

BEDFORD CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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It's All About Jesus!



The Jesus You May Not Know.

Fall Small Groups

SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP LEADERS

- Welcome everyone in a warm and pleasant manner.
- Identify a time and place for each session and share this information with the group.
- Ensure that everyone is given an opportunity to speak and share views if they want to.
- Create a positive judgment free environment
 - One Mic-no talking over others – can people hear each other?
 - Prepare and have handouts ready/ distribute material.
 - Use simple language that can be understood by participants
 - Have fun, smile, laugh
- Drive the Vision of the Group
 - Use questions to look inward, forward, and upward. What does this mean to me presently, what changes do I need to make to incorporate this in my life and my community? How does this enhance my connection with God and His people?
- Encourage participants to take “Appropriate Risk”- No one should feel pressured to answer correctly.
- Ask questions that invite participation.
- Always open and close with prayer.
- Make sure everyone knows the name of each group member- exchange contact information if necessary.

“It’s All About Jesus”

- **Week 1: Past** -October 20~October 26, 2024
- **Week 2: Purpose** -October 27- November 2, 2024
- **Week 3: Presence**- November 3- November 9, 2024
- **Week 4: Perspective**- November 10- November 16, 2024
- **Week 5: Promise**- November 17- November 23, 2024

Suggested Reading:

- ✓ Eboni Marshall Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon.*
- ✓ John Ortberg- *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus.*

Watch: Jesus The Game Changer-Amazon Prime

Songs: Carrie Underwood - Because He Lives (Official Audio Video)

<https://youtu.be/rOUJCZdzpGY?si=yg6KeAWpxgAAK1xE>

Andraé Crouch-Jesus Is The Answer

<https://youtu.be/cKHpwGR7Bs?si=MkzOpkqQibnJ6KKf>

Jesus Promised Me A Home Over There

<https://youtu.be/yrYOUUs4TNNU?si=wmQ-UsAuUPLi5D2f>

Welcome to our Fall Small Groups!

It is All about Jesus!

In western societies Jesus is a household name. Even if you can't relate with the 68% of Americans who identify as Christian, at one point or another you have uttered the name Jesus. Even if it's blurting out Jesus Christ when, upset, when something goes wrong or when pushed to your breaking point, you are familiar with the name Jesus.

Who would have thought that a poor baby, born to a virgin from the city of Nazareth, where nothing good was said to come from would have such worldwide appeal thousands of years after his death. Jesus isn't just an historical figure. He is our Lord and Savior. He was a revolutionary transformational servant leader who embraced, served, healed, empowered, educated, and liberated the lowest members of society-the poor, women, children, the enslaved and those deemed unclean. His message of love, teachings, miracles, unwavering commitment to his father and his purpose challenged the religious groups and government of his time which led to his crucifixion.

Jesus our Lord and Savior lived, died and was resurrected. His gift of salvation grants us eternal life. We expect and anticipate his return. He was present from the beginning. He is not the God of the past. Instead, he is present in all aspect of our existence. Jesus is the creator of our past, present and future. He is intentional. Jesus has a plan and purpose for us. He provided the framework by ensuring fulfillment of his purpose. His word the bible provides practical examples and lessons to order and structure our lives thereby shaping our perspective and reminding us that Jesus will fulfill his promises.

We hope that through deep study of Jesus, you will get to know him intimately, you will fall in love with him, understand what He is like, how He operates, develop a deeper personal relationship with him and be motivated to follow in his footsteps and be the light needed in this era.

Week 1: Past

"History is his story"

Page Opener-Discuss (5 minutes)

We all have a past- How will you be painted and remembered in History?

Deep Dive:(10- 15 minutes)

History is full of stories and biographies of persons who lived, did amazing things and left a legacy. Many of us are familiar with Jesus the baby born in a manger to a virgin name Mary, Jesus the one who was crucified, hung on a cross and died, and Jesus the one who rose from the dead on the third day. Some of us are familiar with Jesus the man believed to be the Messiah, Jesus the teacher, Jesus the carpenter, Jesus the leader of the twelve disciples, Jesus the healer, Jesus the miracle worker, Jesus the Jew rejected by fellow Jews because he had the audacity to equate himself with God, challenging established religious principles with his revolutionary ideas about the Kingdom, ideas about love, equality, treatment of the lowest members of society, service, forgiveness of sins, salvation and eternal life. Many of us are familiar with Jesus as Lord and Savior. Whichever Jesus you are familiar with, one thing is true, Jesus lived, died and is resurrected.

