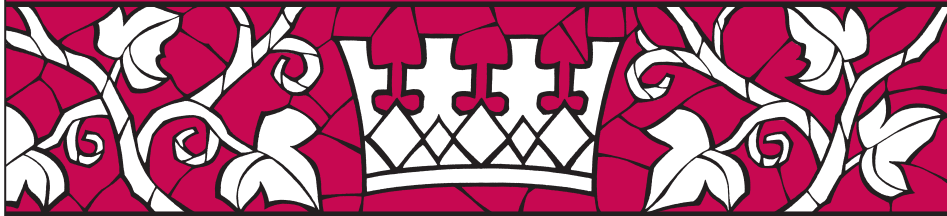


# CHRISTIAN BELIEVER<sup>®</sup>



KNOWING GOD  
WITH HEART  
AND MIND

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Study Manual

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# As You Begin Your Study



## Preparation the Key

You are beginning a thirty-week intensive study that combines study of Scripture and Christian belief. Your commitment includes at least forty-five minutes of study and prayer each day, six days a week, in preparation for the two-hour weekly group meeting. Begin and maintain disciplined daily study in order to complete the large amount of reading and writing required in preparation for group study. Careful notetaking is crucial to participation in group discussions.

## Reading Package

The CHRISTIAN BELIEVER reading package consists of a study manual and a book of readings. You will use both books in your daily study.

### *Study Manual*

The study manual guides daily study. The lesson format, designed to support disciplined daily study, provides instruction, content, and necessary space for carrying out the daily assignments. Elements in the easy-to-use lesson format are the same for all lessons. At the top of the first page of every lesson is a symbol and a group of words—the language of faith. Explanation of the symbol appears later in the lesson. The lesson title and the Scripture verse or verses that follow relate to the doctrine being studied.

Each section of the lesson has a particular function. “Life Questions” raises questions persons considering the doctrine might ask. The underlying assumption is that doctrine is the church’s answer to life questions.

The “Assignment” section includes introductory paragraphs that suggest approach to the week’s Scripture. Each daily assignment includes Scripture passages and readings in the book of readings. Phrases in parentheses following Scripture references make the connection between the Scripture and the lesson topic. The readings are numbered sequentially. The second and third pages of each lesson provide space for daily notetaking on Scripture and Readings.

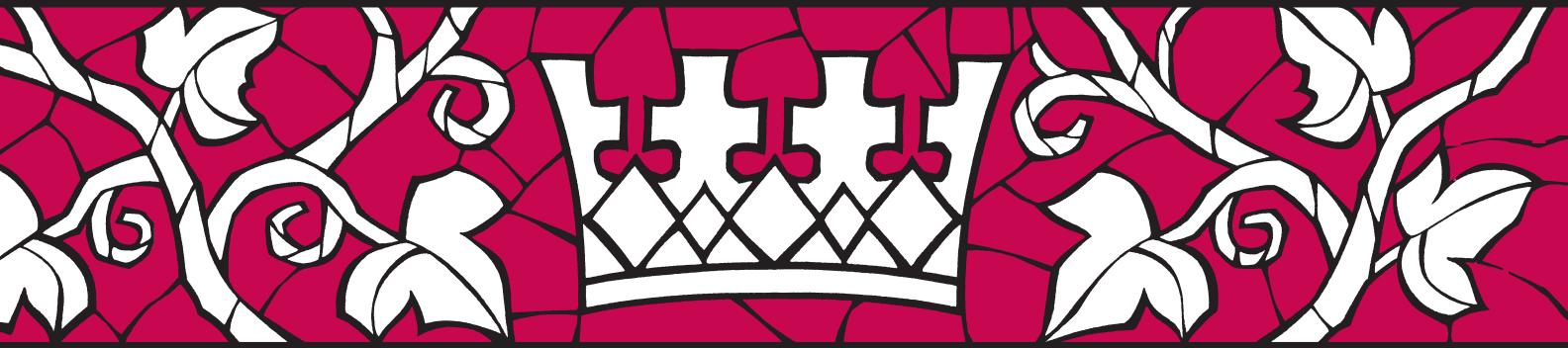
Sequence of study is the same throughout the thirty weeks: Days 1 through 5, read and take notes on assigned Scripture and Readings. On Day 6, read “The Church Teaching and Believing” in the study manual. This commentary is fairly long and requires reflection, so it is important to come to Day 6 having completed all previous assignments for the week. “BECAUSE WE THE CHURCH BELIEVE” statements at the end of the commentary provide opportunity for reflection and decision.

Occasional blocks of information additional to the commentary appear in the margins of the pages.

“Believing and Living” consists mainly of questions that make connections between the doctrine and daily living. You will use your written responses in group discussion.

“Seeking More Understanding” suggests activities beyond the weekly assignments for individuals interested in doing additional study or research. Information gathered from such study can enrich group discussion.

We have used the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible in developing CHRISTIAN



BELIEVER, but individual study and group discussion will be enriched by many different translations. A study Bible with notes will be helpful in daily study.

#### *Readings*

The readings will introduce you to the main ideas in each doctrine. Selections fall into several categories: early Christian documents that contributed to the formulation or expression of doctrines that form the central teachings of Christian faith; writings from such founders of Protestant denominations as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley; writings from twentieth-century thinkers on classical doctrines; selections from contemporary literature, poetry, or hymns that are expressions of or comments on doctrine; and selections that show the role of doctrine in life.

You will read approximately ten selections from this book each week. Pages 5 and 6 in the book of readings explain the nature of the readings, the organization of the book, and the steps to take in preparing for weekly group discussion. Turn to those pages right now and read them.

#### **Scripture in CHRISTIAN BELIEVER**

CHRISTIAN BELIEVER is a topical study, and the Scriptures chosen for this study throw light on the topic under study. Read Scripture through the lens of the topic. For example, if you are studying salvation, ask as you read Scripture, “What light does this Scripture throw on salvation?” The notes you take on Scripture will always be from the perspective of the topic of the lesson. Some Scripture pas-

sages are assigned more than once, but you will read them with different doctrines in mind.

