

**CONTENTS**

Section A - How to Use This Book..... 2

Section B - Bible Introduction and Overview..... 3

Section C - Reliability of the Bible..... 9

Section D - How to Read and Study the Bible..... 13

Section E - Approaching Cultural Differences.....17

Section F - The Jewish People and Culture in Bible Times..... 18

---

Bible Study 1 – Long Lost Son (Luke 15)..... 19

Bible Study 2 – Creation (Genesis 1-2)..... 24

Bible Study 3 – Original Sin (Genesis 2-3)..... 29

Bible Study 4 – Jesus Begins His Work (Mark 1)..... 35

---

Bible Study 5 – Miracles of Jesus (Mark 5)..... 39

Bible Study 6 – Connecting to God (John 15)..... 43

Bible Study 7 – Sacrifice (Luke 23)..... 47

Bible Study 8 – Resurrection (John 20)..... 53

---

Bible Studies 9 – 16..... 58

---

Section G - The Good News (Broken Family Diagrams).....60

Section H - Christian Journey Assessment..... 64

Section J - How to Become a Christian.....66

Section K - Resources to Learn More ..... 68

**Each I-GIG participant AND the leader should all have this booklet.**  
*Note: text in red asks for your input or adds comments but won't be part of the final I-GIG Participant's Guide*

**SECTION A – How to Use This Book**

Welcome to this International Group Investigating God (I-GIG)! We're excited you chose to look at the world's all-time, best-selling book, which has significantly influenced Western culture and the lives of more than 2 billion people. The Bible may be the most important "textbook" you read during your undergraduate and graduate studies, as it provides many important life lessons.

The lettered sections (A to K) in this book provide information to help you understand the Bible and its main message. They are designed for you to read on your own. If you have questions about them, ask your I-GIG discussion leader (or another Christian friend). Your I-GIG discussion leader may also refer to some of the lettered sections during Bible discussions.

The numbered Bible studies (1 to 16) are designed to be done during your I-GIG discussion group gatherings. You will learn more by hearing other participants' comments and the discussion leader's input than you will by just doing the Bible studies on your own. The Bible studies are not lectures. The leader is there to help guide the group discussions. He or she may not be a Bible expert; the Bible text is the "expert." We encourage you to share your thoughts with the others in your I-GIG, even if you've never read the Bible before. Your questions and comments can help others to learn.

We know you are very busy. However, we encourage you to commit to going to at least the first 4 I-GIG Bible studies. They are easier to understand if you don't skip studies. If the first 4 Bible studies go well, we encourage you to continue with Studies 5 to 8. You need to do at least the first 8 Bible studies to get a minimal understanding of the Bible's main message. We hope these discussions will be enlightening to you and you'll want to continue reading and studying the Bible beyond the first 8 studies. Enjoy discovering what the Bible has to offer!

**SECTION B – Bible Introduction and Overview**

The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means “books.” The Bible contains sixty-six books, written by at least forty different authors over a period of at least 1,500 years. The oldest book was written about 1400 BC or earlier. The last book was written about AD 100. When we read the Bible in English, we are reading a translation of material originally written in Hebrew (the Old Testament or first part of the Bible) or Greek (the New Testament or second part of the Bible). The events described in the Bible take place in the lands north and west of the Persian/Arabian Gulf and surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

Although the biblical books are written in different styles and reflect different cultural backgrounds, the authors believed that what they wrote was uniquely inspired by God; their words are God’s message to all people.

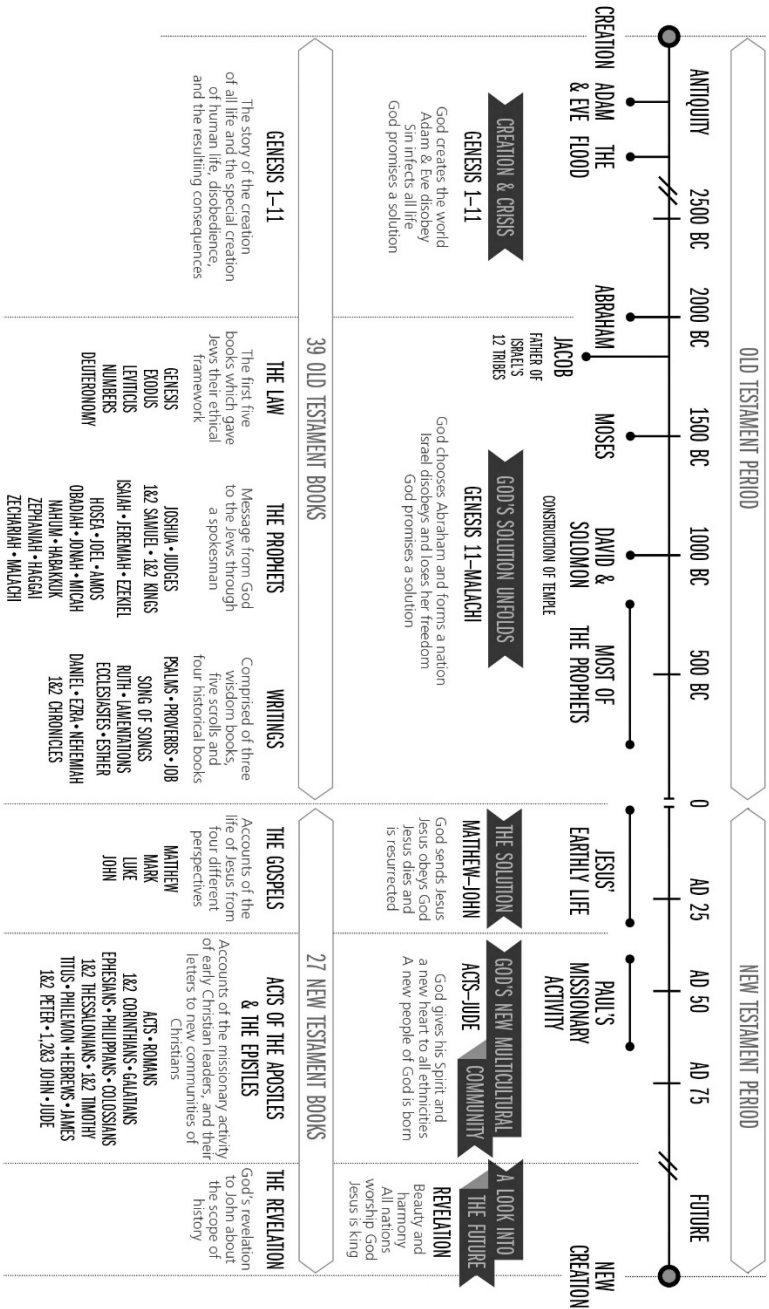
**The Two Testaments**

There are sixty-six books on the “The Bible at a Glance” chart. The first thirty-nine books, from Genesis through Malachi, are grouped in a section called the Old Testament. The last twenty-seven books, from Matthew through Revelation, are called the New Testament. Testament is another word for a will or covenant, a legally binding promise. The Old Testament describes God’s covenants with the Jewish people and his promise to bless all nations of the earth through them. The New Testament shows how this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Despite covering over 2,000 years of human history, the Bible has a theme that unifies all of its sixty-six books. The Bible tells us what God has been doing in human history and the purposes for which he created us. The Bible’s story can be viewed as a drama in five scenes.

**Scene 1: Creation & Crisis, Genesis 1—11**

The Bible opens with the statement, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (NIV). The point of the Bible’s teaching is not to prove that God exists, but to teach us what God is like. The story of our creation is one of beauty and harmony. Everything God made was good.



The first human couple, Adam and Eve, were created for relationship with God, to obey him and enjoy him as his children. The harmony God intended is seen in the picture of a garden beautifully described in Genesis 2.

The picture was ruined when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. Their life of harmony was shattered—not only with God but inside their hearts, with each other and with the earth. The Bible calls this refusal to trust and obey God sin.

