

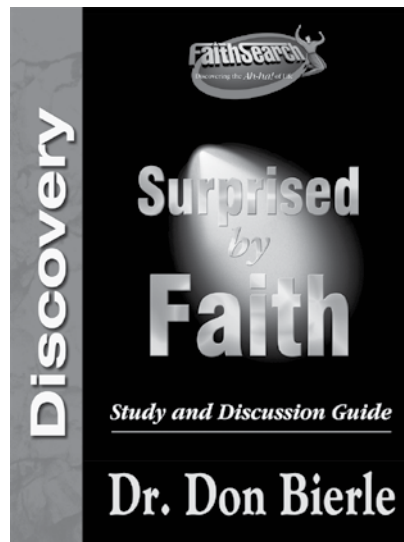
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 8

A Miracle of New Life From Above

Discovering the Life-Changing Dimensions of Faith



- **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 8

A Miracle of New Life From Above

Discovering the Life-Changing Dimensions of Faith

Getting Focused

Materials

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 8
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 4, pages 94-102
- PowerPoint® slides: through *Discovery #8* (slides 135-145) (chapter review: slides 146-147)

Key Points of the Session

1. Genuine biblical faith includes a miraculous component.

A person does not become a Christian by “becoming better” or by acts of merit. The Bible teaches that a person becomes a Christian by an act of God—a miracle of “new life from above” upon a confession of faith in Jesus Christ. The resulting gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit (see John 7:37-39) results in a new spiritual creation in each believer (2 Corinthians 5:17).

2. Becoming a Christian is a life-changing event.

Three major life changes occur when a person becomes a Christian. First, there is a *new relationship* with God which results when the Holy Spirit indwells you. His presence testifies that you are a child of God (Romans 8:16) and confirms God’s promise to return and take you to be with Him in heaven (John 14:1-3). Second, this new life is not based on a set of rules. You are saved by grace, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, you have a *new freedom*—from the power and consequences of sin, and from striving for approval. Finally, becoming a Christian results in a *new hope*—a desirable and confident assurance of eternal life. The presence of these objective realities in the lives of millions of people around the world gives the Christian faith powerful credibility.

Glossary of Terms Used

Freedom: ability to be all I was intended (created) to be

Grace: unmerited favor; a gift

Hope: the biblical word means a desirable and confident expectation

Reformation: change for the better; process of improvement by removing faults or abuses

Relationship: the interaction that occurs when personal beings make a commitment to one another; this interaction involves the intellect, will and emotion

Transformation: a thoroughgoing or fundamental change in the condition, nature, substance or state of a thing or person; metamorphosis

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

* Page numbers are from the third edition of *Surprised by Faith*. In the second edition, see pp. 83-89.

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.

Author's Comment

Sometimes an illustration can help your attendees better to appreciate this teaching. Stanley Baldwin tells the story of a sharp-tongued young woman who was justifying herself to a friend, saying, "I suppose I shouldn't have said it, but if you knew the

**Subjective question on page 73
of the Study Guide**

aggravation to which I was subjected, you'd understand." Her friend asked, "If you were carrying a pail of water and someone jostled you, what would spill from the pail?" "Why, water, of course." "And if you were carrying a pail of acid and someone jostled you, what would spill?" "Why, acid, of course." "The only thing that can spill out of your mouth when you are aggravated is what you are carrying in your heart. The spilling might be

**Subjective question on page 74
of the Study Guide**

someone else's fault; the content is yours" (Stanley C. Baldwin, *What Did Jesus Say About That?* Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 28-29). An honest observation of humanity will also lead to the conclusion that something is wrong with the human race. This is the basis for the astute

**Subjective question on page 74
of the Study Guide**

statement of G.K. Chesterton: "The one doctrine of Christianity which is empirically verifiable is the fallenness of man" (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*. Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw Publishers, 1994, pg. 11).

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha!

The DISCOVERY

#8

Becoming a Christian is a MIRACLE of new life by the Holy Spirit resulting in a new relationship, freedom and hope!

