



Movie Length: 42 minutes

Objective of the study: Although it can stand alone, this study is designed to go along with the “My Son, My Savior” movie using the faith journey of Mary to help participants understand the true nature of Jesus as true God and true man who entered our world so we could enter his and grasp the central importance of his sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world so we could be his family. The focus is on God’s activity, not hers.

Uses: These lessons are meant to serve several different audiences and therefore can be customized as needed and used with flexibility. The possible settings and approaches should be easily customizable for anything from 45–90 minutes sessions. They also assume that some may download them as a commentary on the sections of the movie.

- **Large/Small Classes with highly trained teachers:** Teachers can pick and choose what best fits their style, audience, insights, experience...and time slot. They should feel free to spend more time on any one aspect and assign the rest for personal reading and study. The narrative part would not have to be read (perhaps put it into their own words) as they go through the flow of the lesson.
- **Classes with less trained leaders:** Study leaders may want to ensure that narrative paragraphs are read to clarify the truths being emphasized. Questions, where the answers seem unclear, can be assigned for research (ask the pastor, good commentary?) to be revisited the next week.
- **Small group studies:** Group leaders can spend more time on the discussion of the questions and perhaps do further research with the passages that are used as references for the narratives.
- **Individual study:** For those who view the movie it can be the basis for further study. It could be assigned to a congregation for home devotion during the week (splitting each lesson into 4-5 segments for a daily devotion time). It also may become a downloadable commentary for those who have viewed the movie and need further details to learn about the themes brought out in the movie.

Good resource book: Bible History Commentaries by Werner H. Franzmann

Approach: The leader does not need to teach everything in the lesson but should choose what is most appropriate or needed for your audience and time. You could split the lessons into the segments and...assign some for homework, or have different groups work on different sections during the lesson to report back or split into additional lessons...or just skip sections not needed to make your main point for the lesson.

Objective for Each Session: Keep these in mind throughout the lessons.

Session One: Participants should be able to recognize how God works through people even in seemingly impossible situations, like Mary, to play important roles in his plan to bring salvation to the world and through them to bring hope to the world, and in faith trust he has equipped us for our role in his plan too.

Session Two: Participants should be able to verbalize the nature of Christ as true God and true man, and to recognize how God prepares hearts by calling them to repentance to believe and trust in him for real peace.

Session Three: Participants should be drawn to the miracles and message of Jesus to understand that he IS the Message that God is bringing to the world and that opposition to him is a rejection of the eternal life he came to bring and the intimate relationship with him as the family of God.

Session Four: Participants should be able to recognize the realities of suffering in our world are more evidence of sin and that the Lamb of God came not only to live a perfect life but to be the substitute sacrifice for our sins, so we could stand innocent and holy in the presence of God forever.

Addressing Legends about Mary and the View of her as Priority Saint:

The story of Mary is an encouraging journey of faith that is often given very little attention beyond Christmas. It is valuable to realize that Mary spent more time with Jesus on earth than any other—from the pre-conception prophecies to his birth, to his death and resurrection, and then as one growing as a follower. How God dealt with her and how she responded help us also understand our journey of faith as we walk along with Mary on hers. It is the focus on the biblical account that is the attention in this study. It leads us to see her role was all about being the special person God selected in order for God in Christ to become fully human and in raising him to prepare him for his ministry which he alone could accomplish.

Unfortunately, legends, pious speculations, and traditions about Mary have raised her beyond the role we see Scripture has ascribed to her and cloud the primary focus on Jesus. The evolving doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and the perceived appearances of Mary have raised her to a role at times alongside Jesus and other times equal to the work of the Holy Spirit. Some of the legends and traditions turned into dogmas and doctrines within the Catholic Church that have no scriptural foundation include:

