**THIS IS MY STORY**

**Leader Guide**

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Georgia Baptist Student Groups and Faith Development

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***Sessions***

**Session 1 – What is the Gospel?**

**Session 2 – The Gospel and Your Story**

**Session 3 – Confirming Your Story**

**Session 4 – How to Share Your Story**

***Note to Leaders:*** *Throughout this Leader Guide you will find illustrations for each of the main points in the sessions. These are only suggestions. Feel free to use whichever illustrations you think will be helpful. Add in your own illustrations as you see fit. The best illustrations are those from your own personal experience. It’s also a good idea to begin each session with a story, illustration, or activity to grab the attention of your students as you launch into the lesson.*

**Session One**

**What is the Gospel?**

**About this Session:** You will help students understand four key truths about the Gospel or good news of Jesus Christ.

**LOOK AT THE BOOK**

Have you ever wondered why God would send His only Son into our world knowing He would die such a cruel death? The answer to that question can be found in what we call the Gospel. Maybe you’ve heard that word before, but you aren’t sure what it really means. Gospel simply means “good news.” The core of Christianity is the Gospel or good news about Jesus. In the Bible, the four books that tell the story of Jesus are called the Gospels. These four books - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - record the good news of salvation that came into our world through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Why was Jesus coming into our world over 2000 years ago such good news? I’m glad you asked! We’re going to spend a few minutes looking at the good news about Jesus. Specifically, we will look at four key parts of the Gospel. If we don’t know why Jesus came for us, we will never understand why the life and death of Jesus is good news for us. Let’s get started! The first part of the Gospel begins with God’s desire for our life.

1. **GOD’S DESIRE**

God created man for his own glory according to **Isaiah 43:7**. Everyone who sincerely wants to answer the age-old question “what is the meaning of life” will find no true answer that doesn’t point back to God. Everything in the universe starts with God and ends with God. It’s really all about Him. He made everything and put purpose in everything He made. And one of those purposes is His own glory.

And naturally, God wants all his creation to **fulfill** its purpose in bringing Him glory that He is rightfully due. The question is, how do we do that? One way, is to acknowledge that it is God who created us. **Psalm 100:2-3** says to serve Him gladly, knowing *“that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”*

King Solomon tried living for his own glory and serving himself, only to conclude at the end of his life that the only life worth living is one that honors God and obeys His commands (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). But the only way to truly live for God, serve Him and ultimately fulfill our purpose is in a right relationship with Him.

God created us for a relationship. More than knowing about Him, He wants us to know Him in a personal way. He wants us to love Him and enjoy Him forever! In the Bible, we see God’s desire to know us all throughout its pages. Look at what Jesus said in **Revelation 3:20**: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”* In Jewish culture, sharing a meal together meant much more in that time that it does to us today. Meals today in our hurried culture are often rushed and without much meaningful conversation at all. Meals around the table in Jesus’ day showed that those who ate together trusted each other and held each other in high regard. God wants us to trust Him and hold Him in high regard. This is why we were created. The 4th century theologian Augustine said this to God: “You made us yourself, and our hearts find no peace until they rest in You.” We are all created with a God-shaped void inside us that only He can fill.

Adam and Eve were the first people God created. They enjoyed a close relationship with God until they decided to go against what God told them to do. Their act of rebellion forced God’s hand. God is Holy and just which means He must punish every act of rebellion and sin. He had no choice but to take them out of the Garden of Eden and away from His continual presence. Since their tragic choice, all of us have been affected by what they did. We are all now born with the desire to do our own thing and rebel against God. The Bible calls this our sin nature. That is now every person’s barrier to having a relationship with God.

1. **MY PROBLEM**

No matter how good of a life we try to live, we still fall short of being perfect. That is because we are all sinners. In **Romans 3:11-12, 23**, Paul described the condition of lost mankind: *“No one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one…all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Because of sin, we are all separated from knowing God and unable to fulfill our purpose of glorifying Him. And being separated from God and failing to live for His glory results in our spiritual death. Paul would later pronounce the consequence of this terrible reality in **Romans 6:23:** *“The wages of sin is death.”* This is not just a physical death but a spiritual death. The problem of sin is a problem that we all have in common. We are sinful in our very nature.

