



# THIN RED LINE

○ Volume 3

○ **Tracing God's  
Amazing Story  
of Redemption  
Through Scripture**

## “THIN RED LINE” SERIES

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# THIN RED LINE

Volume 3

**Tracing God's  
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Through Scripture**

KIMBERLY  
SOWELL



**NEW HOPE  
PUBLISHERS**  
Gospel-Centered. Missions-Driven.

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

New Hope® Publishers  
PO Box 12065  
Birmingham, AL 35202-2065  
NewHopeDigital.com  
New Hope Publishers is a division of WMU®.

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Library of Congress Product Control Number: 2014955637

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New Hope Publishers series Project Team: Tina Atchenson, Mark Bethea, Jourdan Berry, Joyce Dinkins, Lynn Groom, Melissa Hall, Joshua Hays, Vicki Huffman, Maegan Roper, and Kathyne Solomon.

Series cover design: Bruce Watford  
Series interior design: Glynese Northam

ISBN: 978-1-59669-432-3  
N154111 • 0215 • 2M1

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate the "Thin Red Line" series to my wonderful church family, Second Baptist Church in Lancaster, South Carolina. Thank you for stepping out in faith as a church to experience God's *thin red line* of redemption together for a year of study. I love you all, and I appreciate your firm stand on the Word of God, your fervent love for Jesus Christ, and your heart that beats for missions. May God continue to bless Second Baptist Church as we move forward to bring glory to His name.

And for each church, Bible study group, and individual who will read this volume and journey along the *Thin Red Line*, may God enrich your walk with Christ and positively flood your heart and mind with His glorious redeeming love.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every book has its own birth story. The “Thin Red Line” series was born out of my home church’s desire to understand fully how all the pieces of the Bible come together to paint one breathtaking picture of redemption. I can tell you that through my personal experience of journeying this *thin red line*, my walk with Christ has been taken to a new level because of my strengthened understanding of what God did to save my soul, and I adore Him all the more. I am excited about what God is going to do in your life and in your church because of this journey you are about to take through redemption’s story.

I’ve tried to go back to the very beginning and retrace the steps of how this book series came into being. I can’t remember if it first happened in my office, or my pastor’s office; perhaps it was in the executive pastor’s office . . . But I remember discussions about the life-changing power of the Word of God. I recall that our hearts were beating rapidly and our voices were escalating with excitement as we began to dream about what could happen if each person in our church began studying together, digging for ourselves to catch the “big picture” of Scripture. We started envisioning the spiritual growth and Bible literacy that God would bring to our people if we started in Genesis and marched through Scripture to thread together the evidence of God’s plan from the very beginning—that God would send a Savior to save sin-wrecked humanity.

This church-wide emphasis coupled with the writing process required many people working together for a common purpose to make the “Thin Red Line” series a reality. Our church body embraced this 52-week journey as we studied together. Our weekly Bible study groups studied one lesson per week. Our pastor delivered sermons to reinforce and more fully develop where we were in the timeline

as we studied redemption's history together. This was no isolated program; this was the theme of our church for an entire year, and we were blown away with how God transformed us through the power of His Word.

**So many people are deserving of thanks:**

Dr. Brian Saxon, pastor: Thank you, Pastor Brian, for being willing to take a risk and do something so "out of the box" for the sake of our church family's spiritual growth. Your desire for each person to know and understand God's plan of redemption ushered us to a deeper appreciation for God's great love for all of us.

Marshall Fagg, executive pastor: Preacher Marshall, thank you for helping to shape the vision and develop a format that made this study effective for everyone. Your doctrinal oversight and words of encouragement each week blessed me every step of the way. Whenever you teach God's Word, I am challenged by how deeply you love Jesus Christ.

Denise Johnston, LifeGroup director: Thank you, Denise, for providing leadership to our LifeGroup leaders and paving the way for an out-of-the-ordinary, yet extraordinary year of study. I appreciate your patience and the hard work you put into this process.

Kristie Taylor, editor: Kristie, I knew I could always count on your keen eye and wordsmithing abilities each week. Thank you not only for the editorial input but also the spiritual feedback to sharpen each lesson and encourage me as a writer.

Melanie Sanders, Pat Nobles, and Beth Center, administrative assistants: Thank you for your important role in getting the materials

into the hands of our people each week, and always leading with a servant's heart. I appreciate your spirit of cooperation and kindness!

