

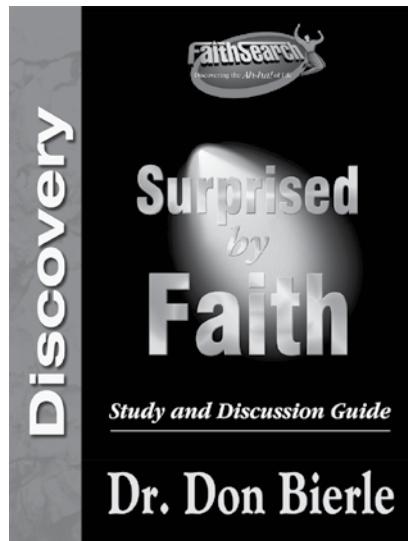
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 9

How Can I Know God

Discovering the Stumbling Block Along the Path to 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

CHAPTER 9

How Can I Know God

Discovering the Stumbling Block Along the Path to Faith

Getting Focused

Materials

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 9
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 6, pages 119-132
- PowerPoint® slides: through Discovery #9 (slides 148-152) (chapter review: slides 153-155)

Key Points

1. Pride is what keeps many people from faith in Jesus Christ.

Pride is the chief cause of misery and alienation in the world. Wars, divorce and other maladies of life can often be traced to the competitiveness of uncontrolled egos. Pride is also the greatest deterrent keeping us from a relationship with God. A refusal to say, "I'm sorry" to God about our sins and a reluctance to renounce our independent self-sufficiency keep us from knowing God.

2. Spiritual brokenness is necessary on the path to faith.

The Bible makes it clear that the path to Christian faith involves moving from "pro" status to "sinner" status; that is, submitting to God by recognizing our pride of self-sufficiency and acknowledging our sinful nature. When spiritual brokenness occurs in a person's life, the resulting humility places us in a position to accept Jesus as Lord and to make a commitment to follow Him in our life.

3. Many of the people recorded in the Bible whom God used in remarkable ways demonstrated this spiritual principle.

There are many examples of spiritual brokenness at work in the people of the Bible. John the Baptist's short-lived ministry illustrates the proper attitude. When tempted by his disciples to build loyalty to himself, he declared his purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus. His crowning words were: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Glossary of Terms Used

Pride: thinking of ourselves as better than others; independence from God and others; not humble

Pro: one who is self-confident to a fault; thinks they are able to handle everything on their own; a know-it-all

Spiritual brokenness: the change in one's personal perception from self-sufficient "pro" to a "sinner" before God; teachable; submissive before God; a conviction that results from the work of God's Spirit

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. 105-117.

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.

Subjective question on page 87
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 88
of the *Study Guide*

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha! The DISCOVERY

#9

**Pride keeps more people from faith and
forgiveness in Jesus Christ than any other
factor!**

Introduction

What evidence can you point to in Matthew 23 that indicates the scribes and Pharisees flaunted their leadership and had a lot of self-righteous pride?

They do everything to be noticed by men (v. 5); they dress to imply greater spirituality (v. 5); they love the place of honor and the chief seats (v. 6); they love to be called "Rabbi" (v. 7).

In contrast, how did Jesus define greatness? (Matthew 23:11)

The one who is greatest will be a servant.

What quality did Jesus want His followers and leaders to manifest? (v. 12)

He wanted them to manifest humbleness.

Why did the Jewish leadership not acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah and Savior? (v. 37)

They were unwilling to.

Like the rebellious citizenry in the parable, when will the scribes and Pharisees see Jesus again? (v. 39)

They will see Him when He comes again (His second coming).

The Spiritual Principle Identified

What evidence do you find in this text that Peter was skeptical of any possible fishing success? (Luke 5:1-8)

When asked to go back out to fish again, Peter said that they had fished all night and caught nothing—clearly not optimistic about Jesus' fishing advice (v. 5). When they collected a massive catch, Peter was amazed (v.9).