**Illustration:**  **It Starts with One Insect.** After a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left. Closer examination showed that it was rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its heart. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm; it began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark.[[1]](#endnote-2)

Many people falsely think they can remove this sin barrier on their own. The Bible says they are sadly mistaken. Consider these words in **Titus 3:3-5**: *“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.”* These verses point to God’s solution for removing our sin barrier. This solution must come from somewhere outside of us because we are all sinful in our core. That’s where Jesus comes in! Out of His great love, God saw our hopeless situation and provided a solution.

1. **GOD’S SOLUTION**

In **Romans 5:8**, we see that God sent us the solution to removing the sin barrier: *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* This is good news! God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to rescue us. Jesus gave His life to pay the penalty for all our sins. Jesus was uniquely qualified for this task. Jesus was sinless and didn’t deserve the punishment He received on the cross. He died because He took all our sins on Himself. He bore the weight of sin for all mankind.

**Illustration: Under His Wings.** An article in National Geographic several years ago gives us a great picture of God’s love. After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the damage. One ranger found a bird literally charred and hardened like a rock, perched on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he moved the bird with a stick. When he did, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother’s wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze arrived, and the heat scorched her small body, the mother didn’t move. Because she had been willing to die, those under the cover of her wings would live. Likewise, Christ gave his life to save us from the disastrous fire of sin and impending penalty of death.

Not only did Jesus take our sin and pay the penalty for our sins, He gave us something amazing. Look at **2 Corinthians 5:21**:*“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Not only does Jesus remove our sin debt but He also gives us a new identity. We are no longer dead to sin but alive to God. We are no longer enemies of God but friends. We are no longer alienated from God but we are reconciled to God. We are no longer viewed as sinners but now we are viewed as good and righteous as Jesus! When God looks at you, He sees the righteousness of Jesus. That is indeed good news! All of this is amazing, but we won’t benefit from all that Jesus did for us unless we respond to God. That leads us to the next part of the Gospel – Our Response.

1. **MY RESPONSE**

The good news of the Gospel is that we can have a personal relationship with God through Jesus if we will believe in Him and trust Him to forgive us our sins and be the leader of our lives. Salvation is a gift that we receive by faith. We see this in **Ephesians 2:8-9:** *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Paul describes the kind of faith that saves in **Romans 10:9-10:** *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord [He is God and has rule over us] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”* An authentic faith in Jesus is birthed personally (“believe in your heart”) and proven publicly (“confess with your mouth”).

**Illustration: Jump from the Roof.** One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, “Jump! I’ll catch you.” He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As you can imagine, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: “Jump! I will catch you.” But the boy protested, “Daddy, I can’t see you.” The father replied, “But I can see you and that’s all that matters.” We can’t see God, but we hear His still small voice. When we recognize that staying where we are in life has no future and will only end in our destruction, we give up control and jump into our Heavenly Father’s arms trusting that He will catch us and keep us as His own.

When we jump into God’s arms by faith, we are jumping away from something. In our case, we are jumping away from a life of sin. The Bible calls this change of mind and direction “repentance.” This doesn’t mean that we are never going to sin again. It does mean that we have gained a God-given desire to live under God’s control and not go on deliberately sinning.

That is the good news, that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Has the coming of Jesus into our world become good news to you personally? If not, I pray that you see the infinite value of knowing Jesus today and respond in faith to Him.

**TALKBACK QUESTIONS**

**Breaking the Ice:**  What is the best news that you have heard recently?

1. In your own words, tell why the appearance of Jesus on earth over 2000 years ago is good news to people today.
2. Why do you think so many people think they can work their way into favor with God by trying to be good? What is the problem with that approach?
3. In your own words, describe what you think it means to have faith in Jesus.