**Small-Group Bible Study Leaders:** To every leader who accepted the challenge to undergo a shift in how our church experienced small-group Bible studies, thank you for your willingness to stretch, grow, and embrace change. I thank God for the love and leadership that you provide each week as you connect with your small group with the heart of an undershepherd.

**The Second Baptist Church Family:** Writing this series was my distinct honor because I knew God was allowing me to connect with your lives at a very personal level: your love relationship with Jesus Christ. Thank you for your words of encouragement, your weekly study of God's Word, your celebration of biblical discoveries, and your willingness to live life together with everyone in our church family. I love you very much.

And as always, I want to extend a special thank you to New Hope Publishers team: for your firm commitment to provide Bible study materials that allow the Holy Spirit to be the teacher of each man and woman who opens the Scripture with a willing heart. I love your clarity of vision, and I am honored to partner with you.



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# INTRODUCTION

## FOLLOW THE SIGNS THAT LEAD TO THE CROSS

What are the Bible stories you remember from childhood? We all have our favorites. Noah's ark. Moses and the bulrushes, Moses and the burning bush, and Moses parting the Red Sea. David and Goliath. Abraham and Isaac. But which story comes first? What is the chronological order? And who was it that fought the battle of Jericho? Where do the judges fit into the Old Testament? When did the prophets come into the picture, and how do they fit into the rest of the Old Testament? When did Israel become a nation, and why is that even important? And can anyone give a clear explanation of how the Old Testament is linked to the New Testament?

If you are one of the blessed individuals who has had exposure to the Bible for much of your life, you could probably sit down with a blank sheet of paper and write down a long list of Bible stories you've studied in your lifetime. You may even be able to jot down a moral or biblical truth to correlate with each story. But so often our Bible study approach can be piecemeal and disjointed, jumping from one text to the next, that we find ourselves possessing an enormous pile of exquisite threads, appreciating each one for its individual beauty, yet unable to weave them together to see the intricate tapestry that is God's big picture.

The "Thin Red Line" series is an opportunity to start at the beginning in the Garden of Eden and walk chronologically through the Bible, tracing the link of commonality found in every book of the Bible: redemption. From beginning to end, God's Word points us to the Cross. The evidence is striking. The benefits reaped from the "Thin Red Line" series are many:

**You'll be overwhelmed by God's intentionality.** Looking at Scripture passages with one particular focus, God's plan of redemption, will show how He has painstakingly dropped evidence like breadcrumbs through time, leading to the Cross. In fact, throughout this study you'll find that sometimes God left breadcrumbs, but more often He provided large arrows with neon lights pointing people to the promised Savior, His Son, Jesus Christ.

**You'll be overwhelmed by God's love.** As you study God's master plan and the many ways God interacted with people to usher in their salvation, you cannot help but understand more deeply that humanity is completely undeserving of God's grace. From the beginning God has been consistent, and He has been faithful; you'll see in this study that from the beginning humans are consistently inconsistent and tend toward unfaithfulness. Why did God follow through with the plan? Why did God keep His promise by sending His own Son into this fallen world? It must be love.

**You'll grow in Bible literacy.** For those who traverse all 52 weeks, you will find a deeper understanding of how the different books of the Bible fit together and how the stories flow chronologically. I confess to you that as the writer, my Bible knowledge grew leaps and bounds as I sat down to march purposefully through time in studying redemption. The growth I experienced has made me a more passionate teacher of God's Word. Whether I'm teaching my children at home around the kitchen table or sharing God's Word in a more formal setting, I long for God's people to possess a working knowledge of the Bible. The "Thin Red Line" series provides a framework for understanding the overall history of Scripture.

**You'll fall in love with the Old Testament.** It's just a theory, but I believe that many Christians shy away from reading the Old Testament because they don't know the history, they can't figure out the relevance of some of the stories, and they don't see how its

contents can deepen their walk with Christ. Prepare to be amazed! You'll fall in love with the Old Testament when you begin to hear its pages whispering the name of Jesus.