Introduction

Something Wrong—Something Missing The Human Problem

Read Mark 7:20-23 in a Bible or the margin of this page. Where does Jesus say that evil thoughts and deeds come from?

They are from within—from the heart of—a person. In other words, evil thoughts and deeds are innate. The Bible refers to this as the sin nature (see Romans 7:14ff).

Read also Genesis 8:21 and Jeremiah 17:9. What is the condition of the heart (i.e. the nature) of each one of us?

According to God's own words recorded in Genesis 8:21, the intent or inclination of man's heart is evil. The Jeremiah passage states that the heart is deceitful and desperately sick (see Jesus' statement in Mark 2:17).

In your own words, summarize briefly the spiritual nature of man based on these Old Testament statements together with the teaching of Jesus above.

The fallen nature of man is documented throughout the Old and New Testaments. Based on this, the Christian position is that all people are in bondage to an innate sin nature, and that they sin because they are sinners. They are also incapable of "healing" themselves of this inner inclination to evil. Only a miracle of new life from above (John 3:3-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17) can break this bondage (see Romans 8:1-2).

There is yet another problem: We have each personally experienced our own moral ineptness in measuring up to the high standard of Jesus' teachings. To illustrate this, read the following passages and write what Jesus says is expected of us.

Matthew 5:27-28 Adultery is not just the act, but also the lust of the heart for a woman.

Matthew 5:44 Rather than revenge, we are to love our enemies and pray for the.

Matthew 5:48 We are to perfect even as God is perfect.

Matthew 18:21-22 We are to have unlimited forgiveness for those who sin against us ("seventy times seven").

Luke 14:33 Jesus said His disciples must give up ownership of all their possessions.

In view of this high standard, it is tempting to throw up our arms in despair. Even our thoughts and motives are declared to be sin! The apostle Paul wrestled with this same problem. Read Romans 7:14-25 in your Bible and answer the following questions.

What does he acknowledge is the nature of his “flesh”?

He says that it is sin and the flesh is in bondage to sin (v. 14). There is nothing good in the flesh (v. 18) and Paul refers to it as the source of evil (v. 19) and death (v. 24).

Does he have the power to free himself from his sin nature?

No, Paul says he practices the things he hates (vv. 15,19) and is a prisoner of the law of sin (v. 23).

For Additional Discussion

The Bible says that to become a Christian requires a miracle of God. Why is this needed in each life? (Isaiah 59:2; John 8:34; Romans 3:22b-23; 5:12; 6:23a)

Our sin has separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2). If we only acknowledge the intellectual aspects of Christianity, we will miss the life-changing power of it. We need to be redeemed from our bondage to sin and death and adopted into the family of God. This is the power we need to truly transform our thoughts and actions. It also gives us a basis for renewed hope of eternal life. This can't be done by reforming our own lives but requires a supernatural work of God (Titus 3:4-6). Perhaps some may feel this subject is too strong a contrast with the scientific and historical approach taken earlier, or may feel a little uneasy or even embarrassed about it. Take your time. Testimony of God's involvement in our lives is rather personal, but it demonstrates that Christianity is not just a religion you study, or a consistent theory, or even a nice idea. Christianity works!

How did he finally find freedom from sin and guilt before God?

In response to his question, “Who will set me free...” (v. 24) Paul declares that he was only set free through “Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 25). See Romans 8:2 for Paul's conclusive statement about this.

The most common offense expressed against Christianity is that a good God would never keep good people out of heaven, and certainly would not send them to hell! Aren't good people good enough? This legitimate concern reflects the greatest misunderstanding people have about the Christian faith: that it is a system of works by which we earn a place in heaven. How would you answer someone with this view?