His story didn't end with his death on the Cross. While there is still some scrutiny whether Jesus truly existed, and if the accounts of his existence is accurate, we know that Jesus has a place in history and a place in our hearts. There is evidence of his life on earth. The gospels provide four-eyewitness biographical account of the life and ministry of Jesus. The gospel of Luke is a commissioned work. There are several thousand copies of each manuscript of the Gospels. A

great number of persons took time to investigate, write, share and ensure that Jesus' story is cemented in history. Jesus was also referenced by writers like Tacitus a roman historian, Lucian of Samosata, Mara bar Sarapion, and Josephus the Jewish scholar. Jesus has an historical footprint.

Jesus is more than an iconic historical figure. His life transcends the pages of the gospels and history. To date Jesus is the most impactful person to ever walk the earth. His impact is seen and felt today because of the first small group members -the disciples, women, apostles, and converts who were committed to sharing his message and building up the early church. His legacy is alive. It is available to everyone. Jesus is the only one who can bring lasting peace, grant forgiveness of sin, salvation and eternal life. Despite our backgrounds, inadequacies, and past mistakes, Jesus loves and accepts us, none of it matters. When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, our past is history. Jesus comes along side us to paint a new picture and rewrite our story.

Let's Talk – (10 minutes)

Jesus came from Nazareth a backwoods section of Galilee but still managed to have worldwide appeal.

- What was your definition of God in the past- How were you first introduced to Jesus? How did you view Him?
- Do you see the stories of him as a thing of the past- that was during Jesus' time. It can't happen now- It happened because he was Jesus- as opposed to he is Jesus. Do you refer to Jesus in the past?

- What can you -a small group member- do to share and educate others about Jesus of the past, present and future?

Read & Emulate: Luke 1: 1-4, Philippians 2:1-11

It's a Rap- Reflect & Close- (10 minutes)

Jesus made his mark in history – his story, works, message and gift of salvation is alive through us. Commit to live and minister like he did.

Week 2: Purpose

“Sometimes you have to be willing to be made a fool of to achieve the greater good and fulfill your purpose.”

Page Opener-Discuss (10 minutes)

What are you willing to endure to fulfill your purpose? Do you know your purpose?

Deep Dive- (10-15 minutes)

We have an image of a non-violent Jesus who went willingly to the cross. He was stripped, beaten, mocked, and humiliated but he did not retaliate. He was asked- if you are who you say you are why not use your powers and save yourself. Jesus' mission was bigger than the physical suffering he endured. Torture could not be used to take him off course. Jesus was intentional, he had a purpose to fulfill.

His sacrifice on the cross paid for humanity's sin and granted the gift of salvation to all who believe and accept him as Lord and savior. The work of reconciliation began with Jesus, he planted the seed, however, everyone has free will and must choose to be reconciled with him. Most of Jesus' ministry was centered on educating, healing, and freeing those bound by tradition and religious ideologies that did not align with God's love. Jesus spent time modeling Godly principles which prepared his followers to carry on his teaching and share the gospel with others bringing them to willingly accept the gift of Salvation.

Jesus knew that force was not needed to start a movement and ignite a revolution. Jesus embodied unconditional love and humility. He met people on their level, fulfilled their needs, made them feel accepted and valued, he served, taught and used spiritual truths to

challenge people to think and act differently. His approach set him apart from the religious leaders and government officials of his day. Everyone wanted to be in the company of the man who was doing miracles and providing spiritual and physical food.

His ministry grew, he had many followers; he was being elevated to kingly, God like status. To maintain the status quo the Jewish leaders and Rome had to discredit Jesus and silence his followers. The crucifixion was meant to do just that, but it did the opposite. What was meant for harm lead Jesus straight to fulfillment of his purpose.

The Jewish leaders and Rome killed Jesus, but they could not kill the message and the movement. Revolution took root. A small group of people who sought to follow Jesus continued the message. They had little or no power, but they progressed. With the power of the Holy Spirit, they withstood persecution, overcame and grew into a massive group with worldwide reach and influence.

Jesus and Christianity out lasted the Roman Empire and the Jews who opposed him. Jesus lives because of faithful believers who embraced the great commission and continue to share the gospel. Because Jesus held fast and fulfilled his purpose modern day believers have been able to do great and wonderful things to enhance the lives of the least amongst us.

The early Christians were committed to following in Jesus' footsteps to educate the poor and heal the sick. To name a few, persons like Robert Raikes of the United Kingdom instituted the Sunday School Movement, a literacy program to give poor children an opportunity to learn to read and write on Sunday afternoons. Followers of Jesus started universities in places like Bologna, Paris, Oxford and

Cambridge. The historically black college Cheyney University was started by funds donated by a Quaker Richard Humphreys. Other Christian communities motivated by the life and ministry of Jesus started hospitals and charitable organizations like the Red Cross. Jesus had to go willingly to the cross to fulfill his purpose providing us an opportunity to fulfill ours.

