The Passion of Christ
Bible Study and Worship Service

By Steve Case
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The Passion of Christ Study Guide
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The Passion of Christ
A study on the Passion of Christ

Introduction: This study is designed for use in three sessions:

1. Before the film, The Passion of the Christ
2. After the film
3. Where do we go from here

Each study can be used separately or together; you could even plan a lock-in around the study and movie. Lead the sessions as close together as you can; you want to make the most of the moment. We’ve also included an optional worship service.

Remind your students that this is an “event.” You are not just going to the movies. All three sessions and the worship experience are part of one “happening.” One reviewer has already said that Gibson’s film will someday be held up along the painting of The Last Supper; so ask your students to check their mindsets as they go into the movie. They would never think of taking popcorn or candy into a museum, so have them view this film the same way.

There is a permission slip for your students on the Youth Specialties site:
Session One: Before the Movie

You will need

- Various depictions of the crucifixion in literature and movies
  - Look for pictures in children’s Bibles or Christian coloring books
- Chocolate crosses (optional)
- A selection of videos that feature Jesus (see list below)

Film ratings are provided for your judgment; you know your situation best. Use your discretion.

Movies That Feature Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth (1977) Considered by many to be a classic. The British Christ seems to be slightly spacey at times, but then wouldn’t you be?


Jesus Christ Superstar (1973) The Jesus played by Ted Neely seems a bit wimpy. He even appears to whimper through the crucifixion. [Link](http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2471)

Greatest Story Ever Told (1965) Sort of a Where’s Waldo? movie of 60s Hollywood stars, but the star seems to portray Christ with great nobility. [Link](http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2472)

Godspell (1973) This will seem really dated to your students, but the crucifixion and taking down of the body is quite powerful. [Link](http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2473)

Movies with a “christ,” but no Jesus

Superman (1978) Play the scene at the beginning when Superman’s father (Marlon Brando) talks about sending his son into the world to be a light. Rated PG for peril, some mild sensuality, and language. [Link](http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2474)

Powder (1995) There is a brief scene at the end when the outcast with special powers is stripped, mocked, and then pushed into the mud in a very Christ-like pose. Rated PG-13 for intense, sometimes frightening elements of theme and language. [Link](http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2475)

The Iron Giant (1999) Play the film’s climatic moment when the Iron Giant chooses to sacrifice himself to save the world. If you have time, you can let it run through the
apparent resurrection at the end of the movie. Rated PG for fantasy action and mild language.

The Matrix (1999) There are any number of scene's to choose from, one in particular is the moment that Neo decides he needs to save Morpheus. Rated R for sci-fi violence and brief language.

Movies With Female Christ Characters
Chocolat (2000) Vianne associates with outcasts and can identify where you are hurting. She also exhibits moments of true grace against her persecutors. Rated PG-13 for a scene of sensuality and some violence

Fifth Element (1997) A supreme being comes to earth (in swaddling clothes) and throws herself into the middle of all humanity. Play the scene in which Leeloo weeps as she watches the history of how humans treat each other. Rated PG-13 for intense sci-fi violence, some sexuality, and brief nudity.

Begin the Session
Gather your group together and play as many clips from the list as you are comfortable with. If you’ve found some pictures of the crucifixion in coloring books, pass them out and let the students color while they talk.

Discussion Questions

• What was the best portrayal of Jesus in these clips?
  ○ In any movie you’ve ever seen?

• Can you think of examples from other movies with a “christ without being Jesus” character?

• Some denominations display Christ on the cross and others show the cross as being empty.
  ○ Which do we do at our church?
  ○ What’s the difference?
  ○ Do you prefer one or the other?

• Is it important that we know what Jesus went through? Explain.

• Isn’t the important part that he rose from the dead?

• Is it possible to appreciate Easter if we don’t fully understand Good Friday?
• What are the greatest temptations you face today?
  o Could Jesus’ answers apply to your situations?

• Do you think we have a tendency to put too much emphasis on the crucifixion?
  o Is that even possible?

• If they were going to paint a portrait of Jesus on the wall in our sanctuary, and the church got to vote on the portrait
  o Do you think our church would want a suffering, crucified Christ or a laughing, resurrected Christ?

• Should we show “sanitized” versions of the crucifixion to children?
  o Are we in danger of making Jesus a “spokesman” for Christianity rather than a Savior?

• Some of the greatest theological arguments in history have dealt with the fact that Jesus was both God and human. He must have known exactly what was going to happen to him, yet he still went forward.
  o Have you ever had to “face the music”, knowing you were going to be severely busted but did it anyway? (Explain: why did you go through with it?)

