

5-Day Study Guide

Sermon Title: Tale of Two Criminals

Series: Being With Jesus

Speaker: Pastor Chad Everett

Main Passage: Luke 23:26–43

[Sermon Video](#)

"**Tale of Two Criminals**" is a powerful message from Pastor Chad Everett in the *Being With Jesus* series, delivered on Resurrection Sunday. In this sermon, we're brought to the cross, where Jesus hung between two criminals — one who mocked, and one who believed. Both were close to Jesus in proximity, but only one chose to be with Him in relationship. This message invites us to reflect on our own response to the man in the middle — the one who makes all the difference.

This 5-day study guide is designed to help you engage more deeply with the truth of the sermon throughout your week. Whether you're studying on your own, with a Roads Group, or as a family, each day will guide you through scripture, reflection, and practical application. The guide is organized into categories for:

- **New Christians**
- **Mature Christians**
- **Jr. & Sr. High Students**
- **Families with Young Children**
- **Families with Teenagers**

Our goal is not just to revisit a powerful Sunday message, but to **walk with Jesus more closely Monday through Saturday** — to shift from being *near Him* to truly *being with Him*.

Let this guide be a tool for spiritual growth, conversation, and transformation — as we answer the question Jesus still asks today: **Which criminal are you?**

DAY 1: Jesus in the Middle

Daily Focus Summary

On the cross between two criminals, Jesus chose not to defend Himself or call for justice, but to forgive. His position between two guilty men was not accidental — it was intentional. This is where He still meets us: right in the middle of our guilt, offering grace.

Big Idea

The man in the middle makes the difference — then and now.

Scripture Reading

Luke 23:32–34 (ESV)

"Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments."

Quote from Pastor Chad Everett

"Even in agony, Jesus didn't pray for escape — He prayed, 'Father, forgive them.' That's love on a whole other level."

Discussion Questions & Application

New Christians

- Why do you think Jesus chose to forgive instead of defend Himself?
- How does this help you understand what it means to follow Jesus?
- **Application:** Ask Jesus today to show you where you need to offer forgiveness, just like He did — even when it's hard.

Mature Christians

- What does Jesus' posture of forgiveness reveal about the posture we're called to carry, even under pressure?
- Where is He inviting you to be "in the middle" for someone else?
- **Application:** Take time in prayer to forgive someone specifically. Write their name down and release them before the Lord.

Jr. & Sr. High Students

- What stands out to you about Jesus' response on the cross?
- How is forgiveness different from saying "it's okay"?
- **Application:** Write a prayer asking God to help you forgive someone who hurt you — even if it's still painful.

Families with Young Children

- Ask your kids: What does it mean to forgive?
- Why did Jesus forgive the people hurting Him?
- **Application:** As a family, talk about a time you needed to forgive each other. Practice saying, "I forgive you."

Families with Teenagers

- Why do you think forgiveness is hard when someone has really hurt us?
- How can Jesus help us forgive, even when we don't feel like it?
- **Application:** Talk as a family about what it looks like to carry forgiveness in your daily life — even with friends or at school.

DAY 2: Two Responses, One Savior

Daily Focus Summary

Though both criminals were equally close to Jesus, their responses couldn't have been more different. One mocked Jesus to the end. The other saw Him for who He truly was — Lord and King. Proximity isn't the same as relationship. What matters is how we respond.

Big Idea

Being near Jesus isn't enough. The man in the middle makes the difference when we surrender to Him.

Scripture Reading

Luke 23:39–43 (ESV)

"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'"

Quote from Pastor Chad Everett

"One criminal died next to Jesus, but not with Him. You can be close to Jesus — and still miss Him."

Discussion Questions & Application

New Christians

- What do the two criminals teach us about different ways people respond to Jesus?
- What do you want your response to Jesus to be?
- **Application:** Say a simple prayer to Jesus today: "Jesus, I want to know You. Remember me."

Mature Christians

- How have you seen people close to Jesus in proximity but far from Him in heart?
- Where is God inviting deeper surrender in your life today?
- **Application:** Journal about an area where you've been near Jesus, but haven't fully given Him your trust.

Jr. & Sr. High Students

- Why do you think one criminal mocked Jesus and the other believed in Him?
- What does it mean to say, "Remember me, Jesus"?
- **Application:** Write down one way you can respond to Jesus this week with more faith and less fear.

Families with Young Children

- Ask your kids: If you were one of the two people next to Jesus, which one would you want to be like? Why?
- **Application:** Use play time or drawing to talk about how we can choose Jesus every day.

Families with Teenagers

- Why do you think proximity to Jesus (like going to church) doesn't always mean relationship?
 - How can we make our faith more personal and real?
 - **Application:** Talk as a family about your personal relationships with Jesus. Share one thing each of you feels He's saying right now.
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DAY 3: Dying to Live

Daily Focus Summary

Many people want the reward of eternal life without the surrender that comes before it. Jesus didn't promise paradise to both criminals — only to the one who acknowledged Him as Lord. True life begins with dying to our old ways and trusting in Christ.