Let's Talk – (10 minutes)

The church is to serve as a haven for the downtrodden and the voiceless.

- What are you committed to doing to serve God and others?
- Do you believe that the church should be involved in social, secular and political ventures?

Read, Understand & Share: John 3:17, John 10:10, Luke 2:42-49 (KJV), John 5: 16-18, Matthew 28: 16-20

It's a Rap- Reflect & Close- (10 minutes)

Jesus stood on business and did not veer from doing his father's work, thereby fulfilling his purpose. Focus, do what God has called you to do- no excuses!

Week 3: Presence

“Jesus isn’t just a charismatic figure who lived. His resurrection places him in the present. He is the man who won’t go away”

Page Opener -Discuss (5 minutes)

Jesus’ presence in our lives makes a difference.

How do you know that Jesus is present in your life?

Deep Dive- (25 minutes)

Because of Jesus we know for certain God is real. Jesus is the real-life manifestation of God’s physical presence on earth, in history and in our lives. No one who encounters Jesus remains the same.

The gospel of John opens with- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” John paints a picture of Jesus as both God and man. He informs the reader that Jesus was with God in the beginning, and he is present among humanity in the flesh as a man.

We are created in God’s image and likeness. Who better to embody this than Jesus. Jesus represents God and his love for humanity. He was both man and God- God’s love for humanity reflected through his son- Jesus a human. Jesus embodied the redemptive and unconditional love of God. He is a mirror image of God and a portrait of who we are, as we are created in his image and likeness. His presence dwells inside us.

Womanist theologians Eboni Marshall Turman makes the connection of healing that can be achieved through Jesus being flesh and spirit. She sees Jesus as the physical embodiment of God who came to reconcile humanity back to God. He came to repair the fracture that took place in the Garden of Eden. This fracture caused separation not just between God and man but between the created beings as well. Humanity no longer had direct communion with God and engaged in many forms of worship and acts of dominance to exert power and in essence make themselves God.

The inability to connect to the essence of God caused self-hatred and ignorance that manifested in misogynistic and racist tendencies that still exist today. Jesus came to redeem women, the church, his bride from the fall, the fracture, which occurred after creation resulting from the decision the woman, Adam's bride, made or at least what Adam credited her with being the cause of. In the third chapter of Genesis, the serpent, Adam and Eve are punished for their disobedience. As a result, the relationship between the woman and the serpent shifted to where the two were at odds with each other. God stated that the seed (child) of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:14-15). Jesus being the seed of the woman was conceived by the Holy Spirit-the spirit of God- not through natural male, female interaction, hence Joseph did not contribute in the birth of Jesus. The seed of the man, Adam, could not restore order.

The Holy Spirit working through the woman and Jesus came to restore the divine balance that was disrupted. Divine order had to be brought back into the framework. As a result of the fall, women were reduced to desiring and serving the will of her husband (Gen 3:16). They were reduced to serving their husband as opposed to serving God. The fracture took place; Jesus came to reconnect her, Eve, womankind to the fulfillment of her destiny and ministry.

Eboni Marshall Turman points out that through the humanness of Christ and the breaking of his body a bridge can be forged to allow the broken and misused bodies of women to find healing and wholeness. Jesus focused on the women who were on the outskirts, those who bore the emotional scar of Eve. He came to minister to them and to reaffirm their worth outside the dependence on men. This is evident with the woman at the well who was trying to validate and find her worth through her relationship with men. Jesus came to provide her with living water, purification and fulfillment, which would quench her thirst (desires) and provide her with the validation needed despite her state of unworthiness (John 4:7-30).

We hold true that Jesus died and was buried. He was resurrected on the third day. Jesus was seen by Mary, the women and his disciples who served as eyewitnesses that he is no longer dead. He rose from the dead as he promised. They were reassured that Jesus' message was true and that he is in fact the son of God. This reassurance

served as fuel to share his message of salvation despite persecution. Jesus' resurrection sets him apart from all other gods. Because of Jesus' resurrection we know that Jesus is alive and present in our lives.

Let's Talk – (10 minutes)

Jesus is the only one who possesses the power to resurrect and forge a lasting bond between us and the creator.

- In Patriarchal societies women are viewed as second class citizens. Jesus was attentive to the needs of women and the outcast. What do you do to ensure that everyone is treated equally, with love and kindness? Do you still believe that much more can be done to heal and enrich the lives of women, especially through efforts made by us the church?
- If Jesus was not present what would the world look like?
- What changes have you experienced in your life since your encounter with Jesus?