**You'll fall in love with the New Testament.** Follow the "Thin Red Line" series from beginning to end. Your heart is going to sing "glory hallelujah!" when you arrive at the manger, having gained a deeper appreciation for the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. When looking through redemption's lens, you'll understand the life of Jesus and the profound nature of every word He said and every act He performed. And how do the Book of Acts and the letters to the churches connect to redemption? Embrace the teachings of *Volume Four* of this series, and experience being a part of God's plan of redemption for all of the peoples of the world.

**You'll go to new levels of friendship with your Bible study group.** The format of the "Thin Red Line" series lends itself to meaningful, on-topic, highly relevant discussions for your study time together. Each lesson is designed to allow participants to walk away with a solid understanding of the Bible passage (you will remember the details of the story for days to come) and also specific applications from God's Word to put into practice in everyday life. The approach is both discussion-based and Bible-centered.

I pray that God will use this study series to enrich your relationship with Jesus and deepen your love for God's Word. May God's people never cease to be amazed at the grace of God, the Author of our redemption through Jesus Christ!

*Kimberly*



# WELCOME TO THE *THIN RED LINE*

Welcome to the *Thin Red Line*. Throughout Scripture, we see a beautiful scarlet thread of God's redemptive plan for humanity. From the beginning, He has implemented a divine strategy to save us from our sins and adopt us as His children. In this study, we will experience powerful life transformation as we understand and embrace how God has revealed Himself and His beautiful redemptive plan from cover to cover in His Holy Word.

Each lesson's small-group leader guide contains some specific components:

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## RED LINE DETAILS

- **Red Line Verse:** the memory verse for the lesson
- **Red Line Statement:** a statement of how the lesson relates to God's redemptive plan for mankind to be saved
- **Red Line Connection:** the theme of the lesson
- **Focal Passages:** the passages covered in the lesson



### **Hear—Listen Attentively to the Lesson**

This section is the telling of the Bible story and its details from Scripture.



### **Search—Investigate the Facts of the Lesson**

This section examines what is happening in the story, allowing each person to thoroughly digest what is being conveyed in the text. *You'll find group-leader discussion statements in italics.*



### **See—Find the Purpose of the Lesson**

This section allows your small group to begin processing what God is teaching about Himself and how they can live for Him. Your group will discuss the significance of God's truths and how they apply to their lives. *You'll find group-leader discussion statements in italics.*



### **Live—Experience the Truth of the Lesson**

This section is a crucial component of the lesson—sharing how God's Word is reshaping your hearts and minds to be strong disciples of Jesus Christ. In this section that closes each lesson, you will have the opportunity as the small-group leader to challenge your group to respond specifically and to implement this lesson in their lives the following week. *See discussion statements in italics.*



## THE KING OF GLORY

*Lift up your heads, O gates,  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
That the King of glory may come in!  
Who is the King of glory?  
The LORD STRONG AND MIGHTY,  
The LORD MIGHTY IN BATTLE.  
LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O GATES,  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
That the King of glory may come in!  
Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD OF HOSTS,  
He is the King of glory.*

—PSALM 24:7–10

He is grace unspeakable. He is wisdom unfathomable. He is peace unexplainable. He is love like the world has never known. He was, is, and is to come. Jesus is the King of Glory.

God sent His Son not as an act of desperation, a “Plan B” to rescue men and women from their own evil. God sent the Messiah not on a whim—a passing thought that the world needed a fresh voice or another good teacher. No, for the *thin red line* of God’s redemption appeared in the volume of human history on page one, where God promised a Seed to defeat Satan (Genesis 3:15). And that crimson thread ran through many a prophet’s words, many a foreshadowing in ancient days, until God declared that the time had come to fulfill His promise of a Savior. The Savior Jesus arrived on the dusty earth

in the same way He would depart in death, most humbly. And yet, His radiant glory lit His path from the manger to the Cross.

