



**LESSON 4**  
**PREPARATION NOTES**

**Jesus**  
**Christ—**  
**Our Saviour**

### **JESUS CHRIST—OUR SAVIOUR IN BRIEF:**

Jesus saves us from our sins through his passion, death and resurrection.

### **KEY ELEMENTS:**

- The goal of this lesson is to help participants see that Jesus' purpose on earth was to suffer, die for our sins, and rise, in order to restore our broken relationship with God.
- The bridge imagery from the writings of St. Catherine of Siena is central to this lesson. *It is important that you practice explaining it* (drawing the bridge and asking the questions). Participants do not have the diagram in their participant guides. The leader draws it for them to copy.
- We do not want this lesson to seem trite or simplistic. It is thus important that the bridge analogy be shared with appropriate passion and conviction.
- Do not rush through your explanation of the bad news (the results of sin, death and separation). This helps us appreciate our need for Christ's sacrifice.
- It is important to understand the theological explanation of Jesus' identity to properly answer question 6. *Read the leader notes very carefully.* These notes explain that Jesus is fully God and fully man. As a human being, Jesus could die on our behalf. As God, his sacrifice has infinite value.
- You will need to practice explaining the analogies and illustrations connected with questions 6 and 7.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- The original text used to describe the bridge is found in *St. Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*. A brief excerpt is provided below. On its own, this text could be difficult for Discovery participants to understand, which is why it has been explained rather than directly quoted. For your reference, a portion of it is included here:

“ I want you to realize, my children, that by Adam’s sinful disobedience the road was so broken up that no one could reach everlasting life....I had created them in my image and likeness so that they might have eternal life, sharing in my being and enjoying my supreme eternal tenderness and goodness. But because of their sin, they never reached this goal and never fulfilled my truth, for sin closed heaven and the door of my mercy....

With sin there came at once the flood of a stormy river that beat against them constantly with its waves, bringing weariness and troubles from themselves as well as from the devil and the world. You were all drowning, because not one of you, for all your righteousness, could reach eternal life.

But I wanted to undo these great troubles of yours. So I gave you a bridge, my Son, so that you could cross over the river, the stormy sea of this darksome life, without being drowned....

And how foolish to choose to drown rather than accept the remedy I have given!

But first I want you to look at the bridge of my only-begotten Son, and notice its greatness. Look! It stretches from heaven to earth, joining the earth of your humanity with the greatness of the Godhead....

So the height stooped to the earth of your humanity, bridging the chasm between us and rebuilding the road.

And why should he have made of himself a roadway? So that you might in truth come to the same joy as the angels. But my Son's having made of himself a bridge for you could not bring you to life unless you make your way along that bridge.

”

*St. Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*  
translated by Suzanne Noffke, OP, pp.58-59

- Catherine of Siena is a Doctor of the Church. This esteemed title has been given to only 36 people so far. It is bestowed on those who are models of great sanctity and whose teachings are universally valuable and pertinent to all members of the Church in every age.
- In the section on “the bridge,” the results of the fall and sin are described as separation and death. There are, of course, other results, but for the sake of clarity and simplicity, we will stick to those two. For your reference, however:

“ As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called “concupiscence”).

”

CCC 418

**RECOMMENDED READING:**

- CCC 430-445; 599-623



**LESSON 4**

# **Jesus Christ— Our Saviour**

# 1 Discuss how last week's challenge went.



## Introduction



**LEADERS:** Open the lesson by saying, “Today we will be looking at some things that you have probably heard before. You may be familiar with these ideas, but in order to get the most out of the lesson, try to approach them as though they were new. People are often amazed at how clear and simple this lesson is. ‘I have never heard it explained that way before!’ is a frequent reaction to this lesson.”



Last week, we looked at the divinity of Jesus—Jesus as Lord. Now we will look at what it means to say that Jesus is our Saviour. We will see the ultimate way in which Jesus, as Saviour, proves God's merciful love for each of us.

## 2 What kind of things did Jesus do during his public ministry on earth?

**LEADERS:** This is a brainstorming question. Examples: he healed, preached, taught, sought and saved the lost, revealed the Father, showed the love of God, reached out to the poor, etc.

## 3 What do you think was Jesus' main reason for being on earth?

**ANSWER:** Jesus' central mission was to restore our relationship with the Father by dying on the cross for our sins and rising from the dead (defeating death).

# Bridging Earth to Heaven



To help us better understand Jesus as Saviour, we will look at insights from St. Catherine of Siena, a Doctor of the Church. In her writings she shares a visual description of salvation which God revealed to her.

