

**THE
ANSWERING HUMANITY'S
COMMON QUESTIONS
ABOUT GOD
STUDY**

LEADER GUIDE



The Answering Humanity's Common Questions about God Study Leader Guide

by Tim Passmore

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1. Religion: Spirituality General
2. Self-Help: Spiritual
3. Religion: Christian Life – Personal Growth

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SESSION ONE

The Relationship

NOTE TO LEADERS:

All of the information in the Leader's Guide in **BOLD PRINT** is in the Student Guide. All non-bolded wording is printed to help you teach the material. Words that are underlined in the Leader's Guide are blanks to be filled in by students during the session in their Student Guide. Go to the web site www.answercommonquestions.com on your smart phone. Create a quick link to your home page on your smart phone for the website. You will also have students in the study go to the website and create a quick link.

You will notice instructions throughout the leader guide with the wording **REMINDER GRAPHIC** which instructs them to go to the web site and click on specific titles that are in the menu bar of the web site. These are **REMINDER GRAPHICS** that remind them of what they have been learning during the session. Give the students the instruction to NOT go to the titles in the menu until you have instructed them to do so. Tell them this will be a test of their self-discipline. When they have completed the class, they will have viewed all of the **REMINDER GRAPHICS** and understand their purpose.

TO BEGIN:

We are so excited that you have made the decision to participate in this important training. Our desire is to help you be prepared to share the Good News of Jesus with others. The foundation scripture for this study is found in the book of 1 Peter....

THEME VERSE FOR THE STUDY

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

1 Peter 3:15

THE REASONS FOR THIS STUDY

Let's take a look at the reasons for this study...

- **To provide help for those who don't believe in Jesus to understand why those who do believe in Jesus can do so with confidence.**
- **To help those who are considering placing their faith in Jesus as the way to have a relationship with God to overcome the doubts that they are having that are keeping them from making that decision.**
- **To help those who believe in Jesus to grow in their confidence in sharing why they believe in him with others.**

INTRODUCTION

- **You may never need some of the information that is in this training. There are those who will give their lives to Christ after sharing a simple salvation presentation. We will be learning a presentation that we can share with others to help them understand how they can become a Christian.**

ILL: If you have a personal example of someone who gave their life to Christ after a simple presentation, share it now.

- **There are others who may not receive Christ after a simple presentation. In fact, you may not be able to give the presentation because of their skepticism about God.**

ILL: If you have a personal example of someone who was skeptical about God after sharing with them how to become a Christian or someone who did not want to hear what you have to say because of their skepticism about God, share it now.

To begin, we need to learn how we can begin a conversation about Christ with others. One method made popular through the evangelism training program called Continuous Witnessing Training used the acrostic for the word FIRE. Each letter represents a word that sparks conversation with others. This word is associated with a statement or question which leads into conversation. Let's learn them...

BEGINNING A CONVERSATION

F.I.R.E.

- **Family: Tell me about your family.**
- **Interests: Do you have any special hobbies?**
- **Religious Background: When you attend church, where do you attend?** Their answer to this question is often revealing about God's involvement in their lives.
- **Exploratory Questions:**
 - **Have you come to the place in your life where you know for certain that you have a relationship with God and that you will go to Heaven when you die?**

Often, this question will open the door for you to share the Good News about Jesus. If they say they are not certain, we can say – “Do you mind if I take 3 or 4 minutes to share with you how you can know for certain?” You will then share the salvation presentation that you will learn. If they seem skeptical about what you have asked, you can move on to the following two exploratory questions....

- **What do you believe we have to do to have a relationship with God?**

DISCUSSION FOR CLASS: Ask students: “What are some possible responses from those we ask?”

After the person needing Christ has answered this exploratory question we can ask the final question....

- **Have you done what you believe is necessary to have a relationship with God?**

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on BEGINNING A CONVERSATION in the menu bar.

We can learn a simple salvation presentation which we can use to share the Good News about Jesus with others. We call it the “Religion vs. Relationship Presentation. It uses many scriptures found in the book of Romans along with another popular scripture. To learn this, we will use an illustration to remind us of what we are to share. Let’s begin learning this presentation....

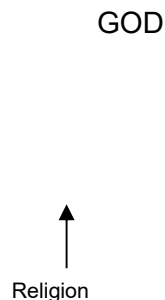
RELIGION VS. RELATIONSHIP PRESENTATION (ROMAN ROAD)

We will share a presentation using an illustration. The illustration can be used for two purposes. First, it can be used as something you write on a sheet of paper to illustrate visually what you are sharing with the person who is needing Christ. This can be beneficial, but not necessary. Second, it is something that the person who is sharing their faith with others learns to help them remember what they are to say and when. It helps them learn the presentation. Let’s begin learning the presentation by hearing it.

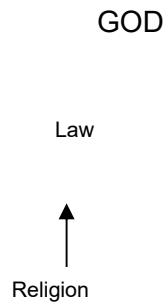
Remember, we have asked the first exploratory question or possibly all exploratory questions. For example, we have asked – “Have you come to the place in your life where you know for certain that you have a relationship with God and that you will go to Heaven when you die?”

Have them close their books and ask them to listen as you share the presentation. Share the presentation. (If you are using the power point presentation, use it as you go through the presentation illustrating to the class how the illustration is used as a tool to remember what you are to share. If you are not using the power point, use a poster board to draw the illustration as you share the presentation.)

• RELIGION

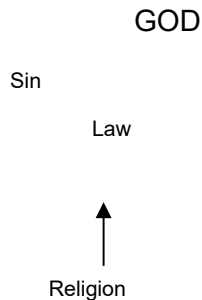


Most religions believe in rules that they are to follow to have a relationship with God. God did give us laws to follow but none of us follow them all of the time.



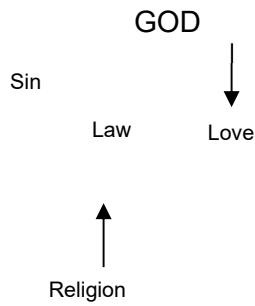
We do things wrong. This is called SIN.

- **SIN**



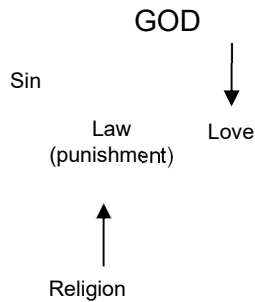
The Bible tells us that we all have the same problem...*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* (Romans 3:23) Sin is a common term understood by other religions. The word sin is an old military term which means to miss the mark you are shooting for. We sin when we fall short of living the way God wants us to. We don't show His love to others all of the time. This breaks the relationship between us and God. Relationships are built on trust and we've broken trust by being selfish and it keeps us from having a relationship with Him. Knowing that we can't earn a relationship with God by following rules, we rely on Him to bridge the gap and come to us. How? Through love!

- LOVE



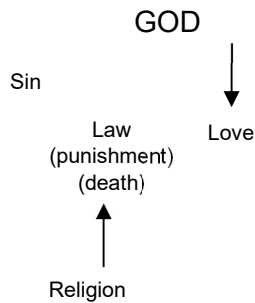
The Bible says...*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16) God decided to come to us by sending His son Jesus to show us His love. The truth is, we don't deserve God's love. What we deserve is to be **PUNISHED** for the things that we do wrong....

- PUNISHMENT



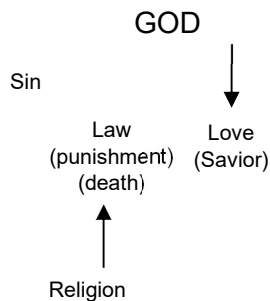
The Bible says... *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23) Many think of wages as money that we earn for something that we do. In this case, we earn something for what we don't do. We don't obey the rules. The payment for our sin is **DEATH**.

- **DEATH**



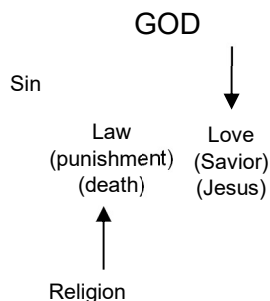
We know that we will die one day and if we don't have a relationship with God, we will be separated from Him forever. God lives in Heaven and we are separated from Him in a place called Hell. God doesn't want that for us so he did something. He sent us a SAVIOR...

- **SAVIOR**



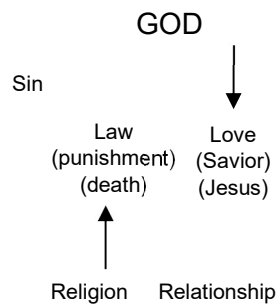
Our savior takes our place by taking our punishment for us. He saves us from being punished. Our savior is JESUS....

- **JESUS**



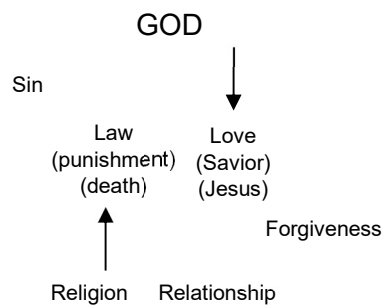
The Bible says... *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8. Not only did he die for us, he also came back to life three days later. He came back to provide a way for us to come back to life in Heaven after our death. God did all of this so we could have a relationship with Him.

- **RELATIONSHIP**



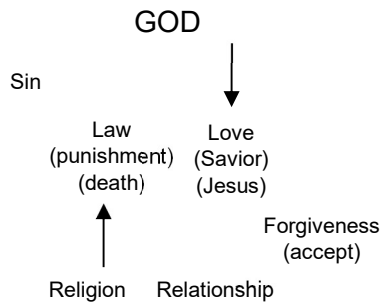
How do we begin this relationship? To have this relationship, we must be FORGIVEN...

- **FORGIVENESS**



We are forgiven when the punishment for our sins is paid for and we ACCEPT what has been done for us.

