

Atonement



Leviticus 16 and selected verses
from the New Testament



The 'Because He Lives' series explores what the death and resurrection of Jesus have achieved. In this first session the young people will explore the meaning of atonement, looking at how sin separates people from God and how, through Jesus' death and resurrection, that separation is overcome and relationship is restored.

You will need:

- Paper and pens
- 'Pictures of Atonement' Handout



Beat

Say:

In the 'Life of Jesus' series we walked through the main events of the Gospel of Luke from the birth of Jesus through to his death and resurrection. Having just celebrated Easter, this series moves us on to ask some important questions.

Ask:

- Why does it matter that Jesus lived, died and rose again?
- What does that actually mean for us as Christians?

Say:

Over the next few sessions we're going to explore these questions in a series called 'Because He Lives'. The title comes from a song that Christians across the world have sung for many years. Here are the lyrics of the first verse and chorus:

**God sent his Son, they called him Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives.
Because he lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because he lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know he holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because he lives.**

- William and Gloria Gaither (SASB 219)

Ask:

- Why do you think William and Gloria Gaither felt inspired to write this song?
- What do you think they wanted to communicate about their faith?

Say:

This song is trying to answer the question ‘So what?’ – what does the death and resurrection of Jesus mean for his people? How are our lives changed because he lives?

Over the next few sessions, we’re going to explore exactly what that means.

 **Bridge**

Ask:

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase ‘Because he lives’?

 **Amplify**

Ask:

What do you think the word ‘atonement’ means?

Say:

Atonement isn’t a word we use very often, but understanding its meaning helps us to grasp what Jesus did for us on the cross.

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine describes it like this:

‘The Cross of Jesus Christ stands at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is the greatest revelation of the love of God. Through the Cross, God overcame the separation caused by sin. Once and for all, Jesus’ death and resurrection opened the way for humanity to be reconciled to a loving God. This reconciliation is called the Atonement, literally making at one, or ‘at-one-ment’.

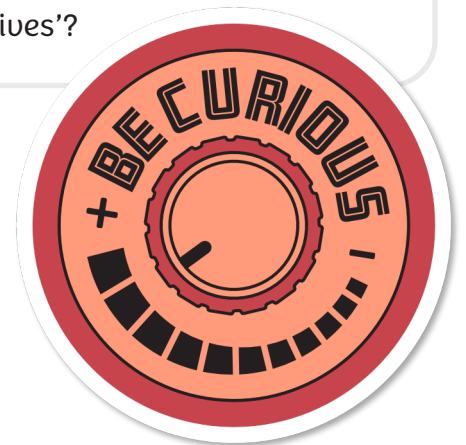
– *Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (2013), p127.

Ask:

How does your understanding of the word ‘atonement’ change when you hear it said as ‘at-one-ment’?

Say:

Throughout this session we’re going to unpack what atonement means. To do that, we need to start in the Old Testament.



Watch:

A Tale of Two Goats: The Story of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) (stop at 3:30)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_skzJzpfPhU

Ask:

- What did the clip mean when it said, 'Atonement is when separated people can become "at one"'?
- How did the use of coloured droplets in the clip help you understand the meaning of atonement?

Say:

There are a few important things happening in this story. The people had sinned, which meant their relationship with God was broken. They were no longer 'at one' with him. Something needed to happen to make things right.

Read:

⁶ Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. ⁷ Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats - one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

- (Leviticus 16:6-10)

Ask:

- How were the goats used as a substitute for the sins of the people?
- The clip says, 'The goats were there to remind people of the redemption they needed and the rescuer who was yet to come.' How does this explanation help you to understand what Jesus did for us on the cross?

Say:

One goat was sacrificed acting as a substitute, taking the place of the people. The other goat carried the sins of the people and was sent into the wilderness, out of the camp. In this one moment, sin was both dealt with and taken away. After the atonement ritual was complete, the people could begin again with God.

Ask:

How often did the people repeat this ceremony?

Say:

This wasn't a permanent solution. It had to happen again and again. The goats didn't truly take away sin. They were a picture, pointing forward to the true rescuer.

This is where Jesus comes in.

Ask:

- What was the separate role of the two goats?
- How did Jesus' death on the cross reflect these two roles?

Say:

Like the first goat, Jesus took the cost of sin on himself. Like the second goat, he carried away the sin completely. Unlike the practice with the goats, this never needs to happen again. Through his death, sin is dealt with once and for all. Through his resurrection, death is defeated absolutely.