**Prayer:** Spend a few minutes in prayer expressing thanks to God for sending Jesus for you to make a relationship with Him possible.

**Session Two**

**The Gospel and Your Story**

**About this Session:** You will outline three common elements of every Christian’s salvation experience. In doing so, you will help students determine whether they have made His story their story.

**LOOK AT THE BOOK**

The stories of changed lives by the good news of Jesus are many. Each story is unique. We all come from different families and backgrounds. We all hear about Jesus in different ways and at different times in our lives. Some are young when they come to know Christ while others are old. Some stories of conversion are dramatic like the Apostle Paul being struck blind on the road to Damascus while others come to know Jesus without much drama such as Timothy who learned about salvation from his mother and grandmother.

While all our stories are unique, there are truths or to a Christian’s story of salvation that is true for all who come to know Him. As we talk through three common elements of a believer’s story, I want you to ask yourself whether these are true for you in your own spiritual journey.

First, every person who comes to know Christ will come to a point in their journey when they will say:

1. **“I SEE MY SIN AND I WANT TO CHANGE.”**

The problem with being spiritually lost, spiritually blind, and spiritually dead is that you don’t have the capacity or ability to understand that you are lost or separated from God because of sin. Listen to Paul describe spiritually lost people in **Ephesians 4:18**: “*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”* In **1 Corinthians 2:14**, Paul goes on to say, *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”* That is bad news for us but that’s where the good news comes in! God is a loving God who wants a relationship with us despite our sin! He has sent His Son *for us* and His Spirit *after us* to win our hearts.

Listen to Jesus’ words in **John 6:44-45**: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”* As you can see, God is at work in our world drawing and compelling lost people to see their lost condition and their need for Jesus.

Some people are aware that they have done some bad things and may even feel bad about those things. If they feel bad about their actions but never turn to Christ, the Bible calls this a worldly sorrow or grief that leads to death (see the example of Judas). However, when God begins to draw a sinner’s heart to Himself, He develops a different kind of sorrow over their sin.

When we turn from our sins and turn toward Christ, the Bible calls this a Godly sorrow. Listen to Paul’s words in **2 Corinthians 7:9-10**: *“As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”* Like the Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-30), we can see our sin but not feel bad enough about it to change. Or, we can be like the Philippian Jailer who was so overwhelmed about his sinful situation (Acts 16:25-34) that he not only turned to Christ but led his whole family to faith in Christ in one night!

**Illustration:** **It’s Like Pulling Teeth.** The key to recognizing our own sinfulness is choosing to do something about it. Consider the story of William “the Refrigerator” Perry. Perry was a defensive lineman for the Chicago Bears when they won the Super Bowl back in 1985. His nickname fit him well, because he was big and wide. Perry was also a friendly man with a wide grin.

Unfortunately for his grin, though he was a mammoth man playing in the tough world of the football trenches, he apparently was afraid of the dentist — so afraid that he didn’t go to the dentist for twenty years. He didn’t go to the dentist even though his teeth and gums hurt terribly, even though his teeth began falling out. Eventually he had lost half of his teeth — some he pulled out himself! — and his gums suffered chronic infection. He was suffering!

Finally, as he neared age forty-five, Perry had had enough. He went to a dentist, who had to pull out all of his remaining teeth, insert screws in his jaw, and implant new teeth — all of which would have cost him $60,000, except the dentist donated the procedure (apparently for the free publicity). William Perry said of his new teeth, “It’s unbelievable. And I love them…I got tired of my mouth hurting all the time.” When we come to Jesus with our sin, we will discover that He’s already paid for the remedy! [[2]](#endnote-3)

Have you recognized the seriousness of your sin in your life? Has God placed a deep desire in you to change the direction of your life away from sin and towards Him? When God opens a lost person’s eyes to their own sin, they are then able to see the glorious reality of a Savior. Every sinner to comes to know the Lord, has been able to say…

