

Teen Devotion

Year B – Lent 4

Rethinking Religion



One truth shared: Our reason says, “I must get better for God to love me,” but Jesus shows us love first in his sacrifice.

Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Numbers 21:9

Look out, look up

Imagine that heaven is like a city and religion is the road in and out of it. If people got to design heaven, they would get to devise the way to get there. If God created heaven (and he did), he determines how to get there. It might make sense or feel better to check items off a list of difficult things to do to get right before God... but somehow, we find ourselves always lacking. When we look inside ourselves for a solution to missing the mark (sin), there is no satisfaction.

Today’s Bible reading is an example of God creating a way to get right with him. The people of Israel had bitterly complained about God. Now they were dying from poisonous snake bites and realized they needed to be saved. There were normal treatments for snake bites. A cold compress to help with the fever, tie off the affected area so the poison doesn’t spread, suck out the venom... but God told Moses, “Put a bronze snake on a pole. Tell the people if they look at it, they will live.” Look to this hanging, cold, lifeless thing and trust that God saves. It defies logic. Without any contribution on my part, just look up and trust that God saves.

Salvation can seem extremely complicated because it’s so simple. We would like to contribute and deserve forgiveness. But God takes full responsibility for our salvation so we would know it is complete and good. Don’t overthink this one, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (John 3:14,15). Lift your eyes from what you’ve done or failed to do and trust that Jesus has you covered, forgiven, completely. You have peace with God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I wish I could tell you all the good things I’ve done and changed, but sin still echoes through my mind. Thank you for forgiving these sins. Thank you for moving my focus off my sin to focus on your sacrifice. Your grace is enough. I’ll lift my head up and trust that your payment is enough. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

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Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- Invite everyone to share their absolute favorite food with the group.
- What if you could only eat that food for every meal, every day for an entire year—would it still be your favorite? *(What’s the longest you’ve eaten the same food? Thanksgiving turkey again, and again...)*

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they’ve looked at it.*

The nation of Israel had traveled on foot a long, long time over many, many miles. Yet God continually and miraculously fed (manna regularly, quail sometimes, fresh water, etc.) and cared for his people (protection from enemies). They were also getting very close to the end of the 40 years when they could finally enter the promised land. Why is the last bit of the journey often the hardest?

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

- Read Numbers 21:4–9: The Bronze Snake.
- Verse 4b-5 says the people were impatient and detesting the miserable food and complaining there was no bread and no water. In what way do you empathize with them? In what way are they way off base?
- Why did God send venomous snakes? (See also Hebrews 12:7-11.) Was it effective?
- Align God’s solution to the deadly snake bites (v. 8) and the First Commandment. Isn’t God commanding idolatry? *(Looking to the snake expressed trust in God’s promise. The snake wasn’t an idol that healed but a connection to a promise of the true God.)*
- Agree or disagree and tell why. The solution looks like the sin... on the pole... and on the cross.
- What makes God’s “simple” and free gift on the cross difficult to trust? Easy to trust? *(People would prefer to contribute to get right with God. Yet only a free gift by Jesus’ work assures our complete pardon. Faith to is worked in us by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word.)*

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the “connecting question” above.*

In view of the perfect joy of never-ending eternity, every trouble, even the most severe, is light and momentary. We are confident in this because of the full and complete sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. Let's give each other permission to call or text each other when we are tempted to grumble or forget the promises God has given us. Make a plan to seek out encouragement from each other when we feel ourselves struggling in our faith. Share contact information (the leader may need to verify sharing contact info is okay with parents/legal guardians).