The essay which follows this question in *Study Guide* contains my response. The problem here is that we are asking the wrong question. Nearly everyone in the world has been conditioned to think that others do things for you on the basis of your being a good person or your having earned it. This is the way they think about everything, not just spiritual things like heaven. Therefore, people cannot imagine a God who would do things for us on the basis of grace, even when we are sinners (see Romans 5:8) and deserve punishment instead. Likewise, they assume that typically good and decent people should be rewarded. This attitude reveals a very

Subjective question on page 74
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on pages 74-75
of the *Study Guide*

compromising concept of God's holiness—that He should grade our lives “on the curve” (that is, that a 60, 70 or 80% performance of good should be acceptable for getting to heaven). There is no understanding of the biblical perspective, of our need to be redeemed, even if we had committed but a single sin—much less several a day for years on end! God makes it much easier and better than that: He redeemed us on the merit of Jesus Christ because of His love for us. Forgiveness is ours on the basis of grace (unmerited favor). It is available for all if they are willing to receive it (God will not force it on people). The essay here and on pages 100-101 in the *Study Guide* explains why Jesus is the only one who could redeem us.

Subjective question on page 76
of the *Study Guide*

God's Solution to the Human Problem

Read John 3:3-6 in a Bible or the margin of this page (SBF, pp. 84-85).

Who is Jesus talking to here?

He is talking to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (this probably means he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest court of Israel).

Was Nicodemus quite religious and spiritually respected as righteous by Jewish people of that day?

Yes, the Pharisees were a religious sect of Israel, men who were active as teachers of the Old Testament in the Synagogues. They were meticulous in keeping the Law and were generally respected by the people as spiritual leaders. The people would probably say that if the Pharisees were not to be regarded as “righteous,” no one in Israel would have been!

What did Jesus say that Nicodemus lacked to go to heaven (i.e. the Kingdom of God)?

Jesus said that Nicodemus was not “born again” (literally, “new life from above”).

What words does Jesus use to describe this in v. 6?

Jesus contrasts being born of the flesh (meaning physical birth) with being born of the Spirit (spiritual birth) i.e. created anew by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told this religious leader Nicodemus, one of the seventy on the highest court in the land (the Sanhedrin) and respected for his righteous adherence to the Law, that he wasn't going to heaven! Why?

This is answered in the material that follows in the *Study Guide*.

Subjective question on page 77
of the *Study Guide*

Use the words below to label the triangle in the margin of this page so it reflects a more complete understanding of the nature of biblical faith.

[Complete the diagram that is on p. 77 in the SBFSDG. Place “knowledge,” “will,” and “response” at the three tips of the triangle, starting at the top and proceeding counter-clockwise. Place the “Holy Spirit” in the circle at the center of the triangle.]

Read Romans 8:9 in a Bible or the margin of this page. According to the apostle Paul, how serious is it if we don't have the Holy Spirit within us?

If we don't have the Holy Spirit within us, we are not Christian ("he does not belong to Him").

Based on the teaching so far in this chapter, prepare a brief answer to someone who says to you that they are a Christian and going to heaven because they have tried to live a good life. (See Ephesians 2:8-9.)

First, we should commend people for striving to live a good life. All of us are far better off to live in a world of nice people rather than a world of people who practice evil. Believing oneself to be a Christian and therefore going to heaven on the basis of living a good life is another issue entirely. See Jesus' own challenge to the Jewish leaders that their belief in God (John 8:41) and keeping of the Law did not mean they "belong to God" or even "know Him" (John 8:47, 55). So, having commended people, we would then give reasons why their premise is false. Many Bible passages teach us that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; John 3:16; 11:25; Romans 5:1-2). On the other hand, the Bible makes clear that salvation is never on the basis of works or personal merit (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7; Romans 3:20). What people need to understand is that if we could achieve our salvation by our own efforts in living a good life, then Jesus would have died unnecessarily (for no purpose). Salvation is by grace, a gift (Romans 6:23)—and only pride keeps us from humbly acknowledging that and claiming our own effort and good works instead.

Three Life-Changing Dimensions of Faith

During His ministry, Jesus taught that a supernatural event would occur in His disciples' lives. Read John 7:37-39 in a Bible or the margin of this page.