• Philippians 2:7-11 tells us that Jesus “emptied himself,” set aside all that made him divine, and became human. Why do you think Jesus did this?

• Why do you think Jesus allowed himself to be crucified? (Have students answer this in their own words without quoting Scripture)

Closing Prayer
Gather the group together and remind them again that this is an event, not just going to the movies. Remind them that the depiction of Christ’s suffering is probably the most violent ever filmed. And yet, we’ll still try to divorce ourselves from the event because “it’s just a movie.” Remind them that a real and true human being named Jesus went through every moment of what they are about to see.

Say: Pray with me.

Creator God, we are about to see a powerful film. Since you created us and put us on the planet, we have tried to understand who and what you are. We’ve tried to become who you want us to be, but we have messed up. We take the wrong path every chance we get. So you sent us your Son. You sent us your Son to die in the most horrible way imaginable so that he could come back. So that we could know everything he said was true. So that we could, possibly, hopefully, understand just the tiniest piece of who you are and how much you love us. Be with us now, God. Let us go into the theater with open hearts, open minds. Speak to us. Your servants are listening. Amen.
Movie Preparation

Prepare your students for the graphic violence done to Jesus as portrayed in the movie. Let them know that they may sometimes want to close their eyes. Give them permission to close their eyes, but also encourage them not to close them.

After the movie, assign some of your staff/volunteers to be available for individual students who are having strong emotional reactions to the movie.

Session Two: After the Movie

It’s important to do this lesson as close to the conclusion of the movie as possible. Seeing the movie on Sunday and leading this lesson a week later is too much of a time lapse, and the emotions and thoughts generated by the movie will be gone. Again this could be an ideal lock-in situation. (i.e., you can see the movie, have the discussion, and close the evening with the worship service.)

You Will Need
Mood Music:
• You may be able to get your hands on the soundtrack of the film; if not, you can try the recording from Passion, Hymns Ancient and Modern: Live Songs of Our Faith. (http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2460)
• Look for the CD The Christ: His Passion - Remembering His Sacrifice. (http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2461)
• If you can’t find those, get some soothing background music (piano or other soft music).
• Bibles
• Large sheets of paper
• Finger paint (navy blue, indigo, black, and gray)
• Baby wipes
• Get a digital image of the Last Supper painting to project in your room (or to print out enlarged).

Begin the Session

Start out by taking your students into a large, dimly lit room where they can spread out. Give each student a sheet of paper and each color of paint. Keep the room lights dim and play some of the mood music.

Say Something Like: We’re all thinking and feeling a lot of things right now because of the movie. I want us to take the next 20 minutes or so and let some of that out. I’m not asking you to create a picture, I want you to express your feelings. How are you feeling right now? Think about it for a few minutes and then begin. If you are having a lot of trouble coming up with something, you can paint a picture of the face of Christ.
* OPTION: If you have students who absolutely can’t stand to get their fingers dirty or are more “word” oriented, offer them a journal and a pen and ask them to write a poem or essay.

Play the music, step back, and allow your students to express themselves. As students finish, give them a few baby wipes to clean up and have them put their picture aside. It’s important to do the paintings first. You’re going to hang these in your worship area. (Maybe talk to your senior pastor about hanging these in the church sanctuary/worship center for some aspect of Lent.)

Wait until everyone is done, and then gather them together for discussion. Don’t turn the lights up yet, keep them dim, and keep the music on but soft.

Discussion Questions:

- Let’s start. What’s in your mind right now?

- What struck you the most?
  - What scene do you think you’ll remember 10 years from now?

- One reviewer said Mel Gibson’s film would be held up with Da Vinci’s Last Supper (show the image of the painting: http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2462 ) Do you agree?

- In case you heard about it, ignore for now the controversy before the film. Who do you think is to blame for Jesus’ death?
  - Are we missing something when we ask that question?
  - Didn’t Jesus have to die in order for us to be here now?
  - Isn’t death sort of required for the resurrection?

- Compare this movie’s portrayal of Jesus to the performances in the movie clips we saw earlier. How does this Jesus measure up?

- Did the subtitles help you?
  - Could this film have been seen without them?
  - What about when Christ is on the cross? What was it like to hear the words in the language that Jesus spoke?

- What did you think of Satan?
  - Do you find it interesting that Satan was played by a woman?
  - Why?
  - Should it matter?
There were several scenes that were definitely not from the Bible. Some things had to be added for the story. Can you think of anything else that was added?

How did you feel about the scene where Judas was chased?
  - Did it seem like something was pushing him toward his own death?
  - Why do you think Satan was there?

