



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

No Matter What / Week 1

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SERIES SUMMARY

A 3-week series about Easter.

WEEK 1: Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.

WEEK 2: Easter reminds us we're important no matter what.

WEEK 3: Easter reminds us we're forgiven no matter what.

SCRIPTURE

"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins" (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- Tell a personal story about an Easter tradition your family had when you were growing up.
- Many of us look forward to the Easter season because of candy and traditions, but it's really a time to remember and celebrate an event that shows us that no matter what, Jesus loves us.

TENSION

- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, "Jesus loves you no matter what"? Maybe you ...
 - Hear it a lot and believe it is true.
 - Never thought much about Jesus or how He feels about you.
 - Wonder if it could be true because of the not-so-great things you've done.
- No matter what we think, feel, or do, Easter is the proof that Jesus loves us totally and completely.

TRUTH

- In the Bible, we read about John, who was waiting for God to send the Savior He'd promised.

- While we don't know exactly what John was thinking, we can guess that he may have had a lot of questions about whether God was going to fulfill the promises He'd made. John may have wondered if God had abandoned them, forgotten them, or was disappointed in them.
- In the New Testament, we read that Jesus met John, and John began to follow Him. He even became one of Jesus' closest friends.
- Even Jesus' closest followers struggled to understand His teachings and actions at times. They had questions and doubts. But then Jesus' resurrection happened, and it changed everything.
- At Easter, we remember when Jesus died on a cross and was buried in a tomb. And we celebrate the fact that He came back to life three days later.
- John grew up studying the Scriptures and understood that death was usually a consequence of sin. In order to avoid death, something needed to be sacrificed to take the punishment from the person. God sent Jesus to Earth to sacrifice Himself for us and pay the price for our sins. When He came back to life, Jesus defeated death.
- Jesus' resurrection allows us to experience life with God now and forever. It shows us that God loves each of us so much. (1 John 4:9-10)
- Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.

APPLICATION

- The things John wrote about that related to Jesus loving everyone no matter what applied back then, and they still apply to us today.
- We can personalize 1 John 4:9-10 as if it was written just for us.
- Easter changed the way we can relate to God forever; we can have a relationship with Him because of Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.

LANDING

- Your Small Group is a great place to talk about and process what you've heard today.
- What's one thing that makes it hard to believe that you're loved no matter what?

THINK ABOUT THIS

Be prepared for and open to potential doubts, questions, and uncertainties that your students may express throughout this series. Remember that the things we talk about at Easter can feel abstract or distant to your middle schoolers, and that can make those things hard to believe. Your job isn't to answer all their questions, prove all the points, or shut down any doubts. Your role is simply to create a safe space for them to share and process. Let them sit in the tension of not being sure what they believe at times. Learning to ask questions and think for themselves is part of growing and maturing not just in their faith, but as people. If they express doubts or questions, see them as a chance to start great (and potentially life-changing) conversations with your students.

INTERACTIVE 1: CANDY SHOWER

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll throw handfuls of an Easter candy of your choosing into the audience to help celebrate the season.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Easter candy of your choice (You'll need enough to throw handfuls into the crowd.)

INTERACTIVE 2: STORY CUT-OUTS

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll use large cardboard cut-outs of people from Scripture to help tell and personalize the Easter story.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 3 different large cardboard cut-outs of fictional or non-fictional characters/people that will represent the following individuals from Scripture: John, Mary Magdalene, and Peter. These can be fun and don't have to be serious or realistic-looking cut-outs.
- 3 letter-size pieces of paper
- A bold marker
- Tape

HOW-TO

- Using the paper and marker, create a name tag for each cut-out.
 - Tape the name tags onto the cardboard cut-outs and place them on stage.
 - These three cut-outs will remain on stage for the entire Easter series.
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TEACHING SCRIPT

No Matter What / Week 1

PRELUDE SOCIAL WORSHIP STORY GROUPS HOME

BOTTOM LINE

EASTER REMINDS US WE'RE LOVED NO MATTER WHAT.

INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

What's up, friends?! Welcome to the Easter season! My name is _____, and I'm so excited to be here with you.

INTERACTIVE: Easter Candy Shower

This is where you'll throw handfuls of an Easter candy of your choosing into the audience to help celebrate the season.

It's officially the time for the best candy of the year. Marshmallow Peeps, Jelly Beans, Sweetheart Chicks, Eggs, Bunnies, Reese's Peanut Butter Eggs, and my favorite . . . [*Insert the name of your favorite Easter candy here and throw handfuls of it into the crowd!*]

One of my favorite things about Easter besides candy? Traditions! There are certain things about Easter that I look forward to every year no matter what!