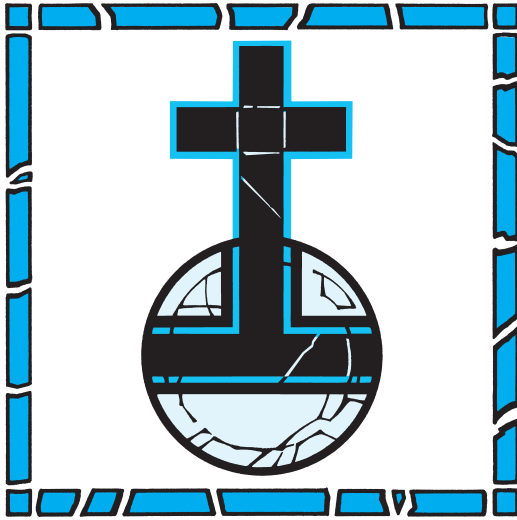
#### **Prayer**

Each week group members will identify particular persons or situations needing prayer. The study manual provides space for recording those concerns. As you read and study daily, add to the list and pray faithfully about each concern. A printed prayer appears at the end of each lesson in the study manual. These prayers come from persons across the centuries and reflect the language of their times.

#### **The Language of Faith**

Faith language is both word and symbol. The Bible, book of readings, study manual, and videotapes work together through word and symbol to heighten your awareness of the language of faith. Study of CHRISTIAN BELIEVER will give you new eyes to see symbols of the Christian faith in the church and elsewhere, and new ears to hear the words of faith in sermons, songs, prayers, and in the rituals for the sacraments.

Look at the symbols at the top of this page. The fish is a symbol for both Jesus and believers. The symbol of the Trinity actually includes four symbols: three circles forming a trefoil with the crossing points becoming a triquetra with a small triangle and a larger triangle at the center. The crown symbolizes victory of Christ through the cross and victory of faithful Christians. Vines and branches weave among the symbols symbolizing the relationship between Jesus and his followers.



## Savior

Jesus Christ Savior of the world

Mediator

Bearing our sins and punishment

Plan of salvation

Conquered death Cross

Deliverer

# The One Who Came to Save

“You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

—Matthew 1:21

## LIFE QUESTIONS

A British playwright put the life of Jesus in dramatic form under the title *The Man Born to Be King*. If Matthew had written the play, he would have titled it *The Man Born to Be Savior*—or perhaps even *The Man Born to Die*.

All of us will die, of course. But Jesus was born with the specific assignment to die. His purpose in being born was to die. So he said as he approached the consummation of his ministry and acknowledged the crisis just ahead. Should he avoid it? “No,” he answered himself, “it is for this reason that I have come to this hour” (John 12:27).

But how do we explain this? Why did Jesus have to die? What is the relationship of his death to our salvation? How does his dying save me? What do we mean when we say Jesus is the Savior—“my” Savior and the Savior of the world?

## ASSIGNMENT

Once again we read some Old Testament Scriptures as we study the doctrine of Jesus Christ. As we do so, we should remind ourselves that the first generation of Christians had no Scripture from which to preach about Jesus other than the Hebrew Scriptures. We do well therefore to try to

read these Scriptures as the first-century Christians did. As we do so, we will recognize more clearly the relationship of the two Testaments. More than that, we will see—with the early church—that the message of salvation runs all through the Bible.

- Day 1 Psalm 22 (prayer for deliverance from suffering); Job 19:1-27 (faith in a redeemer)  
Introduction and Readings 140 and 141
- Day 2 Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (wounded for our transgressions)  
Readings 142 and 143
- Day 3 Matthew 1:18-25 (he will save); Luke 19:1-10 (salvation has come)  
Readings 144 and 145
- Day 4 John 10:1-18 (shepherd lays down his life); 11:45-57 (one man to die for the people)  
Readings 146 and 147
- Day 5 Acts 13:26-39 (set free from sin by Jesus)  
Readings 148, 149, and 150
- Day 6 Read and respond to “The Church Teaching and Believing” and “Believing and Living.”
- Day 7 Rest and prayer

## DAILY PRAYER

Pray for the persons and situations on your Prayer Concerns list and about issues or concerns emerging from your daily reading and study.

## SCRIPTURE

## READINGS

### DAY 1

**Psalm 22; Job 19:1-27**

**Introduction and Readings 140 and 141**

### DAY 2

**Isaiah 52:13–53:12**

**Readings 142 and 143**

### DAY 3

**Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 19:1-10**

**Readings 144 and 145**

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**SCRIPTURE****READINGS****DAY 4****John 10:1-18; 11:45-57****Readings 146 and 147****DAY 5****Acts 13:26-39****Readings 148, 149, and 150****DAY 6****STUDY MANUAL****PRAYER CONCERNS****“The Church Teaching and Believing”  
and “Believing and Living”**

## THE CHURCH TEACHING AND BELIEVING

Even some rather devout persons may wince at the sign over the rescue mission door or in neon at a revival center: *Jesus Saves*. It seems not quite worthy of the grandeur of the subject, a kind of cut-rate advertising slogan when the matter concerned calls for classic poetry and art.

And yet, that's what our Lord does. He *saves*. Saving is the reason for his birth; the ultimate subject of his teaching, the cause of his death; and his resurrection, finally considered, is to the purpose of authenticating his right to be the Savior. If "Jesus saves" seems so terse as to have no dignity, remember that when one needs to be saved, dignity is hardly the issue. Urgency may well be the primary issue.

So perhaps it is not surprising that when Paul begins listing the teachings he considers "as of first importance," the initial word is, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). Paul was, of course, referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, the only Scriptures at the time of his writing to the people of Corinth. In other words, the story was old even when the church was young.

Job describes the need of a savior, and later his confidence that one would come. He pleads his helplessness before God and his inability to get a fair audience:

"For he [God] is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him,  
that we should come to trial together.  
There is no umpire between us,  
who might lay his hand on us both"  
(Job 9:32-33).

With those words, Job declares the predicament of the human race—the need for someone to plead our cause with the Almighty. Later, in a magnificent burst of faith, he cries, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25).

No one can say Job consciously had in mind a savior such as the New Testament gives us in Jesus Christ. However, Job knew what thoughtful persons have always known, that humans are overmatched by their circumstances and need an advocate qualified to speak to God on their behalf.

