

simple

small group study

The Christian Life
Doesn't Have to Be
Complicated

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LEADER'S GUIDE

SIMPLE Small Group Study Leader's Guide

Welcome to this study meant to help new believers or new church members gain a clear picture of the Christian life. Thank you for your willingness to lead this group as they discover the basics of Christianity and tear away some of the fears that come with understanding such concepts. Keep in mind that your group will be coming from varying degrees of knowledge as well as religious background. Take time to get to know each member in a brief introduction that will help set the stage for further discussions. An example would be to ask members if church was part of their growing up years. As you move forward in the study please keep the focus on the basics of the faith—assurance, baptism, church, devotions, and evangelism.

Week 1

Is Salvation Really Simple?

The purpose of this first week's study is to introduce briefly the topics covered in the study as well as to provide insight to you, the group leader, and the study participants regarding each person's understanding of salvation and the core elements of the study: assurance, baptism, church, devotions, and evangelism. This will enable you to serve your group well, allowing you to know on which areas to focus throughout the six weeks of study.

Create a welcoming environment for group members. Encourage questions and discussion; yet, with this first week, resist providing thorough answers that will be addressed later. The goal of Week 1 is to be an introduction, a time for participants to answer boldly and honestly about their presuppositions and ignorances, setting the tone for open, candid discussion.

While this first batch of lessons does not contain much Bible reading, this will not be the case in the following weeks. Weeks 2-6 challenges the group member to examine the Scripture for God's meaning, role, and purpose for these spiritual disciplines in the lives of His children.

Each week the group members are asked to write out a prayer with a specific subject. Please preview the material and have a sample prayer written this first week to help those who may struggle with this concept. Also, take special note of Day 3, questions 1b-d; Day 4, questions 2-3; and Day 5, question 3. If the situation permits, record each person's response so you can review as you prepare to lead Weeks 2-6. These questions ask participants to explain their understanding and opinions of the topics covered in this study.

Week 2

Assurance: How Can I Know for Sure?

Share this story with your group:

Can we know for sure? Absolutely? With perfect certitude? How can we really know without a shadow of a doubt that we are really going to heaven when we die?

Some years ago, a lady in our church said, "Well, I hope I'm saved and going to heaven, but I don't think I can really know for sure."

Another man with a troubled past had similar concerns. During a period of discouragement, he relapsed and started drinking again. "I'm not going to heaven now," he said. "I don't think I'm still a Christian."

Another family with a loved one at death's door wanted me to assure them that their dying relative was really going to heaven. "How can we be sure?" they asked. This man was a wonderful Christian, but his family was insecure about his eternal destination.

These are not uncommon experiences.

Assurance of salvation isn't a matter of whether or not you feel saved. Nor is it a matter of knowing the precise time and place that you became a Christian. What's important is what God has done and what He tells us in His Word, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). There's no doubt or uncertainty about salvation in these words of God. The Bible uses clear, direct words of certainty and assurance concerning salvation.

Emphasize, emphasize, emphasize the importance of the Bible in battling doubt—in any area but especially regarding one's relationship with Christ.

While it is important to review the study, allowing members to share answers and ask questions, please note these points when discussing Week 2:

Day 2 examines truths about Jesus Christ that ensures the believer's salvation. Reread John 20:30-31: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

The word sign was John's code word for our Lord's miracles. In his gospel, John describes eight different miracles that Jesus performed.

Read the account of these miracles:

- John 2:1-11
- 4:46-54
- 5:1-9
- 6:5-13
- 6:19-21
- 9:1-7
- 11:1-44
- 21:1-11

Ask your group members: What do these miracles teach you about who Jesus is? How do they encourage your faith?

Read John 20:20, encouraging group participants to think about the connection between what they know/believe about Christ to faith/belief.

Week 3

Baptism: Why Should I Get Wet?

Present this material by saying:

Have you come to Christ for forgiveness? Have you been baptized? Are you going on your way rejoicing?

Those questions may be difficult for you to answer because you are still unsure about what baptism signifies in your life. When you are baptized, you are signifying your death to the world and your new life in Christ. Baptism is a testimony. It sends a signal to others. It's a way of preaching a wordless sermon that communicates our new life to others.

This “wordless sermon” says:

- 1. I am identifying myself with Christ (Romans 6:4).*
- 2. I have been washed from my sins (Acts 22:16; Revelation 1:5).*
- 3. I have been united with the body of Christ by an act of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).*
- 4. I have decided to live a separated life—no turning back (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).*

That's the fourfold message being preached by everyone who follows the example of Jesus in baptism. That is the most powerful message in the world.

Consult with your church leadership, regarding your church's specific beliefs about baptism. However, below are some of my answers to common baptism questions.

Is Immersion the Only Form of Baptism?

I believe immersion is the preferred form of baptism for three reasons. First, the English word baptize is the transliteration of the Greek word baptizo, which was most often used to mean to plunge or to dip. In one occurrence in classical literature, the word was used to describe the sinking of a ship; in another, to describe the dipping of a ladle into liquid.

Second, as we've already seen, immersion vividly portrays the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. Third, don't forget the mikvahs. The ancient Hebrews of Jesus' time immersed themselves as a cleansing ritual before worshiping at the temple, and the symbol of baptism was introduced against that cultural backdrop. So, yes, I believe immersion is the preferred form of baptism.

Can Children Be Baptized?

Yes, if they are old enough to understand salvation. In the New Testament, entire households were baptized; and that would presumably include children. In Acts 16, for example, the apostle Paul led a businesswoman named Lydia to the Lord in the city of Philippi. Soon thereafter, the warden of the local prison was saved. In both cases, they were baptized “with their household.”

It would not, however, include infants because baptism is a symbol for those who have consciously received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior by grace through faith. There is not a specific case of an infant being baptized anywhere in the New Testament, and I think a child needs to be old enough to consciously receive Jesus as his or her Savior. He or she also needs to be old enough to understand something of the symbolic message of baptism. I don’t want to suggest a minimum age for baptism, but it’s important to work with the parents or guardians of that child to determine the appropriate time, which may be different for every child.

What if I’ve Been Baptized in the Past?

Some people, when they join a new church, wonder if they should be baptized again; and some churches even request that those joining their church from another denomination be rebaptized.

If your baptism followed your salvation experience and if it was meaningful to you, I don’t suggest being baptized again. If you aren’t sure you were really saved when you were baptized or if it wasn’t meaningful to you and you’d like to be re-baptized, your pastor will be glad to cooperate with you in that. Just ask him about it.

What if I’m Shy and Frightened to Be in Front of People?

Jesus called us to be public about our faith and unashamed of Him. Yes, sometimes it seems frightening or intimidating, and the act of baptism may even cost some people the support of their friends or families. But we have to trust God and ask Him for the courage to be a witness for Christ. The Christian life is a life of open faith, and God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

How Long Should I Wait After I’m Saved?

In the New Testament, people were baptized almost as soon as they were saved. The 3,000 who were converted on the Day of Pentecost were baptized immediately on that same day. Paul baptized Lydia and the jailer immediately after their conversion. Peter baptized the Christians in Caesarea upon their profession of Christ. Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch within minutes of his conversion. Different churches have different policies on this, but all in all, it’s best to be baptized soon after your conversion while the excitement of your decision is still fresh.

Exactly What Happens When I Am Baptized?

Some churches have indoor baptismal pools, and others have a choice spot at a nearby lake, ocean, or river. For churches having indoor baptisteries, there will be some sort of private dressing room in which you can change either into a robe or into some presentable wash-and-wear clothes. The pastor will give you some brief instructions and have prayer with you, then you'll step with him into the baptismal pool and cross your arms across your chest, bracing your one arm with the other. The minister will say something to this effect: "In obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." You'll bend your knees a little and assist yourself as the pastor lowers you into the water and lifts you out. You should emerge out of the water just as joyfully and exuberantly as a dead person who is coming back to life. It's wonderfully simple, but gloriously meaningful.

I Want to Be Baptized. What Do I Do?

If you want to be baptized, or if you'd like to talk with someone about it, call your pastor or your church office and make an appointment to talk with someone about this as soon as possible.

Week 4

Church: What's It Got to Offer?

On Day 2 and Day 3, group participants studied the beginnings of the church. Use this material to provide more history and information:

After our Lord's death and resurrection in Jerusalem, Jesus tarried on earth forty days, during which one question was paramount on the minds of the disciples. Now what?

They thought to themselves: We know Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Redeemer of Israel. We know He's the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and types. We know He's the King of the Jews, the King of Israel, and the King of Kings. We know He's destined to rule on the throne of David.

So what's next? What's He going to do now? How will these promises be fulfilled in Israel?

"Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" (Acts 1:6).

The last thing on their minds was that Jesus would suddenly leave and be gone 2000-plus years. They didn't yet comprehend that Jesus was going to return to heaven for an epoch of time, leaving them to evangelize the world while He was gone. They had no idea there would be a gap between His first and second comings; and, in fact, they didn't actually understand that there were going to be two distinct comings. The Old Testament prophets had not understood that. It was a mystery that wasn't revealed until later.

So the disciples were brimming with questions about the immediate fulfillment of the Messianic promises while Jesus was on earth during their lifetime. Having conquered death, hell, and the grave, they expected Him to conquer Israel, Rome, and Caesar.

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

In His reply in Acts 1:7, Jesus did not say Yes or No. Instead He told them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." In other words, Jesus was saying that all the great prophecies will eventually be fulfilled, though not necessarily right now. The Almighty God has His own timetable. He is first going to take My followers, group them together in a body, pour His Holy Spirit on them, create an entity called the church, and send them out to evangelize the world—that is going to happen first. Jesus put it this way in Acts 1:7ff:

And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Now when He

had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

This event, which we call the Ascension of Christ, occurred on the eastern flank of Jerusalem on the ridge of the Mount of Olives, and it totally bewildered the astounded disciples. For a long time, they gazed in stunned disbelief into the sky, trying to see the disappearing Savior. Finally two angels were sent to break the men from their reverie. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Coming to their senses, the disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and returned to the city where they retreated to an upper room. There were about 120 of them in all. For ten days they waited and prayed and praised God and planned for the future as best they could.

Week 5

Devotions: How Can I Stay Close to God?

Share this illustration with your group:

Earlier in the study, I mentioned something Dr. Stephen Olford had said to me when I was a college student. Decades later, just before he went home to be with the Lord, I met him again; and once again, I asked him about his daily quiet time. We had more time to talk, and he went into detail.

“I have a very, very simple procedure,” he said. “I read from Genesis to Revelation. When I reach Revelation I go back to Genesis. Even though I have read it over the years—over and over and over again—never a morning with God that He does not reveal something new to me. I read the passage three times: First time generally, second time expositively, third time personally. I let the Lord speak to me, showing me in His Word a promise to keep, a prayer to echo, a command to obey, a sin to confess, etc. I personalize it entirely and write in that form. And then I like to take what I have written and loosely turn that into prayer so that my prayers are not mechanical. It is not a Chinese wheel I can just put on. It is a prayer that comes right out of my quiet time before I go into thanksgiving, intercessions, etc.”

Then I asked him if he kept a prayer list. He replied, “Yes! My prayer list is a very interesting one. Monday—Missions. Tuesdays—Thanksgiving. Wednesday—Workers, staff, etc. Thursday—Tasks. Friday—Family. Saturday—Saints (so much of Paul’s praying was for the saints). And Sunday—Sinners. On the list of sinners for this present period of my life, one of them is a famous golfing figure that I’m praying for earnestly, because I believe if he were converted it would turn the youth world upside down. Anyway, I do have a prayer list, and under those headings. Now, it isn’t the length of time I spend in my quiet time, though I usually take an hour, but there is a carry-over of the activity of prayer, the attitude of prayer, that marks the rest of the day. I never pick up a telephone without a prayer. I never dictate a letter to my secretary without a prayer. I never let anybody into my study or out of my study without a prayer, and as my beloved workers know, any time we get together we say, ‘Let’s pray.’ And so, prayer is literally praying without ceasing. At the drop of a hat . . . and so I feel I live in that of perpetual prayer.”

All of which is to say, the quiet time is not the totality of our fellowship or communion with Christ. Instead, it sets the stage for it all day long.

Day 5 asked group participants to memorize Psalm 119:147-148. Encourage members to recite the verse. Also, ask: How does Bible memory impact your devotional time? Your faith?

Week 6

Evangelism: How Can I Share My Faith with Others?