TELL A PERSONAL STORY

Tell a story from your own life that illustrates the following thoughts or ideas . . .

- Talk about a tradition your family had at Easter every year growing up.
- Maybe it was the way everyone decorated together, or a meal you always cooked, or an egg hunt you did each season. (Bonus points if you can bring a picture, a prop, or a visual representation of the tradition to show as you share your story!)
- Try to illustrate how you looked forward to this part of Easter and knew it was coming ever year, no matter what!

Now, while the candy, and the decorations, and the games, and the fun Easter traditions are cool, Easter is really a time to remember and celebrate an event that drastically shifted the

entire world. An event that shows us that no matter who we are, what we do, or what we think about all this faith stuff, Jesus loves us, no matter what.

TENSION

2 MINUTES

Can I ask you a question? What comes to mind when you hear this phrase?

Jesus loves you no matter what.

Maybe you've heard people say it before. It might be the kind of thing your parents say, or your grandma always talks about, or something you hear every week when you're at church. To you, this isn't just something you hear about at Easter; it's something you hear all the time! It might even be something you believe. You show up at church, you read your Bible, and you want to get know Jesus more because you believe He loves you no matter what.

After all, it sounds pretty good, right? I mean, the idea that the Jesus we talk about here at church every single week loves you no matter what? That's pretty awesome.

Or maybe you've never really thought about it before. Sure, all this Easter stuff sounds pretty good. And the idea that anybody would love you no matter what? Well, that's not too bad either. But Jesus? Well, you haven't really given much thought to Him or how He feels about you. You've got school, and sports, and siblings, and friends, and activities, and social media, and video games, and all the other very real things that take up space in your mind as a middle schooler. All this Jesus stuff and what it has to do with you? You've just never really thought about it.

Or maybe you hear the phrase, "Jesus loves you no matter what," and wonder if it could be true. At Easter, we talk about Jesus dying on the cross and then coming back to life to show us that He loves us no matter what. But if you're honest, that feels a little hard to believe. Maybe it's easier to believe God is angry, or disappointed, or distant no matter what. If He's this big, all-knowing God, then that means He knows the things you've done, for better or for worse. He knows you've cheated on tests, or lied to your parents, or shown up at that party you knew you weren't supposed to be at. He knows the way you've treated other people or the things you've tried to keep secret. And because of that, you feel like it would be almost impossible to believe that He could love you, no matter what.

Well, whatever comes to mind for you when you think about Jesus loving you no matter what, here's one thing I want you to know: It's true! No matter what we think, no matter what we feel, no matter what we do, **Easter is the proof that Jesus loves us totally and completely.**

How do I know? Well, not only because I've experienced it, but because I've learned a thing or two about it from one of Jesus' closest friends.

TRUTH

6 MINUTES

INTERACTIVE: Easter Story Cut-Outs

This is where you'll use large cardboard cut-outs of people from Scripture to help tell and personalize the Easter story.

Now there were a lot of people from Scripture who were directly impacted by Jesus and played a part in the Easter story. *[Motion to the three cardboard cut-outs.]* In the coming weeks, we'll talk about all of them, but today I'm talking about a guy named **John**. *[Display at the front of the stage the cut-out that you choose to represent John. Interact with it and motion to it throughout the Truth section of your talk.]*

Quick backstory: John was Jewish, so he grew up studying the Scriptures (what we now call the Old Testament). Those Scriptures tell the story of God and the history of the Jewish people. But, like many Jewish people at the time, John was waiting for God to send the Savior, the Rescuer, that He had promised to send. It had been a long, long time of waiting for God to fulfill His promise. Hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of years.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I have to wait, and wait, and wait on someone, I start to wonder if something is up. Maybe they're angry at me? Maybe I've done something wrong? So, I think it's fair to guess that John might have wondered the same thing. Maybe he wondered if God was angry at him and at His people. What was God up to? Maybe He'd abandoned them, or had forgotten about them, or was disappointed in them. We can't be totally sure what John was wondering, but we do know John was human. Because of that, I'd guess that at some point, he probably questioned whether or not the God he learned about when he was growing up was really a loving and good God. If He really would fulfill all the promises He had made. And I would bet John wondered what was taking God so long.

But then, something really big happened. **God sent His Son, Jesus, to the world.** And as we see in the beginning of the second part of the Bible called the New Testament, Jesus met John, and John began to follow Him. In fact, John became one of Jesus' closest friends while He was on Earth.

