

Discovery



FaithSearch Discovery DVD

Leader's Guide

Facilitating discussion for
Ten Life-Changing “Ah-ha!” Discoveries

Dr. Don Bierle

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**Proclaiming the Gospel with Evidence
to All Peoples Everywhere**

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Leader's Guide

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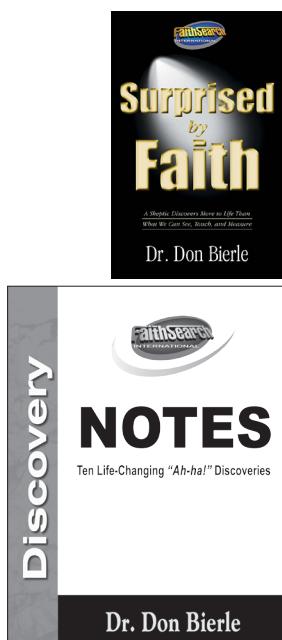


Small-Group Study: Getting Ready to Share

Welcome!

Welcome to an insightful, logical, and biblical faith adventure! Hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and other countries of the world have encountered **FaithSearch** Discovery—and found it to be life changing. It is also a valuable resource for pastors, teachers, and small group leaders to use in their outreach and teaching ministries. I hope you are considering leading a group or sharing this Gospel with evidence in some way. It will be a satisfying experience. Even more, it will bear spiritual fruit by drawing unbelievers into a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, strengthen the faith of believers, and equip them to be more effective witnesses.

If this **FaithSearch** Discovery DVD is used for a group study, several resources are available for both the participants and the leader to complement the presentation. These will optimize the spiritual impact and depth. These resources will be referenced throughout this *Leader's Manual*. May God bless your study!

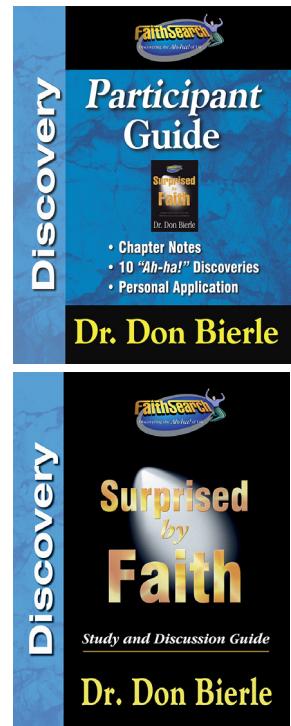


Surprised by Faith, 3rd Edition. This is the text for **FaithSearch** Discovery; 160 pages (left).

FaithSearch Discovery Participant Guide. Chapter Notes, Ten "Ah-ha!" Discoveries, Personal Application; 32 pages (above right).

Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide. In-depth workbook for the Ten "Ah-ha!" Discoveries; 35 key questions and answers frequently asked by attendees; 110 pages (below right).

FaithSearch Discovery Notes. Chapter Notes, Ten "Ah-ha!" Discoveries; 16 pages (below left). These are included on the DVD as a PDF, in versions with and without answers. They may be printed for distribution to participants of a discussion group viewing the **FaithSearch** Discovery DVD.



INTRODUCTION

What is **FaithSearch** Discovery?

FaithSearch Discovery is an eye-opening presentation of the case for Christian faith, including the use of logic, and scientific and biblical evidence. It is for everyone who wonders why they *should* believe and for everyone who wonders why they *do*—providing satisfying answers to life's most important questions. Ten stimulating and inspiring "Ah-ha!" Discoveries lead the participant to a confident and life-changing faith in the historical person of Jesus Christ. With intellectual validity, **FaithSearch** Discovery builds its case by analyzing five key questions which guide the participant to discover the "Ah-ha!" of life:

1. Why Am I Here? (Two "Ah-ha!" Discoveries)
2. Is the Bible True? (Two "Ah-ha!" Discoveries)
3. Is Jesus Really God? (Two "Ah-ha!" Discoveries)
4. When Is Faith Valid? (Two "Ah-ha!" Discoveries)
5. How Can I Know God? (Two "Ah-ha!" Discoveries)



Why Is *FaithSearch* Discovery Needed?

In our world, beneath a veneer of diversity, lies a common core of concerns about life. Can the Christian faith give genuine answers to these concerns and bring meaning to our lives? Yes, if it is communicated in a way that can be understood and applied. *FaithSearch* Discovery was designed to do that.

Christians in the Western world until recently have enjoyed a consensus in society that their message, and the source of that message, the Bible, is true. As a result, there had been little attention given to the reasons that support the Christian truth claims. Christianity became based on the *tradition* of its truth, not a *demonstration* of its truth. Until recently, such demonstration seemed unnecessary.

