

## CoreGroup Guide | Why Did Jesus Have to Die? – Part 1

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### From Pastor Charity

This week we begin our new Lenten series, which invites us to wrestle with one of the most important questions of the Christian faith: *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?* The series creates space to explore that question honestly, faithfully, and with hope as we prepare for Easter.

Our shared practice for this series is **Worship**. Take a look at the *Start / Grow / Stretch* on the [Shared Practices](#) page. Reflect on where you are and where you hope to go. Try to be present in worship each Sunday during Lent and open yourself to the meaning of Jesus' death.

### Welcome

*"The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter. A good many different theories have been held as to how it works; what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work."*

Writer and theologian C.S. Lewis summed it up pretty well in his book *Mere Christianity*. As much as we would like a clear answer, no one can say with complete certainty why Jesus had to die. Instead, we are given an invitation to wrestle with the story of Jesus' death and resurrection as a way to draw closer to God. Throughout this series, we will need to be open to bumping into new ideas, asking questions, and reconsidering previously held ideas.

### Opening Prayer

God, we enter into the journey of Lent hoping to grow closer to you. While we believe in the power of the cross, we admit that at times we do not fully understand it. Help us to open ourselves to varying perspectives and to be comfortable dwelling in mystery. We trust that your Spirit will guide us and encourage us as we explore why Jesus died on the cross. Amen.

### Ice Breaker

What is the most impressive thing you have ever won?

### The Head

For centuries Christians have been trying to explain the purpose, process, and implications of Jesus' death. The answers they have come up with are called *atonement theories*. Each week of this series we will look at a different atonement theory as a way of broadening our understanding of the cross and experiencing the hope of the cross from a different perspective.

This week we start with the Christus Victor theory, which reflects much of the language of the New Testament and was popular in the early church. It views Jesus' death and resurrection as the key to victory in the battle between good and evil, light and dark, God and demonic powers.

Jesus is thought to have absorbed the forces of evil on the cross and instead of succumbing to them, he demonstrates his power over them in his resurrection.

Read this description from the New Testament book of Hebrews:

### **Hebrews 2:14-18**

*14 Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.*

*16 For it is clear that he did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham.*

*17 Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.*

- According to these verses, what did Jesus' death accomplish?
- What does verse 16 mean when it says that Jesus did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham? Who are the brothers and sisters referenced here?
- How would you describe the Christus Victor theory in your own words?
- How does the Christus Victor theory impact your view of God?
- What specific songs, prayers, or worship practices reflect a Christus Victor vision of the cross?

### **The Heart**

The evidence of a struggle between good and evil is not difficult to find in our world, but it can also feel present in incredibly personal ways. We can find ourselves feeling trapped or held back by the consequences of our own sin and the brokenness of our world. Not only did Jesus share in our temptations and sufferings, but he also secured a victory against pain, death, and destruction to be shared. This good news can allow us to experience a new kind of freedom.

- What are your first impressions of the Christus Victor theory?
- Do you buy into its explanation for Jesus' death? Why or why not?
- How does the idea of Jesus having already defeated sin and death speak to your current fears or anxieties?
- How does a Christus Victor understanding of the cross impact the ways you engage with injustice and suffering in the world?
- What holds you back from experiencing the freedom to which God invites you?

### **The Hands**

None of us will connect with every atonement theory we discuss during this series, but each theory can teach us something about the way we follow Jesus. The victory that Christ won on the cross impacts us on a spiritual level, but how does it impact the way we live our lives?

- What is one piece of this theory that you will wrestle with this week?

- What steps could you take to join Jesus in the fight against darkness in our world?
- What signs of light (literal and symbolic) do you see around you? How can you amplify those glimmers?

## Closing Prayer

Jesus, we thank you for becoming human, living among us, and sharing in the same struggles we experience. You have freed us from the power of sin. Through your death we get to share in your victory. Make us people who can live without fear, push back the darkness of the world, and share the hope you have given us. Amen.

## Going Deeper

This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a memory verse that you can learn on your own or together with your group. The recommended memory verse for the *Why Did Jesus Have to Die* series is John 3:16-7 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

*16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. 17 God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

Here are three simple ways to practice memorizing a verse:

1. **Write it** (one time a day on a notecard, in your notes app, or on your mirror).
2. **Say it out loud** (at the same time daily - driving, brushing teeth, before bed).
3. **Pray it** (turn the verse into a one sentence prayer for yourself or someone you love).

## Additional Resources

The Lenten devotional is a great companion to the sermon series and will offer both similar and fresh perspectives on the meaning of Jesus' death. If you haven't done so already, you can sign up to receive the devotional here: [Lenten Devotional 2026](#)

## References

*Why Did Jesus Have to Die: The Meaning of the Crucifixion* by Adam Hamilton.

*Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis.