

Series One: Discipleship and New Life

Session 1

Fresh Start: God's Call to Salvation

Words to Know

Christian: someone who shows the compassionate, forgiving, and accepting nature of Jesus Christ; the state of being a believer in and a follower of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship: using Christ's life as a model for our thoughts, behaviors, and relationships.

Salvation: deliverance from sin by acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior; the free gift of eternal life given by God.

Sin: when we separate ourselves from God's desires for our lives via willful or immoral actions; the act/actions of "missing the mark" of God's standard of righteousness.

Cultivating the Ground

The following questions are designed to help clarify the spiritual challenges we face. In addition to answering the questions, seek to understand their spiritual value for your life.

1. What has been your most significant challenge as a Christian? What is the spiritual work that you have engaged in on a consistent basis to enable you to become more Christ-like? What is your evidence of its success? Of its occasional failure? What must you do on a consistent basis to maintain your Christian walk?
2. How do you know that you have been saved by Christ? How is salvation evident in your life (to you and to your family members, workmates, and strangers)? What deliverance from sin might you still require to give evidence of your salvation? Has your view of salvation changed over the years? If so, how? Write your response in your SEED Journal.
3. How are you tempted to sin on a daily basis? What has tripped you up the most? What specific spiritual, social, emotional, and relationship supports can strengthen your fight against sin? Share some of your thoughts in your SEED Journal.
4. How have you structured your life to be a faithful disciple? (For example, do you tithe? Work in a church ministry? Volunteer in the community? Apologize for wrongdoing? Behave consistently across situations?) What have you taught your children, grandchildren, or others about the responsibilities and privileges of discipleship?

The SEED

John 3:16

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.



Planting the SEED

God loves us. God's desire is that we live right in this life and choose life after death with Him. To do this, we must accept and walk with God's Son, Jesus Christ. Most parents would be concerned if one of their children refused to ever walk, or if the child preferred crawling even though he or she had the physical ability to walk. Such is our relationship with God. We are the sons and daughters of God (see John 1:12-13). As a result, those of us who have accepted Christ as our personal Lord and Savior must learn how to walk according to His expectations. An unsaved life is a crippled and dead life. A saved life is a moving and growing life.

Resources for the SEED

Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9



The "**Roman Road**," also known as the *Plan of Salvation*, is a group of Bible verses from the book of Romans in the New Testament. If you walk down this road, you will end up understanding how to be saved from your sins by Jesus Christ.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (*Romans 3:23*)

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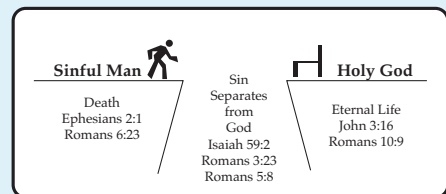
God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (*Romans 5:8*)

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The wages of sin is death. (*Romans 6:23*)

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If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (*Romans 10:9*)



Nurturing the SEED

The most important decision we can ever make in our lives is the decision to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. In order for this to truly have meaning for us, we have to have had a fresh start with Jesus Christ. This "fresh start" is called salvation. This means we clearly know that we have made mistakes (sin), admit that we have made mistakes (confession), and intend to turn our lives around from the mistakes through a "new

birth” in Jesus Christ (regeneration). This means that we are willing to read, listen to, know, and follow the intent Jesus Christ has for our lives.

When, how, and the circumstances around which we were first born through our natural birth was something we had no choice in. When we did start making choices, our choices were not pleasing to God. This is called *sin* and we are controlled by its power. We must understand that all of us, at all ages, are prone to sin—to do things that create a separation between God and ourselves.

The Old Testament states that God has established penalties for our sin. Yet, the New Testament points also to the loving nature of God to pay that penalty for us. This payment was through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, in order for us to be saved we have to make the conscious choice to embrace Jesus Christ and to be guided by Him in all that we do. That is why it is stated in the gospel of John, “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.” This is what makes us His disciples.

The process to get there is by following the example known as the *Plan of Salvation*. It is also called the “Roman Road” (see the passages on the previous page) because all of the passages are in the book of Romans. When a person follows this plan and prays for the Lord to enter into his or her heart, this is the fresh start—this is salvation.

One of the faulty assumptions is that because a person is a member of a church, and may have been a member for many years, we think that is automatic “proof” that he or she is a Christian. Further, there are those who believe that evidence of their being Christians is that they sing in the choir, serve as ushers or “deacons,” or even preach; often that becomes the automatic qualifier that a person is a Christian. There are those who also believe that simply because God has blessed them or even has spared them from some life calamity that they are Christians. These are all very wrong assumptions. The only thing that qualifies us as being Christians is when we make the choice to accept by faith Jesus Christ in our lives and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him in all that we are and do. Then when we are active in the church, this is done with the right attitude, the right meaning, and the right purpose. You will find yourself doing what pleases God and not what may or may not please people.