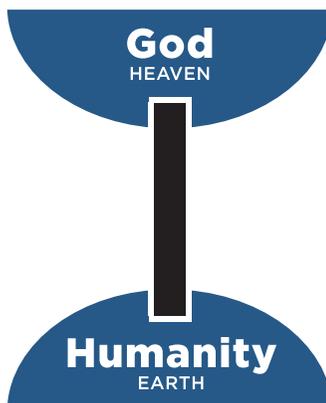
St. Catherine describes Adam and Eve and how they were created in God's image. In Eden, they tasted the beginnings of communion with God that would have grown as they spiritually matured, so that eventually, they would have fully known his eternal goodness, tenderness and love.

However, sin created irreparable problems; it caused an impassable division between God and man. St. Catherine describes this separation as a great, raging river that made it absolutely impossible for man to reach God, as much as man might try. This impassable, powerful river of sin leads to death. The picture painted at this point is very bleak indeed.

**LEADERS:** Say, "Let's draw out the picture to better understand it as we answer the following questions."

The rest of the page is left blank in the participant guide, so that each participant can draw the bridge as it is explained and discussed.

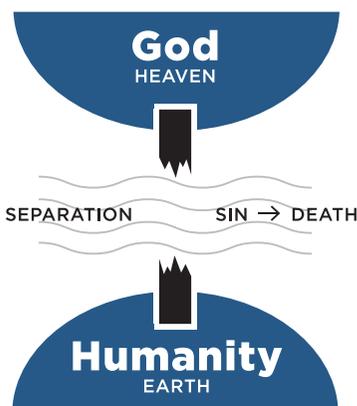
**STAGE 1—Draw Heaven/God and Earth/Humanity with a line connecting them. The line represents the connection and unity they had at creation before the fall.**



## 4 In light of this description and what you have already learned in Lesson 2, what are the results of sin?

**A ANSWER:** Separation from God (his love), and death.

**STAGE 2**—Erase the line from heaven to earth (or draw a squiggly line over top of it). Write *separation*, *sin*, then an arrow pointing to the word *death*.



**LEADERS:** Say, “This is the situation. How does this make you feel?”

**A ANSWER:** Hopeless, upset, discouraged, defeated, abandoned, angry.

**LEADERS:** Ask, “How would you feel if we ended the lesson here?”

Do not be afraid to emphasize the bad news. The gap between us and God is huge, insurmountable. We must understand how bad this situation is in order to appreciate the full impact of the Good News. The Good News is not just touching and nice, it is vitally important.

Say, “As you can see, the river leaves us in a place of desperate need, and can only lead us to death should we try to overcome it on our own.”

God the Father deals with the problem of sin by sending his Son into the world. Through his death on the cross, Jesus becomes a bridge so that we can reach heaven.

“ So I gave you a bridge, my Son, so that you could cross over the river, the stormy sea of this darksome life, without being drowned....And how foolish to choose to drown rather than accept the remedy I have given!...And why should he have made of himself a roadway? So that you might in truth come to the same joy as the angels. ”

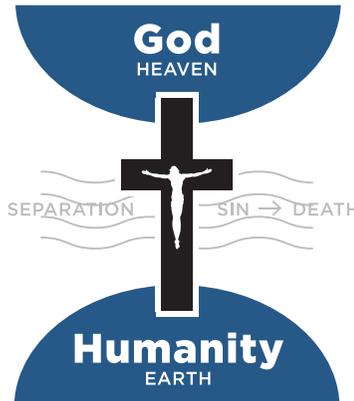
*St. Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue, p. 58-59*

“ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. ”

Colossians 1:19-20

**LEADERS:** Say, “Jesus came from heaven to earth to deal with the problem of sin, death and separation.”

**STAGE 3—**Draw a vertical line coming from heaven to earth, and then continue by making it into a cross. Draw a corpus on it.



## 5 How did Jesus' death on the cross deal with the problems sin created?

### JOHN 1:29

*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

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**L LEADERS:** Ask, "What did the Lamb of God take away?"

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**A ANSWER:** The sins of the world.

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**L LEADERS:** Draw an "X" through sin.

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### ROMANS 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

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**L LEADERS:** Ask, "What has Jesus done for us in this verse?"

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**A ANSWER:** Defeated death and given us eternal life. Of course, we still have physical death, but we have life in heaven and we look forward to the resurrection of the body when Christ returns again. Jesus dealt with eternal separation from God.

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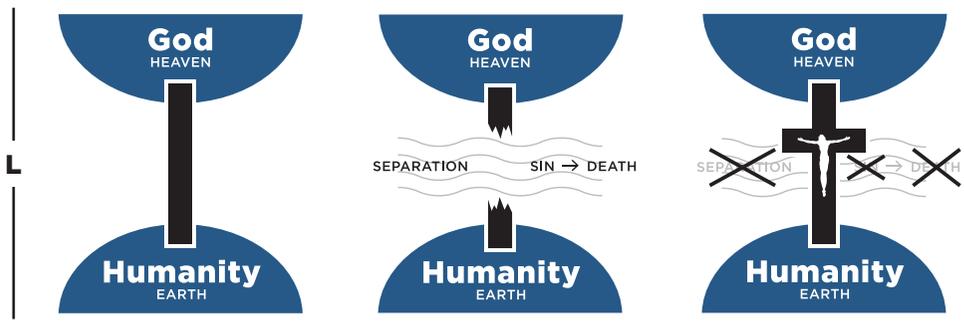
**L LEADERS:** Draw an "X" through death.

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### 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-19

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*

- L** **LEADERS:** Ask, “If we are reconciled through Christ, then what has been overcome?”
- A** **ANSWER:** Separation. Jesus has dealt with separation as well.
- L** **LEADERS:** Draw an “X” through separation.



**6** Read Romans 5:16-19. In light of these Scripture verses and the bridge illustration, why was humanity in need of God's help? In other words, why did we need Jesus to die for us?



## ROMANS 5:16-19

*And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

**ANSWER:** We are all sinful and unable to reach God. The consequence associated with our sin is death—eternal separation from God. Adam started it; Jesus healed it.

Jesus was fully God and fully man. As a man, he physically died for our sins. He was condemned as a man. He hung on the cross as a man. He hung in pain; he bled as a man. He suffered human pain and he endured separation from his Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Though he never sinned, he took our sin upon himself and suffered its consequence. This was real physical pain and real spiritual pain.

As a human being, Jesus could die on our behalf. As God, his sacrifice has infinite value. How? As Jesus hung on the cross, it was as if his right hand extended infinitely into the past and his left hand extended infinitely into the future, symbolizing that he has redeemed all of history—past, present and future.

**LEADERS:** To illustrate the magnitude of our inability to reconcile with God through our own strength, you can elaborate further on St. Catherine of Siena and the bridge.

**ANSWER:** St. Catherine painted the picture for us of that wild, massive river of sin dividing Heaven and Earth, and how Jesus came from Heaven to be the bridge to make the way for us to get back to God. Her writings on this image cover several pages, and at one point she talks about people who try to get across the river to Heaven on their own. They descend the treacherous cliff to access the river bank. They come up with all kinds of ways to get across the river, such as swim, build their own bridge...things like that. What they don't fully grasp (until they actually tackle the river) is that it is enormously vast! The incredible width, depth and raging speed shows no mercy—an attempt to cross is absolutely futile and only leads to a sure death.

A Those who have ever gone down white water rapids can just imagine how hard it would be swim across to the opposite side. It would be all the more impossible to do with this immensely wide river of sin. (To help situate the imagery, you could mention that the widest river in the world is the Rio de la Plata in South America, which at certain points is 225 km wide!) Imagine crossing violent river rapids that distance! It is absolutely humanly impossible—even to construct a bridge to span it.

The same is true in our relationship with God: even our best efforts do not restore what was severed by sin. We need Jesus to bridge this gap. The theological term for this is atonement. Think of atonement as “at-one”ment. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, we are made “at-one” with God. Reconciliation happened through Christ’s atonement for us. Jesus, motivated by love, freely sacrificed himself on our behalf. He was the Mediator who brought peace and healing to the severed relationship between God and man (salvation comes from the Latin word *salus*, which means healing).

**LEADERS:** Mention the incredible generosity of God’s gift in this sacrifice. God was not bound by necessity to make this sacrifice for us, nor did he owe us anything. Jesus’ death on the cross was a marvelous free gift.

“ To honor the Father, that man [Jesus]—although not obligated to die, because not a sinner—freely gave something of his own when he permitted his life to be taken from him for the sake of justice. ”

St. Anselm of Canterbury,  
*Meditatio Redemptionis Humanae*, p. 422.

**LEADERS:** If your group is struggling to understand this concept, try guiding them as follows. Begin by asking, “What is justice?” Justice is giving to each person his or her due. From there, look back to the bridge illustration and say, “Well, what is our due?” We actually deserve to be separated from God’s love—our due is eternal separation, hell. Then say, “God is perfect justice, and according to justice, we merit separation from him. But God is more than perfect justice, he is also perfect mercy.”

**LEADERS:** You can then share the story of Jean Valjean. In Victor Hugo’s classic novel *Les Misérables*, the character Jean Valjean is taken in for the night by a bishop the day he is released from a 19-year prison term. Afraid for his future, Jean steals the bishop’s silverware and runs off in the middle of the night. He is caught by the police and brought back to the bishop for punishment.