In choosing to disobey God, Adam and Eve chose to turn from God and live apart from him, acting according to their own wishes. Not only did this dishonor God but it separated them from the source of all life, and so they experienced spiritual death—and eventually physical death as well. Ever since, all humans have acted just as their original parents did, and so death, spiritual and physical, has become part of all human experience.

God's earth was afflicted by this deadly virus called sin. But God's love for his creation did not change; he promised a cure for sin. A child would eventually be born to a descendent of Eve. This child would take the punishment for sin on himself (see Genesis 3:15). The rest of the stories in this first part of the Bible show how God protected the earth from total pollution by sin.

## **Scene 2: God's Solution Unfolds, Genesis 12—Malachi**

This section contains the beginning stage of God's plan to repair the damage done by human disobedience. Around 2000 BC, God chose one human, Abram (later renamed Abraham), and promised that through his son and grandson God would form a nation: Israel. The Jews, Abraham's descendants through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, would be God's special people to keep alive knowledge about him on the earth.

The stories of how God cared for Israel point ahead toward God's solution for the human problem. God dramatically rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt around 1500 BC. This rescue was a picture of what he intended to do for all humans through Jesus, the Messiah, or deliverer, whom he would send. God also communicated his laws to their leader Moses so that they would know how to live healthy and harmonious lives.

Despite all God did, Israel's history reflects the human problem of distrust and rebellion toward God. When God first gave them their own land, they frequently turned from God's laws and did what was right in their own eyes. They were not content to live under God's rule. They asked for a human king in order to be like other nations. When their kings listened to God and followed his ways, they had peace and well-being, especially during the reigns of David and Solomon, around 1000–930 B.C.

God placed Israel among various world powers so that they could be a lighthouse to all earth's people. God's intention was that Israel would model the peace and wholeness that come when people obey God's words. When Israel's great King Solomon built a temple where people could worship God, he knew foreigners would pray to God there. The great queen of Sheba visited Solomon and praised his God (1 Kings 10:9).

But Solomon himself, who was supposed to be the wisest man in the world, began to worship other gods at the end of his life. As a result, after he died his kingdom was divided into two nations, Israel and Judah. Both nations were conquered and taken into captivity—Israel in 722 BC and Judah in 586 BC.

God did not give up on the people; he sent special messengers (prophets) to teach them how to live and remind them that the Messiah would come. To one of these prophets, Isaiah, who lived around 700 BC, God gave amazing pictures of this Messiah.

### **Scene 3: The Solution, Matthew—John**

The New Testament continues the story of God's plan for his world four hundred years after the last book in the Old Testament. The first four books, or Gospels, announce the arrival of the Messiah. Each Gospel is named after its writer and describes the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Greek word meaning "Messiah," the one first announced to Eve in Genesis and then to the Jewish people through the prophets.

Jesus taught that people could be born into God's family by believing in him. He also said that God's children should live in an attitude of love, serving others and forgiving even their enemies.

Jesus called twelve special men, the disciples or apostles, to be with him and tell others about him. But most of the religious leaders, including the leading priests and teachers of the Jewish law, did not listen to Jesus; they worked together to have him killed.

God's solution to the human problem of sin now became clear. Jesus, who never sinned, willingly died on a cross for the sins of all people who will follow Him, trusting that His death can set them free. The punishment for sin is death, but God allowed Jesus to die for us as a substitute. Then Jesus was raised to life on the third day as a sign that he really is God's Son. The path to God was now open.

Jesus offers to give a new heart and a new spirit to anyone who will accept his gift of life. God forgives our sins, gives us his Holy Spirit to guide and heal us and promises that we will be raised to new life with him after we die, not because of our own goodness but because of the goodness of Jesus. People may now once again live in harmony with God as his spiritual children. (Jesus' death and resurrection occurred around A.D. 30.)

#### **Scene 4: God's New Multicultural Community, Acts—Jude**

Beginning with Acts we read the story of those who begin to follow Jesus. They are equipped to carry on the work of Jesus. They tell all peoples that the Savior has come and that he invites them to join his new community. The books that follow are letters from leaders of the early Christian church.

The most famous of these leaders is Paul. Although he was a Jew, he obeyed Jesus' command to tell the good news to people who were not Jews. Paul saw himself as an ambassador of God, and he wanted people to be reconciled to God through Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 5:20). Paul was beaten, shipwrecked and eventually killed because of his faith in Jesus. But at the end of his life he was able to say, "I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7–8 NIV). Paul wrote these words before he was killed in AD 67 or 68.

#### **Scene 5: A Look into the Future, Revelation**

The prophets or messengers of God in the Old Testament looked forward with hope to the return of the Messiah as King over everything. They thought it would all happen at one time when Jesus first came.

Jesus taught that there are two comings. The first was God's coming to earth in the mission of Jesus to defeat sin and death. His second coming as King is still future. At that time God will remove all people who will not accept his Son as King. Everything will then be restored to the beauty and harmony pictured in the Genesis garden. People of every nation, tribe and language will worship God together (Revelation 7:9–10). The book of Revelation describes the events surrounding the return and crowning of Jesus as King.



**SECTION C – Reliability of the Bible**

There are actually three questions that need to be answered here. The first question is whether the words of the Bible have changed over time.

**1. Do We Have an Accurate Copy of What the Bible Authors Wrote?**

The Bible was, of course, written long before printing presses and so each new copy had to be made by hand. This would naturally make mistakes a very real possibility. However, since the Jews believed that these were the words of God, they were fanatically devoted to accuracy in preserving this book. An example of their care is seen in the practice of a group of Jews called the Masoretes who made copies of the Bible for 400 years -- from AD 500 to AD 900. When they began their day of copying, they would first wash in a certain way -- then dress in a certain way — then say certain prayers — then even sit in a certain way at their desk. Before they actually began their work of copying the text, they would count several things. They would count how many words were in the book — then they would count how many times each word occurred in the book — then they would count how many times each letter occurred in the book — then they would calculate which word was the exact center of the text — and they even counted more things than this! After they completed their work of copying, they compared it with the original line by line and then they would count all of the same things in the new copy to see if they matched the original. If any mistake was found, the new copy was not corrected — it was immediately burned!

The result of this great care was shown in 1947. One thousand years earlier than the Masoretes, a group of Jews lived in Israel near the Dead Sea. They were a religious community who also copied the Bible texts. The Roman army began to invade their country and in order to protect their Bibles, they placed them in jars and hid them in the caves on the hillsides around their homes. As the Roman army invaded, it destroyed this community and these copies of the Bible were lost. Then, in 1947, a young boy who lived in the area, threw a rock into a cave and heard the sound of pottery breaking. He looked in the cave and saw many old jars. As the jars were examined, it was realized that this was a very important discovery. The jars contained copies of Bible texts which were 1000 years older than any known to exist. This meant that you could suddenly see

1000 years back into history and by comparing these copies with those of the Masoretes, you could see how accurately the texts had been preserved! The result of the comparison was amazing. After 1000 years of hand copying, the differences in the copies were almost non-existent. There were errors, but they were so few and insignificant that there was basically no difference. This meant that the accuracy of the text had been shown beyond any doubt.

The accuracy of the text of the New Testament (the second half of the Bible about Jesus and the early Christian church) is similar, but even more well documented. In this case, there are thousands of copies of the texts which date from a wide range of years and from many different countries and even in many different languages. In addition, you can reconstruct the Bible text simply from quotes by authors referring to the New Testament in the early years after it was written. These comparisons provide an even more certain picture of the original words of the authors. In fact, the New Testament is the most well documented ancient text in existence.