Read and Process: John 4:7-30

It's a Rap- Reflect & Close- (10 minutes)

Jesus' presence is eternal. He is present within the hearts of all who believe and share the gospel. Jesus' presence brings healing. True transformation and change occur when we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Week 4: Perspective

“Jesus was a game changer; because of his sacrifice we have forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

Perspective- a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view:

Game changer-an event, idea, or procedure that effects a significant shift in the current manner of doing or thinking about something.

Page Opener (Discuss- 10 minutes)

Do you consider yourself to be a game changer? Why | Why not?

What preconceived ideas do you have about life, people and things?

Does it impact your ability to embrace and serve others?

Deep Dive (10-15 minutes)

After the fall of man and prior to Jesus' arrival on earth humanity didn't have the personal relationship, they once had with God. Jesus changed the game by giving everyone the opportunity to sit at his feet and learn. People were able to go directly to him. Jesus removed the middleman (the priest) who would go to God on the people's behalf to intercede and make amends for sin. Upon Jesus' arrival there was no longer a need for sacrifices and burnt offering as a means of forgiveness of sins. Jesus made it clear- "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The world is completely different because of Jesus and the forgiveness of sin. His death and resurrection repaired the fracture that took place in the garden of Eden. Jesus went to the cross and paid for our sins. He forgave our sins and the sins of Adam and Eve.

Jesus did it just for us, just for me, just for you, making his sacrifice personal. Forgiveness is a costly sacrifice. It cost Jesus his life. Jesus forgave our sins freely and he challenges us to forgive as he has forgiven us. We should forgive because we are forgiven. Forgiveness of sins grants us the opportunity for redemption and a fresh start. All are granted the opportunity to have a direct personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus shifted the trajectory of history. His death on the cross changed the game. His death closed the chapter on the old religious way of doing things and provided a new way of experiencing and being in relationship with God. Jesus' message of unconditional love, justice and service to the least among us illuminates the heart of God. Jesus affirms that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus affirms that the greatest in the kingdom is a servant; whatever you do to the least of these among you, you do to me. Jesus' life serves as a model of how we are to conduct ourselves. He should be our greatest role model.

Let's Talk – (10 minutes)

Jesus leveled the playing field for everyone- we are no longer Jews or gentiles, slave or free, male or female, we are one in Christ Jesus.

- How has your view on life, people, love, service, equality and justice shifted since you met Jesus?
- What can you do to ensure that the values that Jesus held dear are promoted?

Read, Remember & Emulate: Galatians 5: 22-23, John 4: 16, Matt 18: 21-22, Matt 18: 21-35, Matt 22:36-40, Matt 25:35-40.

It's a Rap- Reflect & Close- (10 minutes)

We are forgiven, Jesus died for us. He counted the cost. We can repent and ask him to come into our lives granting us eternal life. Jesus did the work for us; hence we are reconciled with him.

Week 5: Promise

“God never breaks His Promises to us”

Page Opener- Discuss (5 minutes)

What did Jesus leave when he left earth?

Deep Dive (10-15 minutes)

We have a loving, merciful, and just God who loves the world. He is walking right beside us. We are never alone. Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. Prior to Jesus' crucifixion and after his resurrection he comforted and promised the disciples that he would go to his father, however, he would send the comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). Jesus knew the difficulties, hardships and persecution the disciples would face as they shared and promoted the gospel. He tells them that he is leaving his peace with them. Jesus knew that they couldn't do it without supernatural power. He assures his disciples that he would send the comforter- the Holy Spirit- to serve as guide and advocate to be present with them forever.

Jesus brought us the resurrected view of how we will be in the future. The apostle Paul confirms that we too will be resurrected, that the dead in Christ shall be brought back to life. We who remain will be caught up to meet him. We will be given new bodies; we will be transformed into imperishable beings through the power of the resurrected Jesus, and we will be with him.

Jesus has given us the gift of salvation and eternal life. With this comes the promise that all who believe in him will live forever. We

will live and reign with him in his kingdom which is not of this world. Jesus promised that he is going to prepare a place for us, and he will return for us, He asserts that where he is, we will be there also. We are not abandoned – Jesus is coming back!

Let's Talk – (10 minutes)

- Do you believe that God's promises will be fulfilled? Do you believe that he will return or is this something we are told to foster hope?
- What promises Jesus made that brings you comfort?

Read and be Assured: John 14: 1-4, John 14: 15-31, Acts 2: 1-36

It's a Rap- Reflect & Close- (20 minutes)

Jesus is alive and he will return for us his beautiful bride. Live, share and prepare for his return.

- ✚ Share final thoughts regarding Jesus- What have you learned? What didn't you know before this small group experience? What is your takeaway?