Jesus' references to being "thirsty" and coming to Him to "drink" are metaphors for what?

They are metaphors for our spiritual condition and need.

From where will the "streams of water" flow?

They will flow from our "innermost being."

Who does Jesus say will receive the Holy Spirit?

Those who believe in Him will receive the Holy Spirit.

This supernatural event of receiving the Holy Spirit results in a special relationship with God for Jesus' followers now that He is no longer physically present on the earth. Read John 14:16-17 in a Bible or the margin of this page.

What did Jesus say He would request from the Father for His followers?

Jesus said He would request another Helper.

Where will this new Helper (i.e. Comforter; Counselor; Advocate) reside? (Confirm your answer by reading 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 2 Corinthians 1:22).

The Holy Spirit will reside within each believer.

Subjective question on page 77 of the Study Guide

Author's comment

The answer above may seem judgmental or harsh to many people in Christendom today. What I am not saying by this answer is that all or even most people in Christendom are not Christians (by biblical definition—see Romans 10:9-10). The Holy Spirit may dwell within them even if they are ignorant of that fact. Many people have limited understanding of biblical theology and may have done what Romans 10:9-10 says—but without instruction about what happens when we say "Yes" to Jesus. To become a Christian is to receive Christ who gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. What I am saying here is that the Bible is clear that no one can consider themselves to be a Christian without the miracle of new life brought about by the indwelling

Subjective question on page 77 of the Study Guide

Holy Spirit. I am particularly concerned about a fairly large segment of people in Christendom who continue to rely upon church authority or living a good

Subjective question on page 78 of the Study Guide

life for their salvation—and may even deny the teaching of the Bible about the necessity of the Holy Spirit in their salvation.

Subjective question on page 79
of the Study Guide

Where does the assurance that we are children of God come from? (See Romans 8:16)

This assurance comes from the witness of the Holy Spirit within us.

Read Romans 8:1-4 in a Bible or the margin of this page, and answer the following questions.

What no longer exists for the believer because of Jesus Christ? (v. 1)

There is no longer any condemnation (for our sins).

What replaced the Law, sin and the flesh in our lives? (vv. 2-3)

The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross broke the power of the Law, sin and the flesh in our lives.

How do we now fulfill the Law and please God. (v. 4)

We walk in obedience to the Spirit in our lives, not according to the flesh.

Read Philippians 2:13 in a Bible or the margin of this page. When we have the Holy Spirit within and live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God, who should be recognized as the source and receive the praise?

God should be praised because He is the one who is at work within us to accomplish His will.

Subjective question on page 79
of the Study Guide

According to 1 John 5:11-13, who has eternal life?

The one who has ("believes in"—see v. 13) the Son (Jesus) has eternal life.

Why did the apostle John write this letter to believers? (v. 13)

He wrote to assure them (so they can "know") they have eternal life if they believe in Jesus.

Subjective question on page 80
of the Study Guide

In the upper room, the night before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus talked to the apostles (John 14:1-3).

What did Jesus assure them about space availability in God's heavenly home? (v. 2)

There are many dwelling places, evidently enough for every person because Jesus is preparing a place for everyone.

What two things did Jesus say He would do? (vv. 2-3)

Jesus is preparing a place for every believer and will come again to the earth.

What wonderful promise did He make to them? (v. 3)

He will receive every believer to Himself and take them to live with Him in heaven.

Application and Reflection

Write your thoughts and evaluation of how these life-changing dimensions of becoming a Christian are the same as, and how they are different from, your previous understanding. How do you respond to them? Are you: excited? skeptical? accepting? cautious?

The question is asking for personal reflection and response. Some of us may fully agree with these because we have experienced them in our lives. Others may have previously viewed Christianity only as an ethical code or containing guidelines for life. Others may have thought of it as basically the same as all other religions and a crutch for the weak. Still others may have been angry because of a bad church or family experience which was legalistic or judgmental of them. Hopefully, if any of these counterfeits and negative views did exist, they will be replaced with a healthy attitude about God's love which can open the possibility of experiencing these positive life changes.