## **2. Do the Documents Accurately Reflect History?**

For a time in the early 1900's, it was common for the Bible to be accused of mentioning people, places and events which did not actually exist. For instance, it was said that in the Old Testament, Abraham is talked of in ways which would not be true of people in his time and culture. Some scholars said that he would have been from a primitive people group with little knowledge of law or history or writing. Therefore, they said, the Bible was not an accurate reflection of history. However, as archeologists began to uncover ancient sites and learn more about peoples of that region, the Bible was proven to be quite accurate. In the discovery of Ur, the capital city of Abraham's culture, researchers found many clay tablets which are the equivalent of our books, business receipts, temple song books, mathematical tables, inventory lists and even records of how much various workers had been paid for each month. This was indeed a society which looked just as the Bible had said. To date, more than 25,000 archeological sites have been uncovered which relate to the stories of the Bible. As this research has progressed, the Bible has time and time again been shown to be a very accurate record of people, places and culture.

If it is true that we have the original words of the Bible authors, and if they have faithfully written their observations and thoughts, then the last question that must be asked is...

### **3. Did the Bible Authors Lie to Us?**

When they tell us about miracles, are they telling what they really saw, or are they inventing these stories? Especially in the case of the followers of Jesus who wrote the New Testament, did they really see Jesus heal people and drive demons out of people? And did they really hear him say that he could forgive sins and that he was the Savior and that he was the only way for people to know God? And did they really see him die and then meet him again alive?

Some people have indeed accused the writers of the Bible of inventing their stories. However, there are simple and profound reasons to trust these writers. First, these were the men from the small special group Jesus had chosen to be his representatives. They had spent three years following Jesus and being trained by him. This means that they were learning to live like Jesus — to have the ethics of Jesus — to have the concerns of Jesus — to have the courage of Jesus.... And if Jesus taught them anything, it was that they must honor God in all that they said — they must obey the commandments of God which include “you must not lie.” To put a pen to paper and write a story filled with lies about Jesus would have been to betray everything that Jesus had taught them and to dishonor Jesus, whom they followed as their God! Also, they wrote their stories when many people who saw and heard Jesus were still alive and could have exposed their stories as lies. In addition, most of these men were persecuted, beaten and eventually killed because they refused to change their story. Many people are willing to suffer for what they believe is the truth. But few people would suffer and die for what they know is a lie!

One final reason to trust the Bible is simply that Jesus trusted it and said it was God's Word. He quoted it as if its history was accurate and its words were from God. And in one of His most famous sermons, The Sermon on the Mount, he said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the

smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen; will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

### **Resources to Learn More**

Book: *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* by F.F. Bruce (InterVarsity Press, 2003) [tiny.cc/nt-docs](http://tiny.cc/nt-docs)

Book: *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson, 1999)

Website: Videos [josh.org/resources/apologetics/videos](http://josh.org/resources/apologetics/videos)

## **SECTION D – How to Read and Study the Bible**

On one level the Bible is very simple. Jesus summarized it as saying we need to love God and love our neighbor. Yet, it is a very, very old book that talks about people in cultures probably very different than your own. It is also more than a book, since it is a word from God. To fully understand and appreciate it requires more than a casual reading. Here are a few steps and some key information to help you discover what the Bible really says.

### **How to Find Bible Passages**

Bible references list the book name, then chapter number(s), then verse number(s). Note that sometimes book names are abbreviated instead of fully written out.

To find "John 3:16" or "Jn 3:16" go to the table of contents in your Bible and find the book of John (which is the fourth book in the New Testament). Once you open the Bible to the first page of the book of John, start skimming through it until you find the large number "3," which is the chapter number. Then, in chapter 3 find the superscript "<sup>16</sup>," which is the verse.

If there is no colon (":") in a reference it is only listing chapters (not specific verses. So "Luke 2-3" means read all of Luke chapter 2 (which happens to have 52 verses) and all of chapter 3 (which happens to have 38 verses).

If there is a range on the right side of the colon, those are verse numbers. So "Gen 2:8-9,18-24" means find the large "2" marking the second chapter in the book of Genesis and read verses 8 & 9, then read verses 18-24 (all in chapter 2 of Genesis).

"Eph 1:1 – 3:13" means start reading in the first verse of Ephesians chapter 1 (there is usually no superscript "<sup>1</sup>" to identify the first verse in any chapter, just the chapter number), read all of chapter 2 and continue through verse 13 in chapter 3.

**Step 1: Remember Your Goal**

Your goal in reading or studying the Bible is not simply to understand the content. Your ultimate goal is to hear what God has to say to you – and to allow that impact your life. He may challenge your attitude. He may encourage or comfort you. He may give you guidance to lead you in a decision. But if you listen and obey him, you will find healing and hope no matter what your situation in life. And beyond this, you will find that you come to know God himself – not just know about him. This is a doorway into more than we can even imagine.

**Step 2: Pray**

As you begin to read or study, stop and talk to God. Since the goal is to hear from him, it makes sense to stop at the beginning and speak to him. There is no secret formula to prayer. You simply speak to God out loud, or just in your thoughts, and listen for him to answer. You can pray in any language. Ask God to open your eyes and heart and tell him you are ready to listen. This will help you do more than simply read the words on the page before you and will prepare you for what is about to happen. If you are really uncomfortable praying it is ok to skip the prayer steps.

**Step 3: Read**

There are a couple of issues to mention here. One is that we have many different translations of the Bible in English. We call these “versions”. Some stress communicating the exact meaning of individual words. Some stress the emotional impact of the words. Some are in very modern English and some in very old English. For people whose native language is not English, it is much easier to read a “version” which is designed to be in simpler English – like the Contemporary English Version or Today’s English Version. This will reduce getting lost in vocabulary and enable you to focus on the ideas of what you read.

Another issue is that the Bible is made up of several different types of writing. There is history, poetry, teaching, letters.... So as you begin to read, you need to consider what type of writing you are looking at. If you are reading poetry, you do not expect it to be literal. You expect metaphors and picture language. If you are reading letters to a group of people, you need to know who was writing and who was receiving the letter to understand the meaning. Often Bibles have a short introduction

to each book giving you some of this information to keep you from being confused or misunderstanding what you read.

Finally, read slowly. If you slow down, you will always see and understand more – in any book. Take a good long look at the text and see the details. We usually miss much when we read quickly and often the real riches are in the details.

#### **Step 4: Think**

A. What questions come to your mind?

Asking questions always helps us to “think” and “see” on a deeper level. Any question is OK – even if you can’t answer it – but do see if there is an answer there in the text that you missed. You can use your imagination also, but be careful that you do not simply ending up with your own ideas instead of what the writer was trying to say.

B. What is the main point of what you just read?

There may be many ideas which can come out of a passage, but stop, step back from the details and try to summarize the main idea the writer really wanted to say to those reading his words.

C. What insight for life is in this passage?

Is there a positive or negative example? A command? A promise? A warning? And the most important part here is to consider how this applies to your life now. Here is where you begin to go beyond simply understanding the text and move to listening for God’s voice and message for you.

#### **Step 5: Pray**

If our goal is ultimately to hear God’s voice as we read and study, then it is obvious we need to talk to him about what we are seeing and thinking as we read. The Bible is like a doorway into God’s presence. We want to go beyond the book and interact with God – the one who is speaking to us through these messengers of his.

### **Step 6: Live What You learned**

Hearing from God is good, but letting his word guide our life is what changes us, what heals us, what protects us, what rescues us.... A famous passage in the Bible says that reading the Bible but not letting it direct our life is like a person who looks in a mirror and then goes away and forgets what he saw – it is useless. If you take the time to read the Bible and listen to God, make sure to take the last step of acting on what he says to you.

