

THE WAY TO RESTORATION

STUDY GUIDE

Dear teacher,

Slavic Christian Ministries wants to thank you for teaching *The Way to Restoration* in your Bible study or course. We believe the content of this book will help every Christian have a stronger foundation in his or her Christian faith, while also being used as a good tool for evangelism for those seeking Christ.

This study guide was designed to help create, stimulate, and guide lively discussions within your group for an even greater learning environment. We hope you will enjoy the course; may our Lord Jesus bless you as you embark on learning more about our God and his love for you. We are certain that he looks forward to having your group know him even better through this study!

CREATING A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

You need to create a favorable atmosphere by immediately becoming acquainted with your students, if you weren't already. Make sure that this stage of creating a positive atmosphere leads smoothly to the opening of the lesson itself.

The Introduction

You should get the students' attention within the first two minutes of the session. The first fifty words the teacher utters are extremely vital because it sets the tone for the entire evening. Your goal is to attract the student to the topic in an interesting and engaging way. Make sure the introduction contains information these students are already familiar with on the particular topic you are teaching.

The Conclusion

The objective of every good teacher is to bring the discussion to the right conclusion. After teaching the study, make sure that you conclude with concise clarity the main idea of what you were teaching. Summing up the main idea by using a personal illustration or testimony from your own life is always helpful.

The success of each lesson depends in great part on your attitude to God, yourself, your ministry, and the students. To be a good leader and facilitator, you need to be prepared by attempting to know the material in the chapter thoroughly. You don't need to be an expert on the topic, just the guide who keeps the class on the right course. Try to keep a balance between being prepared but not overbearing, so that other people will be willing to participate and listen to you. Otherwise, some people may tune you out. In the worst situation, some individuals or even the group in mass will not return.

LESSON 1: DOES GOD EXIST?

Since this is your first time meeting together, everyone may feel a bit awkward. This is a normal feeling at first; but within the first few weeks the group members should begin feeling comfortable with each other. Assuming this is a new group or class, have all the students take a couple of minutes to introduce themselves by stating their name, a brief summary of their background, why they are interested in this course, and what they hope to achieve from this study.

Introductory Dialogue Question

1. Does God exist?

- a. If someone asked you this question, could you answer it confidently?
- b. Do you currently have the knowledge and ability to prove God's existence to another person? If so, how would you do it?

Teacher's Response

There are many Christians who believe in God's existence but lack concrete information to support their personal experiences and faith. In other words, they lack an apologetic defense to this question of the existence of God.

In this chapter, Putnam attempts to prove God's existence *in intellectu* and *in re* by summarizing briefly a few historical arguments for God's existence, providing a sampling of scientific findings, examining Christian theological beliefs, and offering a few personal testimonies. He says that "no one can fully exhaust this subject, but hopefully [this chapter] will stimulate discussion and acquaint you with the reality of God if you are a seeker after him." Let's look now at the four types of existences.

Types of Existence

Explain the four main types of existence:

- contingent existence
- contingent nonexistence
- impossible existence
- necessary existence

Dialogue Questions on Existence and Theological Arguments

1. How do we overcome the obstacle of transitioning the existence of God from intellect to reality for those who have no faith?
2. How is the best way to express the teleological argument to another person?
3. Try to summarize the ten points of the cosmological argument as clearly and as simply as possible.

Scientific Research

Teacher's Response

We must realize that science does not lay claim to absolute truth. Instead, science is a field of study that is constantly changing and moving forward with the attainment of new verifiable data. Science first observes something, and then attempts to explain this observation by using data, empirical evidence, or through the formulation of a hypothesis.

Empirical evidence is knowledge that is gained through the senses (sight, sound, smell, or touch, for example). However, there are three fundamental problems to all observation, as follows:

1. How do living things grow?
2. How do species evolve?
3. How did life come into existence?

Dialogue Questions Concerning Science

1. Can you identify something that is empirically proven in this room?
 - a. Door exists; chair exists; electricity exists, because the lights work; etc.
2. How can God be proven to exist if we cannot observe him with our senses? Or can we?

Author's Note

- Putnam says, “We may not be able to see God to test him with empirical data, per se, but his effects are all over the universe. In recent times, God has penetrated the darkened minds and hardened hearts of unbelievers through their own scientific research.”
- Dr. Hugh Ross, astrophysicist, author, and founder of the Christian organization Reasons To Believe, is convinced that many physicists are now embracing the belief of a divine Creator.
- Philip Yancey wrote about

an astronomer and science writer who calculated the odds of our universe resulting, as he believes it did, from sheer chance. If, one second after the Big Bang, the ratio of the density of the universe to its expansion rate had differed from its assumed value by only one part in 10^{15} (that's 1 followed by fifteen zeros), the universe would have either quickly collapsed upon itself or ballooned so rapidly that stars and galaxies could not have condensed from the primal matter ... [In other words], if all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the Earth were

possible universes—that is, universes consistent with the laws of physics as we know them—and only one of those grains of sand were a universe that allowed for the existence of intelligent life, then that one grain of sand is the universe we inhabit.

Dialogue Question

1. Does this statistic alone prove design, not blind chance, as the ultimate reality to you?

The Bible

Dialogue Questions

There are two simple ways to discover the truth of God’s existence, through nature and through the Bible. Putnam says that God does not attempt to prove his existence in the Bible; rather, it is an assumption of all that is in the book.

1. Do you know of any Scriptures that assume God’s existence? Review the Scriptures in class.

Teacher’s Response

Putnam points out the following concerning this topic:

- Not including God’s general revelation about himself through nature, the Holy Bible is the Christian’s best resource to learn about God’s existence, personality, desires, and love for us.
- We can rely on the Bible’s accuracy because, as Josh McDowell states, “On the basis of manuscript tradition alone, the works that made up the Christians’ New Testament

were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity.” Currently, “we have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, the *Iliad* by Homer is second with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the 13th century.”

