



# Sacrificed

Jesus' death provides salvation to all who trust in Him.

## LUKE 23:33-46

**MEMORY VERSE:** LUKE 23:43

**STUDY** Luke 23:33-46, noting the different titles and names used when addressing Jesus. Note the way each name points to Jesus as the provider of our salvation.

**CREATE** a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 120–122. Focus on leading the group to view the familiar passage in terms of Jesus dying in our place. Look for ways of using the Key Doctrine (God the Son; PSG, p. 107) to help the group understand Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross.

**GATHER** the following items:

- Personal Study Guides (PSGs) for each group member

**Prepare to display:**

- Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jerusalem in Jesus' Day*)
- Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Jesus' Trials*)

**Make copies of:**

- Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*)
- Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Passages Unique to Luke*)

**CONSULT** the Explore the Bible website for ways of using a current news event to start and conclude the session ([goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras](http://goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras)).

**REINFORCE** the session by creating an email string encouraging the group to use “reply to all” to add a hymn or worship song that emphasizes Jesus offers salvation to all who trust Him.

# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *God the Son*

In His substitutionary death on the cross, Jesus made provision for the redemption of men from sin (Rom. 3:23-26).

The book *Lives Given, Not Taken* details the sacrifices of eight missionary martyrs. These missionaries went to potentially dangerous places because they believed God called them to serve people in hard-to-reach areas of the world. They took serious risks so others might know Jesus. From medical workers slain at a clinic to relief personnel assassinated by gunmen on motorcycles, they gave their lives because Jesus first sacrificed Himself for them.

(In PSG, p. 100) **How does Jesus' sacrifice on the cross motivate you?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## BIBLE SKILL

*Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Review passages from Hebrews about the temple veil. Read Hebrews 6:19-20; 9:1-26; 10:10. What was the spiritual meaning of the torn curtain? How is Jesus described as He entered the Most Holy Place? What effect does Jesus' offering have for believers?

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## LUKE 23:1-49

Jesus endured several trials, beginning with His interrogation before the high priests during the night of His arrest. Each trial emphasized a different accusation. At daylight, the Sanhedrin convened a formal hearing. False witnesses accused Jesus of blasphemy, but their contradictory testimony was inadequate. The Jewish elders condemned Him on the accusation that Jesus made Himself to be equal with God by claiming to be God's Son.

The second formal trial was a brief indictment by the Sanhedrin before Pilate. The chief priests and elders brought Jesus before the Roman governor because only the Romans could sentence a man to death. The charge centered on false claims that Jesus encouraged the people not to pay taxes to Caesar. They also said He wanted to be king.

Jesus' third trial happened before Herod Antipas, who inherited the throne of his father, Herod the Great. When Pilate heard Jesus was from Galilee, he thought he could rid himself of the situation by sending Him to Herod, who ruled the region that included Galilee. This trial focused on Jesus' miracles. At first, Herod was glad to see Jesus because he wanted to see Jesus do a miracle as if performing a trick. Jesus' silence fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

The fourth trial was really a continuation of the second as Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. Recognizing that none of the charges against Jesus were valid, Pilate tried several times to release Jesus, but the religious leaders continually provoked the people to cry for Jesus' crucifixion. Finally, when Pilate's position with Caesar was threatened, he yielded Jesus into their hands.

After being scourged, Jesus was in such a weakened condition that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Jesus' cross as he followed Him to Golgotha. Women wept for Jesus, but He urged them to weep for themselves and their children because of worse conditions to come.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One thief defended Jesus against the mockery of the other criminal and asked Jesus to remember him in His kingdom. Jesus accepted his dying words of faith and promised he would join Him in Paradise.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### FOCUSED (LUKE 23:33-34)

#### Verses 33-34

After the painful trek from Pilate's palace, past the city gates, and up a nearby hill, the execution party arrived at the place called **the Skull**. The reference to **they** included the Jewish leaders, Roman soldiers, Jesus, and two criminals who would also be executed that day. Along the way, weak from blood loss after the cruel scourging, Jesus struggled with the weight of the cross. The Romans forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross to Calvary. Cyrene was located in North Africa and was home to many who embraced Judaism. Simon likely had come to Jerusalem for Passover (Mark 15:21).