- **Immaculate Conception:** This claims that Mary had to be holy to be able to give birth to Jesus if he was to be sinless. Nowhere in Scripture is this implied. We see her flaws and desire for a savior.
- **Perpetual Virginity:** Matthew 1:25 says (Joseph) had no union with her until (Gr: ews) she gave birth to a son. We have no reason to believe that she didn't fulfill the sexual joys and bonds that honor marriage as God intended it. Several times we see Mary along with Jesus' brothers and sister. Nothing leads us to understand this as anything other than Mary's other children.
- **Giver of Blessings:** This also is an injected interpretation that emerged from stretching the meaning of and interpretation of Gabriel's greeting as "Hail Mary, full of grace," instead of "Greetings, you are highly favored" and from Elizabeth's words "blessed are you among women" as if there was some intrinsic quality in Mary that makes her a provider of blessings to others.
- **Queen of Heaven:** This term is not used in a positive sense in the Old Testament describing false gods. The phrase is unfortunately used to put Mary next to Jesus in the honor and ruling in heaven.
- **Co-Redemptrix:** This view claims that Mary also played a part in redeeming the world by the pain she felt at the death of her son. This is often the misapplication of Simeon's words that a "sword will pierce your heart also" to implied she suffered too as part of our redemption.
- **Mother of the Church:** This view tries to claim that when Jesus told John, "Behold, your mother" he was declaring her to be the mother of all believers (Church), rather than Jesus caring for the well-being of his mother during the days after his death. In Acts 1 she is mentioned alongside the rest of the disciples. The rest of Scripture makes no mention of her and our relationship to her.
- **Intercessor:** Since the view is that Mary is next to Jesus in heaven, she is the one who can talk her son into providing the answer to our prayers. Yet there is only ONE mediator between God and man—Jesus; no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. Jesus tells us to ask him...that we have direct access to the Father.
- **Assumption of Mary:** This is a more recently sanctioned legend (1950) that Mary never saw death but was "assumed" directly into heaven. It matches up with the claim that Mary was without sin. There is no evidence in Scripture of what happened to Mary beyond Pentecost.

Many different practices developed over the centuries in connection with these teachings. The saying of the Rosary (Hail, Mary full of Grace, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death) seeking her help. Shrines promise special blessings and icons of Mary get special veneration. There are hundreds of titles ascribed to her and different countries have their own Virgin Mary (Our Lady of...Lourdes, Guadalupe, Madjugorjes, Clairvaux, Fatima) based on claims of apparitions of Mary at those locations.

The term “Theotokos,” bearer of God is often used and can be a legitimate expression to denote how special that child was—God himself. It often, however, has been used to raise the adoration of Mary in her role of mother rather than Christ as Messiah. Pious speculation needs to be replaced with biblical evidence.

The beauty of the story of Mary is that she was an ordinary girl that God equipped to bear the Messiah. We see Mary troubled, panicked, interfering, overprotecting, being rebuked, but ultimately believing and trusting what her son, God’s Son, had come to do for her and all the rest of the world. She too looked for the savior from sin and struggled with the sinful responses and misguided actions that we all struggle with. Yet she, like us, grew in seeing Jesus as the one who brings her forgiveness and raises her and all of us to the status of saints in God’s eyes—ones who will share a heightened relationship with him in his heaven. The movie and subsequent discussions lay the foundation to gain a balanced view of Mary.

Lesson Flow: An introductory lesson is available for just viewing the 41½ minute movie plus an initial discussion about the themes and impact from viewers. The remaining 4 lessons are set up to be used by introducing the topic; incorporating approximately 10-minute segments of the movie and studying related Bible passages to understand its application for their lives today. To help the leader, understand the flow and the participant catch or review the main points, narratives often introduce or follow the questions to give pause between questions or activities and provide a summary of what will be or was learned. The leader can decide how much of those paragraphs will be read (or merely referred to). Most lessons encourage the use of the Bible for the main account while some of the Bible passages have been included in the worksheet to encourage circling or underlining key phrases and maximizing discussion time.

Lesson Flexibility: The *My Son, My Savior* study is designed for flexibility. It can be used for large groups, small groups, or individual study. The Bible study leader should not feel obligated to read every word and work through every question on the worksheets but adjust the teaching approach based on time limitations, size of the group, Biblical understanding, and the response of the participants. If time and approach do not allow a group to cover all the material, the leader may want to identify the passage in each section that most connects with the point and concentrate on it, have different groupings of 3–5 concentrate on one of the passages, or assign for self-study the parts that couldn’t be covered.

Small Group discussions for any setting: The recommendation is to work through the lesson ahead of time and choose 2–3 of the questions or series of questions to be small group discussions. Depending on the learning activity, give approximately 3–5 minutes for small groups (3–7 individuals) to work through answers (see Further Helps). The rest of the questions can be used for whole group discussions or quiet individual digging. Inject your own examples or insights. Be sure to provide time for reflection. Individuals need time to let God’s Word settle into their personal context both to prepare to answer a question (follow a 10-second wait rule) or in applying it to life (some quiet time to think, write down or pray).

Suggestions for Session Flow:

1. Start each session by capturing the joys, struggles, or concerns participants had that week ... Praying related to input and asking the Holy Spirit’s guidance on the study.
2. Spend a moment recounting the main point of the previous lesson and touching on last week’s assignment – how participants “put it into practice.”
3. Set the tone with the opening question – break into small groups when possible.
4. View the “My Son, My Savior” video segment. Get feedback to find out what struck them most and what questions emerge for them (write them down and come back to those questions at an appropriate place in the lesson).
5. Dig deeper with each segment by working through the passages and related questions. If time is of the essence, merely draw their attention to key points in some segments so that you can slow down to better work through segments you (or they) determine are most applicable for them. Keep the flow on track but don’t let it feel rushed during the class or crowded at the end.