- Dr. Hugh Ross wrote in his book *Creator of the Cosmos* that, prior to his becoming a Christian, he spent two years analyzing the Bible and “mathematically determined that the Bible was more reliable by far than some of the laws of physics.”

Ross states:

I knew from studying physics there is roughly one in 10^{80} (that’s the number one with eighty zeros following) chance of a sudden reversal in the second law of thermodynamics. But I had calculated (with the help of skeptical friends) the probability of the chance fulfillment of thirteen Bible predictions about specific people and their specific actions. My conservative estimates showed less than one chance in 10^{138} that such predictions could come true without supernatural intervention. That meant the Bible was 10^{58} times more reliable than the second law of thermodynamics on just this one set of predictions.

SCRIPTURE QUOTES TO HELP THE LEADER

1. Who moved the biblical authors to record their thoughts?

“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
(2 Peter 1:21)

2. What is the main reason for the New Testament?

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

3. What is another reason that we have the Word of God?

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17)

4. Who did Jesus call blessed?

“Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”
(Luke 11:28)

5. For how long will God’s Word stand?

“The word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:8); “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”
(Matthew 24:35)

6. What are the characteristics of the Word of God?

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

7. What does Jesus say about his own words?

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” (John 6:63)

TESTIMONIES, MIRACLES, AND PROPHECIES

Other ways we can know that God exists is through testimonies, miracles, and prophecies.

Dialogue Questions

1. Share your personal testimony of how and when you became a Christian.
2. What are some biblical miracles?

Examples could include:

- a. The flood during Noah’s time
- b. Mixing (or creating) the languages at the Tower of Babel
- c. The plagues of Egypt

3. Have you ever seen a miracle of God?
4. Can you point to a fulfilled biblical prophecy in Scripture?
5. Has God ever revealed a prophecy to you? Can you share this prophecy? Has it come to pass yet?

Teacher's Response

It is widely known that researchers have marked 330 Old Testament prophecies speaking of the coming Messiah, a promised Savior for humanity. Every one of them was fulfilled perfectly in or through Jesus Christ.

A few examples include:

- Jesus being born by a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) within the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- He suffered and died for our sins (Isaiah 53:5–8) by the piercing of his hands and feet (Psalm 22:16).
- He became an intercessor for sinners (Isaiah 53:12), including those who were dividing his garments among themselves (Psalm 22:18) and those mocking him when he was suffering (Psalm 22:6–8).
- He rose from the dead, not “seeing decay” (Psalm 16:10).

Concluding Dialogue Question

1. After studying this chapter, how will you better be able to prove God's existence to someone else?

Role Play

Pair everyone up and have them try to provide a proof of God's existence. The person playing the part of the listener should act like a non-Christian, pushing for greater clarity on areas that seem vague. After several minutes, have the partners switch roles.

You will most likely need to encourage the students to practice this further at home.

LESSON 2: FATHER

INTRODUCTION

Because we determined in the last chapter that God exists, we now need to ask the question “What is God?”

Putnam quotes the Westminster Confession’s Shorter Catechism: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” This may help with the question “What is God?” but how do we connect *what* God is to *who* God is?”

In the next three chapters we will be studying the Trinity, which is comprised of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The goal is to help you understand more intimately each person of the Godhead. Graphs are provided at the end of each chapter in the book to help students who want to go deeper in their study.

Dialogue Questions

1. Who is God to you?
2. Why do Christians call God our “Father”?
3. Is God the “Father” for Christians only or for every person?

Teacher’s Response

Putnam observes that with most people he has encountered, Christian and non-Christian alike, God seems to be an endless labyrinth of complexity that no one can fully fathom. In the beginning of the chapter he attempts to illustrate this with the following story:

There is an old fable about six men, blind from birth, who lived in India. One day they decided to visit a nearby palace. When they arrived, there was

an elephant standing in the courtyard. The first blind man touched the side of the elephant and said, “An elephant is like a wall.” The second blind man touched the trunk and said, “An elephant is like a snake.” The third blind man touched the tusk and said, “An elephant is like a spear.” The fourth blind man touched the leg and said, “An elephant is like a tree.” The fifth blind man touched the ear and said, “An elephant is like a fan.” The sixth blind man touched the tail and said, “An elephant is like a rope.” Because each blind man touched only one part of the elephant, none of them could agree on what an elephant is really like.

Putnam goes on to say that “when attempting to define—much less understand—God the Father, most of the world falls woefully short, like the six blind men in this illustration.”

Dialogue Questions

1. How well would you say you know God?
2. Is your knowledge more on the intellectual or the experiential level?

The best way to answer the question “Who is God?” is by surveying God’s attributes—those permanent and intrinsic qualities of God that constitute what he and his nature encompass.

3. Provide examples of God’s attributes that are listed in the book.
4. Can anyone in the group think of other attributes that are not mentioned in the book?
5. Which attribute of God prompted him to send his Son to die on the cross?
6. How does Gilbert Bilezikian describe God in our book?

7. Can we comprehend God's omnipresence (God is everywhere) and omniscience (God is all-knowing)?

The Trinity and God's Functional Equality

Dialogue Questions

God is three distinct individuals but one substance. We know him as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1. Have you ever wondered how God can be one, yet three distinct persons, at the same time? This is a very difficult concept for many people to grasp.
2. How would you explain the Trinity?

