

Lesson 23: The Price He Paid

Key Takeaway

Jesus died so I can be forgiven and live with God forever.

Scriptural Basis

Luke 23:39-43, Romans 6:23

Bible Verse

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Children will understand that Jesus died to take away our sin and give us new life.
- Children will recognize that we can choose to trust Jesus as our Savior and King.
- Children will describe what it means to have a relationship with God now and forever.

Materials Needed for Small Group:

- ☐ A Bible
- ☐ Name tags
- ☐ A snack per child

Activity: The Impossible Carry Challenge

- ☐ A variety of random large objects (books, toys, small bags, stuffed animals, balls, etc.)
- ☐ A destination marker (tape line, chair, or cone)

Activity: Bridge Illustration Activity

- ☐ Masking tape (plenty!)
- ☐ Marker or labels for "Us" and "God"
- ☐ (Optional) Paper (for paper cross)

Activity: Two Path Signs

- ☐ Printout 1, one per small group
- ☐ Printout 2, one copy for each student

Materials Needed for Large Group:

- ☐ A Bible

Activity: Carrying the Burden of Sin

- ☐ Balloons, several for each student volunteer
- ☐ Cross or garbage can
- ☐ Name tag or card that says "Jesus"
- ☐ Printout 1, one for each volunteer

Alternative Activity: Can't Take It Back

- ☐ A tube of toothpaste
- ☐ A plate or paper towel
- ☐ Toothpicks or cotton swabs
- ☐ Name Tag with "Jesus" written on it

The Story

- ☐ Large poster board or foam board
- ☐ Markers or crayons
- ☐ Optional: pre-cut or printable cross shapes (3 total)
- ☐ Glue or tape (if using cutouts)

Materials Needed for Games:

Game: The Weight of Sin (Team Challenge)

- ☐ A backpack or bag filled with heavy objects (books, weights, etc.)
- ☐ A set of smaller
- ☐ Lighter bags (optional)

Game: Tug-of-War: Sin vs. Grace

- ☐ A long rope,
- ☐ Aline drawn on the floor (or cones to mark boundaries)

Game: Red Light, Grace Light" (Sin vs. Salvation)

- ☐ A red object (paper, flashlight, stop sign) and a green object (or sign labeled "GRACE").

Small Group Session 1

15 Minutes

Distribute name tags and snacks. Choose one of the following activities to do together while children eat their snack.

Share and Listen

Option 1

Ask the children to share their highs and lows (the best and worst things that happened to them either today or from the past week).

Option 2

Ask the children to take turns sharing how they are feeling today using the [“How Are You Feeling?” chart](#).

Pray Together

Collect prayer requests from the students. The leader or a student can pray for the entire group, or a leader can pair up students and invite them to pray for one another.

Opening Questions

- ***“Has there ever been a time when you were doing something that was too hard for you?”***
- ***“What was it?”***
- ***“Did you get help?”***

“There are some things we can’t do on our own, we need help.”

Activity: The Impossible Carry Challenge

Objective: Help kids experience how burdens (like sin) weigh us down and make things harder.

Materials Needed:

- ☐ A variety of random large objects (books, rocks, toys, small bags, stuffed animals, balls, etc.).
- ☐ A destination marker (tape line, chair, or cone).

Choose a few kids to be “carriers” and give them one object each.

- Have them walk across the room and back. It’s easy at first.
- Each time they return, add another object for them to carry in their arms.
- Keep going until it becomes too hard for them to hold everything.

Ask:

- ***“What made it harder as you went?”***
- ***“Was it easier to walk when you carried less?”***
- ***“How did it feel when you had too much to carry?”***
- ***“Have you ever felt weighed down by something?”*** (worry, mistakes, problems)
- ***“Have you ever told a lie and the person found out.”***
 - ***“How did you feel?”***
 - ***“How did they feel?”***
 - ***“How did that affect your relationship?”***

If students have not told a lie, ask them if they have said something mean or taken something that wasn't theirs. Or maybe they made a promise they didn't keep. Ask the same questions for each scenario.