- **ACCEPT**



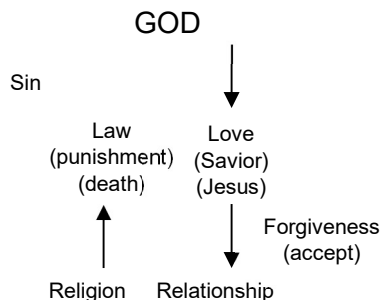
We accept this forgiveness by believing in what Jesus did for us and telling God that we need him. The Bible says... *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*¹⁰ *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.* (Romans 10:9-10) We do this through prayer. The Bible says... *for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* (Romans 10:13) We pray the ABC’s! We **ADMIT** that we have sinned and ask for His forgiveness. We tell God that we **BELIEVE** that Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins and was resurrected to provide a way for me to live forever with you in Heaven.. We **COMMIT** to follow Jesus as the Lord, or leader, of our lives.

Is there any reason why you wouldn’t be willing to accept what Jesus did for you right now?

PRAYER OF SALVATION

Dear God, I **ADMIT** that I have sinned and ask for your forgiveness. I **BELIEVE** that Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for my sins and was resurrected to provide a way for me to live forever with you in Heaven. I **COMMIT** to follow Jesus as the Lord of my life as I live to become like him. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

When we pray a prayer of salvation, the gap between us and God has been removed and we are in a relationship with Him.



NOTE:

Some may ask, “Why death? I haven’t killed anyone so why does someone need to die for me?” How can we answer that question? We can say...

Sin, at its worst stage, leads to death. It’s the greatest way we can hurt others. James 1:15 teaches us – “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” We are punished for the worst of what humanity can do. The worst we can do is to take a life. Death is our punishment.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on RELIGION vs. RELATIONSHIP in the menu bar. You will notice two graphics on the page, one of the Religion vs. Relationship Salvation illustration and the second of the scriptures used in the presentation.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on I ACCEPT in the menu bar.

Where do we go from here? Let’s think about one of the main objections about Christianity. Many believe that Christians are narrow minded believing that Jesus is the only way to have a relationship with God. How do we answer the question....

WHY IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY?

This is a common question from those who are skeptical about having a relationship with God through Jesus. How can we respond to this? We can talk to them about the difference between what other religions believe and what Christians believe. We all believe in a “Go Between.” We believe in something or someone that helps us connect with God. Our “Go Between” is different.

THE GO BETWEEN

There is a common belief among most major religions that believe in a God. They believe that they need help experiencing their God. We need someone or something connected to Him to tell us how we experience Him. We need a go-between who tells us the rules we are to follow. They are **mediators**. This means, they tell us what we need to do to form a relationship with someone else.

For Example: Judaism has the Torah. Buddhism has the Darma. Islam has the Qur’an. Greek Religions have the Logos.

We have a different type of mediator. We call him a love mediator. Let’s learn about the....

LOVE MEDIATOR

The Bible talks about Jesus being our mediator. We read...

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

What's the difference between Jesus and the mediator's of other religions? Jesus took the punishment for our sins as a ransom. He met the requirements of a love mediator. What are they?...

- **Sinless:** We need someone who doesn't miss the mark. We need someone who is always moral and does what is right. If he is a failure like us, we won't respect him. Why should we listen to him? He would also need to be punished for his own sin.
- **Desire:** We need someone who wants us to be forgiven and not be punished. He doesn't want us to be judged even though we deserve it. He wants us to be forgiven and not suffer the consequence. *John 3:17 says, "For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*
- **Sacrifice:** We need someone who loves us so much that he's willing to take our punishment. We need someone who is willing to do whatever is necessary to allow us to be forgiven and have a relationship with God. We need someone who is willing to die for us. That's not all! We must accept what he did for us. It must become personal.

We know that Jesus died. It's recorded in historical documents other than the Bible. How does it affect my life? It doesn't unless we know that we have sinned and deserve punishment and choose to accept what he did for us in our place. When we do, it's personal. If we don't, he's just a guy who died who has no part of my life. But it does have a bearing on our lives. If we don't accept the punishment who took for us, we'll take the punishment ourselves. It's death. But what kind of death? It's not only physical, it's spiritual. Spiritual death is being separated from God forever. This moves us into another characteristic of the savior.

- **Death to Life:** We need someone who cannot be stopped by death. (If he could come back to life, then through him, so can we!) Because we need to be connected to God, we need someone who is both God and man. We need someone who has a father who is supernatural who has power over nature including death and a mother who was natural connecting him to humanity. His resurrection proves his connection to God.

It's like someone who is mixed race. They have two parents. One is of one race and the other is of a different background. The child knows what it is to be both. This is what happened with our Savior, Jesus. Again, we need someone who has a Father who is supernatural who has power over nature including death and a mother who was natural connecting him to humanity. We need someone who is like us as human beings, knowing the emotions and physical feelings that we experience. It's only the one who knows what it's like to be both who can bring both together. How did he prove that he was supernatural? What is the greatest way to prove the power over natural things? It's to make a natural

physical thing that cannot come back to life on its own, come back to life. His resurrection proved he had the power of God. We know that we will one day die, but God has the power to bring us back to life. Jesus's resurrection is our hope of also coming back to life after our death in Heaven. We die to one world and come to life in another. We go from mom's home to dad's home.

There is only one who meets the criteria of a Savior. He is Jesus. That is why Jesus said about himself, "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

When we understand what is needed to have a relationship with God, we understand that to believe in Jesus is not narrow-minded, it makes logical sense. It is what gives us hope of reconciling with God and having eternal life.

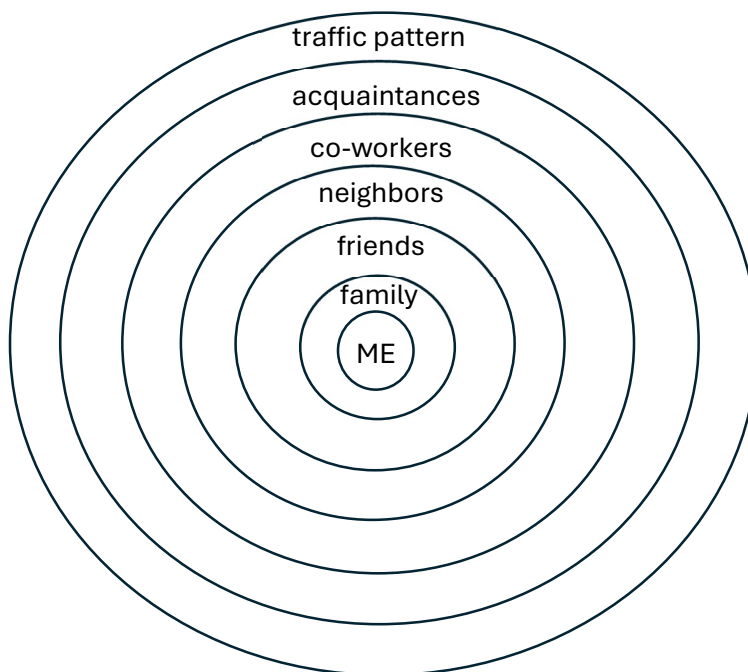
REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on LOVE MEDIATOR in the menu bar.

WE NEED TO SHARE OUR STORY

We need to begin thinking about those we know who need to hear about Jesus. We also need to begin praying that God would give us the opportunity to share the message of salvation with them and that they would be receptive to what we say. Let's begin identifying those need Jesus.

IDENTIFYING THOSE IN MY CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

Let's look at a circle of influence.....



Using the categories below, write the names of those who need to hear about the Good News of Jesus....

Family:

Friends:

Neighbors:

Co-workers:

Acquaintances:

Traffic Patterns: (People we encounter on a regular basis like the check-out clerk at the market)

SESSION TWO

My Story

TO BEGIN:

Go over Religion vs. Relationship presentation again. You will do this at the beginning of each session. The more they hear it, the easier it will become for them to memorize it!

INTRODUCTION

- **One of the most convincing arguments for giving our lives to Christ is our own story.**

Tell your personal story about how you gave your life to Christ including what your life was like before Christ, how you gave you life to Christ and how your life has been since giving your life to Christ.

- **It's personal to us. We need to know how to tell our story.**

To learn this, I want to tell you the story of someone in the Bible who was skeptical of Jesus, who gave his life to him. His name was Paul. At the time of the scripture we'll be reading, he's known as Saul. Paul will be a common thread throughout the Answering Humanity's Common Questions about God study. Let's learn about him....

THE STORY OF PAUL

The actual account of what happened to Paul is found in Acts 9:1-19. He would re-tell what happened to him as he shared the Good News about Jesus with others. Let's read about one of those occasions.

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.) ³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³ The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!" ³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?" "Do you speak Greek?" he replied. ³⁸ "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?" ³⁹ Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people." ⁴⁰ After receiving the

commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic...

Acts 21:27-40

We learn that they were in Jerusalem. The Jewish people wanted Paul killed for speaking against Jewish law. The Jewish people believed that the Torah (book of the Law in the scriptures) provided the law that they were to follow to earn a relationship with God. Paul believed that no one was perfect and could not follow the law at all times. We all miss the mark of the way God wants us to live. We are all sinful. This message was contrary to what the Jews believed and it angered them. The Romans took him in custody to protect him from the crowd. Paul then asked the Romans to allow him to speak to the crowd. Remember, at this time he was known as Saul.

¹ “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.” ² When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: ³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. ⁶ “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ⁸ “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. “ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. ¹² “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴ “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

Acts 22:1-16

His being baptized was significant. It revealed his new belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It revealed that he understood his own sin and need for forgiveness through Jesus. His sins had been washed away. He now had a new life through Christ and a new purpose. He was to tell what he had seen and heard which led to his belief about Jesus. God had revealed to Ananias what Saul's calling would be...

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Acts 9:15

What do we learn about Paul?