Our word *Calvary* translates a term literally meaning "skull," a Greek word from which we get "cranium." The Aramaic word (*Gulgatha*) used by the other Gospel writers is rendered as Golgotha (Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17). The simple phrase **they crucified him there** does not begin to convey the horror of the deed. The condemned man was stretched across the rough frame as the executioner drove nails through his hands. The Romans may have used a location in the wrist which allows for piercing without breaking a bone, fulfilling prophecy (Ps. 34:20; John 19:36). A nail also pierced His feet, fixing them to the vertical beam of the cross, again fulfilling Scripture (Ps. 22:16). These nails were larger than carpentry nails, but smaller than the railroad spikes depicted in some paintings.

Another prophecy foretold the Messiah would be killed **along with the criminals** (Isa. 53:12). One thief was placed **on the right** and another **on the left** of Jesus. There was nothing special about that center cross. It was not higher than the other two, despite typical depictions of the scene. The only distinguishing characteristic of the center cross was the One who hung on it.

Jesus was focused on His purpose of providing for the forgiveness of sin. Verse 34 highlights Jesus' relationship with the Father and His mercy. Impaled on the cross, He experienced excruciating pain. Yet, when He prayed to the **Father**, He did not seek relief but asked God to **forgive them**. Some scholars debate which persons were included in Jesus' prayer. The next sentence uses the pronoun **they** to describe the soldiers who **divided**

#### VERSES 33-34

<sup>33</sup> When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." And they divided his clothes and cast lots.

**his clothes.** In addition, they **cast lots** for His robe which was woven as a single garment, thus fulfilling Scripture (Ps. 22:18). We can safely assume Jesus was praying for the execution squad that crucified Him. Jesus said, **they do not know what they are doing.** They certainly did not understand they were executing the Son of God. Other scholars argue His prayer of forgiveness applied to everyone—Jew and Roman—who participated in His death.

Jesus' purpose of providing forgiveness of sin must remain central to our understanding of the cross. He was no victim. If He had not embraced the Father's will in the garden, these men would have had no power over Him. He knew His atoning sacrifice was the only way we can be forgiven. We cannot offer the excuse that we don't know what we are doing. Each of us is guilty and stands condemned unless we receive Jesus and the merit of His shed blood.

**How did the soldiers respond to Jesus' prayer for their forgiveness? What emotions do you feel if you read the phrase "forgive them" as it applies to you?**

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## MOCKED (LUKE 23:35-39)

### Verse 35

As Jesus hung on the cross, **the people stood watching.** The watchers included some supporters. At least one of Jesus' disciples (John) was present, along with Jesus' mother and other women. However, this reference to *the people* primarily referred to the crowds that had cried, "Crucify him." Because this place was on a byway near the city, many people who came for the Passover passed by, shaking their heads as they watched the spectacle, again fulfilling Scripture (Ps. 22:7; Mark 15:29).

Some of them waited to see if the Miracle Worker would wondrously remove Himself from the cross. Others looked at the sign above His head that read "King of the Jews" and simply shook their heads. The fact that **even the leaders were scoffing** indicates that these people participated in mocking Jesus. Thus was the Scripture fulfilled: "He was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3).

Their disdain centered on His claim to be **God's Messiah, the Chosen One.** On numerous occasions, Jesus made statements that affirmed His identity as God's Son, which was tantamount to being the Messiah. The Jews believed their Messiah would appear in power to set them free from Roman rule. They could not accept a bleeding Messiah hanging on a Roman cross.

They ridiculed the idea that **he saved others** but could not **save himself.** They did not understand the word *saved* in terms of spiritual salvation.

### VERSE 35

<sup>35</sup> The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: "He saved others; let him save himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One!"

They likely referred to His healing the sick and raising the dead. Such a mighty reputation bore little truth when His life was ebbing away before them. Their statement employed the conditional statement: “If you are ...” This phrase did not carry the idea “since you are” but implied the negative. They dared Jesus to prove He was the Messiah.

### Verses 36-39

**The soldiers also mocked him.** Some of them may have participated in His scourging. Now, they laughed scornfully as His body reacted to the pain. They returned His compassionate prayer of forgiveness with cruelty.

Luke does not record Jesus’ statement: “I thirst,” but mentions how the soldiers offered Him **sour wine**. Dipping a sponge into some vinegar, they put it on a long reed and held it up to His mouth (John 19:28).

The soldier’s mockery focused on the primary accusation against Jesus—that He supposedly claimed to be the **king of the Jews**. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, but the guilty verdict did not depend on facts. They yelled, **save yourself!** If Jesus were the king, why couldn’t He call on the populous to rescue Him? If He were truly a miracle worker, let Him come down from the cross. Their snide rebuke did not move Jesus to respond. In order to provide forgiveness and salvation for humankind, He could not save Himself.