Encourage your group participants with these stories:

I'll admit that I'm seldom comfortable when I open my mouth to witness for Christ. Even after years of working on it, I'm shy and nervous as a rule. But I've learned that our greatest earthly joy is leading someone else to Christ. When I gave my life fully to Christ as a sophomore in college, I developed a burden to share Christ with others. A friend encouraged me to go with him to a local mall and witness. I kept a record of those who made decisions for Christ, and just the other week I came across those names:

1-30-1972: Randy Brown (about 20)

2-4-1972: Charles Buckner (about 16)

2-4-1972: Gerry Gyton (about 13)

2-4-1972: Jimmy Bickly (about 15)

2-6-1972: Kevin Weekley (about 16)

4-15-1972: Ray Landrey (soldier at Fort Jackson)

4-15-1972: James Lee (soldier at Fort Jackson, Mormon background)

I don't know what became of any of these people; I hope some of them were truly saved and have continued with the Lord. But the memory of those days is very precious, and I can say that the greatest experiences I've had as a pastor are those times when we have seen people embracing Christ as Savior and Lord.

Recently while we were traveling in Israel, a young man in our group asked me if he could be baptized in the Jordan River.

"Yes," I replied, "can you tell me when you received Christ into your heart?" To my surprise, he told me he had prayed to receive Christ at our church's Easter Service at the Grand Ole Opry House two years ago.

I had preached on the Resurrection of Christ, and at the end of the message I had led people in praying the "sinner's prayer" for salvation. He had quietly joined in that prayer, but he had not communicated that to me until now. Had we not been traveling together, I'm not sure I would have known of it.

When you invite someone to church, take them to a gospel service, or say a word for the Lord, you never know how God may use that in another person's life. Only in heaven will we see the full measure of our work for the Lord. But there comes a time when we have to be assertive in sharing our faith, for the love of Christ compels us to do so.

*Several years ago, someone gave me a little book entitled *Jungle Harvest*, written by missionary Ruby Scott about her experiences among the Tila Indians in the jungles of south Mexico.*

Ruby and her colleague translated the message of the Bible into the Tila language; and they arranged to have the gospel recorded and duplicated on records that could be played on small crank-operated record players.

One of the men who heard the message was a witch doctor named Domingo. He was in his mid-fifties and illiterate, and his face was a sea of wrinkles. Domingo turned from his old way of life and was wonderfully converted. He instantly became burdened for his old friends, the other witch doctors in his former village. One day he decided to take the message to them. He borrowed one of the portable record players and the records (which the Tilas called Talking Black Tortillas), and off he went.

His former friends were happy to see him, and they talked, laughed, and reminisced about the old days. When Domingo opened up the record player, they watched him with great curiosity and began listening. After playing some of the Scriptures, Domingo told them that God had turned his heart around. He shared his own testimony with them and preached the gospel to them.

They responded angrily, "How can you, who have experienced the power and authority of a witch doctor, turn your back on the very gods who have chosen you?" They argued and threatened him. Domingo remained calm and kept preaching Jesus to them. Finally, his friends grabbed their machetes and ordered him to leave.

Domingo hastily closed the phonograph and slipped the records into his carrying bag. Swinging the machine onto his back, he turned sadly and started down the trail. But his heart was heavy and he felt he had to make one more try. Turning back, he began to say another word for Christ.

In anger, one of the men raised his machete and aimed it at Domingo's phonograph. Domingo's hand touched the machine to steady it, and the machete sliced off three fingers. Domingo hurried away, and when he was out of sight tore a sleeve from his shirt to bandage his bleeding hand. Then he trudged home.

Two days later, as Ruby Scott was dressing the stumps of his fingers, she coaxed him to tell her exactly what had happened. He told the story, then after a long pause, he looked at her and said, "Those poor men! God's message just didn't grab their hearts. I'll go back and tell them again."

In her book, Ruby wrote that she stayed awake a long time that night, staring into the dark and thinking of Domingo's crippled hand and of his quiet words, "I'll go back and tell them again."

She thought of the times she had failed to witness to her friends, the times she had grown discouraged with her witnessing, and the times she had failed to go back and tell them again.

"I turned over," she said, "struggled to my knees in the cramped confines under my mosquito net, and rededicated my life to the Lord. I asked Him to make me as faithful a missionary as this humble, illiterate former witch doctor."¹

¹Ruby Scott, *Jungle Harvest* (privately published by Ruby Scott and the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society, 1988), 45-48.

Look for opportunities to act on the “triple-A” of evangelism—attitude, action, and assertiveness. People everywhere need to have Christ in their lives. You may be the one to plant a seed with your co-worker, your child’s teacher, or someone in your family. You don’t need to be a great preacher or world-famous evangelist. An evangelist is anyone who shares the Good News of Christ, whether the audience is a great crowd in an auditorium or one small child sitting on your front porch.