

THE GOOD NEWS

When they receive good news, the typical person can't wait to tell everyone who will listen. Yet the Bible calls the message about Jesus 'Good News', and many of us keep it to ourselves! Why is that?

This week you'll need:

- Paper and a pen for each group member

CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- What would you score your week so far out of 10? Why?
- What's the worst hair cut/style you've ever had? Tell us about it.
- Who have you prayed for recently?
- What invention would you love to successfully come up with?

DISCUSS

Read the following Scriptures out loud:

Romans 1:16-17 -

16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

Acts 20:24 -

24 But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

NEW CHRISTIANS

- What was the best news you ever heard? What was special about it?
- Before you were a Christian, did you think that the message about Jesus was 'Good News'? Why did you think that way? How has it changed now?
- What do you think the phrase 'Good News' refers to? What do you think Paul (the author) is talking about?
- Paul says in Acts 20 that the job of preaching the good news was assigned to him by Jesus. Do you think we're all assigned to preach the Good News?
- Do you find talking about your faith easy or hard? What things make it hard? How can we grow in these areas?



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THE GOOD NEWS

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you from these Scriptures?
- Does the message of Jesus still seem like good news for you? Or has it lost some of its appeal?
- Time for some honesty: Do you actually want to share your faith with others? Are you motivated? Why?
- What makes a good evangelist? What makes a bad one?
- Which do you find it easier to talk about: going to church, or who Jesus is? Why?

INVOLVE

Give each member of your group a piece of paper and a pen. Have them spread out and sit on their own throughout the room.

Challenge your group members to write a '1-minute testimony' – a 1-minute speech that shares the 'Good News'. Give your group about 10 minutes to do their preparation. Some things group members might want to include are:

- Their own salvation story
- An introduction to who Jesus is
- An explanation of how a non-believer can become a Christian.

If you have a small group, come back together and allow time for everyone to present. If you have a larger group, have members get together in 3s and present their testimonies to each other.

APPLY

Ask your group to commit to one thing they will do this week based on what they've learned

OR

Challenge your group to memorise their 1-minute testimony this week. (Next week, you can break into pairs and test each other).

LEADER'S NOTES

- Create a helpful atmosphere before people arrive – put some music on, have a few snacks available, have something for people to do when they arrive.
- Are there any other young people in your church who you'd like to see join the group? Ask some group members to invite them during the week.

JESUS + NOTHING

In their heads, most Christians know that they are saved only by faith in Jesus. But on the flipside, we live in a culture where nothing is ever free - and if it is free, there must be a catch! Has our culture impacted our ability to truly trust our salvation?

This week you'll need:

- Paper and a pen for each group member

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions:

- Who have you served lately?
- What's the worst movie you've ever seen? What was so bad about it?
- What's one fruit of the Spirit God is developing in you at the moment? (see Galatians 5:22-23)
- What's one nickname you have/had. How did you get it?

DISCUSS

Have someone from your group read Romans 3:22-28 out loud.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Has someone ever given you something for nothing? What was it, and how did it make you feel? Was it easy to accept, or did you feel like you had to pay them back?
- Some people think God will only love them if they are good. Where do you think people get this idea from? What does this passage say to you about this?
- "SALVATION = JESUS + NOTHING" – What do you think this means? Do you think it accurately sums up the Scripture passage?
- Are you 100% sure that you're going to heaven? Why?
- It's often human nature to try to make ourselves look better than those around us. What does verse 27 say to us about this?



SALVATION 101

JESUS + NOTHING

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you most from this passage?
- “SALVATION = JESUS + NOTHING” – What do you think about this statement? How should this affect our everyday life? Does it match the way you’re living at the moment?
- Do you think your life at the moment is one that expresses gratitude to God for saving you? Why?
- “People in our culture aren’t very good at accepting ‘something for nothing’. We either start looking for hidden strings, or we feel like we need to find a way to repay the giver.” Do you agree? Why? How can this affect our ability to accept the gift of salvation?
- Read v27. What stands out to you from this verse? What can we learn about Christian living?

INVOLVE

Give your group paper and a pen each, and make sure they have a Bible. Have them find their own space within the room.

Have your group re-read Romans 3:22-28 on their own, then ask your group to write a prayer to God. What would they like to say to God in response to this Scripture?

Once everyone is finished, have a time of prayer and allow everyone to express what they’ve written.

APPLY

Ask your group to commit to one thing they will do this week based on what they’ve learned

OR

Challenge your group to journal other prayers in response to Scripture this week. You can let them choose their own verses, or set some yourself for the whole group to follow. Here are some chapters that contain similar themes to this week’s passage: Isaiah 43, Isaiah 38, Micah 7, Psalm 103, Ephesians 2:8.

LEADER’S NOTES

- Is anyone missing from your group tonight? Don’t forget to ask for volunteers to follow them up.

THE RESCUE STORY

A rescue always has three parts: There's the dangerous situation (what we're saved FROM), the moment of rescue (what we're saved BY), and the arriving at a place of safety (what we're saved TO). We know we're saved by JESUS + NOTHING, but do we really grasp what we've been saved from and saved to?

This week you'll need:

- A large piece of paper and a few textas
- At least one copy of the attached handout

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions.

- What is your favourite 'rescue' story or movie? Why do you like it?
- Have you ever had to be rescued by someone? What happened?
- What, in your opinion, is the best song ever written?
- How have you put God first with your time lately?

DISCUSS

Have someone from your group read Colossians 1:12-14 out loud.

"...always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins."

The above scripture talks about God rescuing us FROM one kingdom and TO a new kingdom. This week's discuss section is about unpacking what those two kingdoms look like.

Put a large piece of paper in the middle of your group. On the top left, write 'Saved From'. On the top-right, write 'Saved To'. In the middle, write 'Through Jesus'. (The attached handout gives you an example of how to layout your page.)

Down the left, have your group brainstorm a list of things they think we're saved from. If your group struggles to understand that task, it might be helpful to get them to complete the sentences:

- Life without God is...
- Life without God feels...
- In a life without God, I'm motivated by...
- In a life without God, the most important things are...



SALVATION 101

life.

PAGE 3.1



THE RESCUE STORY

Once your group starts to run out of ideas, switch to the 'Saved To' side. Challenge your group to come up with a pair for everything on the 'saved from' list.

Once your group has finished both sides, show them the attached handout. Allow your group time to compare the two sheets. What stands out? Are there any differences? Do people agree or disagree with things on the handout?

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Look at the 'Saved To' list (on either sheet). What is one area where you think you need to grow at the moment?

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- Take a look at the lists in front of you. Which set of rules do you feel like you're living by at the moment? Why do you feel that?
- "Many Christians know what they are saved FROM, but don't really understand what they are saved TO." Do you agree with this statement? Why?
- Can you identify within your own life, or within your church, instances where Christians have become 'comfortable' living according to the rules of the Kingdom of Darkness?

INVOLVE

As a group, take time to pray for each other. Lay hands on each other, and ask that God would help us live according to His Kingdom. Ask for God to develop in each other specific qualities that are included on the lists.

APPLY

Ask your group "What's one thing I can do differently this week based on what I've learned?"

OR

Challenge your group to pick one thing from the "Saved To" list and commit to praying that God will build that inside them every day.

LEADER'S NOTES

- How's the atmosphere in the room? Is it relaxed and inviting? Do people feel comfortable when they arrive?
- Are you developing leaders within your group? Check out the LIFE leadership handbook for some simple ideas on how to start.

SAVED FROM...

Principals of operation

LAW – and punishment
WORTH – comes from what I have & what I do
VALUED – wealth, comfort, happy place
REWARD – based on self effort (deserve/earn)
ACHIEVING
RELIGION
HOLIDAY – always needing one

Principals of power

POWER – comes from me
SELF FOCUSED
SELF RIGHTNESS
STRENGTH
WINNING
INDEPENDENCE

Principles of motivation

FEELINGS – I make decisions based on how I feel
FEAR
GUILT, SHAME AND CONDEMNATION
FORCE & MANIPULATION
WORRY
JUDGMENT – I judge others and compare myself to them
REVENGE

Picture of the Kingdom

SEEING IS BELIEVING
LOGICAL, RATIONAL (2+2=4)
THE KING – hides, manipulates, lies and deceives.
DEATH AND DECAYING

THROUGH JESUS



SAVED TO...

