

GROWTH & HEALING

SEVEN STEPS

A Weekly Guide For
Small Groups

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WEEK

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



Week 2 – Respond to God with Faith

The Bible tells us that God is not only interested in us (as we learned last week), He is interested in *helping us*. He wants to help us by offering what the Bible calls “salvation” and hope for the future. The myth, or lie that many people believe is that “I can do it on my own.”

Lie #2

“I can do it on my own.”

You may have heard someone say,

- “God helps those that help themselves.”
- “I’ve got it all under control.”

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence, “I feel like I can do things without God because _____.”

Why do we have these thoughts?

- our culture
- our pride
- fear
- our nature

So, here are two more questions for you,

- When have you had difficulty trusting God and asking Him for help?
- Why was it difficult?

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Apprehension

Many people are apprehensive and fearful to trust God. This can be especially true if someone has experienced *rejection* in life.

According to Jesus, though, we should not fear God because He is *trustworthy*.

One of the most common phrases Jesus used when he was teaching 2,000 years ago was *do not be afraid*. Such as:

- “Don’t be afraid, just believe.” (Mark 5:36)
- “Take courage, it is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Mark 6:51)
- “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7)
- “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”(Luke 12:32)
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

In addition, the Apostle Paul wrote about God’s faithfulness:

- “God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (I Corinthians 1:9)
- “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us...” (II Corinthians 1:10)

So, according to Scripture, we can trust God to help us because He cares for His people.

Here are several more questions for you to consider:

- What about God’s faithfulness do you find encouraging? Why?
- What about trusting God is challenging?

The Need for Forgiveness

According to the Bible, our natural inclination is to do things apart from God. In this regard, we “miss the mark” or sin, as the Bible calls it.

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In Genesis 3, we read about an event called “The Fall” where we see for the first time human sinfulness and rebellion against God.

In Genesis after the account of The Fall, we can see the results of human sinfulness in even greater detail, as people showed that they were:

- deceptive
- in denial of reality
- selfish
- hurtful to others
- unresponsive to God

Later in the Bible, this rebellion was even more pronounced as humans turned to idolatry and worshipped gods other than the Lord.

Some other questions to consider then, are...

- How have you seen this natural inclination to do things on your own, without God?
- What negative consequences of sin have you seen in your own life and in others?

The Law

In the Old Testament, God provided the Law to help instruct His people in His ways.

Part of the Law contained the Ten Commandments, with commands such as:

- “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)
- “You shall not make for yourself an idol...” (Exodus 20:4)
- “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” (Exodus 20:7)
- “You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15)

Response to the Law

In the Old Testament, in terms of the Law, there was only one response that was acceptable to the Lord: obedience.

- o “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.” (Exodus 12:24)

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- “Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.” (Deuteronomy 11:1)
- “Be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today.” (Deuteronomy 11:32)
- Moses said to the people, “If you obey the voice of the Lord your God...then all the blessings will come to you...” (Deuteronomy 28:1)

As the Law was explained to the people of the Old Testament, God enumerated blessings for following the Law and curses for not following the Law:

- “...the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.” (Deuteronomy 11:27-29)

Sadly, however, the Law was not followed and the consequences of disobedience and rebellion were felt as the Israelites fell under the “curse”.

Later, the Apostle Paul wrote about the consequences of not following the Law:

- “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.” (I Cor. 16:22)

Today, through our conscience and reading of the Bible, we can know what is right and what is wrong, yet because of our human nature we naturally do things that are separate from God. Many times we desire to be our own gods, following our own ideas and not God’s.

Seeking a Way Out

Looking at human history, we can see time and again people trying to find a way back to the Garden (of Eden) to a time before the Fall, before the curse of the Law.

Many answer this question by:

- Looking for others to change
- Hoping the government would change
- Seeking to control nature
- Looking to technology
- Working hard to be a better religious person
- Changing relationships
- Looking to material possessions

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Here's a question for you...what reasons have you thought of to fill in the blank?