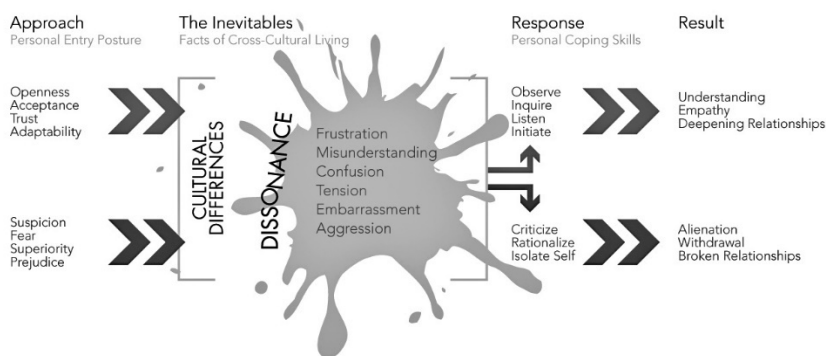


## SECTION E – Approaching Cultural Differences

There are several cultural differences to navigate while discussing the Bible studies in this book. You are likely reading this in a culture different than your own. Other Bible study participants bring their cultures with them. And the cultures of the Bible authors 2,000+ years ago, which provide context to their writing, are most likely different than yours. These differences include unspoken norms and expectations you may not even realize that you have.

Your approach to these differences can help you learn and grow from them instead of causing additional frustrations and hurt relationships. The diagram below shows two paths that start on the left side and move to the right. The top option is good; the lower one is not good.

### APPROACHING DIFFERENCES



The big paint splotch in the center shows that some negative feelings will always happen when crossing cultures. However, if you respond to these negative feelings by observing and listening well, asking questions, and not making assumptions about others' intentions, you will learn more, understand others better, and have better cross-cultural friendships.

## **SECTION F – The Jewish People and Culture in Bible Times**

What is most needed in this section? Should it include maps?

## **BIBLE STUDY 1 – Long Lost Son (Luke 15)**

### **Getting Started**

In this text, Jesus is telling a story to a group of religious leaders who were angry because he had been eating with non-religious “sinners”. They believed that Jesus, as a fellow religious leader, should avoid and criticize these people, not respect and befriend them. Instead of giving the leaders a lecture, He created this story to make his point. This story is in some ways a summary of the main lesson of the Bible. Imagine you are one of the religious leaders or one of the “sinners” as you listen to Jesus telling the story.

Remember, this is a story – not an actual event. Pay attention to the characters and details to see how Jesus is saying things through the way He shapes His story.

**Opening Question:** How would your parents feel if you asked them to give you half of their possessions so you could leave them and just go do whatever you wanted to do?

### **Look Closely**

Read Luke 15:11-32 (NIV) below together:

**15** <sup>11</sup> Jesus also told them another story:

Once a man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons.

<sup>13</sup> Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild

living. <sup>14</sup> He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

<sup>15</sup> He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

<sup>17</sup> Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you.' <sup>19</sup> I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"

<sup>20</sup> The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."

<sup>22</sup> But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. <sup>23</sup> Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"

<sup>27</sup> The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." <sup>28</sup> The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. <sup>29</sup> But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. <sup>30</sup> This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."

<sup>31</sup> His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read a second time – to yourself this time.

2. What did you find surprising or interesting in Jesus' story?

3. Make a list together of details about each of the main characters:  
(attitudes, actions)

the young son

the Father

the older son

### **Investigate Together**

4. Make a list of *at least* five "I wonder" questions about anything in the story. "I wonder....."

5. Return to the text and find any answers to your "I wonder" questions

It is OK to not find clear answers – they still help you think more deeply

It is also OK to use your imagination, but remember this is only guessing, so don't take your "guesses" too seriously.

### **Take It With You**

6. What lessons about God is Jesus trying to teach the listeners through the story?

7. How is this similar or different from your past picture of God?

8. What lessons do you think Jesus is hoping his audience learns from his descriptions of the each of the two sons in his story?

9. What lessons do you see for your own life in this text?

10. What could you do or try as a way of "taking this lesson with you"?

(example to follow, truth to believe, attitude to change, express thanks to God....)

11. Would this be different or difficult or easier in your home culture?  
Why?

**Summary**

The Bible is the story of the "good news" that God has created for us to be his sons and daughters – to live with him and learn from him – to become more like him and experience a full and joyful life. Some of us have run away and need to "come home." Some of us look like we are "home," but are not really honoring the Father in our actions or attitudes and need to ask him for a new heart. Ultimately, as we read the Bible, we learn that God, like the Father in the story, made a way for us to enter back into his family, even though we disobeyed and dishonored him. He sent Jesus to create a way back into the Father's forgiveness – to be "home" where we belong. Keep reading the Bible together to discover more about this way back home!" This story is about a journey all of us are on. Where are you on this journey?

**For next week:** Read Genesis 1-2 if you have time

## **BIBLE STUDY 2 – Creation (Genesis 1-2)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** How did you take last week's lesson with you? What was that experience like?

The Bible was written in simple language (not scientific or technical terms) so it could be understood by people without much formal education. It begins with Genesis, a history book that describes the beginning of the world and human beings. Genesis introduces God and his relationship with the first people. That relationship is what the Bible is about.

**Opening Question:** What were your first days in this country like? Who helped guide you in this new place?

### **Look Closely**

Read Genesis 1:1-4, 1:24-2:3, 2:8-9, 2:18-24 (NIV) below together.

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

<sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

<sup>24</sup> And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.



<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

<sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

<sup>8</sup> Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup> The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

<sup>19</sup> Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup> The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called 'woman,'

for she was taken out of man."

<sup>24</sup> That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read the passage again – to yourself this time.

2. What did you find surprising, interesting, or confusing in this scripture passage?

### **Investigate Together**

3. What would it be like to experience creation happening as it occurred? Draw a picture of what you might see at a particular spot in

the story or describe it in words. Share your picture or map of words with the group, and explain why you included what you did and when in the story it happened.

4. Make a list of at least five "I wonder" questions about anything in the story. "I wonder....."

5. Return to the text and find any answers to your "I wonder" questions

It is OK to not find clear answers – they still help you think more deeply.

It is also OK to use your imagination – but remember this is only guessing so don't take your "guesses" too seriously.

6. What does this tell us about the character of God? Is that different from how you pictured God?

7. What does the text say about how God, people, and the rest of creation (animals, plants, the Earth) relate to each other?

### **Take It With You**

8. What lessons do you see for your own life in this text?

9. What could you do or try as a way of taking this lesson with you?

(examples: setting aside one day to rest each week, getting outside to observe plants and animals up close, creating something—like artwork, music, or writing)

9A. Would this be different, more difficult or easier in your home culture? Why?

Consider reading Psalm 139 to learn more about God's character and acts of creation.

### **Summary**

The universe, the Earth, and people did not come into existence by accident. God created mankind in his image and provided not only for our physical needs (plants and animals) but also for social needs (companionship) and more (the beauty of Eden). It sounds like life was perfect for humans in those early days. What more could they want? We will find out next week.

**For next week:** Read Genesis 2-3 if you have time

## **BIBLE STUDY 3 – Original Sin (Genesis 2-3)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** Take a few minutes to review last week's discussion and share anything you tried or did as a result of the lessons you saw in that text.

Last week was the introduction of the overall Bible story. Today we'll read about the crisis that sets up the rising action throughout the rest of the Bible.

**Opening Question:** Have you ever done or created something you really liked, only to have it destroyed or ruined by somebody else? What happened, and how did you feel?

### **Look Closely**

Read Genesis 2:15-17, 2:25-3:24 (NIV) below together.

**2** <sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

<sup>25</sup> Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

**3** Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

<sup>4</sup> "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup> He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup> So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock

and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring] and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,  
“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;  
with painful labor you will give birth to children.  
Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from  
the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’  
“Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food from it  
all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are

<sup>20</sup> Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup> The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. <sup>22</sup> And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” <sup>23</sup> So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup> After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read a second time – to yourself this time.

2. What did you find surprising or interesting?

### **Investigate Together**

3. Draw a line down the center and list what life was like for Adam and Eve BEFORE they ate the forbidden fruit on the left side and AFTER they ate the fruit on the right side. Share what you wrote with the group.

