



# REDISCOVERING THE CROSS

SMALL  
GROUP  
GUIDE

February 28, 2021

WHY DOES JESUS CHOOSE TO DIE?

## HOW DID IT GO? (10 MINUTES)

Take the first few minutes of this time to check-in on everyone in your group. Some people may still be recovering in various ways from the impact of the storm.

### REACHING UPWARD: GROWING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- ❑ This week's LenTEN prayer podcast focuses on lectio divina, or the "divine reading" of this week's Scripture. Can you take part in this same practice daily and reflect upon the prompts? Note how your observations change day by day. The podcast will guide you through your daily ten minutes—and you'll be one-sixth of the way there to meeting the LenTEN Prayer Challenge! To access the Podcast, Search "FPC Houston Sermons" on your podcast platform. For more information about our LenTEN prayer challenge or other Lenten resources, visit [fpchouston.org/lent-discipleship-series](http://fpchouston.org/lent-discipleship-series).
- ❑ The renowned Bible teacher and former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, Warren Wiersbe, in his commentary on Romans<sup>1</sup>, offers five key takeaways regarding justification found in this passage:
  - » Justification takes place apart from the law (v. 21)
  - » It comes through faith in Christ (v. 22a)
  - » It is given to all who believe, not just to Jew or Gentile (vv. 22b-23)
  - » It is a gift to us as an act of grace from a loving God (v. 24)
  - » It comes at great cost to God (vv. 24b-25)

**In your devotional time in the coming week, reread this passage (Rom 3:21-26) and focus on one of these points each day.** For example, on day one, spend time thinking and praying about the fact that there is a new righteousness available to you, a righteousness that comes from God but which is in no way connected with obeying the law. Consider the implications of this in your own life. On day two, focus on the fact that the only thing you have to do to claim this righteousness is to have faith in Jesus Christ. How could you share this incredible reality with someone you know? ...and so on throughout the week.

- ❑ Luther, Calvin, and most later theologians in the reformed tradition came to believe that justification was a one-time event, not a process.<sup>2</sup> **Consider taking a blank sheet of paper and construct a timeline of your life thus far (major life events) and include when you became a Christian. Where does justification (justified) fit on this timeline? Where do these other terms in the lexicon of the gospel such as salvation (saved), reconciliation (reconciled), adoption (adopted), redemption (redeemed), and sanctification (sanctified) show up on your timeline? Focus on which, if any, are one-time events and which are processes that occur over time.**

1 Wiersbe, Warren. The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1, Matthew - Galatians (Second Edition). Colorado Springs CO, David C. Cook, 2008, 522-523.

2 McGrath, Alister. Christian Theology - An Introduction (Fifth Edition.) London, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2011, 360-363.

## REACHING OUTWARD: INVESTING IN YOUR NEIGHBORS

- ❑ Being an advocate can seem like a daunting task. How can you take one small step this week to rest in God's love while also advocating for someone more vulnerable than yourself?
- ❑ Tim Keller, in his book *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*, uses the phrase "quartet of the vulnerable." He suggests with this phrase that Scripture identifies the four "players" of the quartet as widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. Think about your community: Who does the widow, orphan, immigrant, and the poor include? How does your perspective of these terms change as you personalize this "quartet"? Has the pandemic and this past week caused one part of the quartet to resound more loudly in your ear than another?
  - ❑ Take this one step further: create a chart where you list the widows, orphans, immigrants, and poor who you personally come into contact with or at least know about in our city or state. From this list, commit to praying for one way you can advocate for someone in this quartet, even during the pandemic.
- ❑ Consider reaching out to an organization you are already familiar with or one listed below following this recent winter storm.