In the movie version of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, several large tanks chase Judas to the temple of Caiphas as if he is pushed into his actions. Do you think God drove Judas to do what he did?
  - Do you think he did this on his own?
  - Isn’t blaming Satan a way of saying, “The devil made me do it”?

Wouldn’t that make Judas simply part of the overall plan?
  - We label Judas a villain; even his name has become synonymous with the word *betrayal*. Wasn’t Judas just following the will of God?
  - Jesus already knew what he was doing; would this mean Satan was a part of God’s plan as well?

Some people get angry at “the Jews” or Judas or Satan but what do you think would have happened if Jesus had not died on the cross?
  - Do you think it was all part of the plan or that God took the situation and made it into a triumph?

What were some other differences you noticed between the biblical story and the movie?

What puzzled you?
  - Angered you?

Were you able to see this as just another movie or did you feel there was more of a personal investment?

Is Pilate a sympathetic character? Explain.
  - Who comes off as the most innocent?
  - Guiltiest?
  - Why?

Mary Magdalene is portrayed as the woman caught in adultery. She’s often characterized as a prostitute. There are a number of Marys in the Scriptures but very little information to link them together as the same person, and virtually nothing to say that Mary of Magdalena was the woman who had sinned or was caught in adultery. What do you think of how Mary Magdalene was portrayed here?

What did you think of the way the resurrection was portrayed?
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- Too subtle?
- Too “supernatural”?
- If you were Jesus and had been through all that agony, wouldn’t you want to dance?

- Why do you think some people have a problem seeing the human side of Jesus?
  - Do you have a problem with it?

- The writer Erma Bombeck used to tell a story about arguing with a woman who claimed that Jesus never laughed because it did not say so in the Bible.
  - Do remember any evidence in the movie that Jesus had fun?
  - Do you think Jesus laughed?
  - Do you think he was a funny guy?
  - Why is an image of Christ laughing unique rather than the norm?

- Certain aspects would have to be fictionalized in order to make the story better or at least to fill two hours. Simon, the man who was called to bear the cross of Jesus for example: How did you feel about him when you first saw him?
  - What about later?
  - What changed him?

- Jesus stands before a mockery of a trial and never says a word. And we’ve seen images of Jesus standing before Pilate, but probably nothing like this.
  - How did you feel about the trial?
  - Could you have kept your mouth shut?
  - What was the worst thing you were ever falsely accused of?
  - What happened?

- Imagine for a moment that you have some sort of super power (like super-strength or the ability to turn invisible). You’ve been arrested and tried and are about to be put to death. Let’s say that if you use your powers to help yourself, the person closest to you will die.
  - Could you let yourself be killed?
  - What if it were someone you never met?
  - What if it were a thousand people in a far off country somewhere?

- Has this movie changed the way you see Jesus? In what ways?

Closing prayer:

Say:
God, many of us feel like we’ve been put through an emotional wringer. We may feel like we’re standing in the middle of a path and have no idea which way we’re supposed to go. We thank you for this film, God. We may not like what we saw but we’re glad we’ve seen it. We may be uncomfortable with some of the thoughts in our heads but we thank you for being here to help us sort them out. Be with us as we go through this night, God. We need to feel your presence. Amen.
Session Three

If possible, lead this session in the morning. Put it as the last part of a lock-in or as a Sunday school class. If possible lead it outside, on your church roof or in an open field.

You Will Need:
- Bibles
- A boombox (check for fresh batteries)

Music Suggestions:
- “Cling,” Lost and Found, from This or Speedwood I (http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2465)
- “Thank You for Hearing Me,” David Crowder Band, from Can You Hear Us (Note: There is a version of this song on the All I Can Say, but I prefer this version.) (http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2464)

Images:
Find a picture of Jesus in a Bible or online. Place the picture on a copy machine and make one copy. Place the copy on the machine and create a 10 percent enlargement. Place the enlargement on the machine and enlarge by another 10 percent. Continue enlarging the enlargements until you have 15 to 20 sheets of paper. It shouldn’t take long before your image is distorted beyond recognition.

Begin The Session:

Music: Start with the song “Cling” or “Bartender” from the Session 3 music suggestions or a selection of your own choosing.

- What are you thinking about, regarding the movie this morning?
  - What’s still with you?

- We’re outside because I wanted you to think about what it was like for the women who went to anoint Jesus’ body. We saw Jesus crucified, and now we’re out here the morning after. It was their faith (Judaism) that said they couldn’t anoint the body after Jesus died. They had to wait because it was the Sabbath. What do you think it was like for the women?