One of the reasons the soldiers seized on the accusation of Jesus’ being the King of the Jews was the inscription placed above Him on the cross. Typically, the crime for which a person was executed was written on a placard and nailed above him. In this case, Pilate caused to be written: **This is the King of the Jews**. The Jewish leaders asked that the wording be changed to read that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews, but Pilate refused them (John 19:21).

Even **one of the criminals began to yell insults at him**. The tense of this verb conveys continuous action. Over and over, he goaded Jesus. He was not so interested in Jesus’ saving Himself but tauntingly asked, if Jesus were the Messiah, why didn’t He save them along with Himself? At first, both of the thieves spoke against Jesus (Matt. 27:44). Although they were hanging there, also being crucified, they had no sympathy for the One between them. As the hours passed, one changed his attitude.

Jesus is the Christ regardless of what others may say. He didn’t have anything to prove to the crowds, to the soldiers, or even to the men being executed alongside Him. His proof would come on the morning of the third day. They couldn’t understand it, but He did. For the joy set before Him—the salvation of all believers—He endured the cross, despising the shame.

**What are some ways people mock Jesus today? How should we respond when we hear people ridicule Christ?**

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### VERSES 36-39

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” <sup>38</sup> An inscription was above him: This Is the King of the Jews. <sup>39</sup> Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

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## TRUSTED (LUKE 23:40-43)

### Verses 40-43

After some time passed, the second criminal **answered the ridicule of the other thief, rebuking him**. Perhaps he was sobered by his impending death. His statement to the other criminal suggests he began to **fear God**. Both of them were **undergoing the same punishment**.

The second man understood that they were being punished justly. They had not been condemned without a fair trial. They were merely **getting back** what they deserved. Without detailing their crimes, he acknowledged the things they did as being wrong.

On the other hand, he understood that Jesus had **done nothing wrong**. The criminal's statement and his words to Jesus indicate he had some knowledge of Jesus.

The criminal's appeal reflects genuine repentance and faith. He pleaded, **Jesus, remember me**. What an extraordinary statement! How could a man who was about to die remember someone? This appeal would be insane except for the man's confident faith that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and could overcome death.

Further proof of the man's faith in Jesus lies in the phrase **when you come into your kingdom**. He believed Jesus not only would be victorious over death but would enter His kingdom. The criminal did not say "the kingdom," but *your kingdom*.

Jesus' reply was not merely a statement but an affirmation of the man's faith. The word **truly** strongly affirms what He was about to say. Combined with the phrase **I tell you**, Jesus emphasized His promise even more firmly. His declaration included three important truths. First, Jesus' kingdom was a present reality. They would experience it **today**. At the tomb of Lazarus, Martha thought the resurrection was some distant future event. Jesus corrected her belief and declared that He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The kingdom was not a place on the horizon, it was wherever He was.

Second, Jesus confirmed the man would be **with** him. Jesus' kingdom involves communion with Him. He conveyed the idea that the man would not merely be forgiven and received into heaven, but he would enjoy Jesus' presence forever.

Finally, the place they would share that same day was **paradise**. Generally, the terms *paradise* and *heaven* apply to the dwelling place of persons who receive God's righteousness. These words came to be used synonymously. In the Book of Revelation, John used this idea to describe the paradise of God as being the eternal dwelling place of God where believers enjoy eternal life (Rev. 2:7).

Jesus can be trusted as the way to the Father. The criminal did not continually plead for mercy. Jesus' promise was enough. Believers should have confidence that Jesus has saved them as they repent of sin and receive Him by faith as Savior and Lord.

### VERSES 40-43

<sup>40</sup> But the other answered, rebuking him: "Don't you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment?" <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

**How does your confession of faith compare with that of this criminal?  
Why are you able to rest in Jesus' promise of eternal life?**

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## **SACRIFICED** (LUKE 23:44-46)

### **Verses 44-45**

Jesus was crucified around 9:00 in the morning (Mark 15:25). He had already suffered for three hours when **darkness came over the whole land**. This phenomenon began **about noon** and lasted **until three**. Some scholars debate whether the phrase *whole land* involved the entire world or just the area of Palestine. In either case, it could not merely have been an eclipse to last three hours.

Luke described the darkness happening because **the sun's light failed**. Since we are dealing with a supernatural event controlled by the Creator, we do not have to look for a scientific explanation for this miracle. It could mean that God stopped the sun altogether, but that is not what Luke says. The *sun's light failed*, which means God caused the light of the sun not to shine on the land for three hours.