Today, however, our society is in the process of jettisoning its historic biblical worldview and of challenging the basic tenets of the Christian faith. The truth claims of Christianity now need to be defended with evidence. Many Christians no longer know the reasons why these claims are true, and thus find their attempts at communicating their faith both ineffective and frustrating. *FaithSearch* Discovery restores the “*why*” of the Christian faith: both for those who wonder *why they do believe*; and for those who wonder *why they should*. Hundreds of thousands of people have testified that *FaithSearch* Discovery has satisfied their questioning minds and subsequently changed their lives.

How Can I Use *FaithSearch* Discovery?

The applications and situations in which one or more of its formats could be used are limited only by your imagination and ingenuity. Here are some ideas:

- Office and business interaction groups
- Church adult education classes and forums
- Home Bible study and discussion groups
- Junior- and senior-high classes; youth groups
- College campus groups
- Home school settings
- Camp curriculum for youth and adults
- Men’s/women’s organizations and groups
- One-to-one sharing and lending of materials
- Christian school curriculum and classes
- Curriculum resources for pastors and missionaries
- Equipping leaders/staff of Christian organizations

FaithSearch Discovery is easy to use. Just be a credible person in your networks of influence. You are simply providing an opportunity for your family, friends, or work associates to discover Christ for the first time or deepen their walk with Him.

PRINCIPLES

A Biblically Illiterate World

The content and presentation of *FaithSearch* Discovery is sensitive to people in your networks of influence who do not have much knowledge or understanding of the Bible. Polls conducted by the Princeton Religion Research Center revealed that only 42% of adults in America could identify even five of the Ten Commandments, and 75% did not know the content of John 3:16. This is true even within the church. Another study by the Gallup organization revealed that 20% of regular church-attending teenagers could not identify the historical event that is commemorated by Easter.

When moderating a discussion about the evidence for the existence of God; the foundational truths of the reliability and historicity of the Bible; the life and times of Jesus Christ; and a biblical definition and understanding of genuine faith; be sensitive not to make assumptions as to what participants may know or believe about the Bible or the Christian faith.



Historicity of the New Testament

Whether the Bible is the inspired Word of God is *not* the foremost question in **FaithSearch** Discovery. While we are committed to the truth of Holy Spirit inspiration, our priority is whether the New Testament is a *reliable eyewitness and historical record*. If we can establish this fact through the external evidence of manuscripts and archaeology, then we can use the New Testament records to explore the questions of what Jesus actually said and did. We can also be assured that Christian faith is not blind. These are the critical issues to keep in focus as you go through **FaithSearch** Discovery.

Introducing Real People to the Real God

The central concept of **FaithSearch** Discovery is the visit of God to earth 2,000 years ago in the historical person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14). The fact that details of His life were recorded in the first century by eyewitnesses—or their associates—and accurately transmitted over the centuries to us, sets Christianity apart from every other religion. It is therefore possible to pursue a reasonable investigation of Jesus Christ using the legal method to determine whether His claim to be God is true. That is the focus of Discoveries 1-6 in **FaithSearch** Discovery. These sessions are critical to the effectiveness of this series. Many have testified that the evidence in these sessions “disarmed” their previous arguments against the Christian faith.

Discoveries 7-10 of **FaithSearch** Discovery explain the unique nature of biblical faith, reveal the primary stumbling block to Christian faith, and provide an invitation for participants to follow Jesus Christ. Three important concepts are emphasized:

- The first is the supernatural dimension of faith associated with the work of the Holy Spirit to create in us new life from above (new birth). As a result, becoming a Christian is a miracle of God in each life.
- Second, coming into relationship with God through the forgiveness of our sins and confession of faith (salvation) is the result of grace, not works. This may be the most universal misunderstanding about Christianity in the minds of people. It must be emphasized that *becoming* a Christian is not about morality, merit, cleaning up our act, or fulfilling a list of do’s and don’ts.
- The third concept is our prideful nature of self-sufficiency and independence, which makes submitting our lives to God so difficult. Pride is the factor that keeps more people from faith in Jesus Christ than any other.

PREPARATION

What preparation is needed if you should decide to facilitate or lead a discussion of **FaithSearch** Discovery? What are the fundamentals for making this opportunity a dynamic and fulfilling experience?

