

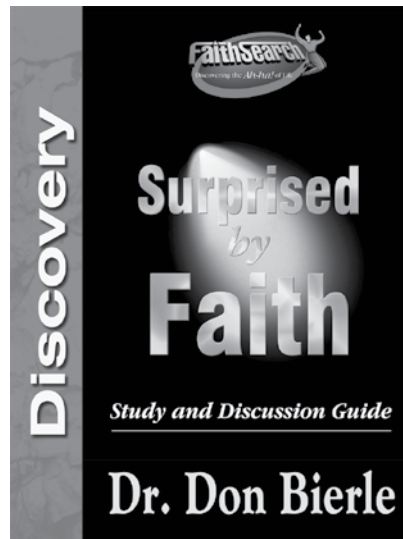
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 1

Why Am I Here?

Discovering that Everyone Has a
Crisis of Purpose and Meaning



- **Answer Key for the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide***
- **Teaching Helps for the Teacher/Facilitator of the *FaithSearch Discovery Presentation***



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- 12701 Whitewater Dr., STE 150, Minnetonka, MN 55343 • Phone: +1.952.401.4501 • FAX: +1.952.401.4504
- E-mail: info@faithsearch.org • Web: www.faithsearch.org

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL WITH EVIDENCE TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER 1

Why Am I Here?

Discovering that Everyone Has a Crisis of Purpose and Meaning

Getting Focused

Materials

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 1
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 1
- PowerPoint® slides: title slide through Discovery #1 (slides 1-13)
Chapter review: slide 14

Key Points

1. Negative views of faith are usually based on caricatures of faith.
Some people think of church and faith in God as anti-intellectual, based on emotions, and as a crutch for the weak. Negative impressions about faith might be stimulated by media stories about religious people who don't "practice what they preach," that is, people who profess faith in God, but demonstrate unfriendly, immoral or irresponsible behavior.
2. If nothing exists beyond chemicals, plants, animals and people, then there is no answer to suffering and pain, we cannot know if life has any ultimate purpose, and death wins.
In spite of negative impressions, nearly everyone longs for a faith that can explain the ultimate questions of how we got here, why we are here and where we go after death. Without God, we are the product of chance—cosmic orphans on a "ball of dirt" of dirt—involved in a meaningless menagerie of activity.

Glossary of Selected Terms Used

Caricature: a description or cartoon which ridiculously distorts or exaggerates the defects of the real thing (For example, faith may be caricatured by some as a crutch needed by weak people.)

Anti-intellectual: irrational; unintelligent; blind (This is a common caricature and distortion of faith.)

Finite: having limits or limitations; dependent; lacking ultimate purpose (For example, the physical world is finite, including people who lack omniscience [having infinite knowledge], omnipotence [having unlimited influence or power], and omnipresence [being present everywhere at all times].)

Hypothesis: a statement that needs to be tested to see if it is consistent with the facts

Answers to the numbered, objective questions are available at the end of each chapter.

Here's where we're headed



The purpose of this section is to guide the participant to make their own *Ah-ha!* Discovery number one.

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha!

The DISCOVERY

1 Death is the ultimate and final conqueror if the finite world is all there is!

Introduction

Can you relate to any of the caricatures mentioned above? Make a brief list of the positive and negative impressions and experiences you have had with religious people, faith, and God. How have they affected your current attitude and life response?

Answers will be personal responses. Lists might include: Negative—judgmental, narrow-minded, inflexible, legalistic, naïve, biased, divisive; Positive—kind, accepting, generous, caring, joyful, honest. Other impressions and experiences might include the experience of unanswered prayer, the problem of evil in the world, and the allegation that religion is the main cause of wars in the world.

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

How do you think caricatures of faith get started, and what keeps them going? Why are people so quick to judge and generalize as in the question above?

The major tool of the enemy of God and legitimate faith is deception, including fostering ignorance and misunderstanding. Second, because of the fallen, sinful nature of humankind, Satan also prompts in us prejudice against the truth and denial of truth. The first can be combated by spiritual education, while the second is an issue of pride and arrogance. This is why the book, *Surprised by Faith* (SBF) and the *FaithSearch* Discovery series has been so effective. It provides the evidence to overcome ignorance and misunderstanding, and it exposes pride as the culprit in prejudice and denial.

In Pursuit of Purpose and Meaning

Make a list of the top five most important things in your life and prioritize them from one through five. In a sentence or two state what you feel is your life's purpose.

Answers will be personal responses. Lists might include: Family, money, love, God, good health, friends, secure job, children, church, Bible, home, recreation/sports. The statement of life's purpose may identify temporal and/or eternal values.

What difference would it make to our first discovery if an eternal and all-powerful God exists?