### Systems and a Person

This lesson is a study of the Savior, not of salvation. Salvation is a doctrine; the Savior is a per-

son. We can rightly say that in Jesus Christ, the word—*salvation*—became flesh—*Savior*—and dwelt among us.

In the Old Testament, the theme of salvation seems to begin with a system, and a rather intricate one. The books of Exodus and Leviticus say nothing specifically about a savior, but they present full-scale plans to meet the need. They describe a sacrificial system intended to win God's favor and to cleanse from sin.

From our point of view, two things stand out. One is the emphasis on blood. The New Testament picks up this theme in several places, as do Christian poetry and hymnody. But most believers are probably more comfortable with poetry celebrating this theme than with attempts to see its doctrinal logic. We notice also the highly detailed way the sacrificial system is set up. The point seems clear: The levitical system is concerned with life-and-death matters, so everything must be done with utmost care.

The longing Job expressed for a mediating individual becomes a dominant theme in the prophets. We are inclined to look at the Old Testament prophecies cautiously, lest we read too much back into them. The New Testament writers seem to have entertained no such fears, nor did the Christian theologians of the first centuries. This doesn't give us license to treat the prophecies in cavalier fashion, but it can encourage us to see them the way the first Christians did, as preparing the way for the Savior who was to come.

Some of the prophecies that seem most significant to Christian readers (including the early church) must have caused great ambivalence in the people of their own time. Because Israel was a nation, seeking a place in the company of nations, their dreams of some unique person would be of someone who would lead the nation to triumph and glory. Many prophecies spoke of such a person. One thinks of these words from Isaiah, words that Christians have made a part of every Advent and Christmas season:

"The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined. . . .  
For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named

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Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:2, 6).

But the writings of the prophets also included dark passages. If there was to be a savior, he would not be simply a vanquishing conqueror. Instead, there were haunting passages, and centuries later the first Christians would see many of these as pictures of their Lord, their Savior.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? . . .

All who see me mock at me; . . .

they divide my clothes among themselves,

and for my clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:1, 7, 18).

Still more dramatic are some of the “suffering servant” passages, especially Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Christian believers from the very beginning looked upon these verses as a description of Jesus’ death at Calvary:

“He was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all” (53:5-6).

The church understood these passages to describe Christ’s role as Savior—one who was bearing the sins and the resultant punishment for others so they might be saved. In a world in which all “have gone astray,” “the iniquity of us all” was “laid on him.” The imagery of these passages is clearly taken from the Hebrew sacrificial system. We see here the same principle of laying sin upon a helpless victim, who then dies in the place of the sinner. So the prophet describes this willing sufferer as one who

“like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth” (53:7).

### **The New Testament Story**

The New Testament is never uncertain about Jesus’ role as Savior. When the angelic messenger told Joseph that Mary’s child was “from the Holy Spirit,” he also told him what to name the child, and why. “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21). The Jewish culture took names seriously; they believed that in both sound and meaning they were to reflect the significance of the child. He was indeed born to be the Savior, so that name was given him at his birth.

Neither is there any confusion about the issue of his saving. Many of Jesus’ early followers believed he was coming to save Israel from their national enemies and to set up a political empire. The angelic description had something else in mind: “He will save his people from their sins.” His role as Savior is specific and profound. Beyond politics and economics, beyond



This representation of the cross is known as the cross triumphant or the cross of victory. An orb or sphere represents the world. The Latin cross rising above the world signifies the victorious reign of the Savior over the world. The base of the cross becomes a band encircling the world, symbolizing the triumph of the gospel around the world.

even physical health and well-being, humans need to be saved from their sins. Since sin is the root problem of the human race, Jesus came to save them from this problem. Call him *Savior*.

Our understanding of Jesus as Savior is linked to the doctrine of the Incarnation. God became *incarnate*—that is, in the flesh—in Jesus in order to save the human race. John’s Gospel reports that the Word made flesh came into the world and was rejected by many; “but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12). Paul makes the same point in his declaration that “though he was in the form of God,” he “emptied himself, . . . being born in human likeness”; and to what purpose?—“even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

The tone in both these statements, from John and from Paul, is nothing short of exuberant. Even with John’s recognition that “his [Jesus’] own people did not accept him” (John 1:11), and Paul’s acknowledging that Christ Jesus “became obedient to the point of death” (Philippians 2:8), still the mood is triumphant. The Word became flesh in order to be the Savior. This accomplished, there is every reason to rejoice.

We can now understand what otherwise would seem to be the disproportionate structure of the four Gospels. Nearly a third of the content of the Gospels concentrates on the death of Jesus. Indeed, in a sense the disproportion is even greater, if one notices that—especially in Luke—the Gospels take a dramatic turn when Jesus “set his face” toward Jerusalem, the place where he will be crucified. When viewed from that angle (that is, from the point where Jerusalem and its events become the focus), fully half of the content of the Gospels is given to the death scene. How does one explain the biographical judgment of the Gospel writers?

The Gospel writers understood that Jesus had come into the world to die, so this was the point of their accounts. They did not minimize Jesus’ teaching, his miracles, or his encounters with the first-century religious leaders; but these activities were preliminary to the main issue, that he should die. Any reading of the biblical record that ignores this emphasis is intellectually irresponsible.

This apparent disproportion in the Gospel accounts also turns an interesting light on the name by which these records are known. *Gospel* means, of course, “good news.” A reader from outside the Christian faith might reasonably ask why these books are called “good news” when so much of their account has to do with the rejection, suffering, and death of the lead character. The same question often occurs to those who thoughtfully consider the naming of Good Friday. The word *good* is seriously inappropriate in both of these usages except as we perceive Jesus as Savior.

Nor can we go far into the earnest piety of the great Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant saints without confronting this issue. Their emphasis on the cross, the wounds, the bleeding heart,

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and the sacred suffering of Jesus will seem quite grotesque unless we comprehend their understanding that these matters deliver the picture of Jesus Christ as Savior.