What title did Peter use to address Jesus, and how does this reflect Peter's limited understanding at this time of who Jesus really is (v. 5)?

Peter first referred to Jesus as "Master" (v. 5) a title of respect (like teacher, or Rabbi) but not what Peter would call Jesus when he had a more full understanding of Jesus as the incarnation of God (cf. v. 8, see also John 6:68-69). This event is early in Jesus' ministry.

If asked at that time, how do you think Peter would compare his fishing skills and experience with those of Jesus?

Peter was a professional fisherman and undoubtedly tried every skill throughout the night, though to no avail. In Peter's view, Jesus

was an itinerant teacher or Rabbi—not expected to know much about fishing. Peter very likely felt he knew a lot more about fishing on the Sea of Galilee than Jesus did.

Read the first two paragraphs on page 107 in SBF. Do you think the evaluation of Peter there as the “pro” is justified? Briefly defend your answer.

Some may not agree with this identification. In support of this view, Peter is clearly reluctant to go back out fishing because he is sure that it will not be successful. That's why he is so amazed when they had a large catch. His response to go to his knees in repentance clearly indicates that he felt guilty for his attitude

After catching two boat loads of fish on the first throw of the net, what title did Peter use to address Jesus (v. 8)?

He referred to Jesus as “Lord” (Greek kurios, meaning supreme one, God).

At that point what was Peter’s attitude and evaluation of himself?

He described himself as a “sinful man,” obviously a repentant attitude from his previous position.

God’s view of pride and humility:

What does God hate? (Proverbs 8:13)

He hates pride and arrogance.

What does God require? (Micah 6:8)

God requires us “to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with [our] God.”

What does God oppose? (James 4:6)

God is opposed to the proud.

Who receives God’s grace? (James 4:6)

God gives grace to the humble.

What is from the world and not from God? (1 John 2:16)

The “boastful pride of life” is not from God.

Jesus example and teaching:

What is characteristic of Jesus’ heart? (Matthew 11:29)

The Bible says the heart of Jesus is “humble.”

What example did Jesus give us that we are commanded to follow? (Philippians 2:5-8)

We are to assume the role of the bond servant and to humble ourselves as He did.

What did Jesus include in the list of evil things that come from within us? (Mark 7:21-23)

He included the sin of “pride.”

Subjective question on page 89
of the Study Guide

Subjective question on pages 89
of the Study Guide

**Subjective question on page 89
of the Study Guide**

**Subjective question on page 90
of the Study Guide**

Author's Comment

Examples of arrogant pride are not hard to find. Professional sporting events sometimes manifest blatant demonstrations of egos which are embarrassing, if not repulsive. Powerful politicians or lawyers may at times reveal egotistic arrogance when confronted over questionable activities. It is not just the highly visible, however, who manifest wrongful pride. Husbands, teachers, bosses and every other relationship or role throughout society has been guilty of destructive pride. This is because pride is essentially competitive. C.S. Lewis wrote, "We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others... It is the comparison that makes you proud... Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone" (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 118-119). Pride is difficult to control because it is part of our fallen nature, and requires a supernatural work of God to break its power. Review SBF, pp. 83-87, which is very relevant to this point. The "gift of God's presence" and the "gift of God's grace" is the only answer to victory over pride. It should be evident from this that the greatest difficulty in becoming a Christian is *not intellectual but moral* in nature. Both are factors, but the moral focuses our attention on the needed power of God to transform us within. Some people will openly indicate they have intellectual reasons which make them hesitant to become a Christian. When these are honest expressions, they should be researched and discussed openly. But even when the intellectual

Application to Jesus' followers:

What characteristic should the servant of the Lord manifest? (Matthew 20:25-28)

We are not to "lord it over" others, but humbly to give our lives for others.

What is commanded in our relations with others? (Philippians 2:3)

We are not to act selfishly, but with humility of mind to regard others as more important than ourselves.

What characteristic is included for those who are the children of God? (Colossians 3:12)

Among other things, we are to have a heart of "humility."