Teacher's Response

Here are a few helpful illustrations that you, as the teacher, may want to use to help explain the complexity of the Trinity:

Sun

There is only one sun in existence near the earth, and it is our predominant source of light and heat. It manifests its power in three ways: through light, fire, and energy.

Space

Space is the infinite portion of the universe that God has created. It exists with at least three dimensions: width, length, and depth.

Eternity

Though eternity is devoid of time, it has a past, present, and future.

The Bible teaches that God is one substance in three distinct individuals. Here are a few examples:

- “Then God [Elohim] said, ‘Let *us* make man in our image, in our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26).
- “And the LORD God [Jehovah-Elohim] said, ‘The man has now become like one of *us*’” (Genesis 3:22).
- “Come, let *us* go down and confuse their language.” (Genesis 11:7).

Teacher’s Response

Putnam quotes Tolstoy, who said, “There are two Gods, the God that people generally believe in—A God who has to serve them (sometimes in very refined ways, say by merely giving them peace of mind). This God does not exist. But the God whom people forget—the God whom we all have to serve—exists, and is the prime cause of our existence and of all that we perceive.”

Concluding Questions

1. There is a huge difference between knowing about God and knowing him. Are you ready to know the living God of the universe? Or do you just want to know *about* him? Are you willing to question your presuppositions? Are you willing to embrace objectively the ultimate reality of your life?
2. How have you changed since knowing more about the Father?

Author’s Note

Before concluding the evening, the leader should ask if anyone desires to open his or her heart to the Lord and then lead those persons in a prayer to know God the Father better.

LESSON 3: SON

Introduction

Since Jesus' incarnation (when he came to earth in human form), there have been many ongoing disputes for centuries about who Jesus really is. Jesus even asked his own disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Throughout history people have had varying opinions about his identity and mission.

Some people reject the deity of Christ and view him as a typical person (Ebionites). Others claim that his body was transformed into a spiritual form before his death on the cross (Gnostics). Still others think that he is superior to all living beings, a transitional form between man and God (Arians). There are also those who consider Jesus a two-fold person, rejecting the unity of two kinds of essence in Christ and thereby limiting him to a normal human being filled with God (Nestorians).

Who do you believe Jesus is? This is what we will examine in this chapter. We will attempt to discover the true Jesus who lived on earth and who is revealed in Scripture.

Dialogue Questions

1. How did Jesus reveal himself to you, and what feelings did you experience when you accepted Jesus Christ into your heart?
2. What good things have been happening in your life since you accepted Jesus as your Savior?
3. If you have not accepted Jesus as Savior, who do you think Jesus is—and why?
4. What does Scripture say about Christ's essence, physically and spiritually?

Author's Note

After plenty of time for discussion, you may want to focus the group toward discussion of the Nicene Creed and the scholar Athanasius.

Then after another period of dialogue, you may want to stop all discussion and provide clear theology from the book and from the information below to help the students discover who Jesus really is.

Teacher's Response

Jesus as the Preexistent and Incarnate Son of God

- Since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven, is one substance with the Father, and was not “made” (i.e., created), then we must conclude that he has preexisted for all eternity (Philippians 2:6–8).
- John 1:1–3 makes it perfectly clear that Jesus not only preexisted with the Father but also is the one who made the universe and everything in it.
- After becoming a man, Jesus never ceased being God. Jesus often used the term “Son of Man” as his self-designation. He possessed a complete human nature and went through all the stages of human development, like any other person.

Testimonies about Jesus

Hebrew historian Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, wrote this about Jesus:

Jesus lived about this time; he was a wise man if it would be right to call him a man, because he

performed miracles and was a teacher of men who were joyfully receiving the truth. He drew a lot of Jews and Gentiles to himself. He was Christ and when Pilate, after having listened to chiefs among us, sentenced him to death on the cross, those who loved him from the very beginning did not reject him for he had appeared to them alive on the third day according to prophets who talked about these and about ten thousand of other miracles relating to him. The Christian generation named after him is alive up to our days.

Antiquities (beginning of the second century)

But Was Jesus Created at Some Former Time?

Author's Note

The leader should study this entire section of the book carefully for a few examples before discussing the matter with the group.

Teacher's Response

- Jesus has existed for all eternity; he is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. His name is revealed in Scripture as the "I Am," which expresses not only that Christ is always present but also asserts his eternal existence (John 8:58).
- Jesus knew about his preexistence with the Father and coming from heaven (John 1:1–3; Proverbs 30:4; Romans 1:20; John 17:3–5; Matthew 3:11, 16:16; Heb 7:1–4; Isaiah 7:14, 9:6–9; Proverbs 8:23–31; Revelation 1:8,11; John 6:33, 41, 50, 51, 58, 62, 8:56–58; Exodus 3:14; Micah 5:2).
- Jesus knew about his preexistence with the Father and coming from heaven (Exodus 3:14–15; Proverbs 8:23–31; 30:4; Isaiah 9:6–7; Micah 5:2; Matthew 16:16; John 1:1–3; 6:33, 41, 50, 51, 58, 62,

8:56–58; 17:3–5; Hebrews 7:1–4; Revelation 1:8).

- Putnam writes, “In the original Greek language, the apostle John makes it emphatically clear that Jesus is not begotten or created by God the Father, whatsoever. Instead of using the most common Greek work *gennaō*, John uses the Greek word *monogenēs* to explain Christ’s *single uniqueness*, not creation. Examples of the use of this Greek word are seen in John 1:14; 1:18, 3:16; 3:18; 1 John 4:9.”

The Form of Jesus’ Humanity

- **He was born a man.**

He was born as a man by a woman (Matthew 1:18–23, 2:11; Luke 1:30–33; Galatians 4:4).

- **His ancestors were representatives of the human race.**

Christ’s genealogy by flesh is traced back to David and Adam by his mother Mary’s line in the Gospel of Luke and to David and Abraham by his earthly father Joseph’s line in the Gospel of Mathew (Luke 3:23–38; Matthew 1:1–17).

- **He was given human names.**

He was called the son of David (Matthew 1:1, 9:27; 12:23; 20:30–33) and the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

- **He possessed a complete human nature.**

a) Jesus possessed a human spirit (Mark 2:8; Luke 23:46; John 13:21).

b) Jesus possessed a human soul (Isaiah 53:11; Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34; John 12:27; Acts 2:27–31).

c) Jesus possessed a human body of flesh, bones, and blood (Matthew 26:12; Luke 22:19; 23:52–56; John 1:14; 2:19–22; Hebrews 2:14; 10:5, 10).

- **He went through all the stages of human development.**

In his humanity, Jesus grew and developed in a normal and natural way, like any other human. He grew as a child (Luke 2:40), developing both mentally and physically (Luke 2:52), and experienced human temptations (Matthew 4:1–1; Luke 4:1–13; 22:28; Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

He learned to constantly rely upon God and the power of the Holy Spirit. He could neither say nor do anything from himself [suggestion: on his own], but only what was given to him to say or do (Mark 1:35; 4:34; 5:19, 30; 14:24; 10:38; Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 5:7).

- **He possessed sinless weaknesses of human nature.**

Jesus felt tired (John 4:6), hungry (Matthew 4:2; 21:18), and thirsty (John 4:7; 19:28). He was also emotionally moved and wept (John 11:33–35).

- **He went through the torment of death.**

- **He experienced a physical resurrection.**

Teacher's Response

You should now have a fairly good understanding of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. Now it is important that you understand the importance of submitting to the lordship of Christ in our lives, which is the next discussion topic.

Dialogue Questions

The Lordship of Christ

1. What are you sensing that God wants you to do daily in your relationship with him?
2. Do you ever struggle with your will versus God's will in your life?

3. Were there ever times in your life when you had a problem with trusting Jesus?
4. What is the best way to discern God's will in your life?
5. In what ways is Jesus working in you now?

CONCLUSION

Let's remember Putnam's words that "Because of the wounds of [Jesus'] hands, he now can clean us, protect us, and save us, but we must submit and yield to Jesus in every way."

LESSON 4: HOLY SPIRIT

Introductory Dialogue Questions

There are many varying opinions about who the Holy Spirit is and how he works in our lives and around the world.

1. What do you think about spiritual power in general?
2. What are your impressions of the Holy Spirit?
3. Do you have a difficult time viewing the Holy Spirit as a person?
4. First Corinthians 2:12 tells us that it is through the Holy Spirit that Christians “may understand what God has freely given us.” How do you think that process works?
5. What Scriptures can you think of that discuss the Holy Spirit?

Teacher’s Response

The Holy Spirit is the most enigmatic, or mysterious, person of the Trinity. There have been disputes, debates, and creeds made about him during the centuries, all with the attempt to know him better.

Jesus told his disciples that after his return to heaven he would send the Holy Spirit (further indicating that the Holy Spirit truly is a person and that he is a gift that is given to all Christians).

In the Old Testament he is most often referred to as “the Spirit of God,” which is the same person referred to in the New Testament as the Holy Spirit. A New Testament passage that clearly validates that this is the same person is Acts 2:17, where Peter quotes Joel 2:28 in telling his listeners on the day of Pentecost about God’s promise that he will pour out the Holy Spirit on all people.

The reason why we designate the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity is because he seems to be the “workhorse” who

accomplishes the Father's and Jesus' will on earth. Since his work often seems to be in secret, many people think that he is impersonal; but this is not true at all.

As Christians, we have been given the special gift of the Holy Spirit to live inside of us. But due to neglect and to a lack of knowledge and experience, many Christians journey through life as spiritual paupers.

Putnam points out that, although Ukraine has perhaps the richest soil in the world, there was a time when people were starving—because they failed to cultivate the soil and produce food. He uses this as an illustration of our neglected spiritual life with God, through the Holy Spirit.

Dialogue Question

1. Rate your current spiritual condition: Are you close to the Holy Spirit or are you far away from him? What can you do to draw closer in your relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Teacher's Response

Please review, at the end of this chapter, the names, capabilities, functions, and gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Scripture.

Dialogue Questions

1. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's source of energy and life. List some of the many different ways that the Holy Spirit is manifested in our lives.

2. What are some of the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible? Where are they mentioned?

3. Why do you think God has given spiritual gifts to the church?

Teacher's Introduction for the Following Questions

Our lives are like a vessel which needs to be filled and used. We were created to “contain” God inside of us. Rather than being like a broken vase unable to hold anything, we should become a channel for the Holy Spirit here on this earth—a huge reservoir capable of containing the full measure of the Holy Spirit.

Putnam quotes Robert Gromacki, who compares the baptism and the filling of the Holy Spirit in five different ways. This is a very emotionally charged topic for Christians in every denomination. Lead the group in reviewing and discussing Gromacki's five proposed differences between being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, along with the Scriptures referenced in these points.

Author's Note

If this will take too much time, then thoroughly review the first point: “The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a once-for-all operation, whereas filling is a continuous process. The command to be filled (Eph. 5:18) is in the present tense, indicating an experience that can be repeated. The disciples were repeatedly filled (Acts 2:4; 4:8). The baptism, however, is a single event (Eph. 4:5), described as completed (1 Cor. 12:13).”