### **The Savior Experienced**

The early church recognized that God's salvation plan existed from eternity, and that it took embodiment and entered the world in Jesus Christ: "This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

Jesus' own references to his role as Savior were sometimes quite practical and pointed, and at other times more mystical. When the crowds criticized him for going to the home of "one who is a sinner," Jesus replied that by his visit salvation had come to that house. "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Luke provides no explanation of the meaning of "to save the lost." Literalists, limiting themselves to this one passage, might reason Jesus was speaking only of a new beginning in the life of Zacchaeus. But if the passage is put in the context of the whole New Testament understanding of Jesus Christ and his ministry, the meaning broadens. We can hardly imagine first-century believers limiting Zacchaeus's saving experience to a change in his lifestyle, although it surely began there and included that.

Jesus himself endorsed his wider role in his conversation with the criminal who died with him at Calvary. When the criminal said, in a remarkable reach of faith, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). The saving the criminal sought was obviously beyond this life, and Jesus assured him he would receive it.

But although Jesus was given the name of Savior before his birth (Matthew 1:21), and although John the Baptist identified Jesus at the outset of his ministry as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), Jesus said little about his role as Savior. He called the disciples to "follow" him in the new mission of the kingdom of God. He healed, cast out demons, raised the dead, and taught, while followers gathered about him. He exhibited a vigorous prejudice in favor of those classified as "sinners"—to the distress of the professionally religious. But he did all of this without specific reference to himself as the Savior.

The statements are more explicit, however, in the Gospel of John. There Jesus is identified with the serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9); so too "must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The serpent is an image of saving; those who looked at the serpent were delivered from death. And of course the reference to the serpent being put up on a pole

In the Old Testament, God's reign was to bring order and justice, bringing the world into compliance with God's purpose. The people of Israel saw God as the ruler of their lives and the king as God's earthly representative. When the earthly kingdom no longer existed, people began to look forward to a future time when the kingdom of God would be restored. Jesus came preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand. Many of his parables concerned the Kingdom. After the Resurrection and Ascension, the early church interpreted the return of Jesus as the coming of God's rule in the world. By the third century A.D., people no longer expected Christ's return to be immediate. After Augustine, the church looked toward a supernatural Kingdom. Later interpretations of Revelation included the possibility of an actual future kingdom of God in this world in which Christ will rule.

was a graphic picture of Calvary. Nor do we stretch a point when we observe that the serpent was an image of sin, and that Paul said, “For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Four times in a brief passage in John 10, Jesus describes himself as the one who lays down his life for his sheep. And as death approaches, Jesus acknowledges his troubling of soul but says, “No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour” (John 12:27).

Jesus’ role as Savior receives its most explicit statement in what may seem a touch of irony, from the people of Samaria. After the woman of Samaria has told her friends she has met one who perhaps may be the Messiah (4:29), the townspeople persuade Jesus to remain for two days. Then they testify, “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world” (4:42). Not by chance did the Gospel writer say the woman spoke of Jesus as the possible Messiah and the townspeople identified him as the Savior, thus bringing the two terms together. Also significant is the Samaritans’ use of a wonderfully sweeping term—“Savior of the world.” First Timothy 4:10 picks up the same far-reaching language: “the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

The letters add still more significance to the understanding of Jesus as Savior by linking the term to God. First Timothy begins, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” (1:1). The letter to Titus uses the term “God our Savior” four times. Jude’s benediction refers to “the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Jude 25). Thus the early church acknowledged that salvation had come through both God and Christ, and that the work specifically done at Calvary was God’s action through God’s Son (Romans 5:8). A powerful picture of the suffering God and of God’s total involvement in the salvation process.

### **The Cosmic Savior**

The New Testament understanding of Jesus’ role as Savior is so far-reaching that the believer is challenged to enter a whole new realm of thought. By his death Jesus did become Savior to all who believe. Still more, he entered into conflict with the powers that otherwise enslave the human race. So the apostle wrote to the Colossians: “When you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:13-15).

All this dramatic statement is tied to the cross. The writer chooses even to use the language of crucifixion, saying “the record that stood against us with its legal demands” has been set aside, “nailing it to the cross.” By his death, Jesus “disarmed

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the rulers and authorities” (2:14-15). The biblical writers perceived we are involved in a conflict with “the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). By the work of Christ as Savior, these powers have been broken and the “rulers and authorities” have been disarmed, to the point of being humiliated—“a public example.”

This perception of Jesus as Savior is consistent with the New Testament understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ. If the Christ is, as the apostle said, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15), and if he “is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:17), then his power as Savior is quite beyond the usual boundaries of our discussion. A martyr’s death is a noble thing, perhaps even to the point of bringing new levels of dedication from others; but a martyr’s death, no matter how noble, cannot affect the balance of the universe or of the spiritual world. If, however, the one who has died is “the firstborn of all creation,” one in whom “all things hold together,” the death is nothing less than cosmic. The very structures of the universe—including structures and universes we cannot see—are shaken. Such is the nature of the death of Jesus, and the power inherent in naming him Savior.

As Jesus was being crucified, some despisers mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself” (Mark 15:31). Unknowingly, they paid Jesus a definitive compliment; it was *because* he was commissioned to save others that he could not save himself. Their words are also appropriate to the kind of anomaly woven all through the concept of Jesus as Savior.

The anomaly begins with the fact that the word *Savior* means nothing unless we need to be saved. But most of the time, we don’t want to be saved until we realize we cannot save ourselves. So to be a savior is to be offensive to the human sense of adequacy. But Jesus came to be the Savior, and his purpose in coming was an indictment of the human race, a divine statement that human beings need help.

Still worse, his saving was by way of his dying. This fact adds to the offensiveness of the story. If Jesus had saved by teaching or by writing exquisite literature, by mounting a political structure or by the sheer nobility of his life, the saving would have been attractive and in good taste. But the method of saving was by the death of the Savior.

Jesus Christ is the issue of the Christian faith. The creeds that came from the earliest centuries of the church make this point unmistakably clear. Indeed, the creeds came into existence because of Jesus Christ, to define his place and nature. In the Nicene Creed, Jesus is the subject of twenty-one of the thirty-five lines; in the Apostles’ Creed, ten of the eighteen lines.

But if Jesus Christ is the issue, he is the issue because he is the Savior. In any other role, his offense would be manageable.