## LIFE LESSON 27

### THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD

- **Red Line Verse:** *"She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21)
- **Red Line Statement:** God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who came to save us from our sins.
- **Red Line Connection:** In times past, God sent human deliverers and leaders to rescue His people from their enemies; when God sent His Son, He sent the ultimate Deliverer. Jesus sets us free from the power of sin.
- **Background Passage:** Matthew 1–2
- **Focal Passage:** Matthew 1:18–2:12



#### Listen Attentively to the Lesson

1. Tell the story of Matthew 1:18–2:12 in your own words.

*Context:* When the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were conquered, the prophets spoke to the Jews about judgment along with deliverance, and their history along with their future. God reminded His people of the covenants between them and that the ultimate fulfillment of these promises was coming. After the ministry of the prophets ceased (Malachi in our Bibles), there

came 400 years of silence. When Jesus came, the silence was broken. Briefly highlight Matthew 1:1–17 with your small group. Perhaps more than ever before, your small-group members will appreciate the lineage of Christ as they read through names they studied in Volumes 1 and 2 of *Thin Red Line*. This lineage reinforces to us that the birth of Jesus is not an isolated event in human history, as some in the world might say. Jesus wasn't just another great teacher who arrived on the scene and captivated people's attention. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan from the beginning and specifically the fulfillment of the original covenant God made with Abraham.

2. Ask the small-group members to reconstruct the story of Matthew 1:18–2:12 together, including as many details as they can remember.
3. Read the passage aloud together from Scripture, confirming the facts of the story. Amend any details suggested by small-group members that did not accurately represent the Scripture.



### **Investigate the Facts of the Lesson**

Use these questions to guide small-group members to investigate the facts of this passage.

1. How does Matthew 1:18 show us that Jesus was both fully God and fully man?

*Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in the natural way, but the Holy Spirit had conceived this Child.*

2. How would you describe the character of Joseph?

*He had the legal right to have Mary publically stoned because of the*

*pregnancy (Deuteronomy 22:13–21), but he was not planning to humiliate and punish her. Joseph showed compassion toward Mary and also courage to accept the responsibility to raise Jesus in his home.*

3. The birth of Jesus had been foretold in many ways and throughout human history.

a. Who especially should have been looking for the arrival of the Messiah?

*The Jews above all should have been looking for the One God had promised them.*

b. Who came looking for the Messiah in this passage (2:1–2)?

*The wise men (or magi) from the East were looking for Jesus in order to worship Him. They called Him the King of the Jews, and they first came to Jerusalem, the city where God had chosen to place His name (1 Kings 11:36). The wise men were Gentiles, probably astrologers.*

c. Whom did King Herod consult about this King of the Jews? Who actually went to Bethlehem to find the Christ Child (2:4–9)?

*Herod consulted the chief priests and scribes, the religious leaders of the Jews. However, note that this visit from the wise men didn't prompt the chief priests and scribes to travel the five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see Christ for themselves. Why weren't they interested in going to Bethlehem too? Why didn't they want to worship their King?*

4. What are the names ascribed to the Baby born to Mary in this passage (1:18, 21, 23; 2:2, 4, 6)?

*He is Jesus, which means Savior, from the Hebrew name Joshua ("Jehovah is salvation"). He is Immanuel, "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). He is the King of*

the Jews. He is a Ruler who shepherds Israel. He is the Christ (“anointed” and the Greek equivalent to “Messiah”).

5. What other details do you see in this passage?

*Allow your small group to share other details that stand out to them and discuss the significance of each point.*



### **Find the purpose of the lesson**

Use these questions to guide small-group members to discover God’s purpose for the passage.

1. When the angel appeared to Joseph, he addressed Joseph’s fears first. What were the possible fears that Joseph was experiencing? When does God have to remind you not to fear?

*Allow your small group to share their personal experiences.*

*Possible answers: Joseph may have feared that Mary would prove to be an unfaithful bride who would bring heartache and humiliation to his life. Perhaps Joseph feared making the wrong decision that would affect his future. Joseph may have feared the unknown. Even Mary and the shepherds, when they heard the news about Jesus, were also first told, “Do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30; 2:10). God knows when we’re afraid, and He encourages us to trust Him.*

2. Herod was “troubled” by news of the birth of the King of the Jews, and Jerusalem suffered the repercussions of his troubled mind (2:3). Why are people today still troubled by the idea of Jesus being King? How does their troubled attitude spill out on the people around them?

*King Jesus deserves our worship and to rule over our lives. We are subject to His authority. Those who rebel against His sovereignty want to rule and reign over themselves. Their rebellious spirit often results in their wielding a*

negative influence over others. Discuss with your small group the blessings that come from bowing to Christ's authority.

