

**Group discussion** *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read Luke 23:32-43 aloud.

1. What were the differences between the two men crucified with Jesus?

*These men were probably both Jews who hoped for the Messiah to deliver Israel from Roman oppression. They encountered Jesus at the same time, but the similarities end there.*

What caused these men to view Jesus so differently?

How has your view of Jesus changed as you have learned more about him?

2. In what ways was the skeptical criminal different from us?  
*You could list 20 – primitive, Jewish, criminal, public execution, doubted Jesus, etc.*

What do we have in common with the skeptical criminal?  
*You could list 20 – deserved to be punished, lacked understanding, schemed to get what he wanted, anger issues, concerned about self-preservation, etc.*

In what sense did the first criminal's request come true (v. 39)?

3. In what ways was the believing criminal different from us?  
*You could list 20 – primitive, Jewish, criminal, public execution, etc.*

What do we have in common with the criminal who believed?  
*You could list 20 – deserved to be punished, got better than he deserved, changed by meeting Jesus, lacked understanding, believed, etc.*

4. How could the criminal be saved without baptism? Was Jesus delirious and forgot the rules?

In what sense does baptism earn our salvation?

*Not in the least. 1 Peter 3:21 says that baptism saves us, but there is nothing magic about the water. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses us. Like the thief, we find that God treats us better than we deserve. Romans 6 would be a good text for further study.*

5. When you have been treated better than you deserve, how does that affect the way you treat other people?

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It's okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

Which person best represents your relationship with God this week?

- Criminal 1 – Looking for God to get me out of my mess.
- Criminal 2 – Thankful for what God gives because I do not deserve such wonderful blessings.
- Pharisees – I love God, but I get distracted by things that are not from God.
- Crowd – Aware of God but not doing much for or against God.
- Women at the cross (Lk. 23:49) – Troubled by events that are beyond my control, needing God to intervene.
- John (Jn. 19:25-27) – ready when God calls me to serve, even though the task may be difficult or painful.
- Soldier (Lk. 23:47) – I recognize something unique in Jesus, and I want to learn more.
- Someone else...

## Resources

### Bible notes

- Matthew and Mark say the two men were thieves. We do not know much about their crimes, but crucifixion was reserved for major crimes like cultivating rebellion against Rome.
- The two criminals were likely Jews, because most of the population of Jerusalem was Jewish and because they used Jewish terms (“Christ” and “fear God”).
- I have no idea what the man had in mind when he asked Jesus to remember him “when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus was dying, so it took amazing faith to see a future for Jesus beyond the cross.
- I also have no idea what Jesus meant when he promised paradise today, but it sounds incredibly wonderful.

### Prayer ideas –

Thank God for treating us better than we deserve.

Pray for us to extend grace to people around us, just as God has treated us better than we deserve.

**Kid-friendly activity.** *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Go outside and ask each kid to cut a small branch with spring buds on it (not leaves). *Ask your host beforehand!*

Bring the buds inside and pull off the brown scales that cover the buds. Get a magnifying glass and look at what you exposed by removing the buds.

You’ll probably see tiny leaves folded up.

What principles can we learn from this branch that looked dead?

Read Luke 23:39-43 aloud.

How does this story show God bringing new life from a situation that looks dead and hopeless?

How does God give hope to bad situations for us?



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## LIFE Group Guide

### Luke 23 – Grace – Criminal on the Cross

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme for this meeting: **Grace for anyone who believes.**

Kevin is preaching a series on the last words of Jesus, and this week focuses on the conversation with the criminal on the cross. This brief exchange gives insight into Jesus’ heart and the nature of God’s grace.

This passage could generate multiple off-topic questions (When did the man expect Jesus to “come into his kingdom”? What happens at the moment of death? Is paradise the same as heaven?). Chasing those rabbits might be interesting, but make sure that they are beneficial. Have a goal in mind for the discussion, and pray for wisdom and discernment.

You might meet early or late so you can attend the 6 p.m. service at College Hills. Southwest Christian College Chorus will perform, and President Jack Evans will preach. Your group is welcome to attend that event, but it is okay to do your regular group meeting.

Thanks for the great ways you supported our special events over the last three months. Training went well, the campaign strengthened groups, we added five groups, and many groups invited new people. Thanks!

Leadership tip: Pray for wisdom to lead the group – where do these people need to grow spiritually? Pray for discernment – what is this person really saying? What is the concern behind the comment? Pray for vision – how can our group bring greater honor to God?

**I. Relate** *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ Even if times are tough, I hope I never have to skimp on...
- ❖ When was the last time you were pulled over for a traffic violation?
- ❖ When has someone given you a second chance?