Fruit from the SEED

What this really means is that to truly be Christians, we must be transformed. Transformation does not mean that we just add something new to our lives, like joining a lodge, a fraternity, or a sorority. It means that once a person makes the decision to be a Christian, every other decision he or she makes in life is made based on what he or she believes Jesus would want him or her to do. You may recall a few years ago a trend that was started called “WWJD?”—meaning, “What Would Jesus Do?” This was established so that we could look at life through the eyes of Jesus, constantly asking ourselves, “What would Jesus do if He was in a similar circumstance as ourselves?” This is the constant question of Christians. When I am faced with any decision in my life, I must ask myself: What would Jesus do?



Harvesting Time

Opportunities for Growth spurts, Pruning, and Maturing



To paraphrase an important question asked by the Global Oneness Project, “What would the world look like if we embodied our highest Christian potential—if we truly walked as Christ walked, treated each other as brothers and sisters, and loved each other as He loves us?” Those blessed to experience their senior years are community elders. Elders have the responsibility to ensure the safety and continuity of our community by teaching lessons that only they know.

Parents and grandparents are among those responsible for ensuring that our *Christian* walk keeps the path wide open for youth, whether related to us or not, who might have gone badly astray. We must remember that many young people who act out, mildly to terribly, are simply asking for us to invite them into the fold. This is what Christ did when He walked among us. It is what He expects us to do. Creating and re-creating family is *discipleship* in action. Helping gang members (and other young people) learn that God has a *plan of salvation* for their lives decreases their desire to sin.

The *Cross and the Switchblade* is a book that relates the true story of David Wilkerson, an Assembly of God minister who, in the 1960s, moved to New York City from a small town. Though his relationship with them often endangered his life, Wilkerson sought to bring change to the lives of gang members by showing them, by example, “what faith in God can do.” Wilkerson attempted to demonstrate to New York gang members that we can be redeemed, even though our human nature makes us sinners who fall short of the expectations that God sets for us (see Romans 3:23). His hard work led to a number of conversions. Having grown tired of lives of violence and impressed by the example that Wilkerson set, several gang members internalized this important lesson: God loved us enough to send Christ to die for all of us who have sinned (see Romans 5:8).

There is one peculiar fact that is often overlooked when we think of gangs: gangs are families. Having been, in many cases, poorly parented, these young people have formed families of their own. With no model to follow, their rules are dysfunctional—their structures are violent. They hold out little hope for long lives. But they are as cohesive as they are personally and socially destructive. Sin always leads to death; gang members have yet to learn that eternal life is found in Jesus Christ (see Romans 6:23).

People who have spent considerable time toiling in God’s vineyard can, at times, become jaded about those who seem to be throwing away the gift of life. It is important that we understand the youth psyche. It is also essential that we recall an important fact: even if we did not engage in gang behavior, we were all young once. We must be convinced that those who engage in the worst behavior are capable of absolute redemption. We must truly believe that all persons created by God are eligible for redemption and salvation. The surprising result to this could not just be the effect on the individuals, but on the community as well. When individuals are saved, communities are also saved.

The truth is that gangs form when society has failed them. Presenting God's *plan of salvation* within the context of our extended families and welcoming church arms are essential steps in counterbalancing the failures.



Digging Deeper

Continue your journey into God's call to salvation by reading the resources available on these Web sites, some of which were used as references in your lesson. Use the Web site information to enhance the exercises in the lesson as well as to further address the self-assessment and class dialogues encouraged by the lesson. You are encouraged to write down your responses in your SEED Journal.

Supplemental Section

Book

- David Wilkerson, Elizabeth Sherrill, and John Sherrill. *The Cross and the Switchblade*. Jove Publisher, 1986. DVD available.

Gangs and Gang Behavior

- www.globalonenessproject.org/search/node/gangs - View the longer version of Barrio de Paz.
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCpCvCpdP_g - Minister Farrakhan on gang behavior
- <http://psychology.jrank.org/pages/269/Gangs.html> - Definition

Human Potential

- www.globalonenessproject.org - In filmed form, this Web site asks the question you were challenged to address personally. "What if the world embodied our highest potential? What would it look like?"

God's Plan of Salvation

- <http://www.chick.com/information/general/salvation.asp>

Christian Games

- <http://biblewordgames.com/> - This site has Christian crosswords, word search and trivia games.

Closing

No matter what wrongs we have done in our lives, it is never too late to accept Christ. Christ has already accepted us. He awaits us with open arms, acknowledging that we have faults and fears. He knows that we wish for our spirits to be washed clean. In Him, we are redeemed. Revelation 22:17 reads, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (A volunteer should lead the class in prayer.)