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LEADER GUIDE

**THIS IS
MY
STORY**

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Leader Guide

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Georgia Baptist Student Groups and Faith Development

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Session

Session 1 – What is the Gospel?

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.

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Session **One**



Georgia Baptist
Mission Board

Groups and Faith
Development

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. **Psalms 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.

2. **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.

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.

3. **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.

4. **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.