Dialogue Questions

1. What is the difference between the filling of the Holy Spirit and the baptism in the Holy Spirit?
2. Are there any hindrances preventing you from living in the fullness of the Spirit?
3. In Mathew 7:15–23 Jesus says that false prophets would be recognized by their fruit. “Do people pick grapes from thorn

bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (verses 16–19). In light of this passage, why is it important for Christians to bear spiritual fruit?

Conclusion

Putnam suggests that being a born-again Christian does not mean the absence of trials or pain. In fact, being baptized in the Holy Spirit may even increase our attacks from the evil one, who wants to discourage us.

Spiritual struggles for sincere Christians in this scenario are not necessarily indications of God’s absence and/or curse upon your life, but the enemy’s attempt to thwart your growth in the Holy Spirit.

Growing in intimacy with the Holy Spirit, in reliance upon him, will provide you with the ability to have greater freedom, power, and joy in the Lord. Cultivate your relationship with the Holy Spirit and see what he will do through you and for you.

LESSON 5: SIN

Introductory Dialogue Questions

1. Is death natural to a person?
2. Do you think there was a time when death did not exist?
3. Why do you think death appeared on the earth?

Theological Dialogue Questions

1. How would you define sin?
2. What is the significance of the Ten Commandments today?
3. What is the New Testament view of sin?

Teacher's Response

Putnam quotes several authors in regard to their view of sin. For example,

- Millard Erickson defined sin as “any lack of conformity, active or passive, to the moral law of God. This may be a matter of act, of thought, or of inner disposition or state. Sin is failure to live up to what God expects of us in act, thought, and being.”
- Brian W. Grant proposed that sin is “whatever we do or are that destroys, for ourselves or another, the reality or possibility of life lived in communion with God, whether we acknowledge that fact or not.”
- Thomas Aquinas said, “Sin is nothing more than a bad human act ... elicited by the will.”

Author's Note

Have the group review the charts on “Biblical Terms For Sin,” “Descriptions of Sin,” and “Types of Sins” located at the end of

the chapter, leading a discussion on the definition and nature of sin according to Scripture.

Perhaps you can give a few hypothetical examples of discerning sin by biblical standards. Examples might include copyright laws for music and movies. Our culture condones copying such things, but is this actually sin—stealing from another person? Or how about when you discover an error in your favor made by a bank or store clerk: Is it a sin to keep the money? The answer is yes to both questions.

Take as much time as you need to answer questions. After all the group members have had a chance to share their opinions, be prepared to teach the following theological views of sin.

The History of Original Sin.

Many theologians assert that Scriptures like Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12–21 support their claim for “original sin.” These passages express the fact that we are *all* sinners because of the sin passed down from our ancestors, beginning with our first ancestor, Adam, when he rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden.

Original sin *does not* mean that

1. every person has revealed his/her own sinfulness to the greatest possible extent;
2. sinners do not have the slightest idea about God;
3. sinners are guilty of every sin;
4. sinners cannot perform good deeds in other people’s eyes.

Original sin *presupposes* that

1. every aspect of human nature was damaged, including all of a person’s abilities;

2. there is nothing in an individual that could justify him/her before the righteous God.

Free Will and Temptation

In conjunction with being born into a sinful state, God gives humanity the free will to make right or wrong choices. It should be highly stressed that temptation is not sin.

1. What are the consequences of sin?

“Sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

(James 1:15)

“For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

2. How many people have perished as a result of Adam’s sin?

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

“In Adam all die.” (1 Corinthians 15:22)

3. How did the sin of our ancestor Adam change the surrounding flora and fauna?

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.” (Genesis 3:17–18)

Dialogue Questions

1. Is there a person in the world who has never sinned?
2. Do you have a different view of sin now that you have studied this chapter more in-depth as a group?
3. What should you do when you sin?
4. Can you forgive yourself after you sin?

Teacher's Response and Conclusion

God will forgive us, as Christians, every time we truly repent of our sins. In order for us to walk in obedience to the Lord, we need to

1. recognize when we sin, and admit the sin before God;
2. accept his forgiveness and believe that God does not condemn us; and,
3. turn away from those unrighteous deeds from which you have repented.

GROUP BIBLE STUDY READING

Let us look at how these principles work in John 8 when the woman was caught in adultery.

Have the group turn to John 8:1–11. Read the passage out loud, or ask a volunteer to do so.

BIBLE STUDY REVIEW

You can see from this passage that a woman was caught having sex with a man who was not her husband. Because she broke God's seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14), the Jews believed that she need to be punished for her sin according to the Law of Moses. Jesus knew that he would bear her sin on the cross and that he was ready to eternally forgive her, after he taught her an important lesson.

Jesus said to her accusing crowd, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." All of them realized that they did not have a right to condemn the sinful woman because they committed sins themselves. In Jesus' presence, people were convicted by their own conscience. Eventually all the condemners departed. Then Jesus said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

God does not condemn us for those sins we have already confessed. Nevertheless, he wants us to become his obedient child who honors his commands of Scripture. If we do not keep the spiritual laws of God, we will definitely suffer the consequences.

Group Activity

Either divide the class into groups of 3–4 students or keep everyone together and invite those who desire prayer to sit in a chair while the others gather around him or her. Give an opportunity for those convicted by the Holy Spirit (and possibly needing salvation as well) to mention their sins to the group, repent, and pray for forgiveness. After doing so, the leader and/or members of the group should pray prayers of intercession on behalf of the repentant individual. Be sure to bestow upon the person much love, grace, and encouragement.

LESSON 6: SALVATION

Author's Notes

Because this chapter is very important, each dialogue question is focused around a particular topic that is purposefully open-ended so that it will hopefully produce lively discussion. Following most dialogue questions is a Scripture reference to support the correct answer. Some categories begin with an introduction designed to help stimulate conversation.