During a battle against the Amorites, Joshua asked God to aid Israel by causing the sun to stand still. God answered Joshua's prayer and the sun remained stationary for nearly a day (Josh. 10:12-13). A greater matter was happening on Calvary's hill than Joshua had encountered. As His Son was dying, the Father intervened again in His creation and darkness filled the land. Some scholars think the darkness expressed God's displeasure with human wickedness involved in the crucifixion.

As Jesus died, the **curtain of the sanctuary was split**. The curtain separated the holy place from the holy of holies which represented the presence of God. The curtain was torn from top to bottom, indicating it was an act of God (Matt. 27:51). The tearing of the temple curtain represented the rending of Jesus' flesh to provide access to God and make salvation available.

### **Verse 46**

At that moment, Jesus called out **with a loud voice**. He cried out with passion that everyone could hear. First, He maintained His relationship with the **Father**. Second, because of that bond He could **entrust** His **spirit** into the Father's **hands**. Third, **saying this, he breathed His last**. While Jesus' body remained on the cross, His spirit left His body and passed into the care of the Father. The soldiers did not need to break His legs to hasten His death. He yielded His spirit and died.

Jesus' death removes the barrier between holy God and sinful humanity. We do not need any other intermediary. Through Jesus, we have access to the Father and receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18).

### **VERSES 44-45**

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three,  
<sup>45</sup> because the sun's light failed. The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle.

### **VERSE 46**

<sup>46</sup> And Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." Saying this, he breathed his last.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION

**BEGIN:** As the group arrives, direct them to write words they associate with Easter on a board. After most have arrived, review the words. Direct attention to the session title: *Sacrificed*. Comment that while Easter was observed last month, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross affects all people every minute of every day of the year.

**RESPOND:** Call attention to the first paragraph on page 100 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Ask: ***How does Jesus' sacrifice on the cross motivate you?*** (PSG, p. 100)

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**INTRODUCE:** Use **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Jesus' Trials*) to help summarize the events between last week's session (Peter's denial of Christ) and this week's session about the crucifixion.

**TRANSITION:** *After the trials, Jesus was scourged. He was in such a weakened condition that Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross to where Jesus was to be crucified.*

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**READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud Luke 23:33-34**, while the group listens for details about Jesus' crucifixion.

**MINI-LECTURE:** Present a brief summary of the comments on verse 33 (PSG, p. 102). Note that Jesus was crucified with criminals. Point out that it was prophesied in Isaiah 53 that the Suffering Servant, or Jesus, would be numbered with the transgressors. Read Isaiah 53:12 and Jesus' own words in Luke 22:37.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Lead the group to locate Jesus' words in verse 34. Point out that of all the comments Jesus could have made after His ordeal, His concern was for others. He experienced excruciating pain on the cross, but He did not pray for personal relief.

**DISCUSS: How does Jesus' declaration in verse 34 point to His purpose?** (PSG, p. 103)

**DISPLAY:** Call attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jerusalem in Jesus' Day*) to identify the location of Golgotha, or "the place called The Skull" (v. 33), noting the elevation of the land where Jesus' cross would be raised. Point to the "Did You Know?" box on page 102 of the PSG: *Luke is the only Gospel writer to use the Greek term for Skull (kranion) instead of the Aramaic term, "Golgotha." (See Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; and John 19:17.) The word "Calvary" comes from the Latin translation of "Skull."*

**TRANSITION:** *Jesus was no victim. If He had not embraced the Father's will in the garden, these men would have had no power over Him. He knew His atoning sacrifice was the only way we can be forgiven* (PSG, p. 103).

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**READ:** Invite volunteers to reflect on reactions they might have expected from those who were around Jesus when He was crucified. **Lead them to compare their thoughts with Luke 23:35-39, as you read the passage aloud.**

**RESPOND:** Invite volunteers to highlight the element in the passage that stands out most to them. Allow them to explain. Enrich the discussion with information from the commentary (pp. 116-118) and your personal study.



**CLARIFY:** Point the group to comments about verses 35-39 (PSG, pp. 103–105) for insight into Jesus' mocking.

**DISCUSS:** *What do the statements of the mockers reveal about their misunderstanding of the Messiah? What elements of truth are found in the statements?* (PSG, p. 104)

**TRANSITION:** *Jesus is the Christ, regardless of what others may say.*

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**READ:** Direct the group to read silently **Luke 23:40-43**, noticing the attitude of one of the criminals toward Jesus.