Atonement is about making things right between God and his people. It's about sin being dealt with and taken away so that the people can be made 'at one' with him again.

Ask:

If you had to explain atonement in one sentence, what would you say?

Say:

The Salvation Army Doctrine 6 words it like this:

'We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by his suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world, so that whosoever will may be saved.'

This means that what Jesus has done isn't limited. It's not just for one group of people. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has made a way for the whole world to be brought back to God and that invitation is open to everyone.

 **Bridge****Ask:**

What connection between the Old Testament atonement ritual and the death and resurrection of Jesus stands out to you?

 **Sound Check****Say:**

We've just been exploring what atonement means and what Jesus has done through his death and resurrection. The Bible doesn't just explain that in one way. It gives us lots of different pictures and each one shows us something important about what Jesus has done.

Leader's notes:

This activity helps the young people explore different biblical images of atonement by turning them into something visual. Rather than presenting atonement as a single idea, it shows that Scripture uses multiple pictures, each revealing something true about what Jesus has done.

Give everyone a copy of the 'Pictures of Atonement' [KM1.1][SJ1.2]handout. Each description includes Bible readings that can be explored to build a deeper understanding of that particular image of atonement.

Groups can be organised in whatever way works best for your context, as long as all five pictures of atonement are covered.

Each group should create a visual response that communicates their idea. This could be a drawing, symbol, diagram or any creative representation.

Make sure there is time for the groups to share what they've created, so that everyone hears and sees each picture of atonement.

 **Bridge****Ask:**

Which of these pictures of atonement helps you to understand what Jesus has done for you most clearly? Explain your response.

 **Selah****Say:**

Today we've been exploring atonement and how Jesus, through his death and resurrection, deals with sin and makes a way for people to be brought back to God.

One of the things we've seen is that atonement isn't limited. What Jesus has done is not just for one group of people or one place. It's for the whole world.

In a moment, we're going to listen to 'Because He Lives'. Part of it is sung in Samoan, and it's a reminder that there are Christians across the world holding on to this same truth.

As you listen, take a moment to think about how you would complete this sentence:

'Because he lives, I ...'

Leader's notes:

The clip is around six minutes long, so you may only want to play part of it depending on your timing.

When the music has finished, close in a short prayer, thanking God for what Jesus has done and for the way it changes our lives.

Watch:

Mount Druitt Conquerors - 'Because He Lives' (Samoan) (6:06)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ9kCk41xEE



Say:

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

- As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?
- What is the one atonement image that stands out the most for you?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.



Understanding the Atonement

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine (2013) pp129–130

Ransom

1

Jesus himself indicated that he had come as a redeemer to give his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6). The term 'ransom' was used in the slave markets of the ancient world where a slave was set free through payment, by another person, of a redemptive price. This picture illustrates our captivity to sin and shows there is a price to be paid if we are to be set free. Our redemption is costly.

The law courts

2

Another concept was borrowed from the law courts: anyone who breaks the law, which is given for our good, deserves punishment. In God's morally ordered world sin has consequences. Jesus paid the penalty and bore the cost of sin on our behalf: 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities' (Isaiah 53:5). Christ voluntarily accepted punishment as a substitute for us (John 10:11–18; 15:13).

Redemptive Sacrifice

3

Another New Testament picture of the Atonement emphasises that Christ became the once-for-all sacrifice which buys our salvation (Hebrews 10:10–14). He gave himself for our sin and so fulfilled the purpose of the great sacrifices of the Hebrew faith, to restore the fellowship between God and human beings (Matthew 26:28). The death of Christ provides a way by which all people can be reconciled to God (Ephesians 1:7). His was a vicarious sacrifice, that is to say a sacrifice made on behalf of others. It was not made for his own sin, for he was sinless: it was made for us – on behalf of humanity (Romans 3:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Victory over sin

4

The New Testament describes Christ's sacrifice as a victory over sin and over the powers of evil which imprison humanity. By our faith in what he has done for us we participate in the achievement of Christ's sacrifice. The Cross, the place of seeming defeat, is actually the place of triumph. Christ's victory on the Cross becomes our victory (Colossians 2:13–15).

Self-giving love

5

The Cross of Jesus is at the heart of the reconciling work of God. It is also the most effective picture of self-giving love (Romans 5:8). We can be drawn to it or repelled by it, but, when acknowledged, few can remain indifferent to the God it reveals. It is a call to be reconciled to the God of the Cross, and to love as he loved us (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). Our atonement is made possible at the great cost of the sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:18,19).