TOPIC: WHAT IS SALVATION?

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The main theme of the Christian message is salvation. *Salvation* is a widely used word that carries the concept of deliverance.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “It is clear from the witness of the Bible and the church throughout history that nothing occurs in the relationship between Christ and the believer apart from decision: we are called in Jesus of Nazareth by an address, and we must decide whether that address comes from God or from insanity. It is always a risk to make a decision either way. Christ will not let us go once we have made the decision to follow.”

Dialogue Question

1. Do you believe Bonhoeffer was right? Why?

TOPIC: DO PEOPLE REALLY NEED SALVATION?

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Many people today are postmodernists—individuals who are continually skeptical toward the ideas and ideals of the modern

era. Putnam writes, “Instead of placing their belief and trust in an invisible God, postmodernists displace God from their understanding and replace him with the freedom of arbitrary decision, believing that humanity has no essential purpose other than to just exist.”

Dialogue Question

1. If postmodernists are correct, do people really need salvation?

TEACHER’S RESPONSE

All unsaved people are naturally disposed toward sin. Even all of our good works and sincere efforts cannot save us from ourselves. Only God, through Jesus Christ, can save us from the error of our ways. The necessity of salvation becomes clear when we realize the connection between God’s divine holiness, law, and wrath and our human sinfulness.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE AND GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Sin has turned humanity into a society of lawbreakers and people of rebellion in every area of life, including our thoughts, words, deeds, and actions. The consequence of these sins has resulted in the eternal separation of men and women from God (Isaiah 59:2). It is now their natural inclination to sin constantly because of this sinful nature. It has been said that people are not sinners because they sin, but rather they sin because they are sinners (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23; 7:7–12; Galatians 3:22).

God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness are in direct contradiction to each other. God’s holiness cannot stand man’s sinfulness; that’s why God’s righteousness requires that man’s sinfulness would be brought into judgment.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY

- Isaiah 59:2
- Psalm 51:5
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 7:7–12
- Galatians 3:22

TOPIC: WHO SAVES PEOPLE?TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Putnam quotes George Barna, who surveyed many Americans and discovered that “nearly two out of three persons believe that all religions teach basically the same thing and that no one is superior to the others.”

Dialogue Question

1. Do you think this statement is true, not only of Americans but of many other people? Can you refute this belief with Scripture?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY

- Jonah 2:9
- John 3:16–18
- John 8:24, 28, 58
- Acts 4:12
- 2 Corinthians 5:18–21
- Ephesians 2:8–9

TOPIC: WHO CAN BE SAVED?Dialogue Question

1. Who can be saved?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY

- Acts 2:38–40
- Romans 10:11–13
- 2 Peter 3:9

TOPIC: WHAT DOES GOD SAVE US FROM?

Dialogue Question

1. What does God save us from?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY

- John 8:23–24
- Romans 1:18; 3:9; 5:21
- Romans 8:5–8
- Romans 8:15
- Ephesians 4:17–24
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8
- 2 Timothy 1:7
- Titus 2:11–3:6
- Hebrews 2:14–15
- 1 John 5:19

TOPIC: HAVE YOU HEARD OF OTHER WAYS TO SALVATION?

Dialogue Questions

1. Is salvation possible through someone or something else other than Jesus Christ?
2. Do you know the differences between the major world religions?

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Buddhism sees ignorance rather than sin as the roadblock to salvation. Life consists of constant suffering or dissatisfaction, which is most likely followed by continual cycles of rebirth after this life until Nirvana is reached. To reach this spiritual state, one needs to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

The ultimate goal of salvation within Hinduism is release from the infinite cycle of birth, death, and rebirth until one enters the eternal resting place that is devoid of personality and into the unimaginable abyss of Brahman.

Islam rejects the idea that someone's sins can be atoned for by another person. Muslims believe, rather, that salvation is dependent upon a person's attitudes and actions.

Devout Jews seek to live a moral life by keeping all 613 laws of the Torah. Final judgment, concerning whether someone is saved or not, will be determined by God taking into consideration the person's continuous efforts.

Universalists believe that all people will eventually be saved. They think that it is impossible for a loving God to send someone to hell.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY

- Romans 3:22–25
- John 14:6
- Acts 4:12

TOPIC: HOW CAN ONE BE SAVED?Author's Note

Unless you feel there needs to be more discussion, you should go ahead and present the following information—so that there is no misunderstanding or confusion.

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

God the Father is equally interested in the Son's glorification and in the salvation of those who are perishing (John 5:19–23; Philippians 2:9–11; Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:3–14). As our representative before God who carried our sin upon himself (1 Peter 1:18–21; compare with Matthew 1:21), Christ should always be our Head. And we were chosen to be called by him, conformed to his likeness, and glorified by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:11, 29–30).

If God's intention is to show his love to us through Christ, then our goal should be a devoted expression of our love in return through our worship of God and our service to Christ. This is our hope of glory, our present salvation, and our eternal happiness.

But first one must be saved by repenting of his or her sins and turning to God. If you are unsure if you are saved, then pray the prayer of salvation found at the end of the chapter in the book and/or follow what your leader says in prayer as you repeat after him or her.

Author's Note

You may want to ask again if anyone in the group wants to repent and be saved.

LESSON 7: THE BEGINNINGS OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

Introduction

The word *disciple*, in the original Greek text of the New Testament, is *matetes*, meaning “one who studies instructions received from another person.” The Greeks used this word in a special sense when someone would become an apprentice of a craftsman. The disciple was not just a student, but also a follower; he was known as a successor of his teacher.