Principals of operation

FREEDOM
WORTH – comes from the King
VALUED – relationship (love God, self and others)
BLESSING – undeserved, unmerited, unearned
RECEIVING
INTIMACY
PERMANENT REST

Principals of power

POWER – comes from the king in me
OTHERS
CREDITED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS
WEAKNESS
LAST
INTERDEPENDANCE – community

Principles of motivation

FAITH – I make decisions based on what I believe
LOVE
ACCEPTANCE
CHOICE
PEACE
NO JUDGEMENT
UNMERITED, UNENDING FORGIVENESS

Picture of the Kingdom

BELIEVING IS SEEING
MYSTERY, SUPERNATURAL (2+2 = 18)
THE KING – is intimately known and good
LIFE – eternal life

Life.

PUTTING SIN IN ITS PLACE

“Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins.” Most Christians could recite this line, or something very similar, off the top of their heads. But every Christian knows that faith in Jesus doesn’t mean we magically stop all of our sinful behaviours and attitudes. How do we make sense of these two realities?

This week you’ll need:

- A copy of the attached handout for every person if you choose to use it (most suitable for mature/established Christians). You may also want some highlighters or pens to allow people to make notes.

CONNECT

Go around the circle and give everyone a chance to answer your choice of the following questions.

- What is your favourite scene from a movie? Why?
- What’s one thing that you think God is trying to teach you at the moment?
- What’s your favourite dessert in the entire world?
- How would you describe your day today in one word? Why?

DISCUSS

Have your group read Romans 7:18-23, Romans 8:1-3, and Hebrews 10:17 out loud.

QUESTIONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

- Have you ever wanted to do the right thing but ended up doing the opposite? What happened? How did you feel afterwards?
- People are always quick to point out our mistakes. Take a moment to reflect on Romans 8:1. How does it make you feel?
- Read Hebrews 10:17 again. How does it make you feel to realise that God doesn’t even remember all the bad stuff you’ve done in the past?
- How do you think God reacts when Christians sin? How do you think we should react to sin in our own lives?
- Should a Christian ever feel like a failure because of sin? Why? What do you think these verses say about that?



SALVATION 101

life.

PAGE 4.1

PUTTING SIN IN ITS PLACE

QUESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

- What stands out to you most from these passages?
- Read the Romans 7 passage. Have you ever felt like that as a Christian before? What do you think about the fact that those words were written by the same man who wrote half of the New Testament? What can we draw out from this?
- Compare the passage from Romans 7 with the one from Romans 8. These passages are right next to each other in the Bible, yet they almost seem to contradict each other – in one the author says he can't conquer sin, but in the next chapter he says the power of sin is broken. How do you think we interpret these passages?
- Romans 8:2 doesn't say we're free from 'sin' – it says we're free from the 'power of sin'. Do you think this word choice is significant, or do they mean the same thing?
- Hand out to each of your group a copy of the attached reading. Give them a few minutes to read over it (maybe provide pens or highlighters so people can make notes). Afterwards, allow some time for reflection and discussion. (Leaders note: The reading is not a word-for-word excerpt from the Bible. It's a personal reflection which may be helpful in sparking conversations.)

INVOLVE

Romans 8:2 talks about the power of the life-giving Spirit. Take some time to pray for each other, and pray specifically for more of the Holy Spirit's power to be released in each other's lives.

Also pray Romans 8:1 for each other – that we would be free from voices of condemnation.

APPLY

Ask your group "What's one thing I can do differently this week based on what I've learned?"

OR

Challenge your group to keep praying this week for more of the Holy Spirit's power to be released in their lives.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY – have supper, play a game, or just chill!
- Is anyone missing from your group tonight? Don't forget to ask for volunteers to follow them up.