What happens to us if we nurture pride in our life? (Proverbs 16:18)

It becomes destructive to our lives and causes us to "stumble" (sin).

Think of yourself, or others you have observed or heard about who are examples of wrongful pride. Circle as many words in the list below that you feel often fit the person or persons who manifested this pride.

The words selected may vary, but these are the most likely: Divisive, Jealous, Competitive; Angry, Dissentious, and Arrogant.

Compare the words you have circled with the two contrasting lists found in Galatians 5:19-23: the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In which list do you find more of the words circled above?

All of the words are found in the list of the deeds of the flesh; e.g. enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, dissensions, envying, etc.

Are there a lot of words from the fruit of the Spirit list that are not circled?

Yes, many of the words which are not circled are included as fruit of the Spirit; e.g. love, peace, kindness, patience, etc.

Based on this observation and what you have learned in this chapter, do you think pride should be thought of as a mere character flaw or a spiritual matter? Defend your answer.

When we identify something as a "character flaw" we apply it to only some people. A "spiritual matter" would be considered universal. Clearly, the Bible teaches that pride is innate in the fallen nature of humankind and applies to everyone. In other words, pride is inherent in the "flesh" which needs to be redeemed by the work of Christ and new creation by the Holy Spirit. True love, joy, peace, etc. are the product of the Holy Spirit within the life of the believer (i.e. the "fruit of the Spirit").

The Spiritual Principle Illustrated

What evidence is there in Matthew 3:5-6 and Luke 3:10-14 that John's ministry was impacting a lot of people from many walks of life?

Matthew's description suggests that John the Baptist was gaining great attention from "Jerusalem," "all Judea," and the "district around the Jordan." Luke refers to "multitudes" and gives some examples of the diversity of people: general public (v. 11) tax-collectors (v. 12) and Roman soldiers (v. 14).

In their excitement and state of expectancy, the people were thinking that John the Baptist may have been the Christ (Messiah). That could have been a temptation to John to bask in the attention. Instead, what attitude did he manifest in what he said? (Luke 3:16)

One is coming who is mightier than John, and John says he is not worthy to even untie His shoes.

John's exploding ministry was only about six months old when Jesus began His ministry. When Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized by him, what attitude did John manifest in what he said? (Matthew 3:13-14)

John protested because he felt that Jesus should baptize him, not the other way around.

About the same time, John's disciples expressed some jealousy since many people were going to Jesus rather than coming to John (John 3:22-30). Note John's response by answering the questions below.

Where did John say his ministry and success came from? (v. 27)

He said it came from "heaven."

What does John understand and accept his role to be? (v. 28)

He said he was not the Messiah, but was His forerunner (to proclaim Him).

What does John say his relationship to Jesus is? (v. 29)

He is the "friend" of the bridegroom (Jesus)—perhaps like our concept of the "best man" at a wedding.

What gives him joy? (v. 29)

He rejoices at the bridegroom's voice (perhaps meaning that he rejoices at the coming of the Christ).

Two Key Questions

Moses

What do you think is the significance of God's statement (Exodus 3:12) that "Certainly I will be with you..."?

Perhaps God was assuring Moses that his return to Egypt would be different than his previous time there. When Moses experienced his failure and committed murder, he acted outside the will and power of God (see Acts 7:20-29). This time Moses would go by the call of God and with His power (see Exodus 4:1-9).

What do you think is the significance of God's answer to Moses' question

Subjective question on page 91
of the Study Guide

Author's Comment (Cont.)

factors are addressed and satisfied, a moral factor will often remain. This is more difficult for people to admit. This moral factor entails agreeing with God concerning the sin which separates me from Him, and the reality that we are unable to be righteous other than through faith in Jesus Christ who died in our place. Because this is a threat to each self-sufficient and proud ego, it requires dying to self and submitting to the Lordship of Christ. This is very difficult and does not occur without the power of conviction brought by the Holy Spirit. If our personal sin is not acknowledged, neither will we confess that Jesus is Savior and Lord. So we must not be naive. Even though we are provided a complete arsenal of evidence which would satisfy even the most brilliant and skeptical mind, this is no guarantee that everyone will respond in faith to Jesus.