We know that Jesus came to earth to save souls for eternity. But he also came to teach and mature believers in their faith. Every Christian is called to be Jesus’ disciple, no matter what the cost. Thus, a Christian disciple is someone who decides to follow Jesus Christ, desires to learn from him, and lives by his example.

The remaining chapters all focus on maturing in our Christian faith.

Dialogue Questions

1. What does “discipleship” mean to you? Read Luke 5:1–11 as a group.
2. Has another mature believer ever invested in your life in a meaningful way? If so, how?
3. Why is personal interaction with other believers so important in the Christian faith?

Two Boats

Dialogue Questions

1. Who does discipleship start with?
2. How did Jesus start calling his disciples to himself?
3. Why do you think Jesus called you to be one of his disciples?

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Jesus knew that his work on earth was too immense for his restricted amount of time before his crucifixion, resurrection, and return back home to his heavenly Father. Thus, from the very beginning of his ministry, his Father had predetermined in whose lives Jesus should invest and whom he would call to himself.

Before Jesus stepped into Peter's boat he knew all that was going to happen in Peter's future. He simply stepped into Peter's boat and began a relationship with him—a relationship that had such eternal significance that it chartered the course for all of Christian history. For it was through Peter and the church that millions of souls would be reconciled to God.

With Jesus' entrance into Peter's life, he enters our lives too. It began with Peter, but continues with us today. He gave Peter full authority in heaven and earth and does so for us too. Before Jesus could hand over such a blessing to Peter, the teacher needed to first prune his young disciple. So how does he do this?

Let us take a closer look and see what we can learn from Peter.

OBEDIENCETEACHER'S RESPONSE

After Jesus entered into Peter's boat and completed his teaching to the crowd, it was time for Jesus to begin the discipleship process with him. Without hesitation, Jesus asked Peter to "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Of course Peter, being the master fisherman, must have thought Jesus was a bit inexperienced and out of his scope of expertise. He gently reminded Jesus of the simple fact by saying, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

This is the first lesson of being a disciple of Christ. Sanctification and Christian growth always begin with simple obedience to Jesus and the gospel.

Dialogue Questions

1. What should be the first lesson we learn as a disciple of Jesus?
2. What results have you seen in your life when you were obedient to Christ?
3. Did you see these results immediately or over time?
4. What were the challenges to your obedience in the past? What are the challenges now?

ABUNDANCE

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Notice what happened to Peter when he obeyed Christ. He was blessed by God so abundantly that it was almost too much for Peter to handle. The nets began to break and the boat almost sank because of the weightiness of God's blessing.

Dialogue Questions

1. What is the result of a disciple's obedience to his or her Master?
2. Has God abundantly blessed you at some point in your life? If so, share your experience with the group.
3. How have you seen God abundantly bless someone else?
4. What does God's desire to bless people say about his character?

REPENTANCE

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Many Christians today want to believe they are obedient to Christ, but never actually give him full reign in their lives. They try to allow God to come just close enough that they can control and manage him. Contrary to the myth of Santa Claus, God is not some kind of a heavenly machine distributing gifts and mercies. He is beyond all of our trivial desires. After all, he is almighty God. He passionately desires that his children would respond to the love he pours out upon them.

Strangely enough, as soon as we stop picturing God as a spiritual vending machine or a generous Santa Claus, it is possible that we will “receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him” according to his Word (1 John 3:22).

Dialogue Questions

1. Why do you think Peter was so repentant?
2. How did this attitude bless Peter? How can it bless us too?
3. How self-sufficient in daily life do you think you are? In reality, how self-sufficient are we?

SUBSTANCE

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Putnam says that transformation will only occur at the level of our faithfulness and sincere love for Jesus, and that people of substance leave everything to follow Jesus.

Dialogue Questions

1. What does a “person of substance” look like to you?
2. If we grow in our relationship with Jesus, will trials and temptations end? Why not?

3. How does God work through the difficulties in our lives?
4. What is the best attitude to have in life?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY

Review the following biblical texts as a group and discuss them in the context of our topic today. Each verse speaks about a condition or attitude we need to have toward God.

- 2 Chronicles 7:14
- Jeremiah 29:13
- Mark 11:24
- James 5:16
- 1 John 5:14

CONCLUSION

When we truly repent and abandon the safe facades of our lives and venture into the wholeness of Christ, we will be transformed into the image of Christ, just as Peter was transformed.

When our Lord called Peter to greater relationship and greater spiritual fruit by becoming a “fisher of men,” what did Peter do? Scripture tells us that he pulled his boat up on the shore, left everything, and followed Jesus.

The influence that the early church had on their world shows us the value of discipleship. Discipleship is the best method of winning our world for Christ as well. If every Christian brings one person to Christ every year, and dedicates one year of his or her life to that person, then in a year this disciple will be prepared do the same for someone else; and we will continuously expand God’s kingdom, while maturing believers in Christ.

LESSON 8: INAUGURATING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Introductory Dialogue Questions

1. What should happen to us after we are saved?
2. How can God use difficult circumstances to change our spiritual condition?
3. Will changes in our character always take place joyfully and painlessly?
4. Is it possible to grow spiritually mature overnight?

Author's Note

If some students have been Christians for a period of time and are still struggling with being free or with personal transformation, you may want to remind the class that there are always some areas lingering in the background of our lives in which there are deep-rooted sins that we have difficulty releasing to God. You may want to discuss the wallpaper illustration from this chapter, reminding the students that their spiritual growth will be a gradual, step-by-step process of transformation into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

I would then encourage you to share with the class that we cannot always observe our transformation, but since God is our source of growth we can trust that he is working in us as long as we are obediently following Scripture and being honest with ourselves concerning our weaknesses.