BEFORE | AFTER

4. Ask some “I wonder” questions about this passage.

5. Then try to find answers to your questions in the text.



6. How are the characters of God and the serpent (snake) different? Why did they say different things to Adam and Eve?

7. What impact does this story have on people and the world today?

### **Take it With You**

8. What lessons do you learn about God from these passages?

9. What did you see or learn that seems important for YOU to remember?

10. What could you do or try as a way of "taking this lesson with you"?

(example to follow, truth to believe, attitude to change, express thanks to God....)

11. Would this be different, more difficult or easier in your home culture? Why?

### **Summary**

Everything that Adam and Eve needed was provided for them in the Garden of Eden. They were not, however, satisfied and chose to sin (disobey God) by eating the forbidden fruit. As a result, several deaths happened: the end of their close relationship with God, people no longer lived in harmony with nature, pain in childbirth, difficulty in farming and finding food, relationship problems between men and women, and eventually their bodies stopped working and they experienced physical death.

The rest of the Bible reveals the rescue plan God put in place to restore all that died because of that original sin and the moral mistakes every person has committed since then. The penalty for even one sin is separation from God and death. So, what does God do to both bring justice and save mankind from death? Find out in the next few studies.

**For next week:** Read Mark 1 if you have time

## **BIBLE STUDY 4 – Jesus Begins His Work (Mark 1)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** Take a few minutes to review last week's discussion and share about anything you tried or did as a result of the lessons you learned from that text.

Today's Bible study looks at the beginning of Jesus' time with his first followers. They are just starting to learn about what he was like, what he had to say, who he was. Jesus taught his followers by his actions and by taking them through experiences as much as by words. In this passage, we will walk alongside Jesus followers as they experience a day with him. Imagine you are part of this small group as you walk through the day listening, watching and learning about Jesus.

**Opening Question:** What have you previously heard about Jesus that makes you interested in learning more?

Read Mark 1:21-34 (NIV) below together.

1 <sup>21</sup> Jesus and his disciples went to the town of Capernaum. Then on the next Sabbath he went into the Jewish meeting place and started teaching. <sup>22</sup> Everyone was amazed at his teaching. He taught with authority, and not like the teachers of the Law of Moses. <sup>23</sup> Suddenly a man with an evil spirit in him entered the meeting place and yelled, <sup>24</sup> "Jesus from Nazareth, what do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! You are God's Holy One."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus told the evil spirit, "Be quiet and come out of the man!" <sup>26</sup> The spirit shook him. Then it gave a loud shout and left.

<sup>27</sup> Everyone was completely surprised and kept saying to each other, "What is this? It must be some new kind of powerful teaching! Even the evil spirits obey him." <sup>28</sup> News about Jesus quickly spread all over Galilee.

<sup>29</sup> As soon as Jesus left the meeting place with James and John, they went home with Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> When they got there, Jesus was told that Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever. <sup>31</sup> Jesus went to her. He took hold of her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she served them a meal.

<sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset, all who were sick or had demons in them were brought to Jesus. <sup>33</sup> In fact, the whole town gathered around the door of the house. <sup>34</sup> Jesus healed all kinds of terrible diseases and forced out a lot of demons. But the demons knew who he was, and he did not let them speak.

### **Look Closely**

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read it a second time – to yourself this time.

2. What did you find surprising or interesting about this day in Jesus' life?

### **Investigate Together**

Look at verses 21-28 together.

3. If you were a reporter covering this event, what details would you be sure to include in your article?

3B. Ask some "I wonder" questions about this event. Then try to find answers to your questions in the text.

Look at verses 29-34 together.

4. Imagine you are Simon's mother-in-law. Share memories of having Jesus at your home this afternoon and evening (key moments, feelings, thoughts).

5. Ask some "I wonder" questions about this part of Jesus' day.

6. Then try to find answers to your questions in the text.

### **Take it With You**

7. What things do you learn from being with Jesus during this day in His life?

8. What did you see or learn that seems important for YOU to remember?

9. What could you do or try as a way of "taking this lesson with you"?

(example to follow, truth to believe, attitude to change, express thanks to God....)

10. Would this be different or more difficult or easier in your home culture? Why?

## **Summary**

As you watch Jesus, a natural question is “what does all this mean?” In short, Jesus said it was proof that he was the Savior promised long ago in the Old Testament and now sent by God. He was demonstrating the good news that God’s power was here to rescue and heal us in a broken world. Here are Jesus’ own words:

John was in prison when he heard what Jesus was doing. So John sent some of his followers to ask Jesus, “Are you the one we should be looking for? Or must we wait for someone else?”

Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you have heard and seen. The blind are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People with leprosy[a] are being healed, and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news. God will bless everyone who doesn’t reject me because of what I do.” [Reference? \(Version?\)](#)

**For next week:** Read Mark 5:21-43 if you have time

## **BIBLE STUDY 5 – Miracles of Jesus (Mark 5)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** Revisit Last Meeting's "Take It With You"

Today's study shows the importance of faith, or trust in God. With it, we can see impossible things happen, but we can often be afraid to hope that God can or will do the impossible for us. So far, what we know about Jesus is that he teaches with authority and has the ability to drive out demons from controlling people. We also saw last week that he can heal sicknesses.

**Opening Question:** What do you remember learning about God so far in the Bible stories that we've studied?

"Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."

- Jeremiah 32:17 (Version?)

### **Look Closely**

Read Mark 5:21-43 (NIV) below together.

5<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. <sup>22</sup> Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. <sup>23</sup> He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." <sup>24</sup> So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. <sup>25</sup> And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." <sup>29</sup>

Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.<sup>30</sup> At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"<sup>31</sup> "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"<sup>32</sup> But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.<sup>33</sup> Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.<sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"<sup>36</sup> Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."<sup>37</sup> He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.<sup>38</sup> When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly.<sup>39</sup> He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."<sup>40</sup> But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was.<sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").<sup>42</sup> Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.<sup>43</sup> He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

A synagogue is a local place of prayer for religious Jews. A leader of a synagogue would have been well-respected as a religious leader in his community

Bleeding: According to Jewish religious law, anyone with a discharge (such as blood) was considered unclean and could not go to the temple or synagogue to pray. They also made anyone that they touched unclean.

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read it again, to yourself this time.



### **Entering the Text**

3. You are a director and screenwriter making a play from this text!

Start by noticing which characters are most important and where the most dramatic emotions take place.

Break up the text into scenes.

Think about where each scene takes place and how it would affect the drama.

Choose who will be each character, then act out the different parts of each scene.

4. What did you find interesting or surprising as you looked more closely?

### **Investigate Together**

5. Complete the sentence: "I wonder..."

6. Return to the text and find answers to the "I wonder" statements.

7. What do we learn about God from this text? How is this different from your past picture of God?

8. What do we learn about people from this text?

### **Take It With You**

9. As the director of this play, which moments would you want to emphasize the most and why? Who are the characters you would focus on? How?

10. What lessons are there in this text for our lives?

11. What can you do or try in response to this text? (Note that the group will follow up about this next study)

Example Responses:

Choose to believe something new about God because of the healings in this story and how they happened.

What are you afraid to believe God can do in your life or the life of your family or people? Like the father in the story, choose to trust him by asking him to do that thing you think is impossible. If not, what do you need to be able to trust him? Try asking him for that!

Is there a SIN to confess?

PROMISE to claim?

ATTITUDE to change?

COMMAND to obey?

EXAMPLE to follow?

PRAYER to pray?

ERROR to avoid?

TRUTH to believe?

SOMETHING for which to praise God?

11. How would it be different if you did this in your home culture?

12. Would this be easy or hard to do in your home culture? Why?

**For next week:** Read John 15 if you have time

## **BIBLE STUDY 6 – Connecting to God (John 15)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** Revisit Last Meeting's "Take It With You"

Have you ever noticed that falling asleep can be a kind of battle? Sometimes it is difficult to rest because of all that is going through our minds, or because we are in a new place we don't trust, or because we can't calm down. Last week, we learned more about faith, trusting in God. This is a bit similar to sleep - we cannot always control when we are ready, but we can take steps towards resting. On the day before he died, Jesus shared some important last words with his followers to prepare them to trust God, even in the midst of the chaos that would come starting later that night. From the text this week, we will learn some more ways we ourselves can practice trusting God.