### ❑ KidsMeals

Kid's Meals mission is to end childhood hunger by delivering free healthy meals to the doorsteps of Houston's hungriest preschool-aged children and through collaboration provide their families with resources to help end the cycle of poverty. They serve many of our ministry partners' children including Nehemiah Center. Sadly, they lost their entire food inventory when power was lost. They must replace the food to be able to feed the 6400 children a day. Families of poverty do not have the financial cushion or food reserves to survive crisis, so the need is significant. They are requesting donations of food items and volunteers to deliver meals. [kidsmealsinc.org](http://kidsmealsinc.org)

- » Current Food needs: desperate need for loaves of bread and proteins—so peanut butter packets, tuna packets, protein bars, and granola bars. They also need shelf-stable and/or soy milk, juices (prefer 100% juice if possible), and small (8oz) bottles of water.
- » Volunteer needs: needed to deliver meals.
- » Financial gifts are needed to help with repair and loss due to the freeze and outage

### ❑ Attack Poverty

Attack Poverty, one of our priority partners who we frequently collaborate with during disasters, has been deliberately addressing the needs of their communities as a result of the Winter Storm in Texas. See their website for details about volunteer opportunities and ways to support ([attackpoverty.org/texas-storm/](http://attackpoverty.org/texas-storm/)). If you have questions or want to volunteer there, contact Lea Byrd at [lbyrd@fpchouston.org](mailto:lbyrd@fpchouston.org).

## URGENT DONATIONS NEEDED:

- |                                |   |   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| » Blankets                     | » Contractor/Trash Bags                                       | » Batteries   |
| » Water                        | » Bleach  | » Hand Sanitizer  |
| » Home Depot/Lowes Gift Cards  | » Child related activity needs (Activity Kits, Bible Studies) | » Financial donations are needed for the long-term recovery effort anticipated. |
| » Hats, Socks, Scarves, Gloves | » Pet Food  |   |
| » Cleaning Supplies            | » Baby Supplies (Baby Food, Formula, Diapers)                 |   |

### ❑ Houston Responds

FPC is a founding member of Houston Responds - Central Coalition. Houston Responds: Central is helping bring churches and organizations together to serve families in Central Houston that have been affected by disasters such as this winter storm disaster. The Houston Responds Winter Storm response page provides

many of the different volunteer opportunities in response to this disaster [houstonresponds.org/disaster](https://houstonresponds.org/disaster). Our Central Coalition disaster coordinator for FPC is Steve Winstead. If you have questions about our work with Houston Responds or getting a group of friends to work as an FPC team, please reach out to Steve at [steve.winstead@att.net](mailto:steve.winstead@att.net).

❑ **Gulf Coast Blood Center**

The need for blood in the Houston area is critical! FPC will be hosting a blood drive at the church on Friday, March 12 from 9:30 AM–2 PM in LC 181. To sign up, visit [fpchouston.org/events](https://fpchouston.org/events).

❑ **Houston Food Bank**

Food insecurity was already a concern in Houston, and this storm has exacerbated the issue. Our community has endured days without power, warmth and healthy meals. To volunteer visit [houstonfoodbank.org](https://houstonfoodbank.org).

- ❑ Many of us have a friend or family member who is a practicing Roman Catholic. There are significant differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant faith traditions surrounding justification and, more broadly, salvation. Reach out in the coming week to a Catholic friend or family member (Zoom calls make this much easier now-a-days) and try to engage in a dialogue with him/her in order to better understand these differences. Simply tell him/her, “My church and Small Group is studying the question, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ I know that you are a practicing Catholic and I’m really interested in how that question is answered in your faith tradition.” The goal here is not to argue or persuade, but rather to listen and understand. Of course, you should feel free to say, “This is what I believe.” Report back to your group next week on how this discussion went. This will also give you a great opportunity to check on your friend to see if they need any assistance in the aftermath of the power outages and water shortages.

**HEAD (15-20 MINUTES)**

Read aloud [Mark 8:27-31](#) and [John 10:14-18](#).

