

'Keep the lamp burning so the Lord's name will remain,

Remain in the temple, remain in my heart.

In the morning and in the evening my soul sings to you

Yeshu, your name, Lord Yeshu, your name.'

Play the video.

**Review the previous story.** If your group has made a drawing, show the drawing first, then have a volunteer tell as much as he or she can remember of the story.

**The story:** John 1:32–42.

### Introduction (read this to the group):

"Right before this story begins, John the Baptist has been baptizing in the Jordan river. He sees Jesus coming toward him and says, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' In this story, 'the 10th hour' most likely means four in the afternoon."

Read the story out loud, spend two minutes looking at it quietly, and pair up to tell it to each other.

### Actual-Text Questions

- What sign did God give John about Jesus?
- What did John declare about Jesus?
- The next day, how many disciples did John speak to? What was Jesus doing? What did John say? How did the disciples respond?
- What did Jesus ask? How did they respond?
- How long did they spend with Jesus?

- What was the first thing Andrew did after that?
- What had he concluded?

### Analysis Questions

- When John pointed out Jesus to his two disciples the next day, what other actions could his two disciples have taken?
- What are some other ways Jesus could have responded to their question?
- From these verses, how do you think Andrew reached his conclusion about Jesus? What were the steps in his process of discovery?

about the picture of baptism at the end of this chapter? Does anything about the *jal sanskar* method surprise you? Does it seem to fit the teaching of Scripture?

- What about the communion using a coconut? What surprised you or impressed you about this?
- Look again at the story of how Pradip came to faith in Jesus. How was his process similar to or different from John's disciples?
- What questions did this chapter raise for you?

### Application Questions

- How do Andrew's steps of discovery compare with the steps you have taken?
- If you had been one of John's disciples, how do you think you would have responded?
- How do people follow Jesus today? What are the steps people go through in their process of discovery?
- If Jesus asked, "What do you want?" what would you answer? Do you have a sense that God is leading you to discover something in your life now?

### The discussion:

The group will share prayer requests and will pray for each other.

### For *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 3):

- In this story, we've looked at what it meant for John's disciples to follow Jesus. Chapter 3 shows people following Jesus within Hinduism. As you think about John's baptism, what do you think

## Session Three: Crowds Begin to Follow

### Materials Required:

None.

### Audio/Visual Requirements:

In order to do the cultural activity, you will need to read words in unison. This will require either showing this slideshow for this session on a screen big enough for people to see, or you can download the file and print out a few copies of the words for people to look at. Just go to [boundlessjesus.com](http://boundlessjesus.com).

### Group Cultural Experience

This prayer form involves reading in unison and then bowing, touching the head to the floor. If the participants in your group don't have the health for this kind of bowing, or if you don't have the room for this, ask them to just sit down and bow their heads while seated. If anyone wants to see the actual Agpia prayers, they can go to [www.agpia.org](http://www.agpia.org). You can read these instructions:

"Today we are going to experience bowing in prayer, as it is practiced by the Coptic church. Egyptian Coptic believers trace this form of prayer, called Agpia, to the early church in Alexandria in the first 100 years after Christ. It means 'Prayer of the Hours.' Monks will pray in this way seven times each day. The picture in the slideshow or printout shows how to bow: getting down on both knees and then touching your head to the floor. It's meant to be done slowly and reflectively. If you can't bow like this, you can sit down and just bow your head, placing both hands, palms up, in your lap. So we will first stand and read the words together, then we will pause to bow, and then we will stand up again to continue reading in unison."

Show the slideshow.

### Review the previous story.

#### The story:

Matthew 4:23-25. Tell the story, look at it silently for two minutes, and then pair up to tell it to each other.

#### Actual-Text Questions

- Where did Jesus go?
- What did He say?
- What did He do?
- How did people respond? What kind of people did they bring him?
- What happened when these people came to Jesus?
- How far did people come from?

#### Analysis Questions

- From the details in this story, what do you think impressed people most about Jesus in the beginning?
- If people came to him from such great distances, why do you think Jesus went out to other villages? Do we have any clues from this story?
- As Jesus went out into the world of His day, what kinds of needs did he meet? What does that tell us about Him?

#### Application Questions

- Imagine you attended a synagogue back in those first days of Jesus' ministry and Jesus came to speak. What do you think you would have seen and heard? How would you have responded?
- How do you think news about Jesus spreads

today? How is it similar and different?