3. Which prophecies of Jesus do we see fulfilled in this passage? Why is this important?

*Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and David (1:1–17); Jesus was born of a virgin (1:23); Christ was born in Bethlehem (2:6).*

*If time permits, briefly share how the angel warned Joseph to take Jesus to Egypt (2:15), fulfilling Hosea 11:1, and that Herod ordered the death of all males ages two and under in Bethlehem and surrounding districts (2:16), fulfilling Jeremiah 31:15. Later Joseph moved the family to Nazareth (2:23). The fulfillment of prophecies is a gift from God to strengthen our belief in Jesus as the Christ.*

4. Matthew 2:11 is a beautiful picture of how we interact with Christ.

- a. In this one verse, how did the wise men show humility? Faith? Sacrifice? Adoration?

(Your small group may choose other words to describe what the wise men experienced.)

*Possible answers—humility: they fell down before the Christ Child. Faith: they worshipped Him. They believed that He was the Christ, worthy of more than simple allegiance to a king but also worship as God. Sacrifice: based on Matthew 2:7 and 16, the wise men had probably been traveling for at least several months to reach the King of the Jews. These were wealthy men of position who chose to leave the comforts of home and travel a great distance to meet Jesus. Adoration: they brought gifts worthy of a King.*

- b. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What gifts do you bring to Jesus?

*Discuss the gifts that Christ desires of His followers.*

- c. Between humility, faith, sacrifice, or adoration, which of these acts is your favorite expression of worship before God? Why?

*Allow your small group to respond, and be prepared to share from your own lifestyle of worship. Help your small group think of ways they can daily express humility, faith, sacrifice, and adoration before the Lord.*

5. What other truths from this passage stand out to you? What else can we learn about God or learn about being a follower of Christ?

*Allow everyone to respond. Share any other points of spiritual growth that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention.*



### **Experience the Truth of the Lesson**

Use these questions to guide small-group members to allow God's transformational truths to reshape their hearts and minds.

1. How do we know that God wanted the wise men to find Jesus (2:2, 9)? How did God lead you to find Jesus Christ for yourself? How did you "rejoice" the way the wise men rejoiced when they saw the star (2:10)?

*God was the One who placed the star in the sky to guide them to the Savior. We might also say that only God could work in their hearts to give the wise men the desire to travel such a great distance not only to meet the King of the Jews, but also to worship Him as God. Allow your small group to share their stories of how God led them to meet Jesus.*

2. Jesus was unlike any other deliverer or king that God had provided for the Jews. Think about what you've learned about the deliverers of Israel (Moses, Joshua, the judges, and the kings) and what you know about the life and teachings of Jesus. How was Jesus set apart as the ultimate Deliverer for the Jews? How is Jesus the Deliverer in your life?

*Possible answers: Jesus did not come to help the Jews defeat their enemies in battle; instead, Jesus said to love our enemies (Luke 6:35). Jesus wasn't reestablishing God's people in the Promised Land of Canaan, but He came to reestablish us in a new promised land, Heaven (John 14:2–4). Jesus came to offer complete freedom from the oppression of evil and sin, not freedom from the burden of worldly oppressors (John 8:36).*

3. This story could be told from many different perspectives—that of Mary and Joseph, the wise men, Herod the King, or the chief priests and scribes. Who has the most tragic role in this story? Who has the most blessed role?

*Be prepared to share your own answers.*

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Between the Lines: Truth Points

**Betrothed** (1:18)—the betrothal period before marriage between a Hebrew man and woman was a time of covenant. During the betrothal, the man and woman were legally bound to one another as in marriage, but the two would not be considered married until their relationship was consummated.

**Son of David** (1:20)—Matthew 1:1–17 traces the lineage of Jesus, which includes King David and includes Joseph, the earthly stepfather of Jesus.

**Bethlehem** (2:1)—means “house of bread”; Jesus is the Bread of Life (John 6:48).



**Herod the King** (2:1)—Herod the Great was appointed King of the Jews by Augustus. He was known for his cruelty, but he also attempted to appease the Jews by reconstructing the Temple.

**Magi** (2:1)—a term used to describe educated men who were considered scientists, astrologers, or workers of magic.

**Frankincense** (2:11)—an ingredient used to make the perfume for the Most Holy Place in the tent of meeting (Exodus 30:34–36).

**Myrrh** (2:11)—an ingredient used to make anointing oil (Exodus 30:22–33). Myrrh was used for its pleasant aroma (Esther 2:12; Psalm 45:8) and for embalming (John 19:39).