“Those feelings are the weight of your sin. Sin weighs us down, and it also breaks relationships! It separates us from other people and from God. In today's lesson, we'll learn how sin is like a heavy burden that we carry—and how Jesus came to take it away! When Jesus takes it away, we can be connected with God and with others.”

Large Group

10-15 Minutes

Welcome the students to Crossroads and tell them you are glad they came this week.

Optional Starters

“Who is Jesus” call and response

Prayer Prompt: “God, I feel your love when...”

(Share with God a time you feel his love—maybe when you pray, sing, or hear about Jesus.)

Opening Song: “I Believe” by Go Fish

Opening Prayer

Tell kids that closing their eyes and folding their hands together can help keep them focused and not distract those around them.

Opening Questions

- **“What’s the biggest mess you’ve ever made?”**
- **“Were you able to clean it up by yourself, or did someone help you?”**

“Sometimes in life, we make big messes—not just with paint or toys, but with our choices. Today, we’re going to hear an incredible story about how Jesus came to clean up the biggest mess of all—our sin—and how he did it because he loves us and wants us to be with God forever.”

Helpful Hint: Choose one of the two activities for the Large Group lesson.

Option 1 Activity: Carrying the Burden of Sin

Get 1 or 2 volunteers to come help you.

- Give each child one or two inflated balloons labeled with different sins (i.e. lying, stealing, saying mean things, disobeying parents).
- Ask them to hold onto their balloons and try to do simple tasks like clapping, picking up a Bible, or hugging a friend.
- As you continue talking about how sin affects us, keep giving them more balloons until they struggle to hold them all.

“Sin isn’t just bad things we do—it weighs us down and makes life harder. It keeps us from being close to God, and we can’t carry it forever!”

Read Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

“No matter how hard we try, we can’t get rid of our sin on our own.

Trying to be “good enough” or ignoring sin doesn’t take it away. We need help!”

Read Romans 3:23 – For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.

Bring out a leader (representing Jesus using a name tag) who offers to take the balloons from each child and place them at the foot of the cross (or in the trash bin).

Once all the balloons are laid down, explain:

“Jesus died on the cross to take our sin away! He carried all of our burdens so we don’t have to. We can be free because of what he did!”

Read 1 Peter 2:24a – He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross...

After laying the balloons down, give each child a small paper heart (Printout 1) to symbolize a new heart through Jesus.

Have them raise their hands or jump in joy to show they are free from burdens!

“When we trust in Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we can live with him forever! The Bible says that anyone who belongs to Jesus has become a new person” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Option 2 Activity: Can’t Take It Back

Materials Needed:

- ☐ A tube of toothpaste
- ☐ A plate or paper towel
- ☐ Toothpicks or cotton swabs
- ☐ Name Tag with “Jesus” written on it

Have a volunteer come up and squeeze all the toothpaste out onto the plate. Then, give them a toothpick or cotton swab and ask them to try putting the toothpaste back in the tube.

After they struggle, explain: ***“Our words and actions are like this toothpaste. Once they come out, we can’t take them back easily. Even when we say sorry, it does not always fix everything right away.”***

Discuss examples of hurtful actions or words and how they affect others.

Examples:

- ***“You get frustrated and say, “I don’t want to be your friend anymore!””***
 - Consequence: Even if you apologize later, your friend may still feel hurt or unsure about the friendship.
- ***“You steal something from a friend.”***
 - Consequence: Your friend is hurt, and if caught, you may be disciplined or you will lose others’ trust.
- ***“You break something at home and tell your parents, “I didn’t do it.””***
 - Consequence: If the truth comes out, your parents may have a harder time trusting you next time.

“The things that we say and do have consequences. The Bible says that our sins, those wrong things that we do, the punishment for our sins is death and separation from God forever.

That is what each of us deserves because of the wrong things we have done."

Bring out a leader (representing Jesus using a name tag) who offers to take the old toothpaste from each child and place them at the foot of the cross (or in the trash bin).

Then have the leader (representing Jesus) give a brand new tube of toothpaste to the child.

"Jesus died on the cross to take our sin away! He carried all of our burdens so we don't have to. We can be free because of what he did!"