Even the issues of his divinity and his humanity would lose much of their sting if he were to be seen only as teacher or moral example. But on the other hand, there would be no need for the divine/human nature if he were not coming to be Savior. Such a combination would be unnecessary for teacher, leader, or example.

He came to be the Savior. To use a common and overworked phrase, this is what it's all about.

**BECAUSE WE THE CHURCH BELIEVE Jesus Christ came to be the Savior of the world, I accept him as my Savior.**

## BELIEVING AND LIVING

Believers, particularly in these decades at the turn of the century, lack familiarity with the language that relates to Jesus as Savior. We speak more often of giving our lives to Christ, or of dedicating or committing ourselves. How do you relate to the term “Jesus saves,” or to speaking of how he “saved” you?

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What is your understanding of why we need to be saved?  
And from what are we being saved?

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Paul wrote that “Christ crucified” is “foolishness to Gentiles,” but to those who accept it, “Christ crucified” is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:21-25). How do you respond to his words as you think about Jesus as Savior?

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## SEEKING MORE UNDERSTANDING

The theme of Christ as Savior has dominated much of religious art for centuries. Consider doing some research on how artists in various cultures and time periods, working in various media, have interpreted the idea of Christ as Savior. Most public libraries have collections of books of religious art, or you may have internet access to art museums and galleries. Two questions might guide your research: What do artists choose to emphasize? What is your overall impression of what the art intends to say about Christ as Savior?

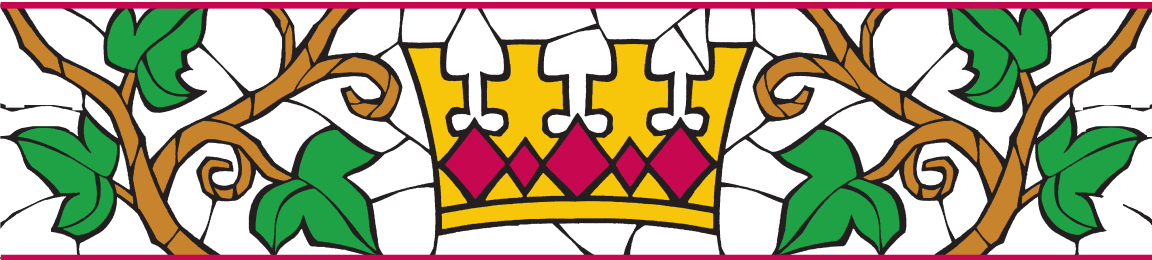
## PRAYER

“O Love divine, what hast thou done!  
Th’incarnate God hath died for me!  
The Father’s co-eternal Son  
Bore all my sins upon the tree!  
The Son of God for me hath died:  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!

Is crucified for me and you,  
To bring us rebels near to God;  
Believe, believe the record true,  
Ye all are bought with Jesus’ blood;  
Pardon for all flows from his side:  
My Lord, my Love, is crucified.”

—“*O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done,*”  
Charles Wesley, 1707–1788

# CHRISTIAN BELIEVER



## KNOWING GOD WITH HEART AND MIND

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Readings

ABINGDON PRESS  
*Nashville*

# As You Begin Your Study

**Y**ou may have come to this study with little knowledge of the people, events, and documents that contributed to the formulation of the doctrines or beliefs central to the Christian faith. With you in mind we have selected key statements from leading theologians and crucial church councils that express the classical teachings of the Christian faith, what the church has said is essential and has continuously taught as essential.

The readings reflect the richness of thought and discussion within Christianity over two thousand years. Through these readings you have opportunity to hear from and join faithful Christians from across the centuries in seeking understanding of the Christian faith.

This book of readings takes seriously the Great Commandment to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, NIV)—that is, it calls for committed effort. Grasping the ideas in the readings will take time, thought, and discipline. Writers express themselves in the language of their day. So, some of the language is outdated and the concepts unfamiliar.

Because a high percentage of the readings in this book come from other centuries, masculine language is prevalent. While at the beginning of the twenty-first century we are sensitive to the need for more inclusive language, we also respect people and their ideas set in their own time. We have made no attempt to change masculine language, believing that the power in the ideas can transcend the time-related differences in language.

Readings are grouped by topic and each week’s readings relate to the topic of the lesson in the study manual. The approximately ten readings per week are intended to acquaint you with a particular doctrine and the key ideas in that doctrine. Readings are mostly arranged in chronological order, from the earliest to the most recent. All readings are numbered sequentially through the book.

The format for the readings follows a common pattern: a general

introduction to the week's readings, an introduction to each individual reading, the reading itself, and the name and date of the author or the document. Sources of all readings are found in the acknowledgments on pages 267–272. Sometimes ellipses appear within a reading to indicate that some material, unnecessary to the purpose of the reading, has been left out.

### **Steps to Understanding What You Read**

The study manual includes daily assignments for reading and taking notes on Scripture and readings in this book. Space for notes is provided in the study manual. You will read the commentary in the study manual after you have completed all of the week's assigned Scripture and readings.

Follow these steps as you read. Understanding will come more easily, and you will be prepared for the discussion in the weekly group meeting.

1. Read sentence by sentence, watching for key terms or phrases.
2. Identify and list the main ideas in the reading.
3. Indicate the points at which you have questions or difficulty with ideas.
4. When you come to a sentence that is hard to understand, keep reading. Often the next few sentences will clarify what the difficult sentence is saying.
5. When you are having difficulty understanding a reading, keep in mind that other members of the group are also reading and making notes and that in the group meeting you will have time together to discuss, clarify, question, and draw conclusions from the various readings.
6. After completing each reading, recall the main ideas and summarize in a sentence or two what the reading is saying.
7. At the end of the week, look back over your notes and list the key ideas for the doctrine being studied. Write a statement of the doctrine.

Christian symbols proclaim the Christian faith in visual language. The eight pages of art in this book depict time-honored Christian symbols for the classical doctrines of the Christian faith. Explanations of the symbols emphasize the message behind each symbol.

# Jesus Christ: Savior

**N**ext to the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, no theological issue is more important than that which deals with his role as Savior. From before Jesus' birth, when Joseph was instructed to name him Jesus because he would save his people from their sins, until his death when he promised a thief beside him that he would have a place in Paradise, and then through all of the preaching in Acts and the teaching in the epistles, he is seen repeatedly as the Savior. No wonder, then, that theologians, mystics, and poets alike have written about this theme.