We see what his life was like before he became a follower of Jesus and what led him to become a follower. Let's write down what we learn about him...

- **He was trained in Jewish theology. He was a protector of the Jewish faith. Because of this...**
- **He saw Christians as a threat to the Jewish way of life. They measured their spirituality by their ability to obey rules. This led him to live a competitive spirituality. The goal is to be better than others. He was a skeptic about Jesus.**
- **He was so threatened by Christians that he had them put to death. They were known as "The Way." He wouldn't have wanted someone to do this to him! This is one way we know that what we are doing is wrong behavior and sin.**
- **He had an encounter on the road to Damascus. He was faced with something he could not handle on his own. He was blinded. He had limited ability. He couldn't heal himself. This man, who relied on his own authority and ability to make it through life, now needed the help of someone else. Not only that, he was confronted with his bad behavior from the one he was harming - Jesus. He asked him - "Why are you persecuting me?" Get the picture! He must rely on the person that he had been harming to be the one to help him with his problem, a problem that he fully deserved to be experiencing because of his actions. He needed the one whom he was harming to be willing to forgive him and help him. The good news is HE DID! He forgave him and provided a way for him to be healed of his blindness. These actions of love overwhelmed Paul and caused him to have a change of heart. He found what he was really looking for. He found the unconditional love from someone that we all desire.**

Paul just told his story. How do we tell ours? If you were the one arrested by the Romans and asked to speak to the crowd, what story would you tell about your experience of placing your faith in Jesus? We want to help you develop your story. To do this, we need to answer some questions. On the following pages we will answer questions to help us develop our story.

We can learn them from Paul's life.

ANSWERING FOUR QUESTIONS TO TELL OUR STORY

There are four questions which we answer on the following pages.

- **What was my life like before I became a Christian?**
 - **What was I living for? (My Identity)** Whatever I was living for was my identity. One way our identity is formed is from what we believe gives meaning to life. **Before you became a Christian, how would you have completed this statement.... “I identified as someone who believed life was about _____.” In the below space, write about what you lived for before becoming a Christian.**

Paul’s life was about having authority. He believed that it would give him meaning and make him happy. This was true until he faced a situation that his authority could not solve.

- **What caused me to consider giving my life to Christ?**

- **Did something happen that caused you to realize that you needed help with your life?**

Paul faced a crisis. He was blinded and couldn't heal himself. God used this crisis to confront him about what he was living for and what he was doing. Remember, he was now reliant on the one whom he had harmed to show love to him and heal him. He had to rely on Jesus's forgiveness. Jesus showed love to him and it caused him to see the truth about his real need. He needed a relationship with someone who loved him unconditionally. This was an eye-opening experience for Paul. Not only because it led him to be able to physically see, but also because he saw what he really needed. What was your eye-opening experience?

- **What convinced you that you needed God?**
 - **What caused you to put your trust in Him?**

Paul was hopeless without God for his blindness to be healed. He had to place trust in someone other than himself who could do what he could not do. He learned that he needed someone more powerful in whom he could place his trust.

- What has your life been like since giving your life to Christ?
 - What gives your life meaning?

He was used by God to take the message of Christ to non-Jewish people. He shared Christ with Gentiles. Some of them were skeptics.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on MY STORY in the menu bar.

WE ARE TO SHARE THE MESSAGE OF JESUS WITH OTHERS

Jesus said...

...*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*
Mark 16:15

We are to share the message about Jesus with others. That’s what Paul did.

Another Story about Paul

Let me tell you another story about Paul. He became active in telling people about Jesus and our need for him. He did this by telling his own story and sharing with them the Good News about Jesus’s death for our sins and his resurrection. Paul, who was once a skeptic, now began sharing this message with others who were skeptics. Let’s look at one occasion where this occurred...

After the crucifixion and the resurrection the message spread and people wanted to know if it was true. Paul was one of those who was sharing the message. While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ ²⁹ “Therefore since we are

God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” ³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Read Acts 17:16-34

Paul had spoken about Christ and a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers came to him and took him to the Areopagus, a place where the leaders were, to ask him questions. Who were these people?

Epicureanism is the philosophical doctrine of Epicurus holding that the highest good is pleasure which can be experienced through indulgence.

- **The idol of the Epicureans was pleasure. It was their god.** It's what they lived for. It's the “If it feels good do it!” philosophy.

Then there were the Stoics. It was the school of philosophy founded by Zeno (a Greek philosopher) who taught that people should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submit without complaint to the circumstances of life.

- **The idol of the Stoic was their self ability – what they could do on their own.** It was only through the discipline of their thought that they could keep themselves from passion and to be unmoved by joy or grief. They did this to protect themselves from being controlled by the circumstances of life.

These philosophies don't provide what we desire in life. Pleasure ends and we're looking for more. The Epicurean philosophy doesn't give us what we desire. We also discover that we can't handle every situation in life like the Stoics believed. Some things are out of our control and it's difficult for these things not to affect our emotions. We try them, but they fall short. These two realities about pleasure and self-effort could very well be the reason why they were curious to learn about Christ and how he connects us to God. They must have been looking for something more, something that only God could provide.

Even the people whom Paul was interacting with at this place, some of the most intellectual of their day, were searching for God. They even had a name for him. They called Him “The Unknown God.”

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god.

Acts 17:22-23

He was an important God to them. We know this because they would swear in the name of the Unknown God when making agreements with one another. Paul acknowledged their belief in this Unknown God. We read this in the Bible...

Paul told them who He was...

*For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*²⁹ *"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.*

Acts 17:28-29

WHO IS THE UNKNOWN GOD?

- **He's the God that we can know personally. God was near to them and wanted to be in relationship. Paul said....**

God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

Acts 17:27

Remember, they were curious about what Paul was saying because of the need for their desires to be met. God meets our desires....

- **He's also the God who meets our desires. What desires? We have several...**

- **We have a desire to know where we came from.** Paul was telling them that God created them.

Paul talked about....

The God who made the world and everything in it....

Acts 17:24

For in him we live and move and have our being....

Acts 17:28

- **We have a desire to know what is right and wrong.** They were told of their need to repent. In other words, they did something wrong and needed to change. We will be judged because of what we do wrong and for what we do with Jesus. Did we accept him for our forgiveness?

*In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*³¹ *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."*

Acts 17:30-31

- **We have a desire for life after death.** He taught them about Jesus' resurrection. We read...

...Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Acts 17:18

This was an important message to hear because of the hope that it gives for life after death. Jesus is the one who gives us hope for the future. If Jesus can live again, so can we!

- **We have a desire to have meaning in life.** Our meaning comes in being a part of God's family and representing Him.

Remember....

They were living for two things: This represents what we can also live for...

- **Some live for what they can do in their own strength without God. (Stoics).**
- **Some live for pleasure. (Epicureans).**

Neither of these ways of life met their desires. They needed something more.

The difference in their image of the Unknown God made of gold or silver or stone and the God who created us is that gold or silver or stone don't love us back. We're looking for someone to love us back.

We're looking for someone to love us in a specific way. We need someone who loves us no matter what we're like and no matter what we've done. We need someone to love us unconditionally even though we break the law. We need a God who loves us even when we fall short of being the person He created us to be. We also need someone who loves us enough to do what is necessary to help us be who He created us to be by pointing out our failures and helping us improve.

What does this love look like? How do we know what this love looks like? We need someone who shows us what this love is like. Paul told them about the one who had come to be the example of God's love. His name was Jesus.

He showed his love to everyone, even those who were considered to be the outcasts of their day like prostitutes and thieves. He didn't shun them or condemn them, he spent time with them, pointed out where they had fallen short of who God created them to be and he encouraged them to be better. It was through Christ's service to those who were living self-centered lives and his service to those who were in need that people saw what God's love looks like. This is how it works. We see God's love through people.

He told them about Jesus and they responded to what he had said. They didn't all respond the same way. The Bible says...

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

Acts 17:32-34

THE THREE RESPONSES TO HEARING THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

- **Some don't believe it because they can't trust what they have heard.** Some rejected him out right because to them, if they didn't see it, touch it, or experience it first-hand, they couldn't logically accept it. They didn't have faith that what they were hearing about Jesus was true. They may have also felt that what they were doing was not wrong. They could have wanted to continue to live their lifestyle.
- **Some are considering that it might be true, but they need more reason to place their faith in Jesus.** Some wanted to think about it more and were considering it. They possibly thought – “Maybe he is the answer I've been looking for!”
- **Some believe what they hear about Jesus, know he is the way to have a relationship with God and that they need him in their lives and accept what Jesus did for them.**

Thinking about the 3 responses we have to the message about Jesus, what has your response been?

HOW HAVE I RESPONDED TO JESUS?

Let's think back to the salvation presentation. At the end of what we share we ask – “Is there any reason why you wouldn't be willing to give your life to Jesus?” What do we do if they say they aren't ready? We can ask them questions related to how people respond to the message of Jesus. Let's take a look at them...

- **If you don't believe in him, what would it take for you to believe?** DISCUSSION: Ask students - “Why don't some believe?” One answer might be that they don't believe in God because of the evil that is in the world.
- **If you are considering placing faith in what he did for you, what is holding you back from making that decision?** DISCUSSION: Ask the class: “What might be holding a person back?” One response might be – “If I follow Jesus, I'll have to give up my lifestyle.”
- **If you do believe in Jesus and have placed your faith in what he did for you, why did you do it?** Other people need to hear that message!

GIVE THE RESPONSE QUESTIONS CARD

How can we help them move closer to accepting what Jesus did for them? We need to know the difference makers. What are they?....

THE DIFFERENCE MAKERS

- **Some could only use their head to make decisions.**
- **Others were able to use their heads and their hearts.**

God speaks to us through using our heads but He also speaks to us by using our hearts. We'll get more into this in the next session.

SOME REALITIES:

- **I can't make anyone believe in God.** I couldn't do it with my friend that I talked about before. I can't reason people to God. I can help people reason why the idea of the existence of God is plausible and makes sense.
- **I can't change someone's heart.** God does this. If someone believes that they are living for the wrong thing, God is helping them recognize this about themselves. God is helping them see that their heart is committed to the wrong thing. They are placing their faith in the wrong thing. If they know it, God is doing a miracle.
- **I can't make someone feel conviction for doing something that God does not desire.** That feeling comes from the one who created us. That feeling comes from God. He created us to feel at peace when we do what is right and to feel uneasy when we do something that is harmful to ourselves or to others. If we feel this conviction, God is speaking to our hearts.
- **We choose for ourselves who or what we trust in.** We choose who we believe we need to help us with our problems. We choose who we believe will give our lives meaning and purpose.
- **God can use me to help others have a change of heart.** God can use something that I say or do to open up their hearts to Him. Remember, God used Paul's words to lead a member of the Areopagus and many others to believe.

God wants us to have faith. End the session with the following story.

Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian Jew, has been called "the voice of the underground church." In the 1940s, he was jailed and tortured by communist officials in his home country. While imprisoned, he spoke boldly of the gospel to his atheistic captors. About one experience in the 14 years he spent in prison, he wrote, "The political officer asked me harshly, 'How long will you continue to keep your stupid religion?' "I said to him, 'I have seen innumerable atheists regretting on their deathbeds that they have been godless; they called on Christ. Can you imagine that a Christian could regret when death is near that he has been a Christian and call on Marx or Lenin to rescue him from his faith?' "The atheist began to laugh, 'A clever answer.' "I continued, 'When an engineer has built a bridge, the fact that a cat can pass over the bridge is no proof that the bridge is good. A train must pass over it to prove its strength. The fact that you can be an atheist when everything goes well does not prove the truth of atheism. It does not hold up in moments of great crisis.' "I used Lenin's books to prove to him that, even after becoming prime minister of the Soviet Union, Lenin himself prayed when things went wrong."

("Our Founders," Voice of the Martyrs, undated article access March 16, 2025, <https://www.persecution.com/founders>)

SESSION THREE

Truth and Logic

TO BEGIN:

Go over Religion vs. Relationship presentation again. The more they hear it, the easier it will become for them to memorize it!

We're in a search for truth...

TRUTH

We all have a desire to know the truth. Why? What we believe to be true guides our choices throughout life. Our beliefs become the filter that we use when deciding what we say and what we do. How do we discover truth? There are two paths...

The Two Paths to Discovering Truth.

There are two paths that we take to discover what is true. Our search for truth happens by understanding the physical and the spiritual. (Some have a different name for the spiritual).

- **Physical Truth (Head)** = Physical truth is found by **scientifically looking at physical elements in the natural world to come to conclusions. We look at the physical evidence and decide on the best explanation for what we discover. This differs from spiritual truth.**
- **Spiritual Truth (Heart)** = Spiritual truth is **made up of our gut level feelings (Morality)**. Some don't call it spiritual, they just say that they feel it in their gut that it is true or false. We all have gut level feelings within us. It's called morality. We know the difference between right and wrong without someone having to tell this to us.
 - **We know something is right when we treat others the way we want to be treated and we know something is wrong when we don't.** This is why we know that rape, murder, stealing, lying and other hurtful behaviors are bad behaviors. Our spirit, our gut, tells us this. Just as we have a spiritual, or gut feeling that something is right or wrong,
 - **We have a spiritual gut feeling that something is true or false.** We feel in our spirit that it's true. We have a peace about it. We combine the physical with the spiritual to discover truth.

This even happens in the scientific world. A scientist has a hunch, a gut level feeling about something, and then works to prove his theory through physical facts. It began with an inward belief about something. The Greeks had a word for this called "splanchnon" which means – "intestines" or "guts." Another word for this is our spirit.

LOGIC

We may ask, “Is it logical?” Let’s consider a question... “Is there a God?” How do we decide if there is a God? This is where faith comes in. After all, we don’t physically see God. We must have faith that He exists.

THE TWO TYPES OF FAITH

There are two types of faith.

- **Blind faith** = We believe something just because someone says it’s true.

This is child-like faith. At early stages of a child’s development, they believe that what their parents say is true. Then things change. They become teenagers. They begin questioning whether or not what their parents say is true. This moves them into a different type of faith. **They begin to ask why.**

- **Reasoned faith** = I’ll believe something because the evidence points to it being the best explanation. (Logic) It makes sense to us that it’s true.

ILL: You may want to share your personal experience of when you became a Christian and the reason why you chose to make this decision.

We decide what to believe through logical reasoning. Reasoned faith is what most rely on when deciding what to believe. This gets back to something we’ve already learned.

- We reason using physical evidence.
- It is supported through a gut level feeling that it is true. We used both reason and a gut level feeling when we decided to give our lives to Jesus. We know that gut level feeling to be the Holy Spirit.

We use logic to form our beliefs.

THE ROLE THAT LOGIC PLAYS IN BELIEF

Can we come to a logical conclusion that there is a God? Believing in God is logical. The facts point us to God. Not everyone believes this. For example...

Atheist Michael Martin said, “*1.6 billion Christians can be wrong...My claim is simply that...rational people should give up these beliefs.*”

He acknowledged that 1.6 billion (now 2.3 billion) people believe there is a God in this statement. Could that many people be wrong?

Many who do not believe in the existence of God claim that people who do believe in Him are unintelligent and don’t use common sense to form their beliefs. The opposite is actually the truth.

Through their logic, or reasoning, they put two and two together and come up with an answer that there is a God.

What is the difference? People who come to this conclusion are “Open Minded” about the possibility of the existence of God. Those who take a hard stand against God’s existence are often “Closed Minded” to the possibility that He exists. Does your mind-logic lead you to believe in the existence of God? This is where the problem comes in...

Many look around and see the circumstances of life and they say, there must not be a God. Why do they believe this? The answer is that God doesn’t do what they would do if they were God.

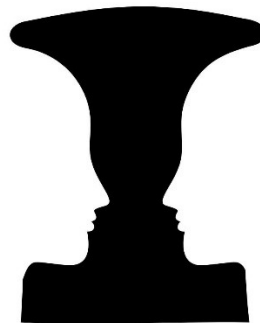
To feel this way is to assume that we know as much as God and therefore can make the decisions that God should be making.

- **If there is a God, surely He is better than we are. We are corrupted but a powerful God who is worthy of believing in is not corrupted.** We can recognize, that if there is a God, we are imperfect and he is more perfect than we are. We also recognize, that...
- **If there is a God, we don’t know as much as He does. He knows the past, present and the future and knows how what is happening today fits in to the big picture.** Our knowledge is limited to the past and the present which keeps us from being qualified to make the best decisions.

Unfortunately, some people see God in the wrong way. This reminds me of the illustration of an image which can be seen in one of two ways.

Susan Barrett shared this image in her book – *It’s All in Your Head*.

THE VASE ILLUSTRATION



What do you see when you look at the image? Do you see the vase? Why do you see the vase? Is it because I told you there was a vase? Did I influence you to look for a vase? Is there something else that you could see? Some see a vase when they look at the image and others see two people looking at each other when they see the image. The image hasn’t changed. The difference is in how we see the image or what we’re looking for when we look at the image. Someone tells us what to see. People tell us what to see about God. However, there may be another view of God.

Let's get back to the illustration. What do you see? Susan Barrett made a key point. Do you see a vase or two people looking at one another? If this is the first time you have seen this, you may be able to go back and forth and see both. However, if you have only seen this in one way for a long period of time, you may have great difficulty in seeing the other, even though it is clearly there. (It's All In Your Head, by Susan Barrett, p. 72). OUR GOAL IS TO GIVE PEOPLE ANOTHER VIEW OF GOD!

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on TRUTH & LOGIC in the menu bar.

Some may have been told something about God for a long time that simply isn't true. Why do they see Him in this way? Many struggle with God's existence because of the presence of evil in the world. Our logic can convince us that we need God.

OUR LOGIC CAN CONVINCE US THAT WE NEED GOD

- There is an explanation for evil.

There is a great story about Ken Rideout, a missionary.

THE LIST ILLUSTRATION

MISSIONARY ILLUSTRATION ABOUT GOOD AND EVIL

Ken was eating lunch with an Indonesian banker one day. The banker said, "I have lived a long time and have seen lots of evil in this world: killing, war, injustice, cruelty. In fact, right outside the door of this restaurant, there are people who don't have enough food to eat, and here we sit in luxury enjoying ourselves. If there were a God, he would not create or tolerate a world like this. Therefore, I don't believe there's a God. If there were a God, he would not be worthy of my respect." Ken took out a piece of paper and drew a line down the middle, making two columns. On the left, he wrote "The World." Then he listed the evils for which the banker had accused God. On the other side, he wrote "God." Pointing to the chart, Ken repeated what the banker had just said, blaming God for allowing these terrible situations to exist in the world such as adultery, lying cheating, murder, stealing, rape, war, and cruelty. "Let's say that there is no God," said Ken. He drew an X through God's name in the right column. "Has anything changed now that we have taken God out of the picture?" "No," said the banker. "Without God in the picture, who is to blame for the evil that is in the world: the lying stealing, cheating, murder, adultery, rape, war, and so forth?" asked Ken. "People," said the banker. Ken wrote "people" in the right column under the crossed-out "God." Why blame people for all of the evil?" Ken asked. "The tiger eats the deer. The cat eats the mouse. A landslide wipes out an entire village. Why don't we blame the tiger, cat, and landslide in the same way we blame people?" "Because people are responsible beings with wills," said the banker. "People choose their actions." "Are you sure people are responsible?" Ken asked. "Yes," said the banker. "Then why blame God for what you say people have freely chosen to do?" asked Ken. "If people are responsible for choosing to do evil, we might as well put God back in the picture. It seems like God may be people's only hope to get out of the mess they've made of life."