"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:3-4

### **Look Closely**

Read John 15:1-21 (NIV) below together.

**15** "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for

you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other. <sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. <sup>21</sup> They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me."

Remain can also mean abide, dwell or endure

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read it again, to yourself this time.

2. Which words or sentences seem to catch your attention the most?

### **Entering the Text**

The leader will read the text one more time.

3. As they do, write down the words or sentences that stick out the most to you. Ask yourself why these words or sentences seem to "jump out" at you and catch your attention.
4. Draw a picture to show what these words or sentences mean to you, and share it with the group. You do not have to be a great artist - you just want to show a little of what the story means to you.
5. What did you find interesting or surprising as you looked more closely?

### **Investigate Together**

6. Complete the sentence: "I wonder..."
7. Return to the text and find answers to the "I wonder" statements.
8. What do we learn about God from this text? How is this different from your past picture of God?
9. What do we learn about people from this text?

### **Take It With You**

Pick 1 or 2 of the following 6 questions to answer. Draw another picture to answer these questions, and share it with the group:

- 10A. Where are you now in relation to the vine?
- 10B. What fruits is your life growing now? What fruits do you want to grow?
- 10C. Where have you seen sacrificial love like Jesus describes?
- 10D. Where in the past have you been rejected?

10E. What would be possible costs if you followed Jesus?

10F. What lessons are there in this text for our lives?

11. What can you do or try in response to this text? (Note that the group will follow up about this next study)

Example Responses:

Address one obstacle or possible cost you have to following Jesus, such as talking to your parents about what you have learned about him in this book.

Ask God to help you make one of the new kinds of “fruit” you want in your life this week.

Ask Jesus to show you how to abide in him as the Vine, and try out what you hear.

Think of another step that you can take to prepare you to trust God for something.

12A. How would it be different if you did this in your home culture?

12B: Would this be easy or hard to do in your home culture? Why?

**For next week:** Read Luke 23 if you have time.

## **BIBLE STUDY 7 – Sacrifice (Luke 23)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** Revisit Last Meeting's "Take It With You"

For the past several weeks, we've studied the life of Jesus. We read about how Jesus used his power and his words to help others, to heal them, and to reassure them. In today's story, we will read of how the people responded to all that Jesus did.

**Opening Question:** In your home country, if someone does something wrong to one of their friends, what will need to be done to restore the friendship?

### **Look Closely**

Read Luke 23:13-25, 32-38, 44-49 (NIV) below together.

**23** <sup>13</sup> Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, I will punish him and then release him." [17]

<sup>18</sup> But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" <sup>19</sup> (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

<sup>20</sup> Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. <sup>21</sup> But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

<sup>22</sup> For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

<sup>23</sup> But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate decided to grant their demand.

<sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

...

<sup>32</sup> Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

<sup>35</sup> The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar <sup>37</sup> and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

<sup>38</sup> There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

...

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." <sup>48</sup> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. <sup>49</sup> But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

1. What words in the text are new to you?



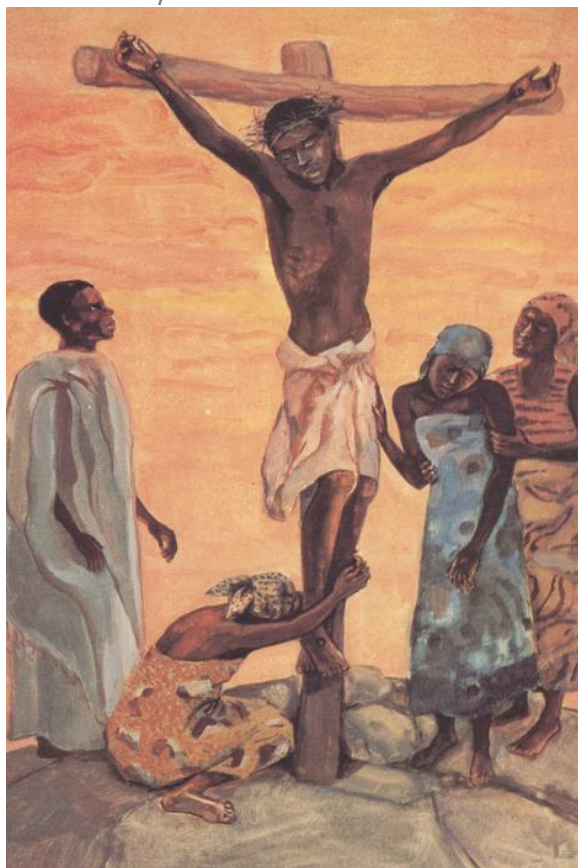
Read it again, to yourself this time. Notice which words or sentences seem to catch your attention the most.

### **Entering the Text**

We're going to read the text one last time. This time, as one person reads the text out loud, the rest of the group will look at one of three different artistic depictions of Jesus being crucified. Each artist is from a different country, and sought to portray the crucifixion as if it were happening in their home culture. Choose just one of the paintings to look at - whichever one you think is the most interesting



"The Crucifixion" by Korean artist Woonbo Kim Ki-Chang



Jesus Mafa project, Cameroon.



Calvary, Central Predella Panel from St. Zeno of Verona Alterpiece by Andrea Mantegna, Italy. [tiny.cc/am-cross-art](http://tiny.cc/am-cross-art)

2. What did you find interesting or surprising as you looked more closely?

3. Did any details the painting help you to notice something new in the story?

### **Investigate Together**

4. Complete the sentence: "I wonder..." (Write examples for leader's guide.)

5. Return to the text and find answers to the "I wonder" statements.

6. What do we learn about God from this text? How is this different from your past picture of God?

7. What do we learn about people from this text?

### **Take It With You**

8. Can you see yourself as one of the people in the story and/or depicted in the painting you looked at? Which one? Why?

9. What lessons are there in this text for our lives?

10. What can you do or try in response to this text? (Note that the group will follow up about this next study)

Example Responses:

Even though Jesus didn't deserve to be crucified, he still asked God the Father to forgive the people. You may need to be like Jesus and forgive someone who has hurt you.

Or maybe you resonate more with the people who crucified Jesus. Can you think of ways you've wronged Jesus? Jesus is eager to extend his forgiveness to us when we ask for it.

At the end of our story, the Centurion concluded that Jesus was a righteous man. As you've learned about Jesus, what is your conclusion?

If you were portraying the crucifixion as happening in your own country, like the three artists did who created the paintings we looked at, what would your painting look like? Can you imagine you and others from your home country at the crucifixion?

**For next week:** Read John 20 if you have time

## **BIBLE STUDY 8 – Resurrection (John 20)**

### **Getting Started**

**Question About Last Week:** Revisit Last Meeting's "Take It With You"

Last week, we studied the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death. After Jesus' death, the Bible tells us that he was buried in a tomb purchased by one of his followers. Jesus died and was buried on a Friday. In this week's study, we read what happened the following Sunday morning.

**Opening Question:** As you've gotten to know Jesus over the past several studies, how has your opinion about him changed? If you don't yet consider yourself a believer in Jesus, how would you answer the question, "Why don't you believe?"

### **Look Closely**

Read John 20:1-29 (NIV) below together.

**20** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

<sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." <sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

1. What words in the text are new to you?

Read it again, to yourself this time.

2. Notice which words or sentences seem to catch your attention the most.

### **Entering the Text**

3. Now, we're going to try acting this story out. Try to play it out by memory without holding the text in your hand. (Don't worry, you don't need to say every word exactly right!) Note all of the characters involved, and assign a role to each person in the group. If you're able, you might even play the first scene outside and have the other disciples waiting inside. The only limit is your own creativity!

4. What did you find interesting or surprising as you looked more closely?

5. As you acted out the story, what did you learn about the character you portrayed? What new insights or questions do you have about how their experience in the story?