Big Idea

New life starts when we die to the old one. The man in the middle makes the difference when we lay our lives down.

Scripture Reading

Romans 6:1–4 (ESV)

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Quote from Pastor Chad Everett

"You want to be a Christian? Then kill the old man. You can't hold onto the old life and live the new one."

Discussion Questions & Application

New Christians

- What does it mean to die to your old way of living?
- Why is that important in following Jesus?
- **Application:** Write down one habit or attitude you want to leave behind as you follow Jesus.

Mature Christians

- In what ways has your old self tried to come back to life?
- How can you stay united with Jesus in His death — and in His resurrection?
- **Application:** Spend time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of your life that need to be "crucified" so new life can grow.

Jr. & Sr. High Students

- What are some ways people your age try to “live both lives” — following Jesus but still doing what they want?
- Why do you think Jesus asks us to fully surrender?
- **Application:** Talk to a trusted adult or youth leader about what it looks like to really follow Jesus right now.

Families with Young Children

- Ask your kids: What do you think it means to live like Jesus and not just for ourselves?
- **Application:** As a family, talk about one way to live more like Jesus at home or school this week.

Families with Teenagers

- How do we balance the message of grace with the call to die to sin?
- What’s one area where you need to choose surrender instead of control?
- **Application:** Have each person share one thing they’re “laying down” this week to live more fully for Jesus

DAY 4: Proximity vs. Relationship

Daily Focus Summary

Both criminals were within feet of Jesus. Both saw the same things, heard the same words. Yet only one responded with faith. Being near Jesus — through church, prayer, or Christian community — doesn’t automatically mean we’re **with Him**. Relationship requires a personal response.

Big Idea

Being close to Jesus isn’t the same as knowing Him. The man in the middle makes the difference when we move from proximity to relationship.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 7:21–23 (ESV)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me...'"

Quote from Pastor Chad Everett

"You can be near Jesus and still miss Him. The one on the left died next to Jesus — but not with Him."

Discussion Questions & Application

New Christians

- What's the difference between going to church and truly knowing Jesus?
- How can you grow in a real relationship with Him?
- **Application:** Spend a few minutes in quiet prayer. Talk to Jesus like a friend and ask Him to help you know Him better.

Mature Christians

- Has your walk with Jesus become routine or distant?
- How do you intentionally nurture relationship, not just religion?
- **Application:** Set aside extra time this week for personal prayer or worship — just to be with Him.

Jr. & Sr. High Students

- Can you think of a time when you were around Christian things but not really connected to Jesus?
- What helps you feel closest to Him?
- **Application:** Try journaling a prayer or listening to worship music alone today — focus on connecting with Him personally.

Families with Young Children

- Ask your kids: Do you think Jesus wants to be our friend? What do friends do together?
- **Application:** Do something together this week that helps your child see faith as relationship — like writing Jesus a thank-you note or drawing Him a picture.

Families with Teenagers

- Why is it easy to confuse “doing church” with actually knowing Jesus?
 - What helps each of you feel personally connected to God?
 - **Application:** Have each family member share one way they want to grow in their personal walk with Jesus.
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DAY 5: Which Criminal Are You?

Daily Focus Summary

On the cross, both criminals faced death — but only one surrendered to Jesus. This question still echoes in every heart: *Which criminal are you?* One sought rescue on his terms. The other surrendered to a kingdom. Eternity hangs on our response.

Big Idea

We all face the man in the middle. The difference is in how we respond.

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 30:19 (ESV)

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live..."

Luke 23:42–43 (ESV)

"And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'"

Quote from Pastor Chad Everett

"They were both close to Jesus, but only one was with Him. The man in the middle makes the difference — but you get to choose."

Discussion Questions & Application

New Christians

- Which of the two responses to Jesus do you relate to more?
- How do you want to respond to Him today?
- **Application:** Pray and tell Jesus, "I choose You. I want to be with You, not just near You."

Mature Christians

- Are there any areas where you've been like the first criminal — asking Jesus for help without surrender?
- How do you daily choose to live on the "right side" of the cross?
- **Application:** Reflect on your walk with Jesus. Reaffirm your surrender and ask Him to reveal any areas of divided loyalty.

Jr. & Sr. High Students

- Do you ever feel like you're watching from a distance instead of walking with Jesus?
- What's one choice you can make that shows you're on His side?
- **Application:** Share with a friend, parent, or leader what your choice is — and ask them to help you walk it out.

Families with Young Children

- Ask your kids: Do you want to be close to Jesus or with Jesus? What's the difference?
- **Application:** Role-play together how to pray and talk to Jesus. Help your child say "yes" to Him in a simple way.

Families with Teenagers

- What's the most important takeaway for each of you from this week?
- How does Jesus' question — "Which criminal are you?" — impact your faith right now?
- **Application:** As a family, talk about what it means to "choose life." End by praying together, each person asking Jesus to be Lord.