1. **“I SEE MY NEED FOR JESUS.”**

When we come become a Christian, we will see our need for Jesus in at least three ways. First, I will see that…

1. **I NEED JESUS TO FORGIVE ME.**

Every person who comes to Christ recognizes their need for forgiveness. If we don’t believe that we are a sinner, we can’t be saved. If we don’t think we have sinned against God, then we would have no need for Jesus. The reason God sent Jesus into the world was to provide forgiveness for our sins. We need Jesus’ forgiveness because God is a righteous judge who will pour out His wrath on every sinner who stays in their sin. When you come to know Christ, you’ll also be able to say…

1. **I NEED JESUS BECAUSE HE IS THE ONLY ONE QUALIFIED.**

Every human being is born a sinner and deserves death. Jesus, in His deity, was the only One who could live a life without sin (Hebrews 4:15) and the only One qualified to take the punishment for the sin of the world. No human can pay the ransom for another’s soul (Psalm 49:7). Only Jesus is qualified to give His blood to give us life.

**Illustration:** Dr. Samuel Weinstein, chief of pediatric cardio-thoracic surgery for Children’s Hospital at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City, went to El Salvador in 2006 with Heart Care International to provide life-saving operations for poor children. It would take more than expertise and advanced equipment to save the life of Francisco Calderon Anthony Fernandez, eight, however. After twelve hours of surgery, the boy began to bleed out of control. The hospital lacked both the medicines to stop the bleeding and the blood to give the boy transfusions. Francisco’s blood type was B-negative, which — according to the American Red Cross — is present in only 2 percent of the population. Dr. Weinstein was the only one there who had the same blood type. So, he set aside his scalpel, took off his gloves, and began washing his hands and forearm. Then he sat down and had his blood drawn. When he had given his pint, Dr. Weinstein drank some bottled water and ate a Pop-Tart. Then — twenty minutes after stepping away from the table — he rejoined his colleagues, who watched as Weinstein’s blood began flowing into the boy’s small veins. Weinstein then completed the operation that saved Francisco’s life.[[3]](#endnote-4)

The believer will also be able to say…

1. **I NEED JESUS TO TAKE MY PLACE.**

Jesus gave up His life to die in my place. On the cross, He took the wrath of God for me. Theologians call this substitutionary atonement. Instead of me on that cross dying for my sins, it was Him dying for my sins. He took my punishment. Not only was Jesus death important, but so was His resurrection. If Jesus had stayed dead, we would still be in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). But, because God raised Jesus from the dead, it signified that He had fully satisfied God’s judgment of my sins.

Have you realized why Jesus is so important? Have you realized that Jesus is the only One who can take away your sin and bring you into a relationship with God the Father?

Last, but not least, every person who becomes a Christian will turn to Jesus in faith. They will be able to say…

1. **“I TURN TO YOU, JESUS, AND TRUST YOU.”**

Every person who is a child of God, comes to Jesus by faith. They realize they can’t work their way into God’s favor. They turn to Jesus and trust Him to forgive all their sins, not due to their performance, but on the basis of Jesus’ death on the cross. In **Ephesians 2:8**, Paul says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”* To place our faith in Jesus means that *we choose to receive the free gift God offers us to pay the penalty that He requires of us*.

**Illustration:** Hayden Carlo, 25, was pulled over by Plano police because he had an expired registration. He said he told the police officer that he was struggling financially. He said he had to choose between updating his registration and feeding his kids. Carlo told the officer that he didn’t have an excuse for the expired registration except he couldn’t afford to pay for it. After a few minutes, the office came back to the driver’s window and handed Carlo a citation for an expired registration. But when Carlo unfolded the paper, he saw a crisp $100 bill, more than enough to renew his expired registration. Carlo did nothing to earn the generous gift except to receive it and depend on it to pay his debt.