PUTTING SIN IN ITS PLACE

So much of the Christian story is focused on SIN as the problem and the CROSS as the solution that we miss the bigger story. We have taken the central scene, the climax of the story, and made it the whole movie. (That's kind of what Mel Gibson did with *The Passion of the Christ*.)

Here is what plenty of Christians do: We know that the cross is about dealing with sin, but we take the cross scene out of context and pretend it's the only scene in the story. And so what follows is that we elevate sin to the central position in our story (main plot status) as the problem that must be dealt with. Sin becomes the 'bad guy' -- the villain -- of our whole Christian journey.

The danger of this is that we end up with a Christian story that goes like this: "My sin is the problem, the cross gets me forgiven, my job is to stop sinning."

For years, I know I played along.

Our salvation story, told this way, is like Snow White being kissed by Prince Charming and then going back to live with the dwarfs, putting all her energy into trying to make herself beautiful so he will kiss her again. Yes the spell was broken but there is no new life with her lover. Let me ask you: Do you think that story would become a Disney classic? Would it have the DNA for retelling?

BUT this is not our story! If our story goes 'Jesus died so that God could rescue me from a life of sin into a life without sin,' then when we still struggle with sin we call into question the very power of God to save us! No wonder our Christian story is filled with frustration that comes from misplaced effort and no reward.

So, how is the story meant to go?

From Genesis through to Revelations our story is a story of RESCUE. It's all over every scene, it's the main plot that holds all the scenes together. The author never lost his focus, he never got sidetracked on a smaller story.

The reality is you didn't get caught up in the mess of sin because of anything you did. Read Genesis - you ended up in this mess because of Adam. One man condemned all of humanity -- and you were caught up in that before you were even born. You're powerless to change it.

But the way in is the way out. One man condemned humanity, and in response our redemption comes through one man alone: Jesus. We are saved from the power of sin by Jesus + Nothing.

NOTHING.

In other words, your story should read like this: "My sin was a problem. The cross gets me forgiven. Now my sin isn't a problem anymore."

THAT's the good news! Because of Jesus we can all stop lying to ourselves. God's amazing grace saves us from having to deceive ourselves and those around us. I can now accept ownership of my failure, my neediness, and my powerlessness.

In short, I can admit all my weaknesses and sin but still be close to God.

I no longer need "spiritual cosmetics" in order to make myself presentable for him, I can accept and walk in the knowledge that God not only loves me as I am BUT also he knows me as I am. It means accepting that God wants a relationship with the REAL me, the messed-up me, not the appearances I try to keep up with everyone else.

Friends: which story are you living?

Is your story about rescue, forgiveness and love, OR is it about effort, appearances and 'being good'?

Based on Romans 5:12-23

MY RESCUE STORY

As Christians, we are miraculously, radically, and graciously rescued through Jesus. That's a fact. But do we really grasp how incredible our personal rescue is? This week we're going to spend some time reflecting on, writing, and sharing our own rescue story.

This week we're breaking the normal format to do something different.

The aim is that all of your group members would write their own personal testimony.

Give your group members the scenario of having been asked to speak for 5 minutes about their faith at a school assembly or a work function. Their testimony should include their own personal faith story, but they should also draw on the knowledge they've gained over the previous 4 weeks. Interwoven into their story should be previous themes (it's Good News, Jesus + Nothing, rescued FROM, rescued TO, etc.)

Just like back in week 1, it's important that your group makes it obvious to a non-believer what they need to do in order to become a Christian. (They don't need to do an altar call at the end – it just needs to be obvious through the way they tell their story).

Give each of your group members a pen and paper (they might need a few sheets), and invite them to find a place where they are comfortable. Give your group around 30 minutes to write out their testimony (although less time might be better if your group is quite young).

Then come together and allow everyone to present their testimony to the group. (If your group is very large, you might need to split into two smaller groups). During the sharing time, it would be great to have snacks and drinks available.

At the end of the night, challenge your group to rehearse and memorise their testimony during the week so it becomes second nature. And challenge them to ask God for opportunities to share their faith.



SALVATION 101