*The star of Bethlehem was a star of hope that led the wise men to the fulfillment of their expectations, the success of their expedition. Nothing in this world is more fundamental for success in life than hope, and this star pointed to our only source for true hope: Jesus Christ.*

D. JAMES KENNEDY

## LIFE LESSON 28

### FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

- **Red Line Verse:** *“Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?”* (Luke 2:49)
- **Red Line Statement:** Jesus came to fulfill the will of His Father and, even as a youth, He remained focused on His calling.
- **Red Line Connection:** Jesus Christ willingly came to the earth to give His entire life in sacrifice for us according to God’s perfect plan.
- **Focal Passage:** Luke 2:40–52

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#### Listen Attentively to the Lesson

1. Tell the story of Luke 2:40–52 in your own words.

*Context:* Little is known about the childhood of Jesus. Today’s Scripture passage is a rare opportunity to peer into the family life of young Jesus and to consider the interactions He had with Mary and Joseph. While this story has often been taught in isolation from the whole of the life of Christ, putting this story in the context of the *thin red line* helps us to understand at least one reason why God gives us this glimpse into Jesus’ life as a youth. Even as a child, Jesus had a desire to fulfill His calling and obey the will of His Father.

2. Reconstruct Luke 2:40–52 together, including as many details as your small group remembers.
3. Read the passage aloud together from Scripture, confirming the facts of the story. Amend any details suggested by small-group members that did not accurately represent the Scripture.



### **Investigate the Facts of the Lesson**

Use these questions to guide small-group members to investigate the facts of this passage.

1. When and where did this event occur (v. 41)? What is the significance of this celebration?

*They were in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of the Passover, which was first instituted when God sent the tenth plague (death of the firstborn) upon Egypt (Exodus 12:1–28). The Passover Feast celebrated God's deliverance from bondage and death, and included the death of a lamb without spot or blemish. Jesus Himself would be the perfect Lamb of God who would deliver us from bondage and death. The Feast of the Passover will be significant again when Jesus celebrates the Last Supper with His disciples in Jerusalem (Life Lesson 36).*

2. How did Jesus get separated from Mary and Joseph (vv. 43–44)?

*Traveling with extended family and friends, or even as a village, was common in this culture. Mary and Joseph assumed that Jesus was among their caravan of travelers.*

3. What were the emotions that Mary and Joseph experienced in this passage?

*Discuss the feeling of a parent when a child is lost, which Mary described as an anxious search (v. 48). They also experienced astonishment (v. 48), confusion (v. 50), and a sense of wonder or contemplation for Mary (v. 51).*

4. What was Jesus doing in Jerusalem (v. 46)? Why were the people astonished (v. 47)?

*Jesus was dialoging with the teachers in the Temple. They were astonished at His understanding and His answers.*

5. What other details do you see in this passage?

*Allow your small group to share other details that stand out to them and discuss the significance of each point.*



### **Find the purpose of the lesson**

Use these questions to guide small-group members to discover God's purpose for the passage.

1. Jesus was only 12 when this event occurred (v. 42). The Temple leaders weren't expecting a youth to be capable of such depths of understanding.

- a. How old were you when an understanding of God became a priority in your life?

*Allow your small group to respond.*

- b. Do you consider it a normal part of the Christian life to search out the wisdom of God, or do you find it astonishing and remarkable when you meet someone who passionately seeks God?

*As people respond, help small-group members realize that their personal expectations can have a major impact on their own walk with Christ as well as the walk of the people around them. When our expectations are low and we believe that only “especially called” people live that kind of lifestyle, we won’t search for God with diligence and we won’t encourage others to live for Christ. When we begin to believe that every Christian can have a deep understanding of the things of God, we will seek God with a passion and will naturally nudge our loved ones to join us on this quest to know God.*

2. Jesus was fully God and fully man, and here we see the young Jesus being teachable. He carved out time to listen, ask questions, and discuss the things of God.

- a. What must take place in our hearts to make us teachable?

*Possible answers: humility; a thirst for knowledge; a maturity to respect those who have knowledge that we don’t yet have; curiosity, and interest.*

- b. What are your personal challenges to being deeply interested in the things of God?