Are you still trying to pay the debt of your sin out of your own goodness? Or, have you told Jesus that you trust Him and His death on the cross to pay completely for your sin debt?

Have you come to the place in your journey where you have been able to say those three truths because you believe them yourself? If not, I pray that God gives you a glimpse of the surpassing value of trusting in Jesus to bring you into a relationship with your Heavenly Father.

**TALKBACK QUESTIONS**

**Breaking the Ice:**  What is the best gift you’ve received this past year?

1. Can you think of the moment when you realized that you were a sinner and separated from God?
2. Why did Jesus have to die?
3. What do you think it means to place your faith in Jesus?

**Prayer:** Ask God to clearly show you where you are in your relationship with the Lord. Then ask Him to help you take your next step, whatever that may be.

**Session Three**

**Confirming Your Story**

**About this Session:** You will teach your students three evidences of an authentic faith. These evidences from the book of First John will give some students reassurance about the reality of their faith. For others, they will recognize they don’t have a personal story of salvation of their own and will be encouraged to explore faith in Christ.

**LOOK AT THE BOOK**

Many evangelists have used the following phrase to get the point across to students who have “played church” but haven’t truly come to know Christ: “Eternity is too long to be wrong.” They are exactly right. The Bible says that it’s wise to examine ourselves and determine whether we have come to know Christ or not. In **2 Corinthians 13:5**, Paul wrote, *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”* Let me ask you, on a scale of 1-100, how sure are you that you will go to heaven when you die? If your number is less than 100, this study is for you. And if you *are* sure, then this study is for you also! Thankfully, God put a book in the Bible to help us identify whether our faith in Jesus is authentic or not. That book (or letter actually) is First John.

John’s goal was not only to give assurance that eternal life is found in Christ, but he also wrote with another goal in mind. He wanted to give assurance that Christ (and therefore eternal life) is found in us. In this short letter, he says at least nine times that we can know that we are safe in Christ. In **1 John 5:13** he wrote, *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”* The “things” he was referring to are the contents of his entire letter. All throughout this letter, he uses the words “We know.” In each case, John says we know we are saved (or have the Son) because of the changes in our lives. Our assurance should not be based on what we think or feel but the fruit that we bear. As we scan through the book, we’ll find three main ways we can know that we have come to know Christ in a personal way. The evidences are not about the *perfection* we have achieved but rather the *direction* our lives are headed.

First, John writes that,

1. **WE WILL KNOW BECAUSE WE OBEY.**

John does not argue that we must obey God perfectly because no Christian has ever done so after their conversion. But he does make the case that our lives will decrease in disobedience and increase in obedience. Look at these verses.

**1 John 2:3** – *“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.”*

**1 John 2:5** – “*Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him.”*

**1 John 3:10** – *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.”*

There is one verse, **1 John 3:9**, that I would like to clear up that may be confusing if you are reading through John’s letter. In this verse, he writes, *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”* John is saying that believers cannot go on habitually sinning. He says that it can’t be their rule of life. This is because believers have been given a new nature and along with it, new desires. Sin in the life of the believer should be the exception and not the rule. Sin is present but it’s not prominent. It will not characterize the believer’s life.

**Illustration:** **Running the Coach’s Plays.** Roger Staubach, who led the Dallas Cowboys to the Super Bowl victory in 1971, admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn’t call his own signals was a source of trial for him. Coach Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run, and only in emergency situations could he change the play. Even though Roger considered Coach Landry to have a “genius mind” when it came to football strategy, pride said that he should be able to run his own team. Roger had a decision to make. Would he allow pride to rule his life and ignore his coach, making himself the star? Or would he listen to the coach and do what he wanted? Staubach later said, “I faced up to the issue of obedience.” He learned to carry out the plays as they were called by his head coach and he enjoyed a hall of fame career. Learning obedience will be the heart of every believer.

Second, John writes,

1. **WE WILL KNOW BECAUSE WE LOVE.**

Not only will we want to obey our Lord, but an authentic faith will also change the way we view and treat others. Our faith in God will fuel our love towards others. Look with me at these verses.