- Do we need films like this?
  - Do we really need to see the blood and the gore?
Can you have a light without a dark to stick it in?

A lot of movies about Jesus, including some we saw clips from, make no mention of the resurrection. Why do you suppose filmmakers leave that part out?

The made-for-TV movie Jesus (2000) had an alternate ending that was shown overseas but not in the United States. In the alternate version, after he leaves his disciples, Jesus is seen walking along the docks in modern-day Italy. He’s laughing and hugging children. Why do you think we in America didn’t get to see this ending?

Why do you think we, as a culture, want things wrapped up in nice, little, pretty packages?

What’s our problem with leaving questions open and unanswered?

Mike Yaconelli once said that the job of the clergy was not to answer questions but to protect them. What do you think that means?

Take your stack of enlargements with the largest (the most distorted) on top. Ask the kids to guess what it is. Begin putting the sheet they are viewing on the bottom of the stack until an image starts to become clear. Continue to show them the images (even after they have guessed) until you have the original copy on top of the pile.

**Say something like:**

*Did you know that none of the four gospels agree on the exact details of the resurrection? One gospel says that there was a group of women. One gospel says that Mary was alone. One gospel says there were two angels; another says there was only one. Only Matthew mentions the fact that the guards were there, and that they “shook and were as dead men.” All of the gospels agree on two things.*

1. Mary Magdalene was there
2. The disciples still didn’t get it.

*Listen to how the Scriptures put it:*

**Read:**

Mark 16:11
Luke 24:11-12
John 20:1-10

**Say:** The Gospel of Matthew even says the disciples still weren’t sure even AFTER they saw Jesus alive.

**Read:** Matthew 28:17 (NIV)

**Say something like:**
The Scriptures are full of stories about Jesus after the resurrection. He comes back several times and his disciples, for one reason or another, don’t know who he is. Mary doesn’t recognize him until he calls her by name. The disciples walking along the road to Emmaus don’t know who he is. In the Gospel of Luke he’s actually sitting at the table with them, and they don’t recognize him. Were they that thick? Do you think Jesus kept his face covered? Maybe God didn’t want them to see Jesus just yet so he “clouded their eyes” to keep them from recognizing them? Why do you think he would do that?

Maybe we don’t get to know all that Jesus is right away. Maybe we get the picture a little at a time. When we are ready, God gives a clearer picture. Do you think it’s possible for any of us to really know Jesus or all that Jesus was about?

Jesus himself said he was the “way,” not a “destination.” Wouldn’t that indicate that our relationship with Christ is a journey?

Play the song: “Thank You for Hearing Me” by the David Crowder Band. It’s an easy song, have your group sing along.

Closing Prayer:

Say: Father God there, are a thousand thoughts in our heads. There are a thousand feelings in our souls. Help us make sense of them, God. Help us focus our minds and hearts on your Son. As we go from here, give us peace but don’t numb us to the visuals we have seen. There is no way we can ever begin to comprehend what your Son went through. Help us to accept that we cannot understand. Help us to know that we don’t have to understand what Jesus went through in order to love him. Amen.
Worship Service

You will need:

Music Suggestions for Worship:

- “Fruit We Bare” and “As You Go,” Lost and Found from *Something* ([http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2465](http://www.youthspecialties.com/linker/index.php?id=2465))

- Hang the paintings by the students from the second session (with their permission, of course) in your worship area, prior to the service.
- Candles: One for each student and one to place in the altar area of your worship space.

Dim the lights in the worship area. You might want to have some soft music playing as the kids come in.

The Service

Begin by asking the students to repeat after you. (This is much better if it is memorized and sounds conversational.) Reading the Psalm in this style automatically gives ownership, or at least partnership, of the service to the students. They become active participants with God as the audience.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd. (The Lord is my shepherd.)
I have all that I need. (I have all that I need.)
I have ALL that I need. (I have ALL that I need.)
God lets me lie down beside still waters. (God lets me lie down beside still waters.)
God leads me in a path of good things. (God leads me in a path of good things.)
God restores me. (God restores me.)
God restores me. (God restores me.)
Even though I walk through a dark, scary forest. (Even though I walk through a dark, scary forest.)
I am not afraid. (I am not afraid.)
I am not afraid. (I am not afraid.)
God is beside me. (God is beside me.)
God will not leave me. (God will not leave me.)
God will never leave me. (God will never leave me.)
God sets a banquet table before me. (God sets a banquet table before me.)
My enemies will have to stand outside and watch. (My enemies will have to stand outside and watch.)
My cup overflows. (My cup overflows.)
My cup overflows. (My cup overflows.)
Surely goodness and kindness will follow me all of my days. (Surely goodness and kindness will follow me all of my days.)
I will live in God house. (And I will live in God’s house.)
I will live in GOD’S house. (I will live in GOD’S house.)
Forever and ever. (Forever and ever.)
Forever and ever. (Forever and ever.)
Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.)
As it was, it is now, and always will be. (As it was, it is now, and always will be.)
World without end. (World without end.)
World WITHOUT end. (World without end.)
Amen. (Amen.)