**140** We speak of Jesus Christ as "the Word," but often we do not put concrete meaning into the term. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, makes the term graphic when he describes Jesus as "the original documents," then proceeds to show Christ as Lord of the Old Testament personalities as well as of the church.

I urge you, do not do things in cliques, but act as Christ's disciples. When I heard some people saying, "If I don't find it in the original documents, I don't believe it in the gospel," I answered them, "But it is written there." They retorted, "That's just the question." To my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the original documents. The inviolable archives are his cross and death and his resurrection and the faith that came by him. It is by these things and through your prayers that I want to be justified.

Priests are a fine thing, but better still is the High Priest who was entrusted with the Holy of Holies. He alone was entrusted with God's secrets. He is the door to the Father. Through it there enter Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the prophets and apostles and the

Church. All these find their place in God's unity. But there is something special about the gospel—I mean the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his Passion and resurrection. The beloved prophets announced his coming; but the gospel is the crowning achievement forever. All these things, taken together, have their value, provided you hold the faith in love.

—*Ignatius, c. 35–c. 107*

**141** John 3:16 probably summarizes better than any other single verse the love that motivated the divine act of saving. Clement of Alexandria, theologian and writer, seeks to examine this love, and sees in it the Mother-quality of divine love.

Consider the mysteries of love, and you will then have a vision of the bosom of the Father, whom the only-begotten God alone has declared. God himself is love, and for the sake of this love he made himself known. And while the unutterable nature of God is Father, his sympathy with us is Mother. It was in his love that the Father became the nature which derives from woman, and the great proof of this is the Son whom he begot from himself, and the love that was the fruit produced from his love. For this he came down, for this he assumed human nature, for this he willingly endured the sufferings of humanity, that by being reduced to the measure of our weakness, he might raise us to the measure of his power. And just before he poured out his offering, when he gave himself as a ransom, he left us a new testament: “I give you my love” (John 13:34). What is the nature and extent of this love? For each of us he laid down his life, the life which was worth the whole universe, and he requires in return that we should do the same for each other.

—*Clement of Alexandria, c. 150–c. 216*

**142** Melito, Bishop of Sardis, emphasized Christianity's heritage in Judaism in a sermon on the “Pasch,” both the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter. The New Testament pictures Jesus as our eternal Passover lamb; Melito captures this theme in words of holy adoration.

The mystery of the Pasch  
is new and old,  
eternal and temporal,

corruptible and incorruptible,  
mortal and immortal . . .  
Born as Son,  
led like a lamb,  
sacrificed like a sheep,  
buried as a man,  
he rises from the dead as God,  
being by nature both God and man.

He is all things:  
when he judges, he is law,  
when he teaches, word,  
when he saves, grace,  
when he begets, father,  
when he is begotten, son,  
when he suffers, lamb,  
when he is buried, man,  
when he arises, God.

Such is Jesus Christ!  
To him be glory forever! Amen.

—*Melito, c. 190*

**143** Athanasius sees in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ a tie to the divine-human nature of the Christ. He perceives that it is only because Jesus took on himself “a body capable of death” that he could fully enter into our humanness, and in turn do away with death.

Therefore, assuming a body like ours, because all people were liable to the corruption of death, [the Word] surrendered it to death for all humanity, and offered it to the Father. He presented it to the Father as an act of pure love for humanity, so that by all dying in him the law concerning the corruption of humanity might be abolished (inasmuch as its power was fulfilled in the Lord’s body, and no longer has capacity against human beings who are like him), and that he might turn back to a state of incorruption those who had fallen into a state of corruption, and bring them to life by the fact of his death, by the body which he made his own, and by the grace of his resurrection . . . The Word thus takes on a body capable of death, in order that, by partaking in the Word that is above all, this

body might be worthy to die instead for all humanity, and remain incorruptible through the indwelling Word, and thus put an end to corruption through the grace of his resurrection . . . Hence he did away with death for all who are like him by the offering of the body which he had taken on himself. The Word, who is above all, offered his own temple and bodily instrument as a ransom for all, and paid their debt through his death. Thus the incorruptible Son of God, being united with all humanity by likeness to them, naturally clothed all humanity with incorruption, according to the promise of the resurrection.

—Athanasius, 296–373

**144** Any discussion of Christ as Savior must at some point ask why Jesus was uniquely qualified for this role; why not any good and admirable person? Or to put it another way, how was Jesus different from any earnest martyr? Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and instrumental in the conversion of Augustine, reminds us that only Jesus was free from the bonds of sin, and thus in a position to save others.

Jesus approached the snares, to set Adam free: he came to liberate what had perished. We were all held in the toils; no one could rescue another, for no one could deliver himself. What was needed was one who was not held by the bonds incurred by the sins of human generation; one who had not been caught by avarice, or enslaved by deceit. Jesus alone was that one; for when he encompassed himself with the bonds of this flesh, he was not caught, nor was he ensnared. Rather he broke the bonds and loosed them, and, looking out through the snares, and rising up above the toils, he called to himself the Church, so that the Church also might learn how to escape being held by the bonds. In fact, so far was he from avoiding the bonds that he even submitted to death for our sake. Yet he was not made death's slave; he was 'free among the dead' free, because he had the power to abolish death.

—Ambrose, 339–397

**145** Augustine reminds us that the Savior must not only be free from personal sin; he must also have the capacity to be a Mediator between God and our human race, because only someone with a unique tie to God can present the human case to God.

For we could not be redeemed, even through the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, if He were not also God. Now when Adam was created, he, being a righteous man, had no need of a mediator. But when sin had placed a wide gulf between God and the human race, it was expedient that a Mediator, who alone of the human race was born, lived, and died without sin, should reconcile us to God, and procure even for our bodies a resurrection to eternal life, in order that the pride of man might be exposed and cured through the humility of God; that man might be shown how far he had departed from God, when God became incarnate to bring him back; that an example might be set to disobedient man in the life of obedience of the God-Man; that the fountain of grace might be opened by the Only-begotten taking upon Himself the form of a servant, a form which had no antecedent merit; that an earnest of that resurrection of the body which is promised to the redeemed might be given in the resurrection of the Redeemer; that the devil might be subdued by the same nature which it was his boast to have deceived, and yet man not glorified, lest pride should again spring up; and, in fine, with a view to all the advantages which the thoughtful can perceive and describe, or perceive without being able to describe, as flowing from the transcendent mystery of the person of the Mediator.