Patrick Glynn, an atheist-turned-Christian concluded...

“Today, it seems to me, there is no good reason for an intelligent person to embrace the illusion of atheism or agnosticism, to make the same intellectual mistakes I made. I wish...I had known then what I know now.” (Patrick Glynn, an atheist turned Christian, Strobel, p. 60)

There are more reasons we can believe in God.

- **The evidence of miracles leads us to believe in God. A miracle occurs when something happens that cannot be explained through the natural world.** Something super-nature or supernatural happens. An example of this is bringing nature into existence. Something in control of nature had to create it and bring it into existence.

Creation is an example of a miracle. Nature cannot create itself. It can change and adapt but it cannot bring something into existence that does not already exist. Paul’s being healed of his blindness is another example of a miracle.

The miracles that take place that have no other logical explanation than the intervention of a supernatural power – God are evidence of his existence. Jesus said...

“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”

John 14:11

- **The evidence of people who believe in God who do not stop believing in Him when faced with severe difficulties. Their hope is evidence of God.**

Look at the people who believe God is true who face severe difficulties in their lives yet their hope does not change. The physical changes around them, but the spiritual remains steadfast because they trust in an unchanging God. There is another reason to believe in God...

- **Our need for answers is evidence of God. Our asking the same questions is evidence that we were created by an intelligent God who wants us to have answers.**

They are the same questions that the Epicureans and Stoics had that Paul addressed. Someone created us to have the same questions. God has the answers! Let’s look at these questions in more detail...

THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

These are the common questions we want answered! There are four fundamental questions that all of us want answered.

- **ORIGIN: Where did I come from?** There is either a God or there is not a God. If there is a God, we want to know what He is like. We want to know if we can connect with Him and have a relationship with Him. If we can, we want to know how this happens. If there is a God, he helps us answer the other questions. If there is no God, we rely on ourselves to answer these questions. People must first come to believe in God’s existence. What are the other questions?

- **MORALITY: What is right and wrong behavior?** We want what is right and wrong to be defined. We have feelings within us that cause us to determine what is right and wrong. If there is a God, he is the source of these feelings and defines what is right and wrong. If there is no God, we define what is right and wrong. Why is this important to us? It's important because right and wrong behaviors are attached to something that all of us want to experience. It's called love. We all have a desire for love. If someone loves us, they should treat us right. If someone doesn't love us, they treat us wrong. Our behaviors are often indicators about how we feel about others. They are the measurements that we use to determine if someone really cares.
- **MEANING: What is my purpose in life?** Not only do we desire love, we also desire significance. We want to feel good about what we are doing. If there is a God, he determines how we find purpose. If there is no God, we determine how we find purpose. *God's purpose is that we show His love to others. We show the type of love to others that we desire. This gives us joy. Man's purpose without God is to experience happiness. He will use whatever means that is necessary to gain it. He may believe that happiness comes through relationships, physical pleasure, personal power, or personal possessions.*
- **DESTINY: Is there life after death? If there is life after death, how can I experience it?** Not only do we desire love and significance, we also desire eternity. We have a longing for something beyond this life. We don't want this to be the end of us. This is the reason why we've all wondered if there is something more. We ask other questions related to this. If there is life after death... What is it like? How do I experience it? If it is through God, how can I come to know Him?

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on 4 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS in the menu bar.

We can look at the physical evidence and come to a gut level conclusion about the existence or non-existence of God.

As people have been considering the existence of God, several world views have come into being. In fact, the major beliefs that we find in the world are associated with these world views. Let's take a look at them.

As people have searched for these answers it has led to four beliefs related to the existence or non-existence of God.

THE WORLD VIEWS

- **Naturalism/Materialism. The belief that the universe (or nature) has always been in existence. Because the universe has always been, there is no need for a God to begin it. Those who are atheists fall within this world view. Those who fall within this world view include Atheists and Agnostics. Atheists believe that there is no God. They believe in the natural world (what we can see, hear, touch, smell and taste) and discard the possibility of a spiritual world (the existence of a presence that is separate from nature, more powerful than nature and can create nature). Agnostics believe that there may or may not be a God. They don't know if there is a God. They are open to the possibilities that there is a God and they are open to the possibility that He does not exist.**

- **Pantheism**. The belief that God is in all things. I am God and you are God and the essence of God is in all things of nature. They emphasize the protection of people and the environment. To destroy anything in nature is to destroy God. Those who fall within this world view include Hindus, Buddhists, Tao's, and other eastern religions.
- **Deism**. The belief that there is a God who created the universe, but He is impersonal and we cannot have a relationship with Him. The Greek religions fall within this world view. For example, Zeus is the God who created the world.
- **Theism**. The belief that there is a God who created the universe and that He is personal and that we can have a relationship with Him. Those who are Christians, Jewish, and Islamic fall within this world view.

Which of these world views is the best explanation? We need to look at the evidence to answer this question. Let's get into these questions in more detail. This leads into the next session.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on WORLD VIEWS in the menu bar.

SESSION FOUR

Origin & Morality

TO BEGIN:

Go over Religion vs. Relationship presentation again. The more they hear it, the easier it will become for them to memorize it!

In this session, we'll be learning about the Origin question of "Where did we come from?" Is there a God or did we come about in some other way?

QUESTION 1: ORIGIN: Where did we come from?

We were either created by a God separate from nature who brought nature into existence – a super-nature or supernatural force, or there was no creation of nature as the universe has always been. If this is true, there is no need for a God to create us. What does the evidence say?

What does the evidence say about where the natural world came from?

- **Does it prove that the universe (nature) has always existed revealing that there is no need for a God?**
- **Does it prove that there was a beginning point to the universe revealing the existence of a force separate from nature that has the ability to create nature who is a "supernature" or "supernatural" being?**
- **If the physical evidence is inconclusive, what does the spiritual evidence (our gut level feeling) tell us is the best explanation of where we came from.**

Let's look at some evidence to draw some conclusions.

WAS THERE A BEGINNING POINT?

There is evidence which supports the belief that there was a beginning point of nature and time. The question is – "Who started it?" Who brought the first physical mass into existence?

We must decide whether or not there was a starting point to the universe. Was there a point when time began? If there was a beginning point, there must be something or someone who brought it into existence. Let's look at some evidence.

There was a major discovery made by a man named Edwin Hubble who created the Hubble telescope. By looking at the universe, he discovered that there are many galaxies and that these galaxies are expanding outward. This is a scientific fact that we have been trying to explain for years. He discovered this by looking at light. Light is just like sound. When sound is closer to us it has a higher pitch and when it moves away it has a lower pitch. The same is true of light. When it is close it has one color and when it moves away it has another color. This was the basis for his discovery that the universe is expanding outward in all directions. He also discovered that the farther away the planets are, the faster their expansion. This was an important discovery because of what happens in time. As time moves on

there is expansion, but when we reverse time, there is contraction. It moves backwards toward a specific point.

- **EDWIN HUBBLE.**

His telescope proved that there are many galaxies and they are expanding outward. Light is like sound. It changes colors with distance. As time moves on there is expansion, but when we reverse time, there is contraction. It moves backwards toward a specific point.

We learn about another scientist. His name is Stephen Hawking.

- **STEPHEN HAWKING.**

He taught that.... Ultimately, when we reverse time, the universe constricts to a point. Hawking said space gets so tight that there is no special volume. You keep tightening the curve. If this is true, there can be no mass in this space. In other words – nothing exists. How do we explain this? He said that *“The actual point of creation lies outside the scope of presently known laws of physics.”*

This is a major focus of the study of physics to this day – to develop theories about the existence of the universe. (http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/study_res/hawking/schaefer.htm)

Although there is no physical evidence that the universe has always been in existence, Hawking chooses to believe there is no God. His preconceived belief that there is no creator causes him to believe there must be some other explanation. This is true even though the evidence does not point to another explanation.

- **CHARLES TOWNES.**

The former chairman of the Physics Department at Columbia University and Nobel Prize winning physicist wrote... *In my view the question of origin seems always left unanswered if we explore for a scientific point of view alone. Thus, I believe there is a need for some religious or metaphysical explanation. I believe in the concept of God and in His existence.*
(<http://www.counterbalance.org/cosmcrea/meyer-frame.html>)

Charles Townes looked at the physical evidence and came up with a gut level conclusion that there must be a God who exists.

- **ROBERT JASTROW.**

A PhD in theoretical physics from Columbia University and was also an astronomer physicist and cosmologist and a leading NASA scientist. He said... *"Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every living thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover. That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact."*
(*"A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths: Interview With Robert Jastrow," Christianity Today, August 6, 1982*)

Robert Jastrow looked at the physical evidence and came up with a gut level conclusion that there must be a God who exists.

- **ALBERT EINSTEIN.**

The issue with some research is the preconceived belief that there is no creator. It makes no logical sense to them. They spend their time trying to develop theories to disprove God because of this. Albert Einstein is a good example. He was a Pantheist who believed that there is a divine essence in all of us and that there is no creator God. His research, which supported the Theory of Relativity, led to the discovery that the universe was expanding. He didn't like this conclusion because it opened up the possibility that there is a supernatural being who created us. Because of this, he introduced an equation into his formula called the "cosmological constant" that supported the belief that the universe was stagnant and not expanding. (<http://physicsbuzz.physicscentral.com/2013/11/getting-einstein-to-say-i-was-wrong.html>)

This is a good example of what occurs with some scientists. They don't base their beliefs on what the evidence says, but on what they want the evidence to say. There would be evidence that Einstein could not deny that would change his thinking. Something happened. He later would meet Hubble and be exposed to evidence which proved that what he discovered originally was true – that the universe was expanding.