1. In Mark 8, Jesus says the Son of Man “must” undergo great suffering, be rejected by the community and religious elite, and be killed. Jesus speaks of these things that “must” occur as though there is a divine logic/plan to the events. What is your understanding of the divine logic by which Jesus “must” experience the cross and all that it represents? Why is Jesus’ death necessary? What all is accomplished by it?
2. In John 10, Jesus twice says, “I lay down my life.” Jesus emphasizes through these words His choice to be an active participant in the events of the cross. What difference, if any, does it make for Jesus to choose to lay down his life? What does it mean for Jesus to be an active participant in the things that “must” happen, as opposed to him passively having these things happen to him?

**HEART (15-20 MINUTES)**

1. Above all else, Jesus’ choice to die is the essential act of faithfulness by which God’s law is fulfilled. Jesus did not allow His human vulnerabilities and fears to control His choice. Instead, He chose to believe and trust in God and His way, even in the face of the power of darkness. **Consider your current life situation. What vulnerabilities and/or fears are impacting your decision making these days, and in what ways? How does Jesus’ choice to die help you to be faithful in your choices?**
2. During his arrest, Jesus said to the chief priests, officers of the temple police, and elders gathered there that the moments about to take place were “[their] hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). Theologian N.T. Wright contends that Israel’s history was “all along

**HEAD**

Observe the text and the author’s main points.

**HEART**

Envision how the text—when applied—might transform your inner life in terms of your thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

the story of the way in which the creator God was going to deal with the problem of evil.” How does Jesus’ choice to die address the problem of evil? (“Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54)). What does this assurance mean to you in terms of how you live your life each day?

## HANDS (10 MINUTES)

### REACHING UPWARD: GROWING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- Spend time this week considering your active faithfulness to God by examining some of the recent choices you have had to make.
  - Begin by identifying some recent choices to examine, both big and small (every choice is an opportunity for worship).
  - Now think back through your decision-making processes: What did you consider when making your choices? How did your desire to be faithful to God impact how you considered your choices and, ultimately, the choices you made?
- Join your FPC family and commit to praying ten minutes a day from now until Easter. Consider using the resources FPC is providing by listening to the “FPC Houston Sermons” Podcast, which will lead you through a different prayer practice each week. You can find more information about this at our FPC Houston Lenten Discipleship Page: [fpchouston.org/lent-discipleship-series](http://fpchouston.org/lent-discipleship-series)
- Our next FPC Alpha will launch April 7th and continue until May 25th. Begin praying the Lord would show you someone you could invite to join this spring’s Alpha experience. For more information, email Emmanuel Paulpeter ([epaulpeter@fpchouston.org](mailto:epaulpeter@fpchouston.org)).

### HANDS

Apply the text by moving from inward reflection to outward action looking for practical ways to live the text out in our lives to serve others.

### REACHING OUTWARD: INVESTING IN YOUR NEIGHBORS

- Spend time this week considering your active faithfulness to those God has placed in your life. Begin by identifying particular relationships to consider.
  - Think through what has been happening in the lives of each of those people.
    - What are their needs?
    - What are their fears?
    - What choices are they facing?
    - How might you support them in their choices?
- Is there a “Reaching Outward” practice from last week (See the “How did it Go” Section above for reference) that you are going to continue participating in for the next few weeks/months? How can your group encourage you to this end?
- Spiritual Conversations Training:** Does sharing your faith with someone feel daunting? Do you feel guilty about not sharing your faith enough? Do you want to know how you can share your faith in ways that are simple, winsome and authentic? Join us on a two-week webinar (March 7th and March 21st: 2pm-3:30pm) and learning group discussing ways to have Spiritual Conversations within our circles of influence (even during a Pandemic). The webinar will provide practical ways to have spiritual conversations that lead people to the love of Jesus. To register, sign up here: [fpchouston.org/gospel-conversations](http://fpchouston.org/gospel-conversations)

### NEIGHBOR

Anyone in your life—whether a friend, colleague, family member, classmate, or literal neighbor—to whom you can show God’s love.

### REACHING OUTWARD: INVESTING IN YOUR NEIGHBORS

- How is God stirring you to learn and grow from this passage?