—Augustine, 354–430

**146** Thomas Aquinas, influential theologian of the Middle Ages and a logician at heart, asked questions about the right of God to restore humanity, and from this question led the reader into the necessity that God must become incarnate in a person if there is to be salvation.

The reparation of human nature could not be effected by Adam or by any other purely human being. For no individual man ever occupied a position of preeminence over the whole of nature; nor can any mere man be the cause of grace. . . . Nothing remains, therefore, but that such restoration could be effected by God alone.

But if God had decided to restore man solely by an act of His will and power, the order of divine justice would not have been observed. Justice demands satisfaction for sin. But God cannot render satisfaction, just as He cannot merit. Such a service pertains to one who is subject to another. Thus God was not in a position to satisfy for the sin of the whole of human nature; and a mere man

was unable to do so, as we have just shown. Hence divine Wisdom judged it fitting that God should become man, so that thus one and the same person would be able both to restore man and to offer satisfaction. . . .

At the same time, by willing to become man, God clearly displayed the immensity of His love for men, so that henceforth men might serve God, no longer out of fear of death, which the first man had scorned, but out of the love of charity. . . .

Lastly, the Incarnation puts the finishing touch to the whole vast work envisaged by God. For man, who was the last to be created, returns by a sort of circulatory movement to his first beginning, being united by the work of the Incarnation to the very principle of all things.

—*Thomas Aquinas, 1225–1274*

**147** We humans are hard put to find language or concepts that will portray the love of God. It is beyond our vocabulary, so we are forced to find figures of speech that will convey at least some measure of the love that brought about the saving act. Julian of Norwich expressed this love in the role of the mother.

The mother's service is nearest, readiest and surest: nearest because it is most natural, readiest because it is most loving, and surest because it is truest. No one ever might or could perform this office fully, except only him. We know that all our mothers bear us for pain and for death. O, what is that? But our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life, blessed may he be. So he carries us within him in love and travail, until the full time when he wanted to suffer the sharpest thorns and cruel pains that ever were or will be, and at the last he died. And when he had finished, and had borne us so for bliss, still all this could not satisfy his wonderful love. And he revealed this in these great surpassing words of love: If I could suffer more, I would suffer more. He could not die any more, but he did not want to cease working; therefore he must needs nourish us, for the precious love of motherhood has made him our debtor.

The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life; and with all the sweet sacraments he

## Jesus Christ: Savior

sustains us most mercifully and graciously, and so he meant in these blessed words, where he said: I am he whom Holy Church preaches and teaches to you. That is to say: All the health and the life of the sacraments, all the power and the grace of my word, all the goodness which is ordained in Holy Church for you, I am he.

—*Julian of Norwich, 1342–after 1416*

**148** The biblical formula for communicating faith from one generation to the next is the household, with its parent-child relationship. Not many parents feel ready to take on such a task. Susanna Wesley did so by way of a letter to her daughter. Here she explains the role of Christ as Savior.

Jesus signifies a Saviour, and by that name he was called by the angel Gabriel before his birth, to show us that he came into the world to save us from our sins, and the punishment they justly deserve. And to repair the damage human nature had sustained by the fall of Adam. That, as in Adam all died, so in Christ all should be made alive. And so he became the second general head of all mankind. And as he was promised to our parents in paradise, so was his coming signified by various types and sacrifices under the law and foretold by the prophets long before he appeared in the world. And this Saviour, this Jesus, was the promised messiah, who was so long the hope and expectation of the Jews, the Christ—which in the original signifies anointed.

—*Susanna Wesley, 1670–1742*

**149** To experience Christ as Savior is to feel a necessity to tell others of the experience. English hymn writer Charles Wesley, son to Susanna and brother to John, wrote the following poem a year after his conversion experience. In it he draws upon a number of biblical passages.

And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood!  
Dy'd he for me?—who caus'd his pain?  
For me?—who Him to Death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all! th' Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange Design?  
In vain the first-born Seraph tries  
To sound the Depths of Love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;  
Let Angel Minds inquire no more.

He left his Fathers throne above  
(So free, so infinite his grace!)  
Empty'd himself of All but Love,  
And bled for *Adam's* helpless Race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For, O my God! it found out Me!

Long my imprison'd Spirit lay,  
Fast bound in Sin and Nature's Night  
Thine Eye diffus'd a quickning Ray;  
I woke; the Dungeon flam'd with Light.  
My Chains fell off, my Heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and follow'd Thee.

Still the small inward Voice I hear,  
That whispers all my Sins forgiv'n;  
Still the atoning Blood is near,  
That quench'd the Wrath of hostile Heav'n:  
I feel the Life his Wounds impart;  
I feel my Saviour in my Heart.

No Condemnation now I dread,  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine.  
Alive in Him, my Living Head,  
And clothed in Righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach th' Eternal Throne,  
And claim the Crown, thro' CHRIST my own.

—Charles Wesley, 1707–1788

**150** Our study has separate lessons on salvation, as a doctrine, and on Jesus Christ as Savior. Jeffery Hopper, professor of theology, indicates the relationship between the two, and reminds us that the theological term for the study of salvation, *soteriology*, derives from the Greek word for savior.

## Jesus Christ: Savior

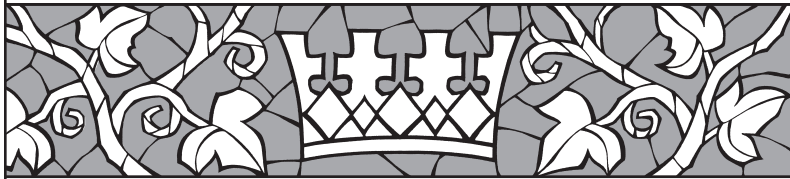
Soteriology, from the Greek word *soter* (savior, deliverer), is that focus in Christian theology that seeks to interpret the *saving work* of Jesus Christ, that is, what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Traditionally it has been distinguished from Christology, which is concerned with clarifying Jesus' "person," that is, who and what Jesus Christ was and is. Most theologians agree that the "person" and the "work" of Jesus Christ must be understood in relation to each other. Serious disputes in the early church led to the decision at Chalcedon (451 C.E.) that Jesus Christ is to be understood as "true God and true man," two natures in one person. This christological decision served for centuries as the presupposition for any understanding of his "person." More recently there has been a growing tendency to give prior attention to the saving work.