- Based on what you see in this story, how much of Jesus do people need to understand in order to begin to follow Him? What implications does this have for our world today?
- Do you know of anyone who has had a dramatic healing from God? What role do you think healings play in drawing people to Jesus today?
- Based on how Jesus responded to the world of His day, how do you think He views you?

**The discussion:** Sharing and prayer.

**For *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 4):**

- As we've bowed and as we've reflected on how people responded to Jesus as He began His ministry, we can now also think about how Muslims perceive Jesus. Based on your experience in bowing in prayer, is there anything about the bowing that you like? What did you find helpful about it? Is the bowing something you can imagine doing in the future?
- Chapter 4 presents the testimony of a Muslim follower of Jesus who says that bowing in prayer now means more to him than it did before. Do you think the practice is legalistic, or do you think Muslim-background believers in Jesus can bring new life to it?
- What do you think about the use of the Qur'an to point Muslims to Jesus and the Bible?
- How do you think a Muslim might view the Bible story we've just discussed? How do you think a Muslim who has come to biblical faith in Jesus would view the story?

## Session Four: Jesus Raises a Widow's Son

### Materials needed:

None.

### Audio-visual requirements:

In order to do the cultural activity, you will need to look at a few slides. To access them, go to the audio-visual materials section of [boundlessjesus.com](http://boundlessjesus.com). If you don't have Internet access where you will meet, please email the link to participants and ask them to look at it before you meet. Also, download and print a few copies of the monk's image.

### Group Cultural Experience

In this group activity, you will consider the value of visual imagery in spiritual growth. Have the group look at the slideshow for this session. Explain: "In this slideshow, you will see some of the images mentioned in the book *Boundless*, chapter 5, which focuses on Buddhism. You will see *mudra* symbolic hand positions, photos of festivals like Songkran, images of shrines and temples, and photos of Likay folk drama (the woman in the pink dress is acting in a Christian Likay play). The slideshow ends with the image that Jao, a former monk who followed Jesus, carried around with him."

Ask the group:

- How do you think these visuals in architecture and festivals help Buddhists in their faith?
- As you look at the photo the monk Jao carried around with him, what do you think he might have found meaningful for his faith in Jesus?
- Can you think of any ways that visuals have helped you in your faith?

**Review the previous story.**

### The story:

Luke 7:11–17. Tell the story, take two minutes to read it, and tell it to each other.

### Actual-Text Questions:

- Who went along with Jesus?
- Where was Jesus when he met the people with the coffin?
- What details does Luke give us about the woman and her son? What does that tell us about the situation?
- How did Jesus feel when He saw the woman? What did he say?
- What did He do next?
- What did the people carrying the coffin do?
- What did the dead man do?
- What did the crowd say about Jesus? What did they do? Where did this message spread?

### Analysis Questions:

- Based on our story from last week, what do you think the large crowd that followed Jesus might have expected? What do you think they might have been saying to each other when Jesus approached the coffin?
- How do you think the crowd's view of Jesus changed? Who do you think they saw Him as? How can you tell?
- What does this story tell us about the character of Jesus?

**Application Questions:**

- Do you believe God could raise someone from the dead today?
- Do you respond to Jesus the way this crowd did? If not, why not? If so, in what way?
- How do you think God views people in desperate situations today? How does that knowledge influence you? How would you like it to influence you?

**The discussion:** Sharing and prayer.

**For *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 5):**

- Based on the descriptions of Buddhism in chapter 5, how do you think Buddhists might understand or misunderstand Jesus in the story we just read?
- The story of the grandmother dancing, and the little village groups that formed around a meal, music, dance and the Bible, how does this present a different image of church? How could you imagine these principles applied in other settings?
- How do you think symbolic hand gestures could communicate biblical truth?
- What did you think of the writings of the Religion of Light? What familiar concepts did you find expressed in unusual language? What do you think this approach tells us about the use of words as we relate with other cultures?

## Session Five: Walking on Water

### Materials needed:

A small, smooth stone.

### Audio-visual requirements:

If you want to do the cultural activity, it will help to watch the clip of a powwow available on [www.boundlessjesus.com](http://www.boundlessjesus.com). Even if you can't all see the images, you can just listen as someone plays the video on their phone. If this isn't possible, please email the link to your group to watch before the meeting.

### Group Cultural Experience

Arrange the chairs to sit in a circle. It doesn't have to be a perfect circle, but try to sit so you are all facing each other.