He was a Pantheist who believed that there is a divine essence in all of us and that there is no creator God. His research, which supported the Theory of Relativity, led to the discovery that the universe was expanding. He didn't like this conclusion because it opened up the possibility that there is a supernatural being who created us. Because of this, he introduced an equation into his formula called the "cosmological constant" that supported the belief that the universe was stagnant and not expanding.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on THE SCIENTISTS in the menu bar.

This evidence supports the belief that there was a beginning point of nature and time. The question is – "Who started it?" Who brought the first physical mass into existence? If it is not nature, then there must be something super-nature (supernatural) that is separate from nature who brought it about. This super-nature being is called God, no matter what our idea of who he is may be.

Let's consider the second fundamental question.

QUESTION 2: MORALITY: What is right and wrong behavior?

Do you remember the foundational question of morality? The question is – "What is right and wrong behavior." We considered reasons why more and more people are choosing not to believe in God. One of those reasons connects with our desires to be accepted and not judged.

- **We desire to be accepted and not judged.** I mention this again because judgment and morality are intertwined together. That's the next lesson...

- **Judgment and morality are intertwined together.**
- **We must decide what is right and wrong (morality) and we filter our behaviors according to those beliefs about right and wrong (we make judgments).**
- **It is natural in our desire not to be judged that we determine morality on our terms according to how we want to behave and what we want to live for.** This leads to a question....
- **Are we the ones who are to make the determination about what is right and wrong or is this the responsibility of the one who created us?** We can ask it this way...
- **Who establishes the rules - mankind or the one who created mankind?**

DOING WHAT FEELS GOOD TO ME

Not only do we want to be accepted and not judged, we also want to do what makes us feel good. We want to do what makes us happy.

- **We want to do what makes us feel good.** We don't want to feel judged by others who say that what we do is wrong. What is the solution? Look at the next statement...
- **We find others who agree with our way of life and we begin convincing others that our way of life is not wrong but is right.**

This is the reason of refusal to believe in God by many. They want to live in a certain way but God says that the way they choose to live is wrong. He knows that ultimately this lifestyle does not satisfy us. It doesn't give us what we need.

There is something we need to know about God.

WHAT KIND OF GOD ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

He is someone who created us and wants to protect us and wants us to function in a way that we experience joy in life.

- **We want someone who protects us. (Helps us in times of trouble)**
- **We want someone who helps us find joy in life. (Gives us a reason to live that is meaningful)**
- **If these are true about God, His telling us that something is wrong is done to protect us from harm or to keep us from living for something that does not ultimately give us joy.**

With this in mind, we need to think about why God would say something is wrong rather than copping an attitude with Him because He said it's wrong. Here are some basic questions to ask:

BASIC QUESTIONS

- Will my decision harm others?
- Will my decision harm myself?

There is a name for these behaviors – SIN.

We've all done it.

The Bible says...

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

**We've missed the mark of who God wants us to be.
He wants to be like Him in treating others with
respect and love.**

There are many behaviors in the Bible that are mentioned that are considered to be wrong. The 10 commandments mentions some.

WHY THE COMMANDS?

(Exodus 20:12-17)

The first four commands point out behaviors in relationship to God and the last six point out behaviors connected to our relationships with other people. **They keep us from harming others and ourselves.** They include:

- **I am to honor my father and mother. Why? If they are parenting the right way, they are doing it to protect me and guide me on my course of life.**
- **I am not to murder.** I would say that's harming others.
- **I am not to commit adultery.** Sexual behavior was meant to be a symbol of lifelong loving commitment.
- **I should not steal.** To do so is to take something that could be used for the survival of others or for their benefit which is harmful behavior.
- **I am not to lie.** To lie is to manipulate the truth which can bring harm to others and to myself.
- **I am not to covet.** To do so is to live for something that doesn't truly satisfy my desire for joy in life and is, therefore, harmful.

The scriptures also teach us that we are to live by the leading of God's Spirit and not by our own personal fleshly desires. Why does he lead us in this way?...

HE'S TRYING TO PROTECT US!

God's Spirit is that gut level feeling we have that helps us feel at peace when we are living correctly or feel uneasy when we are not. What does the scripture teach us about his leading?...

GUT LEVEL RIGHT AND WRONG

We read this -

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever^[c] you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:16-23

There are two lists of behaviors giving in this scripture. The first list includes those behaviors that we do to please ourselves.

BEHAVIORS THAT WE DO TO PLEASE OURSELVES

We all struggle with sins. Some of these sins are called "acts of the flesh." We need to be able to relate to others who are living for worldly things. We empathize with them. Paul said this...

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Corinthians 9:22

Which of these is the skeptic living for? What are they struggling with? It's important to know their struggles so we can give them an answer to their struggles!!

They could be placed in the following categories:

Replacing God: idolatry, witchcraft.

An idol is whatever person or thing we've made our god other than the Creator God. They are the most important to us. We talk about it the most. We spend our free time with it the most. We spend our money on it the most. We form relationships with others who share our passion for whatever it is or who they may be.

It could be celebrity, your car, your house, golfing, your job or a litany of many other things. We replace God with whatever it may be with our attention and efforts. The room we had for God becomes smaller

and the room we make for the “other” object of our passion becomes greater. Who or what is most important to you?

Hurtful Attitudes: hatred, jealousy, selfishness, envy

Life becomes a competition. We feel our value is in being as good or better than others and when we don't measure up we respond out of hurtful attitudes. We hate those who are better than us which leads us to act out in our hatred. We are jealous of those who have what we want and we act out in order to take it from them or keep them from keeping it. We are only thinking about ourselves and what we want instead of others and what they need.

This selfish thought keeps us from considering the harm we do to those we act against. We are envious of others because of their success or their power to gain what we want and we work toward sabotaging them, causing them to fail. Is your life a competition?

Causing Division or Harm: discord, dissensions, factions, rage

We begin to believe that we are always right and we push our agenda on others, not having any concern for their feelings or their reasons for their differing beliefs. The attitude becomes – “It's me against you” or “It's us against them.” This leads to speaking hurtful words, making false accusations or acting out in physical violence to force our point of view on others.

This is seen often in the political environment, in the workplace, in neighborhood associations and other organizational structures. Factions form, negative attitudes persist and hurtful behaviors begin to appear causing others to feel devalued rather than valued. Remember, God is love and His desire is that we all belong to His Family and that we all feel valued as people who are created by Him. Do you push your way on others without regard to the negative influence you may be having?

Substance Abuse: drunkenness

We want to feel good so we abuse substances in order to have a pleasurable experience. This is done either to escape some type of discomfort or to feel the physical high which feels good to us. We rely on these substances to deal with our pain, whatever it may be, or to make us feel good rather than relying on God to give us a way to feel true joy.

Are you abusing substances to escape or to feel high?

Sexual Behaviors: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, orgies

This category is prevalent in our society today and keeps many from becoming willing to believe in God and follow Him.

Sexuality is a part of the human experience. For humanity to survive, humans need to reproduce. Sexuality was created to be a pleasurable experience which bound together two people who were committed to love one another for life. Sexuality was never intended to be used as a pleasurable experience to satisfy a personal desire in order to make ourselves feel good. (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:24)

Yet this is what our world has done with our sexuality. It's been changed into a way to identify ourselves, our preferences and what we believe about the power of our choices.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Genesis 1:27-28

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.
Genesis 2:24

Sexual preferences keep some from accepting God.

We become our own god and decide how we want to use our body for our own purposes. This is difficult to reconcile when it comes to God's view of our bodies and how He created us when it is inconsistent with the purposes God created us. Let's think about those who are engaged in a homosexual lifestyle....

How can we relate to people who are in a sexual lifestyle other than what God desires?

We need to approach it like Paul who empathized...

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.
1 Corinthians 9:22

We can ask...

• **What if there was no God?**

What if there was no God? What if it were just us, human beings, needing to survive.

- **A logical conclusion to humanity's existence is that we procreate and produce more humans.**
- **It could be seen as a service to humanity that we reproduce for the survival of our species.**

This can be seen in history as marriages were arranged and children were expected to be born so that families could continue to live on their land and produce their crops and to succeed in their businesses. Having children was seen as a blessing to the family and as a service to the community. To choose not to do this and deliberately refuse to marry and have children was looked down upon because people were not fulfilling their needed roles to continue on as a people and to provide more people to help their family.

- **What if there is a God?**

Let's put God back in the picture. If there is a God who created us and did it in a way that we would be capable to multiply and continue on,...

- **Do you think He may have an issue with those who choose to give sexuality a purpose that it was never meant for?**

He may have an issue with those who choose to work against what He created in the name of what we want to do and experience rather than what He created us to be for our existence?

THE WRAP UP

We've learned that people live for many reasons other than to please God. Until we come to understand that what we live for doesn't provide for us what we need, we will not change.

We're missing the mark of who we should be!

SESSION FIVE

Destiny

TO BEGIN:

Go over Religion vs. Relationship presentation again. The more they hear it, the easier it will become for them to memorize it!

Let's consider the third fundamental question.

QUESTION 3: DESTINY: Is there life after death, and if there is, how can I experience it?

We've all wondered if there is life after death. Why? We have a desire to live forever. We desire for there to be a life to come. If there is a God and there is a Heaven where He lives, how can this become my destiny. I need a way to experience this new life. I need help in coming back to life in Heaven. I need someone who has the power himself to come back to life. My belief in what he did and my belief in his ability to also bring me back to life in heaven is required for me to live in Heaven with God. How can I come to believe that Jesus came back to life and is capable to also bring me back to life in Heaven? This sounds like a stretch for many to believe. We can believe with confidence that Jesus did come back to life. How?

There are five evidences that Jesus was resurrected shared by Lee Strobel in his book *The Case for Christ*. Let's take a look at them!