- "If only _____ happened (or didn't happen), my life would be perfect.

The reason that those things don't work is because they don't fundamentally change our human nature. All of those systems, techniques or things, depend on our own works; on our doing or getting something. The problem with this approach, then, is that this is simply another way of stating Lie #2 that we discussed earlier, "I can do it on my own." It is clear in the Bible that we *can't* change on our own effort. We cannot remove the curse of the Law nor can we reverse the consequences of sin on our own.

So, if we can't change on our own, who can help us?

The Son

We learn in Scripture that even in the midst of our separation, God the Father, in His mercy and grace offered His son, Jesus Christ, to the world.

- "For God so loved the world that He gave his Son that whoever believes in him will not perish." (John 3:16)
- "And we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14)

How could Christ offer us His salvation?

The Apostle Paul gave us much insight about what type of person could save us from sin and the curse of the Law. He said that it must be someone who kept the Law to *perfection* and would *willingly pay the penalty for our sins*.

...that someone was Jesus.

Because Jesus was *God* He could live a *perfect* life, fulfilling all of God's requirements and be a perfect *sacrifice* for our sins. And because He was *human* He could be our *representative*.

Jesus we learn in the Bible was "The Messiah" a word meaning "the anointed one". In Greek, this word was translated as "christos", which is where we get the name Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). As the writer R.C. Sproul has written, "Christ is the sin-bearer for his people, the *Angus Dei* (Lamb of God) who takes away our sin and satisfies God's demand for justice."

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Christ paid the penalty for our sins. He took for us the penalty that our sins deserved by dying on the cross.

- In Hebrews we read, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word..." (Heb. 1:3)
- In the Gospels, we learn that Jesus "shed his blood for the remission of sin" (Matthew 26:28)
- "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)
- Paul explains that, "...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3)
- "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Cor. 5:21)
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13)

Death is Not the End

The story, however, doesn't end with Jesus' death. In an amazing and miraculous set of events, Jesus, after taking our punishment and dying for our sins, was raised from the dead.

Paul described it this way,

- "...he was buried and raised on the third day...appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred..." (I Cor. 15:3-6)
- because of His death, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..." (Phil. 2:9-11).

Thus we learn that not only is Jesus the "Messiah" (the anointed one of God) who died a humble death, but He is also the *exalted Lord*...the one whom every knee will bow down to worship.

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Step Two

This takes us to the second step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, which is simply called, “Respond to God’s offer of salvation with faith.”

Step #2:
Respond to God’s offer of salvation with faith.

The Bible explains,

- “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)
- Paul said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:31)

A Prayer

If you haven’t taken this step in faith, here’s a common prayer that expresses a desire to receive God’s gift of salvation.

“Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.”

The Results

We are told in Scripture that if we believe and trust, God will forgive us. Theologians describe this as “Christ’s righteousness imputed to those who believe.” That means that His righteousness is *transferred* to His people. A term that the Bible uses to explain this is *justified*. We are justified by Christ. That means, as Billy Graham has said, God sees us *just as if* we were Christ...sinless. Therefore, there is now no condemnation under God’s Law.

Earning God’s Favor

In approaching Jesus, many still bring the myth of “I can do it on my own” as we think, “I’ve got to earn God’s favor.”

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If these ideas were mathematical formulas they might look like this...

- Faith + Works = Salvation
- Faith – Bad Living = Salvation
- Faith + Good Living = Salvation
- Faith + Church Membership = Salvation

In the Bible, however, the equation is simply,

- Faith in Christ = Salvation.

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to trust Him *alone*.

- “No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.” (Matthew 6:24)
- “Salvation is found through no one else.” (Acts 4:12)
- Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Here are several more questions for you to consider:

- What about this message of Jesus’ forgiveness is interesting, compelling or exciting?
- Has there been a time in your life when you embraced this forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers? When? What were the circumstances?
- If you’ve put your faith in Christ, what results have you seen?