Subjective question on page 92
of the Study Guide

as recorded in Exodus 3:14?

God is making clear to Moses that He is above all and from eternity—without beginning, without end, the ever-present “I AM.” This became known to Israel as another name for God. (See Jesus’ assumption of this name in John 8:53-59; cf. vv. 23-24.)

How is God’s action, as recorded in Exodus 4:1-8, relevant to Moses’ second question?

God is saying that He does not need Moses’ own position, abilities and power (as when he was next to Pharaoh in authority) to accomplish His purposes with His people in Egypt. God has all the power in the universe! He will do through Moses what is necessary to accomplish His will.

Contrast the difference in Moses’ attitude: from perceiving himself to be the “deliverer” at the end of his first forty years (Acts 7:23-26) to his actually being used to deliver Israel in his third forty years (Exodus 3:11; 4:1,10,13). How do you explain this change in Moses?

No matter how well meaning, as a man of power in words and deeds (Acts 7:22) Moses originally acted out of that strength and not because he was commissioned by God at that time. He assumed this qualified him to be Israel’s deliverer (note “through him” in v. 25). After personal failure and after the most educated and powerful Jew in the world spent forty years in the wilderness herding animals, Moses was a broken man. He no longer “trusted” himself to be able to do anything he set his mind to do. Thus, when God came to him at the burning bush he had several “excuses” why he couldn’t be the deliverer—and they were all related to his own fears and inabilities (see the Exodus verses in the question). When God then chose him at the burning bush incident, commissioned him, and enabled him with His power, there was no question that it was not Moses but God who would receive the glory for the deliverance. The shepherd’s crook of Moses became the rod of God! God still uses spiritually broken people who humble themselves to be His servants. That explains the change in Moses.

What did God think of Moses? Compare the two different descriptions of Moses found in Deuteronomy 34:10-12 and Numbers 12:3. Based on what you have learned in this chapter, how do you reconcile these two paradoxical descriptions?

The description in Deuteronomy has Moses as the great prophet and a man who was known for his “mighty power” and the “great terror” which he performed (vv. 10, 12). The description in Numbers has Moses as the most humble man in the world. Of one thing we can be certain—he did not learn humility in the court of the Pharaoh! He learned it in the wilderness, and then gained his Deuteronomy reputation as a God-empowered prophet. This is true “greatness” in the sight of God.

Based on the brief study of John the Baptist in this chapter, write how you

**Subjective question on page 93
of the Study Guide**

think John would have responded to the two questions: "Who am I?" and "God, who are you?"

I think he told us in the text of Scripture how he did respond to these two questions. He acknowledged that he was totally indebted to God for everything (John 3:27). He accepted the call (role) which God gave him and would not promote or defend it independent of God (v. 28). Finally, regarding God, he rejoiced in the incarnate Son of God (v. 29) and promoted Him even though it meant his own ministry would diminish (v. 30). This is a marvelous example of the spiritually-broken but God-empowered servant.

Some people may object to this concept of spiritual brokenness and confession of sin because they say it destroys the important need we have for self-esteem and personal worth. Use the discussion below to help you in preparing an answer to this objection.

My response to this concern is in the essay which follows this question in the Study Guide. If this concept was the tradition or doctrine of mankind, then we could properly question it. But it is the teaching of the Bible, i.e. God. He can be trusted to have a greater wisdom than any man, and is motivated to seek our good. Therefore, I would rather trust God than even the greatest of human knowledge.

Application and Reflection

Two key questions were identified in this chapter: "Who am I?" and "God, who are You?" Do you agree that these are important questions which people must ask and honestly answer along the path to faith?