The church has never officially sanctioned a particular understanding of the saving work of Jesus Christ. Rather, several different interpretative themes have had power in the thought and worship life of the church. Most of these motifs find a basis among the many titles and terms of the New Testament that suggest but do not develop interpretations of Jesus Christ's saving work.

Prominent among these themes in the early church was the idea of *sacrifice*.

—Jeffery Hopper, 20th century

# CHRISTIAN BELIEVER



## KNOWING GOD WITH HEART AND MIND

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Leader Guide



## OPENING WORDS SAID AND SUNG

(5 or 10 minutes)

Read Matthew 1:21. Sing or read Stanzas 1 and 4 of “Saranam, Saranam.” Invite persons to talk in pairs or threes about what understanding of *Savior* they brought to their study the past week. Read the prayer on study manual page 135.

## VIDEO SEGMENT 13

(25 or 30 minutes)

**Introduce Presenter:** Ronald Goetz, Professor of Theology and Religion and Department Chair, Elmhurst College

### **Watch, Listen, Take Notes**

Listen for

- the meaning of the term *savior* in the Hebrew Scriptures and what Christians meant when they called Jesus “Savior”
- the disconnect between our claim that Jesus is the Savior of the world and our personal lifestyles and cultural situations
- God’s redemptive will seen in Jesus
- salvation as God’s declaration of love
- the test of whether our salvation is of Jesus Christ

### **Respond**

In groups of three or four discuss these questions: What do we mean when we say Jesus is the Savior of the world? If we Christians believe Jesus is the Savior of the world, how should our lives be different from the secular public? What convincing evidence can we offer of our salvation? What do we see in Jesus that tells us God wills our redemption? How is our view of life and the world changed when we look at them in light of Jesus Christ the Savior? How are we to demonstrate our salvation in Jesus Christ?

## CONTENT OF FAITH

(40 or 50 minutes)

Study two Old Testament passages that would have been familiar to early Christians. Instruct groups of three or four to review Psalm 22, Job 19:1-27, and their daily notes to talk about insights they gained from reading the passages from the perspective of the doctrine of Jesus as Savior. After a

time of discussion, give this further instruction: Now look at these same passages as expressions of two persons certain of vindication. Think of Jesus as probably quoting the whole Psalm while on the cross rather than just the opening lines most familiar to us. Look again at the two passages. Why do you think Jesus quoted this particular Psalm? Where do you see movement through despair to hope in the passages? What vindication did Jesus have in mind in recalling this Psalm? What vindication did Job anticipate?

In the same groups concentrate now on Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Identify images or phrases we contemporary Christians might apply to one we would call savior. What do you see and hear in this Scripture when you relate it to Jesus as Savior? Next imagine early Christians reading or hearing this passage. What, out of their experience, would have convinced them this passage was talking about Jesus as Savior?

Jesus saves. Look for that message in the week’s New Testament passages. Form two groups. Instruct both groups to review Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 19:1-10; John 10:1-18; 11:45-57; Acts 13:26-39, along with their daily notes, to locate statements, actions, or events in the passages that illustrate these claims: (1) Saving is the reason for Jesus’ birth. (2) Saving is the subject of Jesus’ teaching. (3) Saving is the cause of Jesus’ death. (4) Resurrection confirms Jesus’ right to be Savior.

Look now at what the readings say about the saving work of Jesus Christ. Form four groups and make these assignments: Group 1—Readings 140, 141, 142; Group 2—Readings 143, 144, 145; Group 3—Readings 146, 147; Group 4—Readings 148, 149, 150. Instruct the groups to do three things: (1) Use their daily notes to identify the main ideas in each reading; (2) hear persons’ summary sentences of the readings; (3) review the readings to answer these questions: How is Jesus portrayed as Savior in these readings? What made Jesus uniquely equipped to save humankind? What is the nature of the love that brought about the saving act? What is the link between Jesus as Savior and the doctrine of the Incarnation? What is the relationship of Jesus’ death to our salvation? After allowing time for the groups to work on their assigned readings, ask each group to join another group and respond to this question: What points would you include in a definition of the doctrine of Jesus as Savior?

**BREAK**

(5 minutes)

**LANGUAGE OF FAITH**

(15 minutes)

The language of faith carries the essence of the faith's teaching. Divide the language of faith words on study manual page 126 among the group members. Ask each person to write a sentence using the assigned word or phrase that carries the message *Jesus Christ is Savior*. Hear the sentences. After looking at the symbols for Jesus Christ as Savior and their explanations on Readings pages 106–107 and on study manual page 130, sing the refrain and Stanza 1 of “Lift High the Cross.”

**FAITH ASKS QUESTIONS**

(15 minutes)

Recall that the previous lesson focused on the *person* of Jesus Christ—human and divine. This lesson focuses on the *work* of Jesus Christ—Savior. Talk about why the church's teaching on Jesus Christ puts together the person and work of Jesus Christ. Then discuss these questions: What does the doctrine of Jesus Christ as Savior include? What does it deny? What is at stake in accepting or rejecting this doctrine of the church?

**BELIEVING AND LIVING**

(10 or 15 minutes)

Read the “BECAUSE WE THE CHURCH BELIEVE” statement on study manual page 135 and respond in pairs or threes to the questions in this section of the study manual. Then discuss this further question: What difference does accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior make in the way we live?

Finally, invite group members to look again at the questions raised in the last paragraph of “Life Questions,” study manual page 126, to see how they would now respond to those questions.

**CLOSING WORDS SAID AND SUNG**

(5 or 10 minutes)

Turn to Lesson 14 and review the assignment. Hear and write down prayer concerns. Pray the prayer on study manual page 135. Sing the refrain from “Saranam, Saranam” or “Lift High the Cross.”