Read 1 Peter 2:24a – *He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross...*

"But God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to help us because we couldn't fix this problem by ourselves" (remember how we couldn't get the toothpaste back in the tube).

"The Bible says that everyone who believes in Jesus will be saved from the punishment for their sins that they deserve. That's because Jesus took the punishment that we deserve.

Jesus took the bad things we have done and now gave us the best gift!"

The Story: Two Criminals, Two Choices

Objective: To help kids understand that everyone has a choice to trust or reject Jesus, and that Jesus offers forgiveness to those who turn to him.

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Large poster board or foam board
- ☐ Markers or crayons
- ☐ Optional: pre-cut or printable cross shapes (3 total)
- ☐ Glue or tape (if using cutouts)

Set Up the Visual: The Three Crosses

1. Prepare your board in advance or build it with the group.
 - Draw a hill or a simple horizon line near the top of the poster board.
 - Add three crosses: one large cross in the center (for Jesus) and two smaller ones on either side (for the criminals).Label the crosses:
 - The middle cross: "Jesus – The Savior"
 - The left cross: "Criminal – Rejected Jesus"
 - The right cross: "Criminal – Trusted Jesus"

2. If you're making it live with the kids:

- Bring out the poster board blank with just the hill drawn.
- Add each cross one at a time as you read or retell the Bible story, discussing who each one represents.

Tell the Story (Luke 23:32–43)

"As Jesus was being put on a cross, even though he had done nothing wrong, there were two other men there—one on each side of him. These two men had a choice to make: to trust in Jesus, or to reject him."

As you mention each person, point to or label the appropriate cross on the poster board.

(Read Luke 23:32–43 aloud or summarize the story.)

“Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Ask:

- ***“How did the first criminal treat Jesus? What do you think he wanted from him?”***
(Helps kids recognize the attitude of rejection or selfishness.)
- ***“What did the second criminal believe about Jesus?”***
(Guides kids to see his recognition of Jesus as innocent, powerful, and King.)
- ***“Why do you think Jesus responded with a promise of paradise to the second criminal?”***
(Leads into the idea of grace, repentance, and Jesus’ authority as Savior.)
- ***“Which criminal do you think showed trust in Jesus? Why?”***
(Encourages personal reflection and comparison.)
- ***“What can we learn from the way the second criminal spoke to Jesus?”***
(Bridges the story to personal application—humility, repentance, and trust.)

“Today we saw how carrying more and more stuff made it harder to keep going in our challenge. That’s kind of like what sin does in our lives. Sin isn’t just doing something wrong—it’s anything that separates us from God. And the more we carry it on our own, the heavier life feels.

In our Bible story, we saw two criminals—both were right next to Jesus, but they responded to him in very different ways. One rejected Jesus and only thought about being saved from the cross. But the other trusted Jesus, admitted he had done wrong, and asked to be remembered in Jesus’ Kingdom.

And what did Jesus say? He said, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' That's how amazing his love is! Jesus didn't just die for sin—he offers forgiveness and new life to anyone who trusts him.

So when you feel weighed down by mistakes, worries, or anything else—you don't have to carry it alone. You can talk to Jesus. You can trust him as your Savior and King."

Close in Prayer

Thank Jesus for taking the punishment for our sins and offering us forgiveness.

Ask Jesus to help you trust Him, just like the second criminal did.

Say sorry for something you've done wrong and ask Jesus to forgive you.

Small Group Session 2

20-25 Minutes

Share the Key Takeaway: Jesus died so I can be forgiven and live with God forever.

“The Bible tells us that anyone who trusts in Jesus as their Savior and King will begin a relationship with God and live with him forever. Without Jesus’ help we are separated from God because of our sins.”

Activity: Bridge Illustration Activity

Objective: To help kids understand that we can’t reach God on our own, but Jesus’ cross bridges the gap caused by sin.