If the bishop confirms the crime, Jean will be put away for the rest of his life—but the bishop doesn’t. Instead, he tells the police that the silverware is a gift to Jean. Everyone is dumbfounded. The bishop effectively pays the price of Jean Valjean’s crime with that silver, even though the bishop was the one who was sinned against and has every right to demand repayment. Yet instead of this, he makes the payment himself to save Jean’s life from imprisonment.

When the police leave, the bishop looks intently at Jean Valjean and tells him that he “bought” his soul and now he “gives it [back] to God.” He paid the price of Jean’s crime in order to bring him into a profound encounter with mercy.

This is not unlike what the Father does for us. In justice we are convicted for our sins, but God offers forgiveness to all who ask.

## **7 Jesus' death and resurrection restores our relationship with God. What prevents us from grasping how necessary Jesus is?**

**ANSWER:** We don't recognize our need. We think we're not so bad. We don't really think our sins merit eternal separation from God. We ignore the issue and don't think about our eternal destiny.

Many people believe in Jesus but do not recognize their need for him. We must understand that the Christian faith is founded upon Christ's death and resurrection. If we do not recognize that Jesus came to save us from sin, death and separation, our attitude towards him will not go beyond respect and reverence (recognition of Jesus as Lord). In order to live a fulfilling relationship with him, however, we must also acknowledge our profound need for the salvation he offers (recognition of Jesus as Saviour).

We have heard that St. Catherine described the river between us and God as impassable and deadly. If we ever fell into that river, we would absolutely need to be rescued. The following analogy emphasizes that we must recognize our need for divine intervention.

### **THE LIFEGUARD ANALOGY**

When I go to the beach, I recognize and respect the importance of having a lifeguard on duty. The lifeguard is there to help those in need. I am a competent swimmer, however, so I don't need the lifeguard. Once a week I wave and acknowledge him, then go out for a swim in the deep waters.

One day, as I am swimming, I unexpectedly swallow a mouthful of water and begin to choke. Gasping for air, I swallow more water. I begin to panic as I start to sink. I'm submerged once, twice. At this point, I know that if I sink a third time, I will die. My attitude towards the lifeguard has changed drastically: I realize that if he does not get off his chair and come rescue me, my life is over. I have moved from simple respect to desperate need for the lifeguard.

Our view of Jesus may parallel our initial relationship with the lifeguard. We might respect Jesus but not really think we need him. If we really understood our sin, weaknesses and failures, however, and recognized that the result of these is separation and death, we would know our desperate need for a Saviour. Grave sinners and incompetent swimmers are not the only ones who need saving—we all need to be rescued.

So far in the analogy, the bridge is in place but humanity and God remain separated. We have not yet crossed the chasm. In the next lesson, we will discuss why it is important to God—and vital for us—that we make it across the bridge to God’s side.

## Summary

41

Jesus Christ is the revelation of God’s love and mercy. His love is capable of rescuing each of us from slavery to sin and death.

“ He alone makes it possible for every human person to share eternal life. ”

St. Pope John Paul II,  
*Message for World Mission Sunday 2005.*

## Living It Out

41

### CHALLENGE

Share the bridge analogy with someone this week.

**LEADERS:** You could suggest they say to someone, “Can I show you something from my Catholic small group that I am supposed to practice explaining?” Encourage them to share the bridge analogy with someone who needs to hear about what Jesus has done.

### MEMORIZE ROMANS 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

# Leader's Journal



Take 15 minutes as soon as possible after finishing the lesson to reflect on how God moved during your study and how your small group participants responded.

## 1 Thanksgiving

**Reflect and say a prayer of thanksgiving for specific ways the Holy Spirit was present in that small group.**

- a. How did you experience the Holy Spirit helping you to lead the lesson?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. How did you experience the Holy Spirit moving in the small group today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What were the positives from today's group?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d. What were areas for improvement?

## 2 Prophetic Listening

**Ask the Holy Spirit to help you review the lesson. Think about each person in your small group as you prayerfully reflect on these questions.**

- a. What are some indications that each participant caught the main points of this lesson?

- b. If you noticed gaps in any participant's understanding of the main points, is the Holy Spirit inviting you to do anything over the course of this week to help this person better understand?
  
- c. Are there any other ways the Holy Spirit is inviting you to intentionally care for or nurture your individual small group participants?
  
- d. Is there anything you want to remind yourself from what played out in this lesson for when you sit down to prepare the next lesson?

### **3 Intentional Accompaniment**

**Write down a plan to intercede for your small group participants based on the specific insights above, including how you will reach out to them and/or tailor the next lesson's introduction based on your reflections.**