Explain: "Today for our cultural experience, we are going to participate in a Native American practice. We'll begin by watching a short video of a powwow, which is a Native American dance and music festival. Then, when it comes time to make personal applications from this story, we will pass around a small rock. When you have the rock, you can either say something or you can pass the rock to the next person in the circle. When you speak, all the other people have to listen silently, without interrupting you."

Depending on your group, you can also have them pass the rock a second time when they share prayer requests.

Show the video.

### Review the previous story.

#### The story:

Matthew 14:22–33.

**Introduction** (read this to the group): "This story uses the term 'the fourth watch of the night.' The fourth and final watch of the night took place from three until six a.m."

Tell the story, take two minutes to read it, and pair up to tell it to each other.

### Actual-Text Questions

- Where was Jesus and who was with Him?
- Who was in the boat? What was happening to the boat and where was it?
- Where was Jesus going when He was walking on the lake?
- When the disciples saw Jesus, who did they think He was, and how did that make them feel?
- What did Jesus say in response?
- What did Peter say, and what did Jesus reply?
- What direction did Peter go when he got out of the boat?
- What did Peter see, feel, and say when he started to sink?
- What did Jesus do? What did He say?
- What happened after they got into the boat?
- What did the rest of the disciples conclude?

### Analysis Questions

- Based on the details of the story, how close do you think Jesus was to the boat when the disciples first saw Him, and how close did Peter get to Jesus before Peter started to sink?
- What does this story tell you about faith? About fear? About doubt?

### Application Questions

- As you think about your own fears, how can the

actions and words of Jesus in this story help you?

- Have you ever taken a step of faith that made you feel like you were walking on water? What happened?
- What does it mean for you that Jesus went to a solitary place to pray?

**The discussion:** Sharing and prayer.

**For *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 6):**

- Chapter 6 features this story about walking on water. What do you think the founder of the Indigenous Family Centre in Winnipeg meant when he said that he often felt like he was walking on water? What do you think it will take for us to get beyond the familiar?
- If the powwow dancers pray to Jesus before they dance, and if the intention of a dancer is to worship the Creator in his or her dance, do you think the powwow can be a form of worship?
- What do you think about the use of dance in worship?

## Session Six: The Mustard Seed, the Yeast, the Treasure, and the Pearl

### Materials needed:

None.

### Audio-visual requirements:

None.

### Review the previous story.

### Group Cultural Experience

Today, there isn't really a culture that the group will focus on. Instead, explain: "Today we are going to think about a concept that transcends culture, something Jesus called the kingdom of God. As a way to prepare ourselves for this discussion, we want to think about our own faith journeys."

Ask if anyone in the group would be willing to share their story about how they came to faith in Christ. Ask them what has changed about their life since making that commitment.

### The Story:

Matthew 13:31-33,44-46. Tell the stories, read them for two minutes, and pair up to tell them to each other.

### Actual-Text Questions

- Mustard seed story: What did the man do with the seed? How does the mustard-seed story emphasize size?
- Yeast story: What did the woman do with yeast? How much flour was she working with? How long did she mix it? What are the words that stand out to you?
- Field story: Where was the treasure? What did the man do when he found it? How do you

picture that? How much did he sell? How do you know he didn't have buyer's remorse?

- Pearls: Who is the guy in this story and what is he doing? How do you picture this search? How much is he willing to pay for that pearl?
- What is similar about the men in these last two stories? What is different?

### Analysis Questions

- Jesus begins each of these stories by saying "the kingdom of heaven is like...." What element of the kingdom do you see in the mustard seed story? What element do you see in the yeast story? The field story? The pearl story?
- What do the first two stories have in common?
- What do you think Jesus was emphasizing by saying the man in the field and the merchant each sold everything? How does that challenge or encourage you?
- In an earlier story, we read that Jesus went around preaching the good news of the kingdom. Here Jesus says these stories describe the kingdom. What good news do you see in these stories?

### Application Questions

- Have you ever made a mistake in a recipe? How did a slight change to a small ingredient effect all the rest of the meal? How could that experience illustrate the point behind the yeast story?
- Do you ever feel too small or insignificant to make a difference? What encouragement could you find in the seed and the yeast stories?
- Do we focus on the kingdom as much as Jesus

did when we talk about God's message to us? How do you think it would change our communication if we emphasized stories like the ones from today?

**The discussion:**

In the discussion, encourage others to share about where they are in their faith journey. Pray for each other.