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Masking tape (plenty!)
- ☐ Marker or labels for “Us” and “God”

Setup Instructions:

1. Use masking tape to mark two parallel lines on the floor, 14 feet apart (13ft is the world record for standing long jump).
 - Label one side “Us” and the other side “God.”
 - The space in between the lines represents the gap caused by sin. Let kids know this space is “hot lava”—no touching!
 2. Have kids line up on the “Us” side and try to jump to the “God” side.
 - Let them try a few times, showing that no one can make it on their own.
 3. Then, use masking tape to create a large cross shape that reaches across the gap.
 - Make a long vertical strip that reaches all the way across, and a horizontal piece for the arms of the cross (you can make the arms 2–3 feet wide on each side depending on space).
- Helpful Hint: You could also use sheets of paper to bridge the gap.*
4. Lay the tape cross flat across the gap so it connects the “Us” side to the “God” side.
 - Let kids walk across the cross to safely get to “God’s” side.

“We can’t get to God by trying really hard or being good enough. Just like we couldn’t jump the gap on our own, we can’t reach God without help. That’s why Jesus came—to be the bridge for us. His cross makes a way for us to be with God! There are people that we look at as being “good” people.”

- ***“Who is the nicest and best person you know?”***

“No matter how hard we try, we all fall short because of sin. We can’t reach God on our own.

Jesus died on the cross to take our sin and make a way for us to be with God. His cross is like a bridge that connects us back to him.”

Read Romans 6:23 out loud for the group.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

“When we trust in Jesus, he brings us to God. We don’t have to jump on our own—he already made the way!”

Activity: Two Path Signs

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Two large signs - “Reject Jesus” / “Accept Jesus” (Printout 1) or pictures representing each response.

Setup:

- Tape or place the “Reject Jesus” sign on one side of your room or small group area.
- Tape or place the “Accept Jesus” sign on the opposite side of the room.
- Make sure the area between the signs is clear for kids to move across.

Read Luke 23:39-43 out loud.

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” “These two criminals show two different responses to Jesus—one rejected him, and the other believed in him and asked to be remembered.

Today, we’re going to hear some statements or situations that show how people respond to Jesus. After I read each one, decide which response it shows—Rejecting Jesus or Accepting Jesus—and walk to the side of the room with the sign that matches.”

Read Each Statement Aloud: (You can mix them up or add your own!)

- I know I’ve sinned, and I believe Jesus died to forgive me.
- I don’t think I need Jesus—I can be good enough on my own.
- I’ve heard about Jesus, but I don’t really care about him.
- I want Jesus to be the King of my life and help me follow him.
- I want to do things my way, not God’s way.
- When I mess up, I ask Jesus to forgive me and help me do better.
- I believe Jesus is the Son of God and he rose from the dead.
- I don’t believe Jesus really died and came back to life.
- I trust Jesus more than I trust myself.
- I only think about Jesus when I’m at church.

Give kids a moment to choose and walk to a side after each one.
After each movement ask:

- ***“Why did you choose that side?”***
- ***“What do you think Jesus wants us to learn from that statement?”***

“Thank you for being honest and thinking about those choices. The truth is, everyone has to decide what they believe about Jesus. Just like the two criminals on the cross—one rejected Jesus, and one believed and asked him to remember him.

Jesus loves us so much that he died for us, and he gives us the chance to choose. We can either walk away, or we can trust him as our Savior and King.

If you’re still thinking about what you believe, that’s okay. But know this—Jesus is always ready to forgive, to lead, and to give you a new life when you say yes to him.”

- ***“Have you received Jesus’ forgiveness and fixed your relationship with God?”***
- ***“Would you like to believe in Jesus now and receive the forgiveness of your sins?”***

Provide ABC of salvation and include salvation prayer.

A – Admit

- Admit that you are a sinner and need forgiveness.
- We’ve all done wrong things and need God’s grace.

Romans 3:23 – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

B – Believe

- Believe that Jesus is God’s Son who died for your sins and rose again.
- Trust that his sacrifice is enough to forgive you and give you new life.

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

C – Choose / Confess

- Choose to follow Jesus as your Savior and Lord.
- Confess your faith in him out loud and commit your life to him.