So being that up close and personal to Jesus, you'd think that John probably got it right away. He saw several miracles Jesus performed. He saw the way Jesus treated people. John heard Jesus preach powerful sermons about the Kingdom of God. He heard Jesus talk about how in God's kingdom the hungry are fed, thirsty are filled, refugees are welcomed in, naked are clothed, sick are cared for, and prisoners are freed. John listened to all the stuff Jesus taught about what it means to love others. And because of that, John just figured out that God really did love us all no matter what, right?

Well, not exactly. See, the stories in the Gospels, which are the four books that detail Jesus' life on Earth, show us time and again the way Jesus' followers struggled to understand His teaching.

There were several times where even His closest followers were confused about what Jesus was talking about (and doing!!!).

- Why did Jesus talk to certain people?
- How did Jesus have control over the storms?
- What did Jesus mean when He said "blessed are the poor"?

Jesus' followers heard what He said and saw what He did, but they had questions. They had doubts. They didn't always get it. Honestly, they were just like us in that way!

But then, something else happened. Something that we celebrate every year at Easter. And that something changed everything. That something was **the resurrection**.

So, your first question might be: *What do you mean, "the resurrection"?*
And your second one is probably: *Why does this matter to me or my friends?*

Well, let me break it down.

To *resurrect* something means to bring it back to life. So, at Easter, we remember when Jesus died on a cross and was buried in a tomb. And then we celebrate the fact that He walked out of

the tomb three days later. In other words, He *came back to life*, which is what we call the resurrection.

Why is this a big deal? Well, for starters, Jesus said lots of things while He was alive—including that He was going to rise from the dead. So if He had stayed dead after He was killed, that would've meant that everything He said during His lifetime wasn't true. But as we know, that's not what happened. Jesus did come back to life, just like He said He would! And that meant that everything else He said during His life was true, too.

John, who grew up studying the Scriptures, would have known that death was usually a consequence of sin. So, when somebody committed a sin or made a mistake, the punishment would have been death. In order to avoid that death, something needed to be sacrificed in order to take the punishment from the person.

And that's where Jesus came in! See, God sent Jesus to Earth to sacrifice Himself for us. To pay the price for our sins. To make sure that we don't have to carry the weight of those mistakes or experience their consequences. But then, **Jesus came back to life!** He defeated death! That means that death doesn't have any power anymore. Even though we will physically die, Jesus made a way for that not to be the end of the story. If we believe in Him, then we get to know that we will live with Him forever, no matter what! That is something worth celebrating!

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross changed so much for so many of us, including John! John didn't need to wonder if God had given up on keeping His promise. Jesus' resurrection showed John that God did really love him. And it also showed him that God loves people who aren't like him, too!

God loves every person enough that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross. He loves every person enough to defeat death. He loves every person enough to make a way for John (and for all of us!) to be in a relationship with Him that will last forever!

See, **Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.**

And we know this because John wrote it down. Later in his life, he reflected on his experiences and wrote this in a letter to other believers:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).

John was there when this all happened. He walked with Jesus, watched Him get crucified on a cross, and then saw Him alive again three days later. When John wrote about this love that God has for all of us and the sacrifice of Jesus, he knew what he was talking about!

Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.

APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

All this stuff John wrote about in the verse we looked at? All the stuff that reminded him that Jesus really did love everyone no matter what? Well, that same stuff applies to our lives, too.

Let's look at this verse again. But this time, I want you to read it in a different way. I want you to read it as if it was written just for you.

God showed how much he loved _____(Insert your name here) by sending his one and only Son into the world so that _____(Insert your name here) might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that _____(Insert your name here) loved God, but that he loved _____(Insert your name here) and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away _____'s (Insert your name here) sins (1 John 4:9-10 NLT).

So, what does this Scripture have to do with each of us in this room? Well, what's awesome about Scripture is that we can personalize it as if it was written just for us. Personalizing a verse like this helps remind us of what God says is true for all of us. The Scripture that we just read about God's love is true for you, and it's true for me. And that's why Easter matters today! It didn't just matter for people who lived thousands of years ago. Easter was the event in history that changed the way each of us can relate to God forever. We can have a relationship with God because of what we celebrate at Easter!

Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

Maybe this is the first time you've heard some of this stuff today. Or maybe you're just hearing it in a new way. A way that makes you want to lean in and learn a little more. A way that makes you want to really believe that you're loved no matter what.

Well, your Small Group is a great place to talk about that. We meet in Small Groups every week so that we can have a safe place to process what we're feeling or thinking when it comes to our faith, family, and friends. And it's also a place to share with adults like your Small Group Leader when you have big questions or want to take big steps in your faith. If that's where you are today, I encourage you to talk to your Small Group Leader about that.

And now, as you head to group, I want you to remember that **Easter reminds us we're loved no matter what.**

Think about this question: **What's one thing that makes it hard to believe that you're loved no matter what?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