If an infinite and personal God exists who has all power, then death is not the ultimate victor in our lives. God has broken the power of death and has provided an eternity of life for His followers. He cares

Subjective question on page 6 of the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide* (hereafter to be referred to in this manual as the "Study Guide")

Author's Comment

Very often people believing caricatures and "attitudes" about faith have gotten them from a single bad experience. They then generalize them to statements like, "They're all like that!" Of course, if we took that position regarding every "bad egg" in teaching, plumbing, law, medicine, etc., we would end up entirely throwing out some very legitimate people and professions. Likewise, in our response to "bad eggs" in the arena of faith, church and religion, we must be careful not to generalize a bad example by applying it to everyone.

Subjective question on page 7 of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 8 of the *Study Guide*

for each person as precious. We were created by God for a purpose and our earthly work, though temporal, has an ultimate context and consequence. This gives dignity and ultimate value to our lives.

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

What factors, intellectual and otherwise, may cause some people not to believe in God?

Possible intellectual factors might be: 1) The conflicting claims of many religions often confuse people, resulting in uncertainty whether all religions are right, or none is right, or how anyone can know; 2) Many don't believe that the alleged holy books like the Bible are trustworthy records; 3) Some struggle with the problem of evil—if God created all things, and God is good, where could evil have come from? 4) If there is a loving and all-powerful God, why is there so much suffering and pain in the world?

Polls in the United States continue to indicate that over 95% of the people believe in the existence of God. The problem is that most do not know God as a personal and loving being in their life because they are ignorant of the way to God, i.e., Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the author's personal conviction that the critical intellectual factors that keep people from a personal relationship with God ("faith," in the biblical sense) are skepticism of the truthfulness of the New Testament records (SBF, chapter 2) and skepticism concerning the historic incarnation, i.e., that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man (SBF, chapter 3).

Factors other than intellectual ones may include: 1) The moral factor—the person won't acknowledge and repent of sin; 2) The lifestyle factor—the person believes God will cramp their style, and they don't want to change; 3) The emotional factor—the person has had a bad experience with religious people, or with suffering and pain (e.g., a mother died of cancer; a whole family was killed in an auto accident; has a retarded son or daughter, etc.); 4) The pride factor—the person won't surrender to God or acknowledge their need (addressed in detail in SBF, chapter 6).

What if someone says they live for family? Isn't that a purpose? Isn't it enough that our life's purpose is to build a better future for our family and society? After you have read the following perspective on this, write your own brief response as if you were answering a friend.

Living for family is commendable, but it is a temporal value. What kind of future is it for our family and society if death is the ultimate victor over them all? No, that level of life's purpose is not enough. Why not give them abundant life lived in relationship with God now, and an eternal future with God in a perfect place? That would be ultimate purpose.

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

When everything is going well for people, what kinds of things will they identify as satisfying their need for purpose and meaning?

The answers here will be personal responses and testimonies of people in your group. Some people may comment that temporal things do bring them personal fulfillment. If satisfaction comes from creativity or a job well-done, it is certainly proper. Satisfaction with personal creativity

Author's Comment

An important principle to remember here is that stereotypes often provide an open door of opportunity to correctly explain the Good News. For example, when someone claims that all Christians are hypocrites, they are probably right—we all fail. But their view arises from a misunderstanding. They think believers in Christ are claiming to deserve or merit being a Christian by doing good works or superior actions which make them better than others. This misunderstanding provides an opportunity to teach that the Bible says salvation is not the result of works or personal merit, but rather by grace, a free gift, received through faith in Jesus Christ (see John 1:12; 3:16; Ephesians 2:8,9; 1 John 5:11ff). As teachers and facilitators of Discovery, we should not become defensive when confronted with stereotypes and misunderstandings. Rather, we should use them as stepping stones to lead the person to a correct or fuller understanding of Christian truth.

Subjective question on page 9
of the *Study Guide*

reflects God's own satisfaction with His creation: "It was very good." (For a brief discussion of a proper sense of fulfillment that comes in doing a job well, see *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis, Book Three: Christian Behavior, chapter 8, "The Great Sin," pp. 112-114).

But this is different from fulfillment derived from finite power, position or popularity—as an end in themselves. We need to realize that these are temporal and do not meet our need for ultimate worth. People of great wealth and fame have taken their own lives, e.g., Marilyn Monroe and Earnest Hemingway. We can only know true and ultimate value if there is an infinite and personal God who defines a reality greater than the physical universe. Thus, without an Absolute (God) and an existence beyond this life, purpose and meaning are relative values. The things like money, power, etc., are all meaningless as viewed from a grave that annihilates us.

