

Seven Stories of Hope

1) Luke 7:36-50

When Jesus forgives a prostitute she responds with real worship. This is a great “hook” story for the very first lesson because it gives the unchurched post-modern lost person some great things to wrestle with: Jesus forgiving and touching a prostitute (in contrast to how postmoderns think Jesus and Christians are judgmental and aloof), He forgives her sins (we introduce the topic of sin right at the beginning and see that we need forgiveness), Jesus tells a brilliant “aha” parable that is very thought-provoking (instead of boring and old-fashioned as many postmoderns expect), the religious leaders are against Jesus (it shows that Jesus cared about people more than organized religion or politics). Most importantly, though, it leaves the group with the lingering hope, “if Jesus can forgive her, maybe he can forgive me too”

2) Luke 18:9-17

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector teaches the kingdom is for humble and repentant sinners, not the proud and self-righteous. Jesus tells the story of the “good” Pharisee who doesn’t need to repent vs. the very bad tax collector who begs for God’s forgiveness. The Bible describes the “good” person for what he really is: “confident of his own righteousness and looking down on everybody else.” Instead, Jesus tells us “those who humble themselves will be exalted.” He then follows up by saying we have to come to the kingdom helpless like little children. Also, this continues the theme from the first lesson where we saw a humble prostitute receiving Jesus’ approval.

3) Acts 17:16-34

The sovereign creator God will judge the world through Jesus. This is an excellent presentation of God as creator, sovereign, and judge but not in a boring way... there are interesting “people events” in the passage to catch the listener’s attention. Most importantly, the listener realizes there are two groups of people in the story: those who mock this revelation of God and those who believe. Which brings the listener to ask, “Which one am I?”

4) Matthew 16:21-17:9

Jesus tells His gospel plan and displays His holiness as God’s Son. The transfiguration passage demonstrates His holiness and uniqueness as God’s Son, but the preceding verses powerfully show that Jesus *planned* to go to the cross, rise again, and rule the world. The Gospel was a *plan*, not an accident. Jesus wasn’t a victim, He is a savior.

5) Luke 22:66-23:25; 23:32-43

Jesus’ death on the cross, and a criminal is forgiven. Even the Romans have to admit Jesus had not sinned, yet Jesus refuses to avoid the cross which is presented in graphic, painful detail. Even on the cross, though, Jesus is loving the people around Him and offering forgiveness to those who seem unforgivable.

6) Luke 18:18-30; 19:1-10

The ruler, Peter, and Zacchaeus weigh the cost of following Jesus. The great message from Jesus is that following Him should be more important to us than any cost. But it also gives a strong promise that any price we pay to follow Jesus will be returned 100-fold in this life and the next life.

7) Matthew 18:21-35

The story of the merciful king shows how God’s forgiveness should change our lives. Following Jesus should transform us. The Gospel is not fire insurance; it is not an educational creed. It should change the way we interact with the world around us. If we aren’t different after the Gospel, then we haven’t experienced the Gospel. This is a great bookend to the first lesson: “he who is forgiven much, loves much.”