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INTRODUCTION TO DISCOVERING THE *J-CURVE* SERIES

“I’ve believed the gospel. Now what?”

Believing *more* seems like the correct response. But if you focus exclusively on believing more, you’ll likely become self-entangled, constantly looking inward at the state of your heart. The apostle Paul has a better answer:

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...” (Phil. 1:29).

So we don’t just believe the gospel; we become *like* the gospel. We join Christ in what Paul calls a “fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:1).

Paul acknowledges something we’ve largely ignored as a church: Jesus’ life takes a downward path into death before moving upward into resurrection.

If you think of it visually, you can trace the letter “J.” We at seeJesus call this arc of the gospel “the *J-Curve*.” The apostle Paul describes the *J-Curve* as the normal Christian life—a reenacting of the death and resurrection of Jesus—but it doesn’t feel normal to most Christians.

Discovering the J-Curve is a series of four units that search out what it means to faithfully live the kind of dying-resurrection life Paul describes in Philippians. By God’s grace, we will catch Paul’s radical vision of living life in the shape of the *J-Curve*—a vision that lies at the heart of Paul’s definition of what it means to be a Christian.

Living in the *J-Curve* means we don’t have to succumb to our allergy to suffering or equate God’s favor with earthly success. Embracing the *J-Curve* renews our hope in a dark world, draws us into fellowship with God’s people, and radically re-centers our daily lives on Christ. And it answers our deep and earnest question: “I’ve believed the gospel. Now what?”

SUMMARY OF DISCOVERING THE *J-CURVE* SERIES

Unit 1: United with Christ

Union with Christ—being “in Christ”—doesn’t sound like the solution to a real problem. But a careful study of Philippians 3:1-11 reveals that our problems with legalism and the Flesh are solved by our union with Christ. Justification by faith liberates us from human pride and despair by giving us righteousness as a gift. This lays the groundwork for understanding how the *J-Curve* builds on justification by faith and makes union with Christ come alive in a way that simply believing the gospel by itself doesn’t.

Unit 2: A Jesus-Shaped Life

If Unit 1 looks at the larger world that surrounds the *J-Curve*, Unit 2 analyzes the different kinds of *J-Curves* that the apostle Paul describes. We begin by “getting our bearings” on Paul’s three different kinds of *Present J-Curves* (*Suffering, Repentance, and Love*), and then we discover how our *Present J-Curves* are based on the *Original J-Curve* and the *Faith J-Curve*. We see how all these *J-Curves* work together in the story of Joni Earekson Tada’s life.

Unit 3: The Descent of Love

The focus of Unit 3 is the *Love J-Curve* in Philippians 2. The apostle Paul uses the story of Jesus’ *Original J-Curve* (his dying and rising for us) as the model for our own life of dying love. In Christ’s descent, his obedience to his Father is the very heart of the gospel. As we re-enact Jesus’ descent, the beauty of Jesus emerges in us. We call this the *Love J-Curve*. We’ll discover some of the fascinating patterns of the *Love J-Curve* that will encourage us in this most Jesus-like of all work—the work of love.

Unit 4: Living in Resurrection

We discover how a resurrection lens reshapes the apostle Paul’s vision of life. Participating in the dying and rising of Jesus transforms how Paul encounters both hardship and blessings. It is the secret to Paul’s joy. We begin in Philippians 1, where Paul tells the story of his imprisonment and possible release. In Philippians 2, we discover how Paul’s co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus, embody the gospel. Finally, in Philippians 4, we glimpse two of Paul’s co-laborers who don’t embody the gospel.

KEY CONCEPTS OF UNIT 2: *A JESUS-SHAPED LIFE*

Past *J-Curves*

- The *Original J-Curve* is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for our sins.
- In the *Faith J-Curve*, we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection. His story becomes our story.

Present *J-Curves*:

In the *Present J-Curve*, we re-enact Jesus' *Original J-Curve*. There are three distinct ways of dying to self, all of them connected to how we relate to the "problem" or "evil."

- In the *Suffering J-Curve*, "the problem" is coming after us, unwanted.
- In the *Repentance J-Curve*, I am "the problem." I must put to death sin in me.
- In the *Love J-Curve*, we are pursuing "the problem."

Future *J-Curve*

- In the *Future J-Curve*, we will be resurrected with bodies like his.

COMPARISON CHART OF UNIT 2 AND *J-CURVE* BOOK

UNIT 2: A JESUS-SHAPED LIFE	<i>J-CURVE</i> BOOK
Lesson 1 Dying to Self	Chapter 10—Dying to Self
Lesson 2 <i>Repentance J-Curve</i>	Chapter 10—Dying to Self Chapter 11—A Cascade of Love
Lesson 3 A Cascade of Love: Joni’s Story	Chapter 11—A Cascade of Love
Lesson 4 The <i>Original J-Curve</i>	Chapter 10—Dying to Self
Lesson 5 What Makes the J Go Up?	Chapter 21—Discover the Power of Resurrection
Lesson 6 The <i>Faith J-Curve</i>	Chapter 5—In Harvard Chapter 10—Dying to Self
Lesson 7 Living in the <i>Faith J-Curve</i>	Chapter 35—Jesus: The Ultimate Party-Crasher
Lesson 8 The <i>Suffering J-Curve</i>	Chapter 13—Living in the Borderland
Lesson 9 Liberated from Ego	Chapter 13—Living in the Borderland

LESSON ONE: DYING TO SELF

This lesson overviews the concept of the Present J-Curve by exploring three ways we can die and rise with Christ now (suffering, repentance, and love). It establishes the critical principle “What happens to Jesus, happens to us.”