Most of us have had the experience of hearing someone state that the life changes claimed by Christians are not convincing to them of the truth of their faith. Instead, they maintain that Christians are all hypocrites and they don't want to become like them. How would you answer this?

My response to this question is in the essay on page 81 in the *Study Guide*. I would add that the dishonest skeptic will use any excuse to avoid facing his or her own sin and accountability to God. The points I make in the essay assume that the unbeliever has an honest misunderstanding of the Christian faith and would respond differently if they had better information. This is not true for the dishonest unbeliever. For them, the accusation of "hypocrisy" is a convenient scapegoat to justify their unbelief.

Is **becoming** a Christian more of a reformation or a transformation? Explain your answer. (See John 3:3; Romans 6:4-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; and Galatians 6:15)

Biblically, becoming a Christian is definitely a transformation, not a reformation or remodeling. We have new life in Christ that is compared to being raised from the dead (Romans 6:4). We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the flesh has been "crucified" (Galatians 5:24). This question leads naturally to consider how Christianity is different from every other religion or cult group. Every other group appeals to human pride by identifying how they can "earn" (or at least contribute to) their approval before God and thereby be saved. Christianity teaches that people must acknowledge their sin and die to self's desire to earn God's approval. Obviously the first message is more appealing. The best that other religions can promise is a degree of reformation or remodeling of their life. Furthermore, they can never give assurance of forgiveness or approval by God since the standard is arbitrary and no one ever knows if they have done enough. On the other hand, Christianity can promise the transforming power of the Spirit of God who comes to live within them. The difference may be illustrated by a drowning man going down under the water for the third time who is offered either swimming instructions (other religions) or a life-jacket (Christianity).

Subjective question on page 81
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 82
of the *Study Guide*

How about **being** a Christian? Is this more of a reformation or a transformation? Explain your answer. (See 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6; 3:12-15.)

“Becoming” a Christian is a miracle of God in a person’s life that results in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (an event of transformation). “Being” a Christian is a life-long process of becoming (in our practice of Christ) what we already are (in our position in Christ). The Holy Spirit is gradually changing us into the likeness of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18) a process referred to as “perfecting” (Philippians 1:6) into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). As Paul says, it is a process that is always ongoing (Philippians 3:12). It is a process which is leading to a certain result: we shall be like Him at His appearing (see Philippians 1:6, 1 John 3:2).

Subjective question on page 83
of the *Study Guide*

A common question and concern by Christians and non-Christians alike is the fate of those in the world who die without hearing about forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Is it their fault that they never had an opportunity to hear about the cure for sin? What would you say to someone who asked you this?

Use my answer in the essay which follows this question to help. The book reference by Sanders in the related reading below is good for those who want to pursue this matter in greater depth.

Confirming the Discovery

Bible confirmation on pages 84
of the *Study Guide*

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided here in the margin. Write after each one how it relates to or confirms the discovery made in this chapter.

The summary which follows the verse listing in the *Study Guide* is the author’s view of the main teaching of these passages. Refer to that for the answers to this section.

Looking Ahead

Author’s comment

Read the two transition paragraphs under this heading on page 84 of the Study Guide. The stumbling block to faith referred to there is pride. It is important to identify it and bring it into the light of Scripture in the next chapter. This will lessen its power. If you have any in your group who do not yet know the Lord, they may feel some resistance welling up within them about now—and they may not know why. It is likely to be the temptation of pride—not wanting to admit they cannot do what is necessary to please God in the flesh. By talking about it in the next chapter, it will make it easier for everyone to humbly respond when the invitation to follow Jesus is given in the last chapter. Be much in prayer for each person in your group.

Related Reading

- Donald Bierle, *Making Sense of Creation and Evolution* (Self published through FaithSearch International, 2001), Chapter 7.
- Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1980), Chapter 11.
- Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994).
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), pp. 145-167, 169-194, and 223-245.
- John Sanders, et. al., eds., *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995).