

He Chose the Nails Leader Guide

Session 1: He Chose to Be One of Us

Notes:

The gifts of Easter are the most precious gifts any person could ever receive because they cost God so much to give.

God's greatest gift of all – his greatest act of love for us – was sending Jesus into our world.

Jesus gave up:

Timelessness: Jesus swapped eternity for calendars. The Bible tells us God is “beyond our understanding the number of his years is past finding out” (Job 36:26). There is no moment when God was not God, for he is eternal.

Boundlessness: Jesus gave up being a spirit to live in a body. One moment he was a boundless spirit; the next moment he was flesh and bones.

Sinlessness: Jesus became sin for us. An object that symbolizes the consequences of sin in humanity's heart is a thornbush (see Genesis 3:17-18; Numbers 33:55; Proverbs 22:5; Matthew 7:16). The thorny crown on Christ's brow is a picture of the fruit of our sin that pierced his heart.

We are “by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3 NASB). Though we have been made in God's image, we're corrupt at the core. The sinless One took on the face of a sinner so that we sinners could take on the face of a saint.

Jesus never knew the fruits of sin until he became sin for us (see 2 Corinthians 5:12). When he was crucified, he cried out in a loud voice. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Those are not the words of a saint but the cry of a sinner.

The crown of thorns could have been made – and should have been worn – by every one of us. But it was not, thanks to the greatest gift of all.

Why did God give us this gift? “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)

God did it for us – just for us – because he loves us.

Discussion Questions:

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

Receiving the Gifts of Easter

2. Imagine for a moment that you have decided to do a random act of kindness for a stranger by leaving a \$100 bill in a public place (such as a park, a lobby, or a store aisle). What kind of person do you most hope will and will not find your gift?
 - a. If someone in the less-than-deserving category were to find your gift, what thoughts might you be zing his or her way?
 - b. What internal dynamics sometimes make it difficult for you to truly receive a gift?
3. How would you describe your understanding or experience of Lent over the years?
 - a. What, if anything, shifts in your perspective when you think of Lent less as a season of guilt or giving something up and more as a time to be intentional about preparing to receive joy and good things from God?
 - b. The Hebrew verbs translated *rend* and *return* in Joel 2:12-13 are images of repentance in action. People would *rend* or tear their garments as an expression of intense grief or in response to a catastrophe. To *return* means to make a U-turn, to go to the point of departure, to change one's mind. What do these two words – *rend* and *return* – suggest about what it means not only to seek reconciliation with God but also to do so *with all your heart*?
 - c. Drawing on any previous experiences of repentance and forgiveness (with God or others), what three words or phrases would you use to describe what it's like to *rend* your heart? What three words or phrases would you use to describe "the joy of being cleaned out"?
4. What do you think is the significance of the crown of thorns?
5. As you anticipate learning more about the gifts of Easter in the remaining sessions of this study, in what ways does this perspective about receiving God's gifts challenge you? In what ways does it intrigue you or encourage you?