**For *Boundless* book discussion (chapters 7-11):**

- This discussion will cover the whole of section 2, Boundary Breakers—chapters 7 to 11. Chapter 9 uses the kingdom of God to explain the journey of faith. How could you use the kingdom circles to describe your own journey?
- Now that you have experienced storying for yourself in this Bible study, what benefit can you see in approaching the Bible as stories, particularly with youth today?
- If you viewed your community more in terms of a centered set of people in various positions regarding Jesus and less as a bounded set in which people are either saved or unsaved, how would that change your perception?
- As you saw in chapter 10 how pagan customs have been redeemed, could you think of anything that might become a doorway to Jesus for people who aren't attracted to traditional Christianity?
- Do you think non-Christian religions can contain truth? How could that idea be dangerous? How could it be helpful?

## Session Seven: Mary Anoints Jesus

### Materials needed:

None.

### Audio-visual requirements:

None.

### Review the previous story.

### Group Cultural Experience

This session can start with a breathing exercise that will help the participants prepare their minds for the Bible story. I learned this technique from a friend, Tim Latzke, who developed this from his study of Christian contemplative prayer practices. Tim and I have worked together on prayer retreats, and when he has taught this technique to participants they have found it helpful.

Ask your group if they are willing to try it. It will take about 10 minutes. If so, begin by reading or summarizing the following introduction:

"This exercise, which comes from Christian traditions, will help you relax and prepare your mind for our Bible story today. It will also help you find out what it's like to focus on breathing as an element in meditation."

Ask the members of your group to sit quietly with their legs uncrossed. Ask them to rest their hands palms down on their legs. Have them close their eyes and breathe deeply.

Wait about ten seconds.

Ask: "Do you notice a thought that is bothering you or distracting you? If so, try to visualize the distraction. For example, if the distraction is a financial concern, you might imagine a big green dollar sign. As you breathe out, imagine the distraction traveling from your mind, down your neck, through your shoulders, and past your palms. Repeat this process for any other concerns or distractions."

After two or three minutes, ask the participants to turn their palms up.

Say: "Now try to imagine images of God's love. You could imagine yourself as the prodigal son being hugged by the Father. You could visualize yourself as a tree planted by the waters of God's love and mercy. As you breathe in, imagine that picture coming into your body."

After a couple of minutes, ask everyone if they've had enough time, and then ask the group a few questions about their experience.

- How did you experience that exercise?
- Did it relax you?
- Did you discover concerns?
- Did it help you transition from your busy day and get your mind ready for our time together?

Explain that if they've found this exercise helpful, they could use it every day or whenever they are feeling stressed.

### The story:

John 12:1-8. Tell the story, read it silently for two minutes, and pair up to tell it to each other.

**Introduction** (read this to the group): "This story takes place right before Jesus enters Jerusalem, where He will be crucified. Martha and Mary were Lazarus' sisters."

### Actual-Text Questions

- Where and when did this story take place?
- What was the purpose of this dinner?
- What did each member of that household do during the dinner?
- How much perfume and what kind of perfume did Mary use?
- Where did she pour it and what did she do after pouring it out? How far did the fragrance

spread?

- Then what did Judas say? What was his real reason for being concerned about the expense?
- How do we know how valuable Mary's perfume was?
- How did Jesus respond?

#### **Analysis Questions**

- What other actions could Mary have chosen to express gratitude? What does it say about her that she chose this?
- What statements or actions related to cost or value do we find in this story?

#### **Application Questions**

- How does this story speak to you about the value of money or possessions?
- If you could say something to Mary about what she did that day, what would you like to say?
- Do you find Mary's actions inspiring? Troubling? Challenging? In what ways?
- Have you ever expressed a seemingly holy opinion but really you had selfish motives? How does this story challenge a pious exterior that covers up a self-centered interior?

**The discussion:** Sharing and prayer.

#### **For *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 12):**

- Mary expressed her feelings about Jesus in an extravagant way. Chapter 12 presents many ways to follow Jesus. Do you ever have the desire to follow Jesus extravagantly? If so, which ideas, if any, from chapter 12 appealed to you?

- How do you think Christian clichés can create barriers with unchurched people? In the section about finding other language to express what you believe, what ideas seemed helpful to you?
- What kinds of places come to your mind when you think of alternative settings to gather with people?
- Have you heard of Christians partnering with people who follow other religions in order to work toward common concerns? If so, what happened? If not, what issues in your community might bring you together with people who follow other religions?
- Have you or anyone you know tried Christ-centered yoga? If so, what was your experience?
- Did chapter 12 or this discussion today make you think of some other ways to apply the concepts found in *Boundless*?