6. Review the text again. Are there any parts of the story that your forgot or skipped when you acted it out? Why do you think you forgot/skipped that part?

### **Investigate Together**

7. Complete the sentence: "I wonder..."

8. Return to the text and find answers to the "I wonder" statements.

9. What do we learn about God from this text? How is this different from your past picture of God?

10. What do we learn about people from this text?

### **Take It With You**

Think about how Mary Magdalene and Thomas each responded to learning that Jesus is alive. Mary Magdalene was eager to call Jesus her Lord and God, and told others about him. Thomas was more skeptical and still had questions. At this point, when hear the news that Jesus is alive and is God. 11. Are you responding more like Mary Magdalene or like Thomas? Why?

12. What lessons are there in this text for our lives?

13. What can you do or try in response to this text? (Note that the group will follow up about this next study)



### Example Applications:

Maybe you find yourself responding like Mary Magdalene, calling Jesus Lord and God. And perhaps you're doing so for the first time. Take time this week to pray with others in your study. Consider worshiping with other followers of Jesus in the coming week either at a church or with a Christian fellowship on campus. If you don't know where to find such a gathering, ask one of the Christians in this group!

Maybe you find yourself responding more like Thomas, with some significant skepticism and doubts. Schedule time to talk about these doubts with a friend. If you're willing, consider praying, "Jesus, if you're alive, address my doubts..."

The news that Jesus is alive has led people all over the world to worship Jesus just like Mary Magdalene did in today's story. Do you know of Christians in your own country? How do they worship Jesus?

## **ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDIES**

How many total studies would you want in the new *I-GIG* booklet? 8, 12, 16, or some other number? If you do the first 8 during one semester, BIBLE STUDIES 9+ could be what you study the next semester. These haven't been written yet, but let us know if studies based on the following passages & themes would be great to do next. If not, please suggest other passages you think would work better (and briefly why).

Part of the reason these were selected is that most share/review the gospel message in different ways than it was presented in the first 8 BIBLE STUDIES. (A person typically needs to hear the gospel 7 times before it really makes sense.) These also provide other teaching and themes including examples of how people respond to the gospel and a partial preview of what being a Christian might be like.

### **BIBLE STUDY 9: The Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-24, 37-41)**

Themes: Pentacost, miracle of people hearing their native language spoken, gospel review, people responding positively to the gospel, baptism

### **BIBLE STUDY 10: Elijah and the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:16-40)**

Themes: connecting with internationals from fear-power cultures, idol worship

### **BIBLE STUDY 11: Elijah Flees (1 Kings 19:1-18)**

Themes: connecting with internationals from honor-shame cultures, God's provision for our needs, how God speaks

### **BIBLE STUDY 12: David and Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:1 - 12:19)**

Themes: earthly consequences of not following God, no sin is too great for God's forgiveness

### **BIBLE STUDY 13: Prophecies About Jesus (Isaiah 53:1-12 & NT verses showing them fulfilled)**

Themes: Jewish Messiah expectations, God is timeless and all-knowing

Question: Would it be better to talk about the Messiah prophecies in a section participants can read on their own or would a Bible study like this be better?

**Resources to Learn More:**

Website: 44 of the Prophecies Jesus Fulfilled [tiny.cc/44proph](http://tiny.cc/44proph)

Website: 353 Prophecies Jesus Fulfilled [tiny.cc/353proph](http://tiny.cc/353proph)

Website: Applying the Science of Probability to the Scriptures  
[tiny.cc/jesus-odds](http://tiny.cc/jesus-odds)

**BIBLE STUDY 14: Responding to the Good News (Acts 16:11-40)**

Themes: Lydia believes, costs of Paul following Jesus (beaten and jailed), a gospel review, then the jailer believes

**BIBLE STUDY 15: (Acts 17:16-34)**

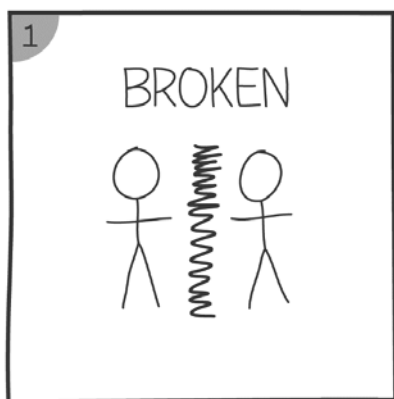
Themes: In Athens, religion vs relationship, limited gospel review, people respond

**BIBLE STUDY 16: (1 John 4:7-5:5 & 5:13-15)**

Themes: God's Love, assurance of salvation, loving others, brief gospel, Christian living

## SECTION G – The Good News

These Broken Family diagrams present God's good news (the gospel) in a way that makes it easier to understand for relationship-oriented people. They briefly explain the essential message at the heart of Christianity. The emphasis is on the honor and shame aspects of the gospel in order to give a more complete view than Western outlines that focus on guilt or law.



### Frame 1 - Broken

When we look around the world we see broken relationships everywhere: between nations, people groups, families, and friends.

Where have you seen examples of broken relationships in the world?

### Frame 2 - Harmony

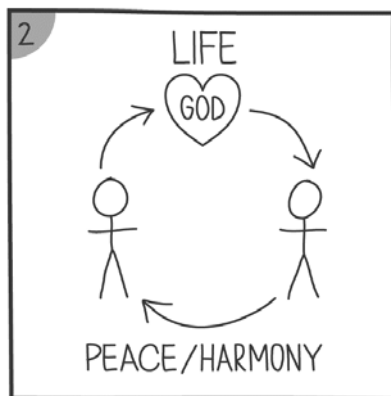
What do you think a world without broken relationships would be like?

We deeply desire that world without broken relationships; we yearn for harmony. The fact that we can imagine this world and yearn for it is a clue that we were made for it. In fact, the Bible teaches that God, the eternal Creator, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, made

human beings for relationships of harmony with him and each other.

Where have you seen examples of broken relationships in the world?

Human beings received life directly from God; relationship or harmony with God gave them life. God honored them by giving them a special face-to-face relationship with him. The Bible tells us that the first man



and woman were naked and yet not ashamed. Although they wore no physical clothes, they were clothed with the honor of God. They honored God with their hearts and they honored him by living in perfect obedience to him. So they both received and gave honor to God and to each other.

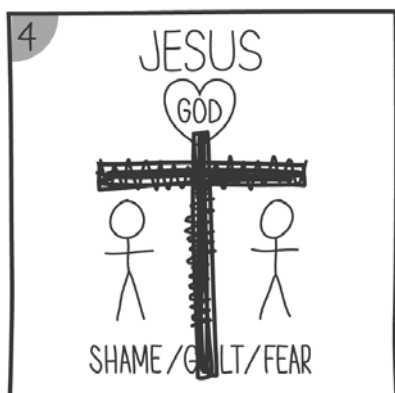
Read Genesis 1-2 or do Bible Study 2 in this book to learn more.



### Frame 3 – Sin

But the harmony the woman and man enjoyed was broken. When they disobeyed and dishonored God, relationship with him was broken, and soon the relationship between the two of them was broken as well. When the relationship with God was lost, the man and woman also lost the honor they had received from God; they realized they were

naked and therefore hid from God, feeling both shame and guilt. Ever since then, human beings continually dishonor and break relationship with God and with each other. The Bible's word for this is sin. Sin is the heart attitude that puts self first and dishonors and breaks relationship with God and people. From this heart attitude come the individual thoughts and acts that are "sins." Through sin, the man and woman also lost life; they were sent away from God's presence and learned that they would eventually die.



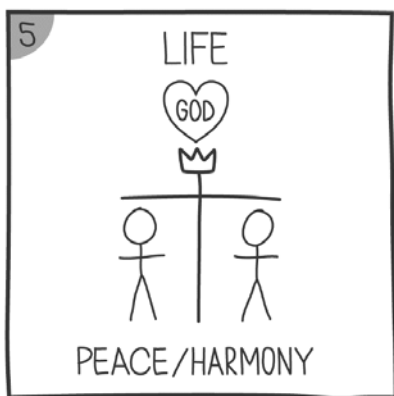
Read Genesis 2-3 or do Bible Study 3 in this book to learn more.