Application and Reflection

Subjective question on page 9
of the *Study Guide*

What do you think most people in society would say if asked the question, "What is it that gives you purpose and meaning in your life?" Check this out by asking several people you know. Make a brief list of their responses. How many items on this list are the same as your top five identified earlier?

The answers will be personal responses. Quite likely, most responses will be like those listed in the answer on page 7. Their top five may be prioritized differently depending on whether or not the person interviewed is a Christian, and whether they are thinking primarily of life here and now or of life eternal.

Subjective question on page 10
of the *Study Guide*

Do you think this list would be different for people facing life crises, such as terminal illness, participation in war or a natural disaster? Why?

Yes, because in those crises we probably focus more on the central values of life and eternity. These would likely include prayer, God, loved ones, etc. In life-threatening crises, we realize that we may be moments, hours, or days from the total removal of temporal things. Of course, in those circumstances the only values left to consider are absolute ones.

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

What are some common ways that people avoid dealing with, or are distracted from, the issue of purpose and meaning?

Many have immersed themselves in materialism, temporarily substituting "things" for any thought of God or purpose in life. Others seek an ecstatic experience, Eastern mysticism or illegal use of drugs to fill the void. Some commit all their waking hours to their work or activities, never pausing long enough or daring to think whether life is meaningful (SBF, pp. 15-16). The lack of personal worth and ultimate meaning is probably widely felt but seldom articulated clearly. People don't know why they are unhappy, unfulfilled, or restless. It does not seem to be a significant concern as long as life is good and the person is not faced with suffering or aging issues. People who are hurting physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc., most often ask, "Why?" Suicide cases may at times be extreme examples of those who struggle with purpose and meaning. Daily boredom, alcoholism, drug experimentation, occult activity and new-age fascination may all be symptoms of a lack of purpose and meaning in people's lives.

The assumption in this chapter is that everyone needs and seeks to have ultimate purpose and meaning. But what if someone says to you that purpose and meaning are not important to them and they feel they don't need it? Read the following response. In view of what you learned in this chapter, how would you answer?

A person who says that purpose and meaning are not important to them is either in denial or has a low view of themselves and of life. According to the Gallup Organization they represent only about 1% of the people in the United States. They are living far below the dignity of being created in God's image. At the least, they should be responsible enough to want to know the truth about ultimate purpose—even if they feel no personal need for it.

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

Do you agree that most people have an inherent desire to know how everything began, why we are here, and what happens to us after we die? Do you think it's possible to know these things?

Again, responses here will vary. A majority of people agree on the importance of knowing that their life has a purpose. A poll by the Gallup organization asked, "How important to you is the belief that your life is meaningful or has a purpose?" An incredible 95% said it was very or fairly important. Only 1% said it was not important (Gallup, *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America*, p. 12). Is it possible to know the answers to ultimate questions with certainty? The agnostic (one who believes ultimate reality is unknowable) will say, "No," but **FaithSearch** Discovery challenges that view. The skeptic or agnostic is invited to consider the evidence and logic presented in future sessions about discovering the absolute God, and thereby discovering certain answers about origin and destiny.

Confirming the Discovery

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided in the margin of this page. Write below how the main teaching of each relates to or confirms the discovery in this chapter.

Genesis 1:27 We are unique in God's creation to bear His image

Jeremiah 29:11-13 God created us to have purpose and meaningful fellowship with Him

Hebrews 9:27 God requires accountability of our lives to Him

Final Thought: Review the dilemma of the "work cycle" (SBF, pp.15-16). What do you have in your life, and what have you done or are you doing in your life, that death will not sooner or later erase, so to speak? Reflect on this.

Everything temporal, regardless of how significant it seems here and now, will not survive death. If there is no God or absolute values, then death is the final victor and erases not only the substance, but the very memory of the temporal.

Subjective question on page 10
of the *Study Guide*

Bible confirmation on page 10
of the *Study Guide*

Author's comment

Note that the paragraph following the verses in the *Study Guide* is a summary of the main points of these verses.

Author's Comment

It is necessary to point out here that our need for God doesn't prove that there is one. Nor does saying the letters g-o-d make it true. Furthermore, not just any "god" will be helpful in solving the crisis of purpose and meaning which we all have. Only a God who has the qualities of being both infinite and personal is able to provide the answers to resolve the crisis. Is the existence of such a God something you "just have to believe"—without reason or questioning? Is this idea of God just Christian tradition? Although some make such allegations, they are not true. Christians maintain that their God was able to be seen, heard and touched—that faith in God is supported by historical evidence. Is it possible to know which of these positions is true? In the next chapter we'll find out.

Looking Ahead**Related Reading**

- Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), Chapter 1.
- Clark Pinnock, *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), Chapter 1
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), Chapters 1-2.