**IDENTIFY:** Lead the group to locate the criminal's comments in verses 40-43. Compare those with the other criminal's insults in verse 39. Refer to information about the comments under verses 40-43 (PSG, pp. 105–106). Discuss: *Why might people choose to mock Jesus than turn to Him? What happens when we ignore the reality of our sin?* (PSG, p. 105)

**HIGHLIGHT:** Point to **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Passages Unique to Luke*), referencing that verses 39-43 are unique to the Book of Luke. Lead the group to identify how Luke's details add significance to our understanding of the crucifixion events. After discussion, explain that verse 43 is the memory verse for this week. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*), challenging the group to memorize verse 43 this week.

**DISCUSS:** *How does the promise Jesus made on the cross define our salvation through faith in Jesus?* (PSG, p. 106)

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**READ:** Before you read aloud Luke 23:44-46, turn out the lights in the room. **Read Luke 23:44-46** from an electronic device or with a flashlight.

**EXAMINE:** Form two teams, and instruct each team to review comments about verses 44-45 (PSG, pp. 106–107). Instruct one team to locate information and related Scripture passages about the darkness, and the other team to focus on the splitting of the sanctuary curtain. Also refer the second team to the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 106) that includes additional Scripture passages about the temple veil. Invite teams to share reports with the group. Ask: *How does Jesus' death remove the barrier between sinful humanity and the holy God?* (PSG, p. 107)

**FOCUS:** Direct attention to verse 46. Explain that Jesus quoted Psalm 31, which was often used as a bedtime prayer with children in ancient Israel. Lead the group to read the verse silently, like one would during a bedtime prayer. Say: *Jesus closed His eyes like a child in the darkness of night, with the confidence and assurance that He would be awakened by the brightness of morning.*

## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

**REVIEW:** Call attention to the four statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 108). Lead the group to identify specific verses in today's passage that support each statement, recording the passage reference next to each statement. Allow the group to offer other summary statements to add if they desire and a Scripture reference that supports their added statement(s).

**RESPOND:** Prior to the group time, select one or more of the question sets under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 108). Lead the group to respond silently to the selected questions.

**PRAY:** Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for sacrificing His Son to provide salvation for all who trust in Him.

## OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

### MUSIC

Locate a copy of “The Old Rugged Cross,” by George Bennard. Sing or read the words as a springboard for recalling other songs about Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Invite volunteers to name their favorite hymns or praise songs about His sacrifice.

### RESEARCH

Pre-enlist someone to provide a mini-lecture about splitting the sanctuary curtain in Luke 23:45. In addition to the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 106), point the person to resources, such as Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, or commentaries. Discuss: ***What was the spiritual meaning of the torn curtain? How is Jesus described as He entered the Most Holy Place? What effect does Jesus’ offering have for believers?*** (PSG, p. 106)

### ART

***Gather paper and acrylic paints.***

After the first passage is read, call attention to the paper and paints. Invite a volunteer to select a paint color and add images to the painting to express the mood reflected in that passage. Encourage others to add to the painting after each passage section is read, noting the escalating emotion with the angry mob and darkness over the land. At the conclusion, note the different colors and imagery included. Lead the group to discuss how the final art expresses the point of today’s session: *Jesus’ death provides salvation to all who trust in Him.*

### COMPARISON

Direct the group to compare Luke’s description of the crucifixion with the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John (Matt. 27; Mark 15; John 19). Lead the group to discuss: ***How are the accounts similar? How are they different? How does one Gospel writer’s encounter help us understand the others?***

### NATURE

Lead the group to reflect on the passage from the perspective of nature. Look for evidence of the created world, such as the hill of crucifixion and darkness descending. Invite volunteers to recall other details of the crucifixion that are related to nature, such as the wooden cross and the crown of thorns. Discuss: ***How do these details help us relate to Jesus’ crucifixion as a real, actual event?***

### DRAMA

***Gather paper and pencils.***

Pre-enlist a person to create a dramatic reading of Isaiah 53. Provide paper and pencils for the group, and instruct them to listen for references to Jesus during the reading of the passage from Isaiah. Use information about verse 33 (PSG, p. 102) to connect the passage with Jesus.

### REFLECT

Luke 23:4; John 19:4-6; 1 Peter 2:22 each support the criminal’s declaration about Jesus in Luke 23:41. Lead the group to reflect on what it means to them that Jesus’ innocence and bloodshed led to our ability to stand welcomed before Almighty God one day.