THE FIVE EVIDENCES OF REALITY

1. The disciples died for their beliefs.

Remember, *"They no longer had confidence that Jesus had been sent by God, because they believed anyone crucified was accursed by God. They also had been taught that God would not let his Messiah suffer death. So they dispersed.* Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, re-gathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message – that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them. 1 Corinthians 15 names them. (I Corinthians 15:3-8). Jesus appeared to Peter, the twelve, more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, (most of them who are still living when Paul wrote the scripture). He appeared to James, the brother of Jesus and to all of the apostles. He also appeared to Paul. They refused to deny his appearance. Because they claimed they had seen him, their lives became very difficult. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned and finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways. If they were not absolutely certain, they wouldn't have allowed themselves to be tortured to death for proclaiming that the resurrection had happened. It's been said that people will die for their religious beliefs if they sincerely believe they're true, but people won't die for their religious beliefs for a lie.

2. The conversion of skeptics. James, the brother of Jesus (John 7:5) and Paul.

There were hardened skeptics who didn't believe in Jesus before his crucifixion and were dead-set against Christianity who turned around and adopted the Christian faith after Jesus' death. There is no good reason for this except for their having experienced the resurrected Christ. Both of these skeptics are

mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. There was James, the brother of Jesus. The gospels tell us Jesus' family, including James, were embarrassed by what he was claiming to be. His own brothers didn't believe in him. (John 7:5). In ancient Judaism it was highly embarrassing for a rabbi's family not to accept him. It's amazing what happened. The historian Josephus tells us that James, the brother of Jesus who would become the leader of the Jerusalem church, was stoned to death because of his belief in his brother.

Paul tells us the resurrected Jesus appeared to him. As a Pharisee, he hated anything that disrupted the traditions of the Jewish people. To him, this new countermovement called Christianity would have been the height of disloyalty. In fact, he had them executed when he had a chance. Suddenly he doesn't just ease off Christians but joins them. He tells us why. He wrote that he saw the risen Christ (Acts 9:5) and heard Christ appoint him to be one of his followers and servants. Both of these men are historical figures whom we know were follower of Christ and died never turning away from their faith in him.

3. Changes to key social structures.

The thing that made the Jews – Jews, was their social structures. They gave them their national identity. They believed these institutions were entrusted to them by God. To abandon these institutions would be to risk their souls being damned to hell after death. Five weeks after he's crucified, over ten thousand Jews are following him and claiming that he is alive. They are willing to give up or alter all five of the social institutions that they have been taught since childhood that were important.

They no longer believed they needed to offer an animal sacrifice to atone for their sins. They now believed that Jesus was the final sacrifice. They no longer believed that you were connected to God through obeying the commandments. We are incapable to always follow the law and can't earn a relationship with God. They no longer worshipped on the Sabbath, but began worshipping on Sunday acknowledging the day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead. They no longer believed that God was one person, but expressed who He is in three persons – The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They no longer believed that the Messiah was going to be a political leader who would destroy the Roman empire. They believed that he would save the world from their sins through his death and resurrection.

4. Communion and Baptism.

The followers of Jesus came together regularly to have a celebration meal to remember that Jesus had been crucified. This was a new social structure that served as a reminder of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. The social structure that changed was... BAPTISM. The early church adopted a form of baptism from their Jewish upbringing called proselyte baptism. When Gentiles wanted to take upon themselves the laws of Moses, the Jews would baptize those Gentiles in the authority of the God of Israel. But in the New Testament, people were baptized in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – which meant they had elevated Jesus to the full status of God. Remember, Jews didn't believe that man could be God. Baptism was a celebration depicting the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It now had a different meaning. For the Jews, it was a commitment to connect with God by obeying the law. In Christianity, it was an acknowledgment that we don't always obey the law and, therefore, need what Jesus did for our forgiveness.

5. The emergence of the church marked by the following of a belief.

Historians look for events that can explain major cultural shifts when they occur. One of these shifts was the beginning of the Christian church which began shortly after the crucifixion. There were specific beliefs that were the basis for this cultural shift. Paul wrote about it in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

The beliefs were - ***We believe Christ died for our sins. We believe he was buried. We believed that he was raised again on the third day.***

This became their creed. This has been the belief of the Christian church from its inception until now. The church rapidly spread and would become a central belief throughout the Roman Empire. The claim of someone coming back to life was so unbelievable that the evidence from those who witnessed him alive had to be so powerful that it was hard to deny. Their testimony started the church and gives reason for it spreading so quickly.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on RESURRECTION EVIDENCE in the menu bar.

Looking at this factual evidence together has given reason for many logical thinkers to come to the conclusion that the resurrection did occur and is the way that we can be changed forever and spend eternity with Him.

Remember, it is because of Jesus' resurrection and coming back to life that we can also come back to life in Heaven after our death. It gives hope of a new life to come.

WHY IS ETERNITY IMPORTANT?

- **We all need something.**
- **We all need hope!**

We are to prepare ourselves to reason with others about the hope that we have found in Jesus.

Do you remember the scripture that is the foundation for this training?...

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

1 Peter 3:15

Do you have hope? Without it, it's difficult for us to go on. We feel overcome by our circumstances and defeated by what we face in this world. We need hope that there is something more and that our future will be better. We all need hope! The question is –

“What do we place our hope in?”

A definition is needed for us to better understand hope. What is hope? A quick search on Dictionary.com reveals to us that

“Hope is the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best.”
(Dictionary.com)

Let’s learn some lessons about hope...

1. HOPE IS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

What do you want in the future? How do you want things to turn out?

2. HOPE IS A FEELING.

We put these together and understand that hope is a feeling that we have about the future.

Because it is a feeling, it can be associated with our emotional state. Psychologists continue to study hope as a means to help people deal with their emotional struggles. They understand that helping people work toward a better future is beneficial.

Where does hope come from?...

3. HOPE COMES FROM THE ACTIONS PERFORMED THAT LEAD TO THE DESIRED FUTURE

Have we done what is needed to experience the future that we desire?

4. HOPE REQUIRES BELIEF.

We must believe that this future is possible. Thelma Bryant wrote –

“Hope isn’t a denial of what is, but a belief that the current situation is not all that can be. You can recognize something’s wrong, but also that it’s not the end of the story.” (Past president of the American Psychological Association and PhD Thema Bryant)

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/01/trends-hope-greater-meaning-life>

5. HOPE HAPPENS IN COMMUNITY.

We see hope through others. We see how they respond to the difficulties of life with confidence. We want the hope that others have!

6. WE CAN MAINTAIN HOPE.

How can I maintain hope when I face difficulties in life? There are three ways this happens...

- **If we are limited as to what we can do to change the future, to maintain hope, we must partner with someone who is capable to do what we are incapable of doing.**

If I am sick, and I am not a doctor, I can enlist the help of a physician to help me overcome my sickness. But what if I'm sick and I'm not a doctor and the physician that I partner with can't do anything for me to cure me of my illness. What then? Do I lose hope? If there is no other source which has more capabilities, then the answer to that question is "Yes!" I lose hope.

The question now is – "Is there someone other than who I've partnered with who can help me overcome my challenge?"

If there is no one, I have no hope for being well in my future. If there is someone – I maintain my hope. Those who believe in God believe there is someone who is more capable than a doctor with limited ability to heal us. We believe that God can heal us. Therefore, we have hope.

If He can bring it into existence, He can also control it. He is the one who is capable to help me with struggles that humanity can't fix for me. I have hope that he can do something in my future to make my future better.

All of this connects with what is happening in our world. What if He chooses not to do it? What if He chooses not to solve me problem here? He still has a solution to our problems!

Wouldn't it be great to be in a world where there were no problems? Wouldn't it be amazing to be in a place where there was no sickness, death, bills or bullies? We want to live in a place like the one just described.

- **We maintain hope when we believe in a world without pain and suffering.**

It is in our future! It's in a place called Heaven. What would make it better? To be there with the one we love!

- **We maintain our hope when we know we are going to be with the one we love.**

Our looking to God for our hope is not just about our solving our problems, it's also about our longing to be with someone that we love.

There may be a person in your life that you deeply love. If you have gone through difficulties in your life and you've been away from them during this time, your knowing that you are going to see them in the future gives you hope. This hope comes because the relationship is important to you. Our longing to be with someone whom we love and whom we know also loves us gives us hope.

We're looking in the future to a time when we are with God who loves us unconditionally, in a place where there are no problems that need anyone's help. We're looking toward a time of being at peace with the one we care for the most. This gives us hope.

Seeing people who are close to the end of life who have a relationship with God and are facing their last days with joy in hopes to be with God where He is, is one of the most convincing arguments to have a relationship with God. Nothing can take away this joy.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on WE ALL NEED HOPE in the menu bar.

SESSION SIX

Meaning

TO BEGIN:

Go over Religion vs. Relationship presentation again. The more they hear it, the easier it will become for them to memorize it!

QUESTION 4: MEANING: “What is my purpose?”

We’re all looking for a reason to live. We want to feel like our lives have significance. The question is – “What gives my life meaning? The good news is that when we discover it, we experience something that we all desire. What is it?

We live to experience one of two feelings:

- **We live for happiness. It is a temporary feeling.**
 - **Happiness is often dependent on our circumstances.** We can feel happy when we achieve some type of accomplishment, purchase something that we’ve been wanting, have a physical experience that leads to some type of euphoria, get a raise or promotion,... and the list goes on. These are all circumstances that we experience.
 - **Our purpose is to get what makes us happy.**
 - **What happens when the happiness wears off?** We’re looking for something new to make us happy.
 - **What happens when we face difficulties?** These rob us of happiness. **Yet there are some who face difficulties who continue to feel good about life and maintain this positive feeling.**
- **We live with joy. Joy can be a never-ending good feeling of satisfaction.** This feeling is important to us. Joy is different than happiness.
 - **People with joy don’t rely on their circumstances for happiness, they rely on a relationship with someone who has a love for them that never fails and disappoints.** Their good feeling about life comes from knowing that nothing can take away this relationship. It gives them a joy that doesn’t end because the relationship will never end.
 - **It gives them their sense of identity. (I am a child of God!)**

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...