*Be willing to share honestly about your own personal struggles. As your small group shares issues of time constraints, mental fatigue, or other personal challenges, don’t end the discussion with the challenges. Ask your small group to meet each challenge with a solution.*

3. When Mary asked Jesus about what happened, Jesus responded with two questions (v. 49).

- a. How does Jesus’ response show that He was aware of His identity as the Son of God?

*Jesus called God His Father, and Jesus realized that He was on the earth to do His Father’s will or “business” (NKJV).*

b. How did Jesus' actions match His calling?

*Jesus was growing in knowledge and preparing Himself to fulfill His calling. (This concept may be difficult for some to grasp, that the Son of God was gaining knowledge, but Luke 2:52 indicates that Jesus experienced growth.)*

c. How do your actions match your calling?

*Allow everyone to respond. Are they aware of their calling? Are they fulfilling the call?*

4. Mary and Joseph were astonished by Jesus (v. 48), and they didn't understand (v. 50). Should they have understood? Who else was close to Jesus but also misunderstood Him?

*No one was as close to Jesus during His childhood as Mary and Joseph, yet they struggled to understand who He was. Your small-group members may have different ideas about how much Mary and Joseph should have understood, because they both had been given individual instruction through an angel about the identity of Jesus before His birth. However, the disciples also often misunderstood Jesus during their days of ministry. Ask your small group to be encouraged and not discouraged by Mary and Joseph's lack of understanding. God was patient with them. Despite their human limitations, God gave them the privilege to watch over the growth of Jesus. God is patient with us too. We must keep moving forward in obedience to God.*

5. Mary tucked this experience in her heart, much like her response when the shepherds came at Jesus' birth (2:19). How do you hold onto the truths God teaches you in the moments of your life? Do you allow yourself time to ponder your experiences and hear God's voice?

*Encourage your small group to value the importance of learning each lesson God teaches them through life experiences. Challenge them to invest time to think, reflect, and pray.*

6. What other truths from this passage stand out to you? What else can we learn about God or learn about being a follower of Christ?

*Allow everyone to respond. Share any other points of spiritual growth that the Holy Spirit brings to your attention.*



### **Experience the Truth of the Lesson**

Use these questions to guide small-group members to allow God's transformational truths to reshape their hearts and minds.

1. How would your life change if you followed the example of Jesus and invested more time seeking a deeper understanding of God?

*Such a question warrants giving your small group a moment to sit still and seek the answer from God. Give everyone a moment, and then challenge each person to give a specific answer. Encourage them to "dream big" about how purposeful and fulfilling their life journeys could be if they went deeper in their walk with Christ. Then ask, "Is there anything stopping you from making this life adjustment?"*

2. With so little of Jesus' childhood recorded in Scripture, we must consider that God had a specific purpose in sharing this story with us. How does this story connect with God's plan of redemption on the thin red line?

*Possible answer: God's plan has always been to send His Son to be our Savior. Jesus' self-awareness at such a young age gives us deeper insight into His passion, purpose, and sense of urgency for being obedient even unto death on the Cross (Philippians 2:8).*

3. Luke 2:52 is a summary of Jesus' childhood, and it's a great formula for life. What did Jesus value in His growth? How can you stay balanced in your personal growth to live more like Jesus?

*Jesus grew mentally, spiritually, and physically, and He grew in His relationships both with God and with people. Ask your small group to discuss the blessings of well-rounded growth and meaningful relationships. Ask them to allow God to work in any areas they have been neglecting. Pray that each of you will value what God has called valuable.*

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Between the Lines: Truth Points

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**Feast of the Passover** (v. 41)—the first of the three annual festivals of the Jews. The animal to be slain was selected on the tenth day of the month and killed on the fourteenth day, then eaten (Exodus 12:3, 6). This feast was also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread because unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days after Passover (Exodus 13:6–7; 23:15).

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**Caravan** (v. 44)—a group of travelers who journeyed together for safety or comfort.

**Nazareth** (v. 51)—a small village in lower Galilee. Jesus was often named in association with this city of His childhood, being called "Jesus of Nazareth"; when Jesus appeared to Saul (Paul), He also identified Himself as "Jesus the Nazarene" (Acts 22:8).

*We spend our lives dreaming of the future, not realizing that a little of it slips away every day.*

BARBARA JOHNSON