1. “Take Up Your Cross”

Read: Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”” Matthew 16:24.

“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”” Mark 8:34.

“And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”” Luke 9:23.

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” Luke 14:27.

1. What does Jesus mean by “take up your cross”? What are the different ways of dying to self?

SUFFERING	REPENTANCE	LOVE

2. What is implied by the verb “take up”?

2. Three Ways of Dying to Self

Teach: Our Three *Present J-Curves*

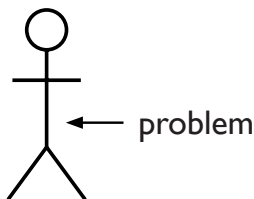
There are three distinct ways of dying to self, all of them connected to how we relate to the “problem” or “evil.”

- In the *Suffering J-Curve* “the problem” is coming after us, unwanted.
- In the *Repentance J-Curve*, I am “the problem.” I must put to death sin in me.
- In the *Love J-Curve*, we are pursuing “the problem.”

These are three different ways of dying with Jesus. For the sake of simplicity, we will call them a “*Suffering J-Curve*,” a “*Repentance J-Curve*,” and a “*Love J-Curve*”. In this unit, we will explain in detail each of these three kinds of dying.

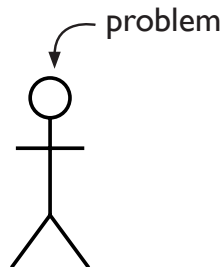
3 Present J-Curves

Suffering J-Curve



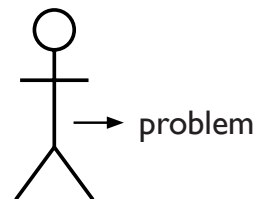
2 Cor 12: 7–10

Repentance J-Curve



Col 3: 5–11

Love J-Curve



Phil 2: 5–11

3. What do all these ways of “dying to self” have in common?



Insight: What Unites Our Present J-Curves

Each of these three *J-Curves* participates in Christ’s dying *in the present*. Each embraces a form of his suffering as it envelops, absorbs, or pursues evil. To summarize, each *J-Curve*...

1. Enters some kind of suffering where evil is weakened or killed.
2. Weakens the Flesh and forms us into the image of Jesus.
3. Tastes a real-time, present resurrection.¹



Insight: Martyrdom J-Curve

We will only refer briefly here to the *Martyrdom J-Curve*, but it is unique among the *J-Curves* in that it is most directly identified with Jesus. Like Jesus, you physically die, but it is a unique death because the death is *for him, for his name*. You bear his shame for identifying with his name and refusing to renounce him. With an act of your will, you reject fleeing the *J-Curve*. You can only do this if you have already had a life that is characterized by the dying and rising of Christ. In the years to come, the *Martyrdom J-Curve* will become more common as the Spirit of Jesus draws the church even more into the life of his Son.

The *Martyrdom J-Curve* combines all three of the *Present J-Curves*. That is, it is Jesus’ downward path of love to death in Philippians 2, it is suffering coming at you unwanted, and it involves the complete death to self. You literally disappear because you are killed. In martyrdom, the beauty of Jesus is displayed more than anywhere else.

The principle runs through life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

—C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*

¹ Adapted from: Paul Miller, *J-Curve: Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 87-88.

3. Peter's World vs. Jesus' World

Read Mark 8:31-37.

Step One: Jesus, _____

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

³² And he said this plainly.