**1 John 3:10** – *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”*

**1 John 3:14** – *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”*

**1 John 3:18** – *“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”*

Why does faith in Christ have this effect on the way we love others? Because when our hearts have faith in God, we rest on His promises to meet all our needs and deficiencies. When our hearts trust in what Jesus can do for us, this will inevitably drive out guilt, fear, and greed from our lives. Think about it. Will you feel free to love others, especially strangers, if you feel like a failure, are scared of what others will think, or are only interested in what it will profit you? The Apostle Paul used this phrase in Galatians 5:6, *“faith working through love.”* How do we know we have an authentic faith in our hearts? It will begin to work itself out through our love for others. We will think less about how others can benefit us and more about how our lives can benefit others.

**Illustration:** **Riding Lawn Mower of Love**. On November 12, 1996, Alvin Straight died of a heart ailment, but his legacy of love will be remembered for generations to come. During the summer of 1994, Alvin was age seventy-four and unable to drive because of his poor eyesight. His brother, Henry, had suffered a stroke and Alvin desperately wanted to see him. As Alvin sized up his options, he decided his only mode of transportation was his riding lawn mower. So, he set off in early July from his home in Iowa. He attached a trailer to his lawn mower to carry gasoline, clothes, food, and camping gear. In mid-August he reached his brother’s house in Blue River, Wisconsin. This seventy-four-year-old man traveled 240 miles on a lawn mower to show love to his brother. This is the kind of selfless love that believers will begin to demonstrate toward others.[[4]](#endnote-5)

Third, John writes,

1. **WE WILL KNOW BECAUSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US.**

At the time of conversion, every believer gets the gift of the Holy Spirit who comes to live in them. This is a reality that every believer should know. In **1 Corinthians 6:19**, Paul asked, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?”* John says the presence of the Spirit in our lives is one of the assurances that we have come to know Christ. Look at these verses.

**1 John 3:24** *– “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”*

**1 John 4:13** – *“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”*

One of the ways we can detect the Spirit’s presence in our lives is in how we relate to sin. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to make us super sensitive to sin. He does this not to keep us *from joy* but to keep us *in joy*! It's impossible for a Christian to have the same attitude toward sin after salvation as he or she had before being saved. If someone can willfully and knowingly sin and feel no conviction about it, and even feel good about it afterwards, then that person is likely not a Christian. That means you probably don't have the Spirit of God, the life of God growing in you. Evidence of being a Christian is not an absence of sin but a new attitude toward sin.

**Illustration**: **The Pull of the Kite String.** The story is told about a little boy who was flying a kite. It was a windy day, and the kite kept going higher and higher. Finally, it got so high that it was out of sight. A man passed by and saw the little boy holding onto the string. The man could not see the kite, and he asked the boy, “How do you even know you have a kite up there?” The boy replied, “Because I can feel it.” Although we cannot see the Holy Spirit, we should be able to sense His work in our lives as He changes our attitudes and desires while giving us strength for obeying.

John want us to look beyond our feelings and good intentions to the fruit of our lives. In **Matthew 7:17-18, 20**, Jesus talked about the lack of spiritual fruit in the lives of those who were pretending to be Christians. He said, *“Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit…You will recognize them by their fruits.”* Now, I want to make sure you understand what I’m saying and what John is saying. These three evidences are not the causes of our salvation, but the result of it. If we are saved, we will begin to grow in obedience and love, and we will experience the Holy Spirit more fully. Recognizing those things in our lives gives us great assurance that the Gospel has taken root in our hearts. In **1 John 3:18-20**, we see that our own love and obedience will grow over time and this is how we *“know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.”*

**TALKBACK QUESTIONS**

**Breaking the Ice:**  What or who are you a fan of? What evidences can you point to in your life that prove you are a fan?