You may want to read the quote from Dallas Willard at the beginning of the chapter: “The perceived distance and difficulty of entering fully into the divine world and its life is due entirely to our failure to understand that ‘the way in’ is ... to take the small steps that quietly and certainly lead to it.”

Profound Religious Emotions

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Putnam says that “Just because a person is momentarily passionate does not mean he or she is a spiritually mature individual. In fact, love and passion are easily mimicked.” For instance, some within the Jewish community were shouting to Pilate regarding Jesus, “Crucify him!” while a week before they were exclaiming “Hosanna!”

“Conversely, we should not neglect or stifle our emotions because of potential abuse,” Putnam says. “We should all praise God with all of our heart and with our utmost strength.”

Dialogue Questions

1. Why do we need emotions?
2. Can we trust our emotions?
3. How should we evaluate our emotions?

Distinguishing between True and False Humility

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

An outward sense of humility is also an unclear sign of spirituality because it is unknown to the onlooker if the person is truly sincere or not.

Dialogue Questions

1. Despite what looks like similarities, discuss the differences between King Saul and King David.
2. What other biblical examples can you think of where false humility looked like real humility?
3. What is the difference between striving to be holy and being hypocritical?

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Trying to be holy, and failing, is much different than putting on a facade before people. It all depends on the individual's internal motivation.

Encourage the class to continue their outward attempts to be seen as holy, while constantly working on their inward attempts to be transformed daily by the Holy Spirit, allowing God to transform their lives.

CLASS PROJECT

To conclude the study of this chapter, have everyone get a piece of paper and a pen and sit prayerfully and quietly for about ten minutes. Ask the class to write down the following question and list five items that they need to have transformed by God to make them more holy.

1. In what ways does your life need to change spiritually?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

Author's Note

After the group members have finished, encourage them to place their sheet of paper someplace (such as the bathroom, the kitchen, next to the bed, or in their Bible) where they can be reminded to pray over these five things daily until God has transformed all five of the areas listed.

The leader should close by praying for the entire class, asking God to bless the sincerity of their hearts.

LESSON 9: SANCTIFICATION

Introductory Dialogue Questions

1. What is sanctification?
2. Who is responsible for sanctification—God or people themselves?
3. Who else besides the Father takes part in the process of sanctification in our lives?

TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Putnam offers the following definitions of sanctification:

- The Westminster Confession explains that when a person is sanctified “the power of sin ruling over the whole body is destroyed, and the desires of the old self are more and more weakened and killed ... Although the old nature temporarily wins battles in this warfare, the continual strengthening of the sanctifying Spirit of Christ enables the regenerate nature in each believer to overcome.”
- Millard Erickson describes sanctification as the “process of making the person holy or good.”
- Putnam says that sanctification is “the process of a Christian being made holy—a process that begins by being set apart for God.”

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all take part in the process of sanctification. It is God the Father’s will for all believers to be sanctified. Sanctification is not just knowledge of instructions but relationship with the Person of Christ, the One who sanctifies us. The Holy Spirit, in particular, applies God’s power of sanctification in the life of a Christian.

Author's Note

The leader is encouraged at this point to review with the group the chart which compares what “sanctification is not” with what “sanctification is” within the Christian faith.

Group Project

Putnam presents eight theological views of sanctification. Depending on the size of the group, have each person take one or two views and present to the group their findings from the book. Have each person give a five to ten minute presentation discussing the following points for each perspective. It is not necessary for the presenter to adhere to that particular position, since he or she will be able to give a personal conclusion.

1. Tell the group which perspective you will be presenting.
2. What does this perspective teach about the sanctification process?
3. How is the justification and sanctification process linked together or separated?
4. How is this view of sanctification different from the other seven views?
(It will be necessary for the presenter to understand all the views to answer this question.)
5. Provide open discussion time for the other members of the group to ask questions and provide insights.
6. Conclude by presenting your own view of sanctification, using Scripture to support your position.

Author's Note

After all the positions have been discussed and analyzed, it is important for the leader to stress how God works to mature us outside of any denominational theology on sanctification.

Have the group review the six steps to Hagberg and Guelich's *Critical Journey*. The steps are as follows:

Lead the group in a review of the six steps in Hagberg and Guelich's book, *The Critical Journey*, which are as follows:

1. Recognition of God
2. Life of discipleship: Commitment to following God
3. Productive life
4. Journey inward
The Possible Wall
5. Journey outward
6. Life of love

Dialogue Questions

1. Which stage of the critical journey best expresses where you are?
2. What do you need to do to get to the next stage?
3. What is hindering you from proceeding to the next stage?
4. How can we help each other as a group to proceed in this ever-increasing life of love for God?

CONCLUSION

We must never forget that the sanctification process is a supernatural and ongoing work of God through the Holy Spirit to make us more like Christ. But we have a very vital part to play in this sanctification process, which necessitates each Christian making the proper choices of pursuing righteousness and godliness. I believe it's impossible to reach perfection on earth through human effort, but we are becoming a greater representation of Jesus as we grow in knowledge, faith, experience, and action. It is our primary aim in this life to work cooperatively with God in becoming more Christlike each day.

And as we yield more of our lives to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, we are becoming a spiritual masterpiece where God resides and reflects his glory and likeness through us. Yet every one of us must take an active part in our own transformation.

Author's Note

Before ending the course, the leader should thank the group for committing to this study. Find out if anyone in the group needs prayer or if anyone needs to make a commitment to Jesus as his or her Savior, in case the person was not prepared to do so earlier in the course.

It is up to each leader and group to decide if you would like to continue as a group and study another topic of your choice.

Thank you for all of your effort in guiding and facilitating this class. May our Lord Jesus bless you richly for your commitment and love for these people under your care.

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