Romans 10:9 – “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Going Deeper

Questions Younger Kids:

- ***“How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus takes away your sins?”***
- ***“What are some things that feel heavy or make you sad? How can Jesus help you with them?”***
- ***“What do you think it means that Jesus took our place?”***
- ***“What did Jesus give us when he took our punishment?”*** (Forgiveness, love, eternal life)

Questions Older Kids:

- ***“Why do you think sin is like a heavy backpack? Have you ever felt weighed down by something wrong you did?”***
- ***“How do you think Jesus felt when he took our punishment?”***

- *“When you traded a “bad” card for a “good” one in the game, how did that remind you of what Jesus did for us?”*
- *“Looking at Romans 6:23, what does it mean that eternal life is a “free gift”?”*
- *“How can knowing that Jesus forgave you change the way you live?”*
- *“What are some ways we can respond to Jesus’ love and forgiveness in our daily lives?”*
- *“Why do you think God chose to send Jesus to take our punishment instead of just forgiving us without the cross?”*
- *“What does it mean that Jesus’ sacrifice was a “gift” and not something we earn?” (Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9)*
- *“How does understanding Jesus’ sacrifice change the way we think about sin?”*
- *“If Jesus has already taken our punishment, why do people still feel guilty about their sins? How should we respond to guilt?”*
- *“How should knowing that Jesus carried our burden impact the way we treat others who sin against us?”*
- *“If someone asked you, “Why did Jesus have to die for our sins?” how would you explain it to them?”*

Ending Together

5-10 Minutes

Younger Kids:

“Just like we tried to carry all those items across the room, sin weighs us down and we can’t deal with it on our own. We can pray and tell Jesus when we do something wrong. He is always ready to forgive! Trust Jesus with your sins. If you feel sad, worried, or guilty, talk to Jesus and remember that he took your burdens. You can always talk to Jesus about anything. If you sin, just ask Jesus to forgive you.”

Older Kids:

“If Jesus already took your punishment, you don’t have to carry guilt or shame. Confess your sins and trust that you are forgiven. Don’t just know about Jesus—trust him with your own life and decisions.”

- ***“Who can you tell about Jesus and how he forgives our sins?”***

Response and Reflection

“Since Jesus’ gift is for everyone, look for ways to tell others about his love and forgiveness. Ask Jesus to help you forgive others when they hurt you.”

If time allows, go through the [Gospel Hand](#) or Salvation Prayer (Printout 2) with your students.

Consider printing copies for each student to take home.

Print out the Bible verse.

Practice the Bible verse for this unit (John 3:16). Take a look at the [Memory Verse Game Ideas](#).

Pray with the students and dismiss them.

Close in Prayer

Games

25 Minutes

Game: Cross Tag (Freeze Tag Variation)

Materials Needed: No supplies needed, just space to run!

How to Play:

- Choose 2-3 kids as "Sin" (taggers).
- If a player gets tagged, they must freeze in place with their arms stretched out like a cross.
- To be unfrozen, another player must come and "pray" (place a hand on them and say, "Jesus saves!").

Connection: Jesus' sacrifice on the cross set us free from sin and gave us new life.

Game: The Weight of Sin (Team Challenge)

Materials Needed:

- ☐ A backpack or bag filled with heavy objects (books, weights, etc.)
- ☐ A set of smaller
- ☐ Lighter bags (optional)

How to Play:

- Select one volunteer to wear the heavy backpack, representing the weight of sin. As you name different sins (Lying, Anger, Disobedience, Selfishness, etc.), add a heavy object to the backpack.
- Keep adding weight until the child struggles to carry it.
- Ask the child to walk across the room, do 5 jumping jacks, or pick up something from the floor.
- They will struggle because of the weight, making the point that sin makes life harder and separates us from God.
- Choose another child to represent Jesus.
- Have them walk over and remove the heavy backpack from the first volunteer.
- Ask the first child how they feel now that the weight is gone (lighter, free, able to move, etc.).

Connection: Just like this, Jesus took all our sins when he died on the cross. We couldn't carry them ourselves, but he carried them for us!

Game: Tug-of-War: Sin vs. Grace

Materials Needed:

- ☐ A long rope,
- ☐ A line drawn on the floor (or cones to mark boundaries)

How to Play:

- Divide the kids into two teams—one side represents sin, the other Jesus' grace. Start the game with "sin" pulling harder (by adding stronger kids to that team).
- Halfway through, introduce a "Jesus helper" (an adult or extra kids) to help Grace win.