1. Do you think it’s possible for a Christian to never experience a change of direction in their lives? Why or why not?
2. If you asked those who are around you the most, especially those with whom you live, to tell what evidence they see in your life that you are a Christian, what would they likely say?

1. Why do you think God wants us to be sure of our salvation? Do you think it’s possible to be sure in our minds that we are a Christian but wrong? What have you learned from this study?

**Prayer:** Ask God to reveal to you the presence or absence of spiritual fruit in your life. Ask Him to set your mind at peace if you are a child of His but also to disturb your heart if you have not come to a place of genuine faith in His Son.

**Session Four**

**How to Share Your Story**

**About this Session:** You will help students write out their personal salvation story and learn how to share their personal story of salvation with others.

THIS SECTION NEEDS TO HAVE A SUB-SECTION THAT ANSWERS THE QUESTION “BUT WHAT IF I WAS SAVED A VERY YOUNG AGE AND THERE WAS ONLY A FEW YEARS OF CHILDHOOD BEFORE COMING TO JESUS?”

**LOOK AT THE BOOK**

In **1 Peter 3:15-16**, Peter says, *“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”* In this session I want to help you be prepared to tell others your own story about how you met Jesus and how He has changed your life. One of the greatest tools that we have been given by the Holy Spirit in witnessing to others is our own story of life change. People may argue about things such as doctrine, the Bible, and religion but they can’t argue with your own first-hand experience. First, I want to help you work through the different parts of your personal story and then at the end of this session, I’m going to give you time to write it out. Let’s get started!

First, I want us to read the Apostle Paul’s testimony as he was telling his personal story to King Agrippa in Acts 26:9-23. Listen for three parts of his story -his life before Christ, how he came to know Christ, and his service to Christ after coming to know Christ.

**Acts 26:9-23**

**My Life Before Christ**

*9 “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

*10 And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.*

*11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.*

**How I Came to Know Christ**

*12 “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.*

*13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.*

*14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’*

*15 And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*

*16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,*

*17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you*

*18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’*

**My Life After Christ**

*19 “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,*

*20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.*

*21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.*

*22 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass:*

*23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”*

Using Paul’s model as a guide, here are the three key elements of an effective faith story:

1. **MY LIFE BEFORE CHRIST**

This should be the shortest part of your story. Make sure that you don’t glorify your old life in a way that makes you look like you miss being lost without Christ. At the end of this portion of your testimony, share how you realized that you needed a change in your life. When thinking about writing this part of your story, ask yourself these questions:

* What about my life before coming to know Jesus will relate most to the unbelievers I know?
* What did my life revolve around? Where did I get my security, identity or happiness from?
* How did those things begin to let me down?

1. **HOW I CAME TO KNOW CHRIST**

Talk about the events surrounding your conversion experience as best you can remember such as location, who was involved, who influenced you, and who was praying for you. When thinking about writing this part of your story, ask yourself these questions:

* When was the first time I heard the good news about Jesus and how did respond at first?
* When and why did my attitude toward Jesus change?
* What were the biggest struggles that I experienced before I accepted Him? Why did I finally make the decision to follow Jesus?

1. **THE DIFFERENCE THAT CHRIST HAS MADE IN MY LIFE**

Share about your life having purpose, direction, and joy. Talk about reconciled relationships, answered prayers, strength to overcome problems, and ministries you are involved in. When thinking about writing this part of your story, ask yourself these questions:

* How is my life different now? How has my attitude, desires, and habits changed?
* What motivates me now to live differently? What is my purpose?
* Even though I still mess up, how does knowing Christ help me keep going?

Your faith story is powerful because it describes a personal experience that happened to you – it’s unique. It is relevant and not outdated. It allows the person listening to your story an opportunity to examine their own life to see whether they’ve been changed by faith in Christ like you have. Here are some helpful hints as you prepare to write out your story.