6. Refer to (or go to) appropriate sidebar references where you can go deeper into the topics if needed.
7. End by recapping the main point, make assignments, (the Put into Practice section and/or those questions or sections you went through too quickly) and offer a closing prayer.

FURTHER HELPS FOR LEADING THE BIBLE STUDIES

In preparing for teaching the course you will be thinking mainly of learning content. Once the class is underway, you will be just as concerned with the process of making learning “easier.” This includes influencing the dynamics of the learning environment: the way you present the information; the atmosphere you set; and the attitude you show toward the participants. It is extremely helpful for you as the leader to be well-informed of the topic and continue to learn.

Leading the sessions should be flexible to the context of the lives of the participants, whether old or young, learning and learned Christian. Participants need to see how timeless Scriptural messages are connected to everyday life today. Determine what the participants may already know and build from that. Involve them as much as possible in the discovery of answers and how it will apply to their lives. Be sensitive to the time factor but give opportunities to ask questions without getting too far off track.

The lessons are designed with recognition of differing learning styles in mind—those who absorb best by listening, those who need to talk in smaller settings, those who need to view things on the screen or the page. It would be good for the leader to keep in mind and incorporate the following tenets of adult learning if it isn't the leader's primary teaching style:

- Self-directed – giving some freedom for the class to express what they most want to learn.
- Experience-oriented – building off the rich personal and professional experiences of those present.
- Task-directed – giving the individual an activity that will help the learning.
- Problem solving – providing time and resources to find solutions that especially apply to them.
- Immediate feedback – testing out what was learned and how it will apply to life.

Be conscious of the time but also be inconspicuous about it. Participants have heavy demands of their time and appreciate when it is respected. Start on time and end on time. Make the sessions worth their time. Know what the main points need to be. Be prepared to only lightly touch those elements you don't have time for.

Preparation

- Work through the study on your own to capture what God is communicating to you personally.
- Prayerfully picture each participant and their situation, choose the best questions to apply to their spiritual or situational needs.
- Think of the timing and involvement levels of your sessions. Determine how many questions the group can realistically cover in the time you have. The goal is not to get through all the material but to ensure the key points are covered and the group leaves with the main point.
- If the group is large, find ways to break out several times during the class into smaller discussion teams to encourage wider participation and more personal connection. Small group time is a valuable component that builds group learning, support, and accountability. These times also provide a pause from the heavy content. The process provides opportunities for individuals to share personal challenges as well as practical lessons and stories that will benefit others.

Small group discussion and learning activities

The following are suggestions for small group discussions and learning activities. Remember that the first small group discussion will help show the participants how these discussions will happen throughout the course. Take

time and be clear to set the expectations when you organize the first small group discussion. When it is time for small group discussion, it may be helpful to:

1. Shuffle the leadership for each small group discussion to get everyone involved. One way of doing that is suggesting who will be the leader this time (*e.g. most children, fanciest dressed, most humorous, oldest, earliest birthday, - see list for others*). This provides a bit of a mental pause (often humor) and a break to build the relationships before moving forward.
2. Clarify specifically what you are expecting of them. Provide any extra detail ahead of time needed to help them work together as a group.
3. Tell them the time limit they have. Generally speaking, when assigning these small group learning activities, it's better to point to the clock and say, "*We have until ... (time on the clock)*" or "*Use the next seven minutes...*" Then, when there is one-minute left, come back to the front and announce, "One-minute left."
4. When the time is up, focus attention again to the front. Have the leader for one table at a time briefly share just one helpful comment from their discussion. Go on to the next table without comment and have them add something new. If they have nothing new to add, they can pass. Keep the pace moving. Decide how much information you want to solicit. Don't feel you have to exhaust everything they have talked about. Savor moments of humor before moving on.

When assigning small group or learning activities, it's best to get out of the way. Don't "hover" over the tables, "mingle," or ask, "how's it going here?" Let them work. Make them think, wrestle, and figure it out together. That's how people learn. Each session can end with a Small Group Reflection time to capture the "Aha" discoveries and how they will apply to individual life.

Room arrangement

The seating arrangement can exert a strong influence on group dynamics. Be conscious of the hindrance of sitting in rows (lecture style). Participant engagement can be enhanced by arranging participants in groups of 3–7 people (or in a way that they can easily slide into that size grouping). Tables give them a point of common contact and allow them to sit comfortably for writing in their worksheets. If possible, use round or square tables. These provide more eye contact with each other, facilitate equal group discussion, and still can be arranged so that everyone has a view of the facilitator. This may not be possible in your space but think of how to get close to the concept by having people sit or interact in clusters. The following are some of the most common arrangements (depending on the type of room and resources available):