Music: Play one of the versions of My Father’s House by Springsteen or choose another song from the suggestions list or play a song of your own choosing.

Read one or two of the following Psalms. Use these interpretations or one of your own choosing.

Psalm 41

When someone trips and falls in the hallway
And they go sprawling to the floor, their books scattering.
God loves the one who helps them up.
Because that is what God would do.
God will stay by them.
God will lift them up.

But now, the trippers and the pushers
They are after me, too.
Because I did what God would do.
They tell lies.
Spread rumors.
Gossip.
They smile in my face and then laugh behind my back.
Even someone I thought was my friend.
It is not their opinion of me that matters to me.
It is God’s.
I will help up the fallen.
Even if I didn’t know God was watching I would help.
I do so because I know that You are on my side.
You stand next to me. Forever.

Psalm 46

God is my room.
In my room I am safe.
God is my room, and I am safe.
Hurricanes can come.
Earthquakes can shake the foundations.
The ocean itself can rise up against me.
I am safe in my God.
My God gives me joy.
When all the voices in my head scream so loud
that the walls begin to rattle.
When noises of the world become so loud
that I can't shut them out anymore.
When it feels like my entire life is in chaos
God will say "Shhhhhhhhhhhhh
Quiet my child. I'm here.
I've been here all along.
I will be here and never leave you."
God is my room.
Amen

Psalm 79

God, listen to me here.
Just don't look.
Look somewhere else,
Because you don’t want to see us right now.
We took what you gave us and made a wreck of it.
We twisted your words to our own purposes.
We tried to make you exclusive, ours.
We didn’t share.
You have a right to be angry.
We broke the toys we were given.
How long will you be mad?
How long will we be grounded?
Others laugh at us.
They point and say “Look at the religious fanatics”
“Hypocrites.”
“You’re not so special now are you?”
God,
Silence them.
Make them shut up.
It’s bad enough that we screw up, do we have to endure this?
We will praise you.
We will try again.
We will do better this time.
Let us make it up to you.
We will earn a better reputation.
Then maybe we will have the right to tell others about you.
The God of second chances.
Amen

Give the following scriptures to your adult volunteers, ask them to place themselves behind the students or surround them. Encourage the students to look around at the paintings as the Scriptures are being read.

Have your volunteers read:
Luke 22:54-62

Say something like:
Have you ever been hanging out with friends and it’s late, you’re all tired and somebody tells a bad joke–and everyone just starts giggling? Pretty soon you’re laughing so hard that you can’t even sit up anymore. Jesus gave that up...on purpose.

Have you ever been somewhere where the music was just right and the company was just right and the weather was just right and you just stood there and breathed that in and everything felt right with the world. Have you been there? Jesus gave that up...on purpose.

We think of Jesus as the Holy Son of God, the King of Kings. He’s that great glorious picture on the front of the Easter cards we buy at the Christian bookstore. Standing there in his clean white robe, with his perfectly combed hair. That’s how we like to look at Jesus, because if we see him as human, we see that side of him that laughs, or sings, or dances. But the images of Jesus make it horrible to think about what he went through. He did everything that we saw in the movie, and he did it so that we would know that everything he said was true. God sent prophets and preachers before, but people ignored them. So God sent his own Son so that he could die in the worst way imaginable, and then come back...so we would know it was true.
- Think about Jesus not as that image on the Easter card, but as a man.
- Doesn’t that make His gift even more precious?
- Doesn’t that make what Jesus went through even more important?
- What is the real importance of what Christ did?

Music: Play the song “All I Can Say” by David Crowder Band or one of the others from the suggestion list or one of your own choosing.
Pass out the candles in silence. As the song plays, light your candle from the altar candle. Light the first student’s candle and instruct them all (in silence) to pass the light on.

Closing Prayer
Creator God, we don’t understand. It was just a movie. Nobody else really got hurt. Nobody else really died. We don’t want to think about what happened to your Son. We’re sorry we’re such a skeptical bunch, that we didn’t get it to begin with. What you asked your Son to do, we could not do. Jesus chose to do something we cannot fathom. Thank you for your Son, God. Thank you for your patience with us. We are trying. Amen.