

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Jesus and the Cross 2: How does Jesus restore us?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: These sessions explore the many different meanings of the cross and, if possible, it is good if they can be used in order to help build up the picture of what it means.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Why might what Jesus does on the cross be like a diamond?

### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

The meaning of the cross is like a diamond – one gift but with many ways to see it. In the letter to the Colossians Paul writes that by dying and rising again Jesus achieved (at least) two things for us which we could not do for ourselves: Dealing with sin through complete forgiveness which saves us and puts us right with God and dealing with its destructive effects through victory over the fallen powers which pollute the world and lead to death. So the meaning of the cross is personal and cosmic – and it is at the centre of God's purpose.



The word 'crucial' refers to something that we cannot do without – and literally means 'like a cross'. The teaching of the Bible is that we cannot put ourselves right with God. But through His torture, death and resurrection Jesus "ransoms, heals, restores and forgives" us in a way that nothing else can achieve. At the heart of the cross is 'atonement'. God always wants to be reconciled with His covenant people. But for the forgiveness which restores the relationship to be possible, there must be a way to make amends for the damage caused – to 'atone' for it in a way that heals its effects forever.

To atone literally means to cover over someone's debt – whether that is a direct debt because of specific harm done or, as in much of our experience, how our sin can indirectly pollute our relationships with God, creation and each other.

The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament provided a temporary solution but did not effect the change God was looking for. God promises an atoning sacrifice which will deal with sin once and for all, through a person – a King – who would become a “suffering Servant” – and die for the people. Isaiah promised that this person would bear the consequences of all the kinds of brokenness we described last session: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53: 4-10 abridged)

Jesus and the New Testament writers rarely use the actual word ‘atonement’ to describe His death and resurrection. Instead, different words emphasise the wonderful way in which Jesus saves us by taking the consequences of sin upon Himself. These pictures serve to reveal the completeness of what God has done.

**Ransom** Through the cross Jesus gives “His life as a ransom for many”. (Mark 10:45)

**Sacrifice** He is the “sacrifice” (Ephesians 5:2), the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) “...our Passover lamb, (who) has been sacrificed.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

**Representative.** He represents us, standing in our place and bearing the punishment for our sins: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...” (2 Corinthians 5: 21) “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross...” (1 Peter 2:24) He also becomes “a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’” (Galatians 3:13)

**Redemption and freedom.** To be redeemed is to be bought out of slavery and the bondage of sin and being under a law we could never keep.

**Justification and no condemnation.** Atonement also means that the consequences we might expect from a holy God for sin are removed. There is now “no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

**Cleansing and purification.** Just as the sprinkled blood in the Temple symbolically purified the community, so on the cross while Jesus takes on the sin of the world, human beings now receive His purity in exchange: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

**Reconciliation.** Through the cross, the peace with God we could never earn for ourselves is achieved. “...we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:11)

**Discuss:** Which of these images mean most to you? Why?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21 which describes how complete the work on the cross is.



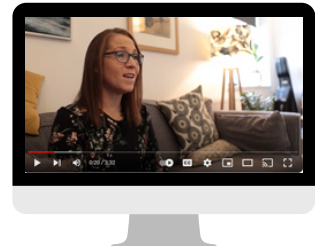
Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?

## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/ObrZkSluvsA>

What struck you as important in the video?



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

Only someone who is both fully God and fully human could do this. Because by being divine Jesus doesn't only take sin into God at the cross – He also destroys it as sin dissolves on contact with the undiluted holiness of God. Only by becoming fully human is it possible for a holy God enter into the full depths of sin, evil and death, taking our place and responsibility for our history of failure. Only by being one of us, can He be both our judge and our saviour.

One possible understanding of the cross is to see a 'good Son' protecting the world from an 'angry Father' – as if God has a split personality. Some have described it as "cosmic child abuse". Rather than being good news of freedom and forgiveness the cross becomes a place of fear and guilt. Rather than seeing a God of love and grace we see a God of contained anger. If the picture we have of God is the most defining thing about us, it is vital that at the cross we see that: God is fully involved in every way.

So while the various pictures God gives us to understand the atonement speak in many different ways, the foundational truth is that on the cross "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19) pouring Himself out in the only way His nature allows. The love of God for us is on display. God IS love and therefore cannot do anything but love. Even before the cross Christ revealed the nature of that love in forgiving sins and restoring people. John 3:16, perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible, says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." The cross is not just something that God who is love does; it is the expression of who He is. St Catherine of Siena said, "Nails were not enough to hold God-and-man fastened to the cross, had not love held him there."

Discuss: Why do you think people sometimes have an idea that God is an angry Father?  
What can we know in response?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

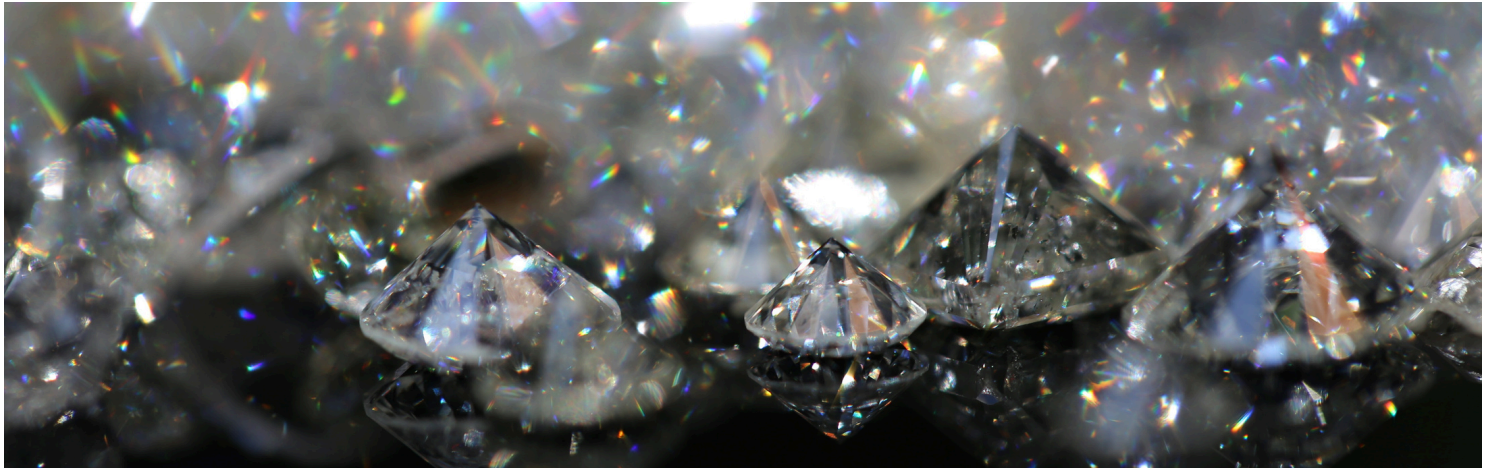
The Cross is the abyss of wonders,  
the centre of desires,  
the school of virtues,  
the house of wisdom,  
the throne of love,  
the theatre of joys,  
and the place of sorrows;  
It is the root of happiness,  
and the gate of Heaven.



Thomas Traherne



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## Additional notes:

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