### Frame 4 - Jesus

Human beings were in a state of separation from God. There was no way they could restore the relationship with God on their own because they could never honor or

obey God perfectly no matter how hard they tried. Only God could make the relationship right again. In families in some parts of the world, the older brother is responsible for the younger brothers and sisters and must seek them if they are lost. In the family of human beings, God the Son, Jesus, became human in order to seek after human beings and reunite them with God the Father. In dying on the cross, Jesus took on shame and guilt and honored the Father by his perfect obedience.

Read Philippians 2:5-8 and John 3:16 or do Bible Studies 1, 4, and 5 in this book to learn more.



### Frame 5 - Resurrection

But Jesus did not remain dead. The Father honored Jesus' obedience by raising him from death to life. The word for this special rising to life is resurrection. We place a crown over the cross to represent the honor Jesus received in the resurrection. When we choose to follow Jesus, his obedience is credited to us and our sin is forgiven. Jesus offers life,

honor, and forgiveness to everyone who will follow him and return to God's family. When we choose to follow him, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to live inside of us to help us honor and obey God and honor others. This is the main message of the Bible. What questions do you have?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, 20-23 or do Bible Studies 7 and 8 in this book to learn more.



### Frame 6 - Come

Today there is a worldwide family connected to God and each other. Members of that family are working to bring harmony to the many broken relationships in our

world. Jesus offers two different invitations:

**1) Come and See:** Learn about Jesus through reading the Bible, praying, doing what he says, and spending time with his people. Become a sincere seeker after God. If you want to become a sincere seeker, you can pray something like this:

"God, if you are real, please reveal yourself to me. If you do, I will make you the Leader of my life."

**2) Come and Follow:** Join Jesus and his family in bringing harmony to this broken world. John 1:12 (NIV) tells us how: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." To "receive" Jesus means to welcome him into your life as leader and teacher. To "believe in his name" means to trust in him deeply. If you want to become a follower of Jesus you can pray something like this:

"Father God, I have been living independently of you, but I want to come home to you. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for my sin. Please come into my life, take control, and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Thank you."

Jesus is making these invitations today. Are you ready to answer one of them or do you need some more time to think about it? If you accepted either of these invitations, let your Bible study leader or another Christian friend know.

Read John 1:10-13, 35-51 to learn more.

## **SECTION H – Christian Journey Assessment**

Where are you in your spiritual journey? Have you written down or shared your story? Many journeys begin in childhood with the religious beliefs and practices introduced by parents or other family members. You may want to map out your journey by drawing a timeline and listing significant events that shaped your path to the point where you are at today.

Each person's journey is unique, but the portion of the story where one is considering Christianity may include similar steps. The five thresholds, or steps, below can provide a common language when talking about where you are in relation to becoming a follower of Jesus. Their order comes from the path many people take, but it is not the same for everyone. For example, you may have developed curiosity about Christianity in your home country (Step 2), but you may be meeting Christians for the first time now and still developing trust (Step 1). Which of the five steps below best describes you right now?

### **Step 1 – Building Trust**

Trust takes time. If you've had a bad experience with Christians in the past or have heard negative rumors about Christians for years, then that makes building trust harder. Every Christian makes mistakes (only Jesus was perfect), and many of us have done a lot that has hurt others or caused us and others to lose face. This can happen even more when followers of Jesus interact with people from other cultures and religious backgrounds that they are not familiar with. So, the authors do apologize to you on behalf of Christians who have hurt you in the past. Are you ready to include Christians among your friends?

### **Step 2 – Being Curious**

College and graduate school are great times to explore both the world around you and also who you are, especially while studying in another country or culture. Ask questions. Find out why things are done here like they are. Search for the answers to life's big questions. Are you curious?



**Step 3 – Becoming Open**

As you better understand yourself and why things work like they do, you realize the way you were taught is not the only way (to cook, to learn, to communicate, etc). Your eyes are opened to new possibilities and you become open to change. This openness to change can impact everything from what brands you buy at the grocery store to your philosophy of life and core beliefs. Are you open to seeing Jesus in a new way?

**Step 4 – Seeking Jesus**

As you learn about Jesus from the Bible, you may realize that true Christians are not simply following a list of religious rules, they have an actual relationship with God through Jesus. Have you seen God answer prayers made in Jesus' name? Maybe you've felt the gentle promptings and encouragement of the Holy Spirit. Have you asked Jesus to reveal himself to you and answer your prayers?

**Step 5 – Following Jesus**

When some people say they are "Christian" it is because they follow a Christian culture and do Christian things (like going to church on Christmas and Easter). This is common in the "Bible Belt" of the American Southeast and many other places in the US and around the world. But truly following Jesus does not mean changing to a specific culture. People in every culture are invited to follow Jesus as their lord and savior. And you don't have to make your life right before accepting Jesus' offer of eternal life. He accepts you as you are. See Sections G and J to learn how to take the step of following Jesus with your life. Have you already committed to following Jesus with your life? Let a Christian friend know so they can celebrate with you!

To learn more about these thresholds, see the *Starting International Small Groups* booklet at: [tiny.cc/sisg](http://tiny.cc/sisg)

## **SECTION J – How to Become a Christian**

Before getting to the answer, let us clear up some myths about how one becomes a Christian:

- Being an American (or of any other nationality or background) does NOT make you a Christian
- Going to church (even every week of your life) does NOT make you a Christian
- Reading the Bible or singing Christian songs does NOT make you a Christian
- Being born to one or more Christian parents does NOT make you a Christian
- You CANNOT accidentally become a Christian or be forced to become a Christian
- Saying you are a Christian is not enough to make you a Christian
- Being dedicated or baptized with water (as a baby, child, or adult) does NOT make you a Christian (baptism is intended to be a visible symbol that someone has become a Christian, but the baptism itself doesn't make a person Christian)

How does someone become a Christian? It's simple. You just need to do:

Believe in your heart that Jesus is God, that he lived a perfect life on earth and died on the cross as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for all the dishonor and mistakes (sins) of every human being, and that Jesus came back to life. Desire to follow Jesus as the leader of your life.

Confess (among others or in private prayer to God) that you believe these things and will follow Jesus.

One way to do the second step is to pray a prayer like this to God. These are not magic words. You can rephrase them and say them in any language.

"Father God, I have been living independently of you, but I want to come home to you. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for my sin. Please

come into my life, take control, and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Thank you."

Romans 10:9 (NIV) says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." So, if you have done this, you can be sure you are saved and will be with God from this moment for all eternity.

## **SECTION K – Resources to Learn More**

What do we need to include here? Or is this section needed?

Should this be focused on NEXT STEPS instead of just resources? If so, what would those steps be?

### **BACK COVER TEXT**

The Bible is the world's all-time, best-selling book. It has been translated into thousands of languages and affects the lives of billions of people -- even entire cultures. The Bible talks about who God is and how he relates to us.

An International Group Investigating God (I-GIG) helps you get to know God by understanding what the Bible says about him. Since the Bible was written thousands of years ago by people living in cultures probably very different than your own, the original meaning of the text is not always obvious. This booklet includes group Bible studies, so you can learn together, and additional sections you can read on your own to better understand the Bible and its main message.

Each person in the I-GIG, **including the leader**, should have one of these booklets. Leaders may also want to have extra booklets available for participants to borrow if they forget to bring their own *I-GIG Participant's Guides* to a Bible study (and for new participants who may join the group without informing the leader in advance).

### **PLEASE SEND FEEDBACK**

Send feedback on this Field Test Edition of the *I-GIG Participant's Guide* to Brian Hart [bhart@intervarsity.org](mailto:bhart@intervarsity.org)