- After Grace wins, discuss: Jesus is stronger than sin, and through him, we have victory!

Connection: Jesus helps us win the victory over sin and death.

Game: Red Light, Grace Light" (Sin vs. Salvation)

Materials Needed:

- ☐ A red object (paper, flashlight, stop sign) and a green object (or sign labeled "GRACE").

How to Play:

- Line up all the kids at one side of the classroom.
- When you hold up red, they must freeze (symbolizing how sin stops us).
- When you hold up green, they can move (symbolizing how Jesus sets us free!).
- The first few kids to reach the end must shout out a truth about Jesus (e.g., "Jesus loves me!" "Jesus forgives us!" "Jesus died for my sins!").

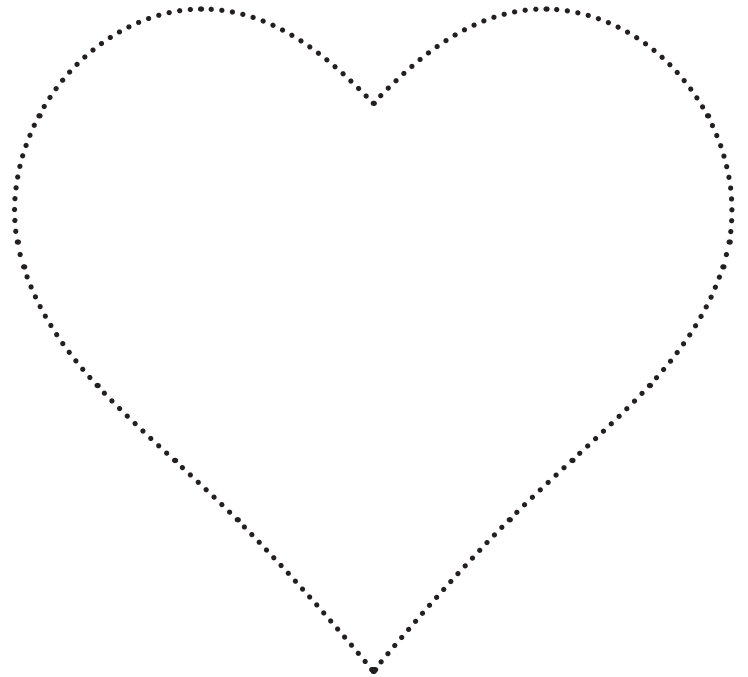
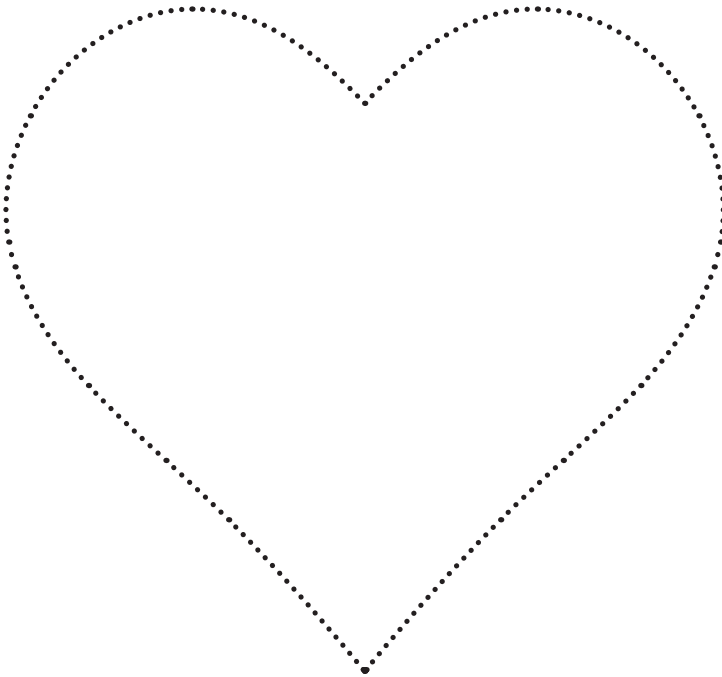
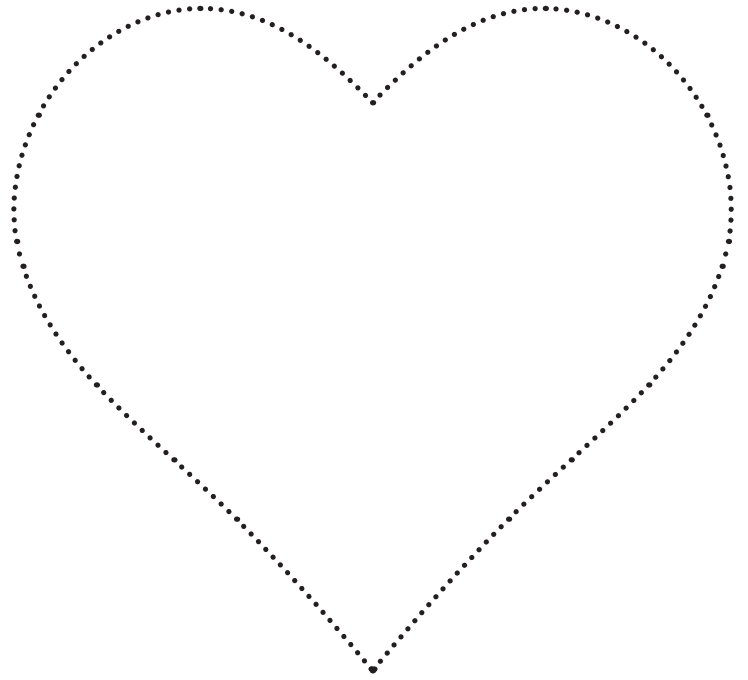
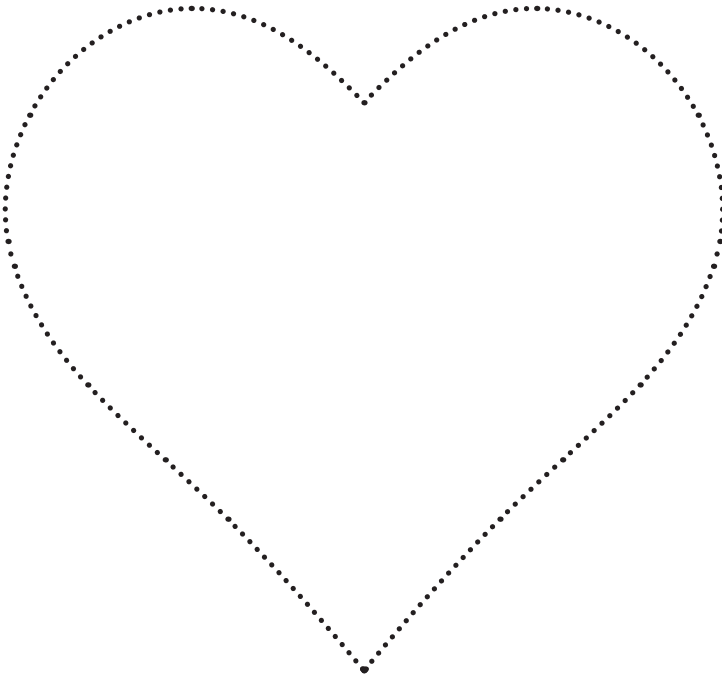
Connection: When we come to Jesus he sets us free from sin.

Printout 23.1

THREE CROSSES



Printout 23.2



Printout 23.3

TWO PATH SIGNS

**REJECT
JESUS**

**ACCEPT
JESUS**

Printout 23.4

SALVATION PRAYER:

Faith in Jesus is what saves someone. It is not about saying the right words in a prayer. Believing that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead to take the punishment for your sins is how you are saved. (Romans 10:9)

“Lord Jesus, I confess that I have sinned against you.

I turn from my sin right now.

I believe that you died on the cross to pay the punishment for my sins.

I receive you as the Lord and Savior of my life. I give my life to you.

In Jesus’ name, amen.”

God loves you! Believing in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is about more than avoiding Hell, it’s about being able to spend eternity with the God who loves you and wants to know you personally. (John 3:16)

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