Discuss this with your group. Let them be free to disagree and reflect on the concept. My view is that these two questions focus on the heart of the matter—who I really think I am compared to how big my God is. Obviously, these are central to our attitude and willingness to even consider a response to the teaching in FaithSearch. If I see myself as the self-sufficient "pro" or someone who "knows better," then the thought of spiritual brokenness would seem to be wimpy or a response for the weak. We would feel that it is for those who are not handling life very well, but if we are successful and climbing—why would we need it? From the perspective of the Christian faith, this would not be realistic. We would be denying the big picture, including eternity. We would be acting as if we were autonomous in the universe and not created by an infinite and personal God to whom we are accountable. Unfortunately, life often awakens us, sometimes abruptly and painfully, from our fantasy of "all is well." These two questions point the way on the path to faith for discovering a proper perspective about self and God without the pain.

Have these questions been a factor in your own path to faith? Write briefly about your own experience.

People will vary in their ability to relate to these two questions. Some will even say that the issue of pride and self-sufficiency has never been a problem for them. They need to think about times in their life when they may have been humbled. It does not always have to be negative. For example, it may come at the birth of our first child or even upon receiving an important recognition. Unfortunately, many of us are only humbled by negative experiences such as a failed marriage, lost job or tragic accident.

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of the Study Guide

Subjective question on page 94
of the Study Guide

Subjective question on page 95
of the Study Guide

In telling others about your faith, have you found some for whom a confession of faith in Jesus Christ is difficult?

If we are at all active in sharing our faith, we will encounter those who find a confession of faith in Jesus to be quite difficult.

If so, what percentage of them do you think had pride as a stumbling block to faith?

The answer here will vary. I am not so interested in getting an accurate number as I am to encourage your group to think about the cause of people's resistance or rejection of the Gospel. Women may have a tendency to think of pride as a "male" problem, but this is not true. Women may manifest pride in a less overt way, but it is equally a problem.

What other reasons do you think keep people from making a confession of faith and following Jesus?

As we discussed in chapter 7, some people don't profess faith in Jesus because they are ignorant of Him or have a misunderstanding of the Christian faith. Others do not respond because they have hardened their hearts to the truth. The reasons people give for not responding can be intellectual, (e.g. the problem of evil) or moral (e.g. don't want to change their lifestyle). Sometimes people have been "turned off" by a bad experience with religion, church or a religious person.

For Additional Discussion

A faith response to Jesus Christ can be a difficult thing for some. What is the "bottom line" that keeps many from a saving relationship with God? Explain.

In contrast to other religions which say we can earn our heavenly destination by our own efforts and good works, Christianity says we just admit our sinfulness and our need for God in order to be saved. This is often an affront to self-sufficiency. Critical to many people is the issue of autonomy—those who say, "I am captain of my own ship; I report to no one; and I can make it alone." It is also an affront to self-righteous pride to hear that I am a slave to self and sin (Romans 3:10-12, 20; John 8:34) and that I must become totally dependent on God to take away my sin (1 Peter 3:18). This is a moral issue and the critical issue of becoming a Christian. The Bible says three forces are at work to maintain prideful autonomy from God: the world (1 John 2:16); the flesh (Romans 7:14, 24-25); and the devil (Ephesians 6:12). As C.S. Lewis has written, "As long as you are proud, you cannot know God" (quoted in SBF, p. 112). This is the "bottom line." The path to genuine faith involves a change from pride to humility. We can see this throughout the Bible. Have your group read together the following Bible passages to verify this for yourselves: Jeremiah 17:5; Zechariah 4:6; Matthew 6:1, 18:1-4, 19:30, 20:16; Luke 18:9-14; John 12:24, 25; 13:12-17; Romans 6:3; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; and Galatians 2:20.

Confirming the Discovery

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.

Bible confirmation on page 96
of the *Study Guide*

Looking Ahead

Related Reading

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), Chapters on Forgiveness, The Great Sin, and Charity.
- Charles Colson, *Born Again* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), Chapter 8.
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), Objection #1, pp. 25-55.