## Session Eight: Zacchaeus

### Materials needed:

None.

### Audio-visual requirements:

None.

### Important note:

In this session you will make plans to meet in a public place next time. It could be a coffee shop or a park, or some other place where you will be around other people and you will be able to meet. Pick the place and time. Ask each person to bring something to write on to the meeting next time.

If your group is too large for the place or places you want to meet, you can split up. If you do so, find a facilitator for each of your subgroups. Ask each facilitator to download the Facilitator's Guide from [www.boundlessjesus.com](http://www.boundlessjesus.com). Ask each facilitator to read the pages for Session Nine before the meeting.

### Review the previous story.

### Group Cultural Experience

The cultural experience today will come close to home. It will involve simply reading this introduction and then asking a question:

"The culture we will focus on today will be our own. In particular, we will consider the departure of young people from the Christian church. According to the surveys cited in *Boundless*, the percentage of people who do not affiliate with any religion is rising fast in the United States. When asked to pick their religion from a list, 25% pick 'religiously unaffiliated.' Studies show that most of these people grew up in a religious tradition, but now have left it behind. Other research reveals that these people show very little interest in coming back to church. Less than half of Americans now see church attendance as even slightly important."

Ask, "Do any of you know a person like this? Can

you tell us their story?"

### The story:

Luke 19:1-10. Tell the story, look at it silently for two minutes, and then pair up to tell it to each other.

**Introduction** (read this to your group): "In this story, like our last story, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where He will be crucified."

### Actual-Text Questions

- Where was Jesus, and was he staying there?
- Who was Zacchaeus?
- Why did he climb into a tree?
- What did Jesus say to Zacchaeus?
- What does Zacchaeus do and how do Jesus' words make him feel?
- How does the crowd respond?
- What does Zacchaeus pledge to do?
- What does Jesus say has come to Zacchaeus' house, and who does Jesus say Zacchaeus is?
- What does Jesus say He has come to do?

### Analysis Questions

- The people in the crowd called Zacchaeus a "sinner." How does this story help us understand why they used this word? Can you sympathize with how the crowd felt when Jesus chose Zacchaeus to stay with?
- Based on the events of this story, how do you think Zacchaeus felt about himself? How then do you think Jesus' words would have made him

feel?

- What do you think of Zacchaeus' pledge? Compare what Jesus asked of Zacchaeus with what Zacchaeus pledged to do.
- When Jesus said he came to seek and save what was lost, what point do you think He was trying to emphasize to Zacchaeus? What point was He making to the crowd?

### Application Questions

- Imagine that you are Zacchaeus. How does this story speak to you about the grace of God?
- Imagine that you are in the crowd. What kind of person today would shock you if Jesus chose that person to stay with? How do Jesus' actions challenge you today?
- If God is still trying to seek and save the lost, how can Jesus' words shape your life?

### The discussion:

In addition to the other concerns group members share, encourage the group to pray about people they know who have drifted away from faith in Christ.

### For *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 13):

- So far in *Boundless*, you've been exposed to many different people who have chosen to follow Jesus outside of what we commonly think of as Christian culture. Chapter 13 presents the views of people who agree and disagree with these approaches. In the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus says He came to seek and save the lost. As we think about God's desire to seek and save Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, what do you think He wants to say to them?

- What do you think they need to change in order to follow Him?
- What do you think they don't need to change?
- How do you think cultures could benefit from having fellowships of Jesus followers all across the C-Scale, from Western-style gatherings to traditional-culture-style gatherings?
- What do you think the world needs most?

## Session Nine: Thomas Believes

### **Materials needed:**

Each person will need something to write on.

### **Audio-visual requirements:**

None.

### **Note:**

This session will take place in a public setting.

### **Review the previous story.**

### **The story:**

John 20:24–29. Tell the story, look at it quietly for two minutes, then pair up and tell it to each other.

**Introduction** (read this out loud): “This story takes place after Jesus was resurrected from the dead. On the evening of His resurrection day, Jesus appeared to most of the disciples as they were together in a house. He showed them His hands and side.”

### **Actual-Text Questions**

- Who wasn't with the other disciples? What did the disciples tell him?
- What did Thomas want to see and do in order to believe?
- When Jesus appears to Thomas, how much time has gone by, who is there, and what has happened to the door?
- What does Jesus say to the disciples?
- What does He tell Thomas to do?
- Who does Thomas say that Jesus is?
- In Jesus' response, who does He say is blessed?