Step Two: Peter, _____

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Step Three: Jesus, _____

³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

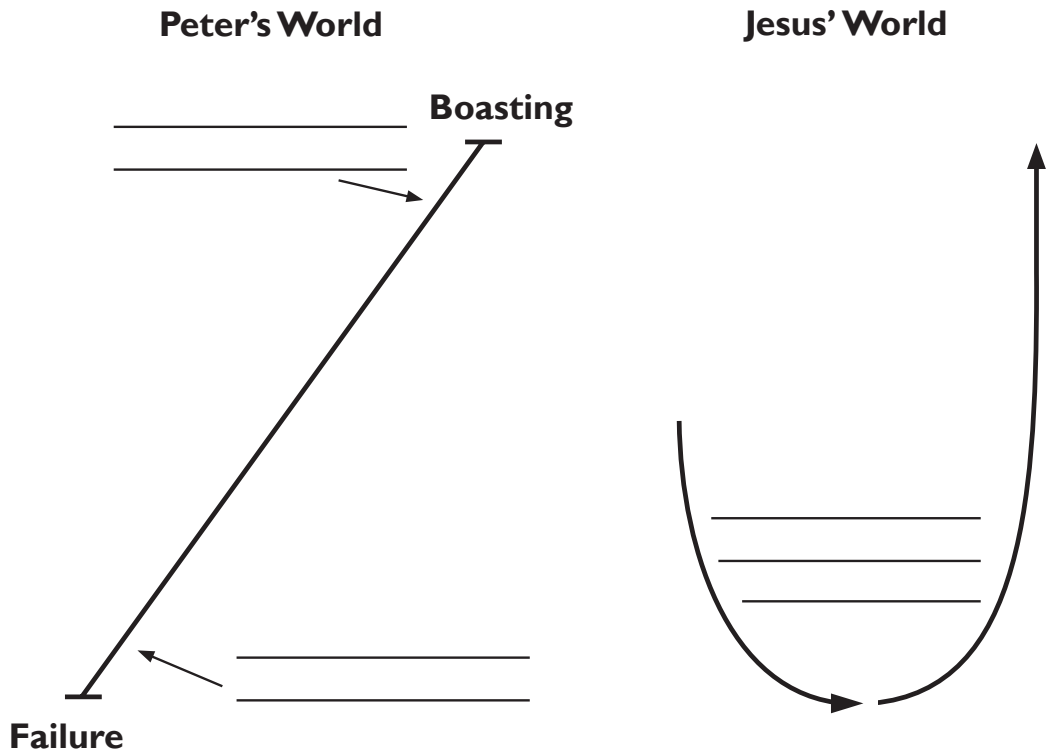
Step Four: Jesus, _____

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul?"

4. In Step Two, why is Peter so upset with Jesus, when Jesus describes the J-Curve?

5. In the Failure-Boasting Chart below (Peter's World), where is Peter's Messiah? Where does a crucified Messiah go on Peter's chart?

6. Where is Jesus (Jesus' World)?



7. In Step Four, what crucial principle does Jesus state? Make a slogan out of it.

This is a very important question and is at the very heart of our teaching on *J-Curve*.

- “What happens to Jesus, happens to us.”
- “Jesus’ Journey is Our Journey.”
- “His Journey is My Journey.”
- “I believe the gospel and become like the gospel.”

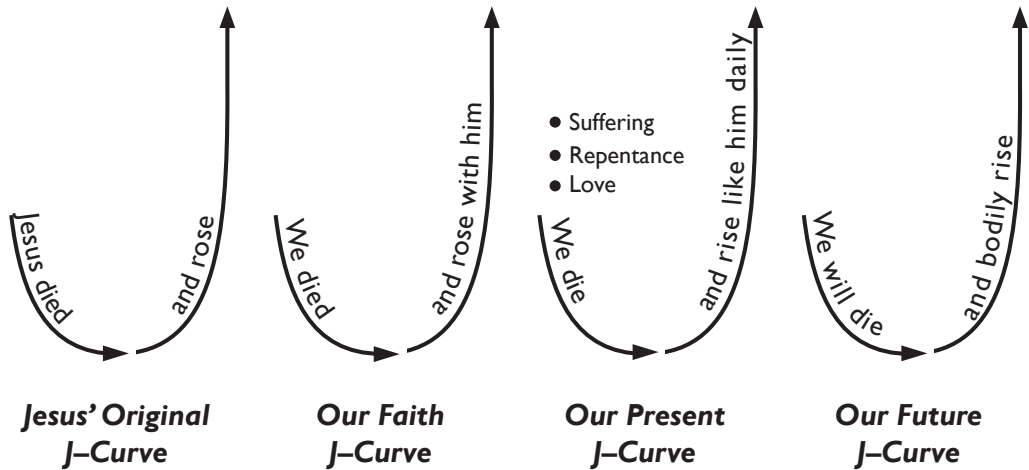
4. The Apostle Paul’s Four *J-Curves* 15 mins

Here is a brief summary of these four *J-Curves*.

- The *Original J-Curve* is the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.
- The *Faith J-Curve*, the most mysterious of these *J-Curves*, tells us that we have already died and risen with Jesus.

- The *Present J-Curve*. This is the primary focus of all our *J-Curve* studies: What does it look like to die and rise with Jesus in the present?
- The *Future J-Curve*. The apostle Paul frequently looks forward to the final resurrection when all the *J-Curves* will be completed and our dying will be all over with!

The Apostle Paul's Four J-Curves



8. What strikes you about the apostle Paul's vision of dying and rising with Jesus? What questions does it raise in your mind?

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. Give a one-sentence example of a *Present J-Curve* you are struggling with in each area below:
 - a. Suffering
 - b. Repentance
 - c. Love
2. Which of these three *Present J-Curves* is hardest for you (*Suffering, Repentance, or Love*)? Why?
3. Can you think of a situation in your life (past or present) where you have been like Peter, avoiding the cross? Briefly tell the story.
4. Pick one of the *J-Curves* above. How have you seen your flesh weakened and your life being formed into the image of Jesus? Tell the story.
5. In your own words, rephrase and explain the principle "What happens to Jesus, happens to us." What scares you about this idea? What encourages you?