John 1:12

Not only do they experience joy because of the relationship, but...

- **It gives them joy when they help others have a relationship with the one that they know.** They have joy when others come to have the same relationship. In fact,...
- **It's their purpose to help as many people as possible to have this relationship. It's what gives their lives meaning.**

Remember, we're learning about the MEANING Question: What is my purpose?

TWO PURPOSE PATHS:

For some – their purpose is to get what makes them happy.

For others – their purpose is to be a Child of God and to lead as many people as they can to also be Children of God.

Our feelings of happiness or joy are good indicators of whether or not we are finding our meaning from the correct source. It's either circumstances or a relationship. Whichever we choose helps to form who we are as people.

Whatever we trust in to give our lives meaning gives us our identity. We've "identified" what we believe will satisfy us and we identify as one who believes in whatever or whomever it is.

Remember, we learned about identity when answering the question in developing our stories of what our lives were like before becoming Christians. We believed that something or someone other than God gave our lives meaning. What we identified with didn't provide for us what we desired.

Let's take some time to learn more about our identity.

IDENTITY

One of the most significant obstacles keeping people from choosing to begin a relationship with God is their struggle with identity.

1. WE CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT MAKES UP OUR IDENTITY.

The term "identity" was made popular from the study of a famous psychologist in the 1950s named Erik Erikson. (*Identity: Youth and Crisis* written in 1968).

He shared in this book that identity was best described in a statement from a letter he had read written by William James to his wife. He wrote...

A man's character is discernible in the mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says: "This is the real me!" (p. 19)

From this statement we understand that...

- Our identity is what makes us feel alive.
- It is what gives us a reason to live.
- It gives us a sense of purpose.
- It results in a good feeling (happiness or joy).

We want to feel alive. How do we experience this? Where can we find this sense of well-being? He went on to write that there are different elements that influence who we become. He wrote...

It's influenced by two factors:

"...for we deal with a process "located" in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities." (p. 22)

He believed that our identity is determined from a combination of...

- Who we feel we should be and...
- Who our community tells us we should be.

As societies have changed, the definition of who we should be has changed. The reason for this shift comes from the influence of those who desire to live in a way that a society has previously determined to be unacceptable. We begin judging ourselves by what we believe others expect us to be and we judge others (the community) for expecting us to be like them when we desire to be someone different. It helps us see something...

2. OUR IDENTITY CAN BE IN CRISIS

- If we don't measure up to the expectations of a community, we find ourselves in identity crisis.

Our beliefs are in conflict with what those in the community believe. We are judged for not changing our beliefs.

- Our identity is in crisis when who we are doesn't match who we want to be.

We see this related to gender. A decision is made by the individual as to who they want to be, not who they were created to be.

We answer the questions

- "Do I want to be who I want to be?" or
- "Do I want to be who someone else wants me to be?"

That “someone else” can be God. I can experience conflict when I desire to be someone that God did not create me to be. I can also be in identity crisis if we I choose to live in a way that God does not want me to live.

This crisis is solved in one of three ways....

- To exclude who God created us to be and wants us to be and be who we want to be separate from Him, believing that I know what is best for myself.
 - Understand that I have a desire to be someone whom God did not create me to be or wants me to be but I believe that God knows what is best for me and He wants what is best for me which leads me to work to shift my desire to please Him. I do this rather than please myself separate from Him.
 - Include God in my life, but only in areas of my life where I am in agreement with Him.
- If I do this, can He really be my God?

Why is this information on identity significant as it relates to our decision on beginning a relationship with God. To better answer this, we need to define God. Who is God?...

God = any deified person, object or activity.

We need to define another term to understand the meaning of this definition.

Deity = a person, thing or activity that is revered.

If it's revered, it's valuable to us. We respect the position of importance that it holds to us. We can put all of this together to formulate a definition of God.

God = a person, object or activity that we value the most that is placed in the position of highest importance.

What can we learn from this?

- Our “god” is a part of our identity.
- Our identity is determined by who or what we value the most.
- This person or thing becomes the defining element of who we are.

Does our God do what we need our God to do? Does He fulfill our desires?

Let's consider some desires related to our identity.

Our Desires:

- We desire to be protected resulting in our desire for a solution to our problems.
- We desire significance.
- We desire to be loved, even when we don't deserve it.

With these in mind, we answer some god questions....

The God Questions....

- Does your god solve your problems?
- Does your god give you a sense of significance by making you feel that what you do for your god matters?
- Does your god love you back even when you don't deserve it?

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on THE GOD QUESTIONS in the menu bar.

This leads to another identity crisis situation....

- Our identity is in crisis when what we rely on as our god to meet our desires of protection, significance and love doesn't measure up.

We all place our faith in something to meet these desires. If our god doesn't meet these desires we are in an identity crisis and feel a need to change. We look for a new identity. We look to trust in a new god.

We are all the same. It is the process of our searching for our identity that leads us to whomever or whatever our god becomes. It is this same process that has led people to find their identity in being a child of the God who created them. They have determined that He meets all of their desires. They also believe that He wants what's best for them.

There is one final identity crisis.

- I'm in identity crisis if I'm not living for what God created me to live for.

What are we to live for? We are to show God's love! The Bible teaches...

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1 John 4:7-8

We're told that God is love and what we are to do as people who know the God of love. We are to love one another. It's proof that we are children of God. We want others to also have a relationship with God!

What does that love look like? Jesus is our example. Let me tell you about an encounter that Jesus had....

There was a guy named Zacchaeus. He was a short guy. He was also a dishonest tax collector. He took more from others than he should to improve his own life. He hurt others for his own benefit. Zacc came to see Jesus one day as he walking through the city. Because he was short, he climbed a tree so he could see. Jesus noticed him there. He told Zacc to come down because he was going to go to his house with him. This shocked the religious people. They couldn't believe that Jesus would hang out with this sinner. Zacc did come down and Jesus did go to his house. Zacc's life was changed. The love that Jesus showed for a guy who didn't deserve to be shown love because of his hurtful behavior broke his heart. He realized that he had been living for the wrong thing for his happiness. He realized he needed a relationship with someone who loved like Jesus loved. He committed his life to a relationship with God because of this experience. Jesus made a statement after this happened. Jesus referred to himself as the son of man and said...

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10

We can look at this as Jesus' own personal purpose statement. He came to help people who had lost their way by living for something other than a loving relationship with God to help them find their way into a relationship with Him. We are to be like Jesus. His purpose is our purpose. We can put it in a personal statement....

My purpose is to seek and to save the lost.

What happens when we do this? It gives us joy! Not only do we have joy because we have a relationship with God who loves us and we know that no circumstance of my life will change that God loves me, I also have joy because my life has meaning. It's to help as many people as possible to experience this same joy.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on IDENTITY – (MEANING) in the menu bar.

GIVING THEM ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

We have spent much time discovering truth. Remember, we use the physical and the spiritual. The physical is researched through science and historical events. We look at evidence and come to conclusions about the best possible explanations. The spiritual is a gut level feeling of what we believe to be true after looking at all of the evidence. What is your gut telling you? There are certain gut level feelings that we have which lead us to come to know God. There are five of them. We'll call them beliefs.

To be identified with God, we need to have certain beliefs. We can ask those we are telling about Christ if they share these beliefs?

THE 5 BELIEFS QUESTIONS

- **Do you believe that God exists (God Exists)?** After looking at all of the evidence, do you believe that someone created the universe and that we are not an accident? Do you believe there is someone who is separate from nature who has power over all things?
- **Do you believe that you have missed the mark and sinned (I have sinned)?** Do you know deep down what is right and wrong and that you don't measure up to whom you were created to be – always good and loving?
- **Do you believe that you can never obey enough rules to earn a relationship with God because you know you will fail (I can't earn it)?** Do you know that you are not perfect and will not always do what is right?
- **Do you believe that God still loves you and wants to have a relationship with you (God wants me)?** Do you believe that God sending Jesus to show His love for you is proof that He wants a relationship with you?
- **Do you believe that Jesus is the way to have a relationship with God (Jesus is the way)?** Do you believe that he came to earth to show you how to live, take the punishment for your sin and come back to life to provide a way for you to also come back to life in Heaven after your death? Do you believe you experience this through being forgiven for your sins by accepting what Jesus did for you?

If they answer “YES” to these questions, they can begin their relationship with God by accepting forgiveness through prayer. Give them an opportunity to become a Child of God by leading them in the Prayer of Salvation:

Dear God, I ADMIT that I have sinned and ask for your forgiveness. I BELIEVE that Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for my sins and was resurrected to provide a way for me to live forever with you in Heaven. I COMMIT to follow Jesus as the Lord of my life as I live to become like him. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

REMINDER GRAPHIC: Have students go to the website and click on THE 5 BELIEFS in the menu bar.

TAKE THEM BACK TO THE I ACCEPT REMINDER GRAPHIC!

WHAT NOW?

What do we do if they have accepted Christ? We need to encourage them in the spiritual growth as a Child of God. Here are five actions that we can encourage them to do:

- Tell others about your new relationship with God.
- Connect with a church that will help you grow as a new Christian.
- Obey Jesus's instruction to be baptized letting people know of your belief in the loving life of Jesus lived, his death for your sin and his resurrection providing eternal life for you in Heaven.
- Begin to grow in your relationship with God by reading the Bible and talking to Him through prayer. (If you do not have a resource to do this, you may want to check out *Imagine the New Life* located in RESOURCES on the website).
- Engage in showing God's love to others by helping those who are in need.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THIS STUDY!

Are you ready to share the Good News about Jesus with others? Hopefully, this course has prepared you. Let's remember the scripture which is the foundation of this study...

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

1 Peter 3:15

Jesus made a strong statement about the need for us to share Good News. The Bible teaches...

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Matthew 9:35-38

**It's time to go into the field and share
GOOD NEWS!**