### **Analysis Questions**

- What proof does Thomas want? What proof does he get?
- What other ways could Jesus have responded to Thomas' unbelief?
- What other ways could Thomas have come to faith?

### **Application Questions**

- What does this story tell you about how Jesus responds to our doubt?
- How does He respond to our belief?
- Do you ever wish you could see what Thomas saw? How do you find yourself able to believe in spite of not seeing for yourself?

### **The discussion:**

Even groups who are not studying *Boundless* will reflect on the *Boundless* application questions. They will write down their answers to those questions and will take those ideas to the next meeting.

### **For general discussion and *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 14):**

- Chapter 14 gives a picture of many kinds of faith in one city. As you look around at the people in this room or in this park, and as you think about doubt and faith, in what ways can you imagine faith reaching out beyond the church walls of your community?
- What places can you imagine people meeting in?
- What can you imagine people doing when they meet?
- What needs could people meet together?
- Brainstorm about what that could look like and how you could be involved. Pray for each other.

## Session Ten: Feeding the Five Thousand

### Materials needed:

Each person should bring their notes from the last session. Also, if you have created drawings for each story, bring them all.

### Audio-visual materials:

If you have a small whiteboard or a flip chart, it would help for this session. It's not necessary, though.

### Review all the stories so far.

Get a different person to tell each story. If you have created drawings for each of the stories, use them to help you remember.

### The story:

Mark 6:30-44. Tell the story, look at it for 2 minutes, and pair up to tell it to each other.

**Introduction** (read this to the group): "After Jesus rises from the dead, He not only appears to His disciples, but he also sends them out saying, 'Go and make disciples of all nations.' In this story, which takes place before Jesus' death, Jesus' 12 disciples return after being sent out. Jesus had sent them out two-by-two to preach and heal."

### Actual-Text Questions

- What were the disciples telling Jesus?
- What was happening that made Jesus suggest going to a quiet place?
- What did Jesus and the disciples do? What did the people who saw them leaving do?
- How did Jesus respond to the people who had gathered?

- What time was it when the disciples brought up dinner? What did they want Jesus to do?
- What did Jesus say to the disciples?
- How did they respond?
- What did Jesus ask them to do?
- How did Jesus organize everyone and prepare for the meal?
- What did the disciples do before, during and after the meal?

### Analysis Questions

- Based on what was happening in the first part of the story, how might the disciples have felt when they saw the crowd?
- How was Jesus' reaction different than that?
- What does the story suggest the disciples might have been thinking when Jesus asked them to find out how many loaves they had?

### Application Questions

- Based on what Jesus asked His disciples to do, what do you think God asks from us? What's our part and what's His part?
- How does this story make you feel about what you have to give?
- Have you ever sensed God leading you to do something that was humanly impossible? What happened?

### For general discussion and *Boundless* book discussion (chapter 15):

- *Boundless* ends with a scene in Bangladesh

where I tell the story of the feeding of the five thousand to a group of Muslim men. What have you learned about Bible storying through this study? How have you already used these stories? How would you like to use them?

also offer ideas from believers around the world that can help us grow deeper in our faith. I look forward to hearing your comments and ideas.

- Share as a group the plans and dreams you came up with last week. If Jesus said, "You feed them," what would you say? What could you say you have? If you have a whiteboard or flip chart, write your ideas on it.
- Conclude by praying for each other, for ideas or plans made in the last meeting, and for the ability to continue learning and telling the Bible's stories.

## Next Steps

If your group wants to continue with storying, you can tell them there is [a whole year's worth of story ideas on this page](#) (<http://simplythestory.org/downloads/PDFs/Stories%20Workshop%201-52%20in%20Chronological%20Order10-10-10.pdf>). With these stories, you could cover the whole Bible in a year. You have enough experience with storying now to create your own questions. If you want to learn more about how to use storying, look at the Resources section in the beginning of this guide.

Also, please take a moment to let me know your ideas for how to make a difference in your community. You can reach me at [www.bryanbishop.net](http://www.bryanbishop.net).

Thank you for facilitating the Boundless Jesus Bible Study! I hope and pray this experience has drawn you closer to Jesus and has strengthened and inspired you.

If you want to stay in touch, you can sign up for my email updates at [www.boundlessjesus.com](http://www.boundlessjesus.com) or [www.bryanbishop.net](http://www.bryanbishop.net). In these updates, I share stories of what others are doing to bring the message of Jesus outside the walls of the church and I