* Before writing out your story and sharing it with someone else, ask God for wisdom and the words to say.
* Write the way you speak. Don’t use big words you usually don’t use. Don’t try to impress, just express what has happened to you.
* Be honest and real. Don’t make up stuff that isn’t true.
* Try to keep your story around two to three minutes.
* Practice saying your story out loud several times until you feel good about telling it to someone else.

Remember, when you tell your story, God is the One who is responsible for changing hearts. You are simply called to be ready and to share what God has done in your life.

**What if you have come to faith in Christ at an early age?**

Using Paul’s model for sharing your testimony is especially fitting if you have come to know Christ as a teenager or adult. Paul experienced a dramatic conversion at an unforgettable moment in his life after years of walking in sin. But, what if you grew up going to church? What if your salvation experience took place when you were a young child? If this was the case, you can still follow Paul’s model for sharing your story. Here’s how.

Regardless of when you accepted Christ, there is still a time when you didn’t have faith in Christ. You may not remember much about it, but you can still share about how you grew up, your family life, and your journey to faith. The key is to include WHY you decided to place your faith in Christ and trust Him for salvation. Think about what Jesus promised you that you didn’t have without Him. Some examples might include a personal relationship with God, forgiveness for the selfish attitude and actions you had before Christ, forgiveness of any future sins you might commit, eternal life, joy, peace, Holy Spirit in your heart and life, desire to know God better, etc.

Another tip would be to focus on what Christ means to you now, and describe what you imagine your life would be like without him. After describing this clearly, simply point back to the fact that you wouldn't have this Jesus in your life if He hadn't made your relationship with him possible through his death on the cross.

If you came to know Christ at an early age, don’t be disappointed that you don’t have a gripping, over-the-top testimony. Don’t feel like you somehow missed out. Instead, be grateful that you won’t have to tell about how sin wrecked your life and wreaked havoc on those around you before God rescued you.

***Illustration:*** *In the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, the American women's 4 x 100 relay race was favored to win the gold medal. The team featured Marion Jones, a sprinter who had won four gold medals at the previous games in Sydney. The American team was already off to a strong start when Jones took the baton for the second leg of the race. She gained ground as she ran her 100 meters and approached Lauryn Williams, a young speedster who would run the third leg.*

*Williams began running as Jones drew near, but when she reached back to receive the baton, they couldn't complete the handoff. Once, twice, three times Jones thrust the baton forward, but each time it missed William's hand—she couldn't seem to wrap her fingers around it. Finally, on the fourth try, they made the connection. But by that time, they had run out of the 20-yard exchange zone and were disqualified. Everyone knew they were the fastest team on the track. The night before, they'd had the fastest qualifying time. But when they couldn't complete the handoff, their race was over.[[5]](#endnote-6) We must learn to “hand-off” our story to others to help others across the finish line of faith.*

**TALKBACK QUESTIONS**

Write out your personal testimony using the three sections that were discussed in the large group session. Then, practice telling your story with others. You will not have room to include everything. Be brief and include only the highlights.

MY LIFE BEFORE CHRIST - (Spend the least amount of your time in this section)

HOW I CAME TO KNOW CHRIST - (Spend the second most amount of your time in this section)

THE DIFFERENCE THAT CHRIST HAS MADE IN MY LIFE (Spend most of your time in this section)

**Prayer:** Ask God to bring someone to mind — a friend, a family member or an acquaintance — who doesn’t yet know Him. Then pray for God to draw that person to Himself. Ask God to help you see and take the opportunities He provides to share your story.

1. Our Daily Bread [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Craig Brian Larson, “ ‘The Fridge’ Gets New Teeth,” Preachingtoday.com; source: “A Story with Some Teeth,” Chicago Tribune (December 20, 2007) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Jim Fitzgerald, “Doc Stops Surgery to Give Own Blood to Patient,” LiveScience.com (May 26, 2006) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Houston Chronicle, November 16, 1998, p. 9A. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Bryan Wilkerson, "From Generation to Generation," PreachingToday.com [↑](#endnote-ref-6)