Attitudes

First, avoid becoming paralyzed with the fear that you do not know enough. No one knows everything! You won’t be embarrassed by questions if you approach them with honesty rather than pretense. Sometimes the best answer is, “I don’t know.” Nevertheless, if this is your tendency, consider the following reminders:

1. A teacher or discussion leader is not necessarily the “expert,” but the moderator and facilitator of the study and discussion. It is enough that in advance you have read the appropriate material in the book, *Surprised by Faith*. If you also use the *Participant Guide*, complete the appropriate chapter.
2. A teacher or discussion leader will readily acknowledge when he/she does not know the answer to a question. Such honesty will gain the respect of your group. Trying to “snow” your group when you do not know the answer reflects insecurity on your part and eventually will distance you from the group.
3. Accept that you will not do a perfect job the first time through. No one does! If you learn from each experience, you will improve. Resolve to grow in competence over time, but don’t let a perfectionist attitude rob you of the privilege and responsibility of making a difference in the lives of others through **FaithSearch** Discovery.

Second, avoid thinking that you know it all. An aura of super-confidence, even arrogance, prevents your acknowledging the need for study and preparation. If you err in this direction, consider the following:



1. It is important for the discussion leader to be candid and transparent—in other words, “real.” The best discussion leaders usually have a teachable spirit. When you don’t “know it all,” your group can relate better and relax with you.
2. Humility was a key characteristic of Jesus’ life. As is presented in **FaithSearch** Discovery, pride keeps more people from faith in Christ than any other factor. The discussion leader, as a Christian, is to model to the group the attitude of a humble servant (see John 13). In this way you make it easier for them to acknowledge their own shortcomings.
3. You may have more background preparation in the Bible and teaching than some or many others in the group. Thank God for the opportunities you have had. There is information in **FaithSearch** Discovery which is important, and which you may not have mastered. Much thought and field testing has gone into this series. Therefore, learn and use **FaithSearch** Discovery with little modification at first.

Third, accept others as they are with their assets and liabilities. Give others the benefit of the doubt, demonstrate a positive attitude, and be optimistic. Perhaps above all, culture the quality of patience.

Sharing Skills

The discussion leader should develop two sharing skills to become more spiritually effective. First, you should be prepared to relate your own spiritual journey. This is important experiential evidence that supports the legitimacy of the Christian faith. While the emphasis early in **FaithSearch** Discovery is on pragmatic (purpose and meaning) and historical evidence, the final sessions focus on the experiential evidence of God’s transformation of our lives. In a testimony you are claiming to know the infinite and personal God and that He has made a positive difference in your life. Everyone desires this transcendence. A testimony of experiencing God, when spoken with conviction and genuineness, is particularly helpful following the other apologetic evidences presented earlier in the study.

Second, you should be prepared to present a simple outline of the Christian Gospel and provide an opportunity for individuals to affirm faith in Jesus Christ through prayer. As the teacher or discussion leader you need to be prepared for those occasions when a group member asks what they need to do to become a Christian. Many think that will never happen. Be assured that as a teacher or discussion leader of **FaithSearch** Discovery—it will. Get ready!

You can keep this as simple as sharing the four points of a Gospel booklet like *Your Most Important Relationship* (Youth for Christ/USA). These booklets are inexpensive and available in quantities at Christian bookstores. Another option is to order *Discovering the Truth about Jesus*, a PocketGuide produced by **FaithSearch** International. It includes brief historical and archaeological evidence for the Gospel and is available by calling (952-401-4501) or online (www.faithsearch.org). Both of these summarize the Bible’s teaching concerning God’s love, the human problem, God’s solution through Jesus Christ, and our need to respond to Him in faith. **FaithSearch** Discovery itself includes this Gospel message with much greater detail and explanation.

PRACTICE

Materials

Your small group can simply watch the **FaithSearch** Discovery DVD and then consider the provided discussion questions. For greater depth over a period of time (like a semester class) each person should have a copy of *Surprised by Faith* and the *Participant Guide*, or a printout of the *Discovery Notes* (included on the DVD). This will get everyone into the Bible so the Holy Spirit can be at work in their lives as they make each “Ah-ha!” Discovery.

Discussion

Both objective and subjective questions (and their answers) are included with each of the Ten “Ah-ha!” Discoveries in this manual. The answers do not exhaust the information relevant to the questions. You may have additional thoughts to share as well. At times, you may want to rephrase a question, or even write some of your own.

Look for opportunities to get participation from most group members. However, be sensitive to people who are shy about sharing in a group setting. To encourage their participation, ask members to write down questions or issues that they may be reluctant to ask aloud. You could respond to them at the next meeting.



Spend time reviewing the session beforehand to determine the questions which will keep the group focused on the main theme. Don't be too rigid or participants are likely to feel their concerns and thoughts are not valid. When you feel a question would lead the group too far from the main theme, offer to meet separately to discuss the issue.

If you are new at facilitating group discussion, you are likely to feel a bit uncomfortable with pauses. For instance, when you introduce a discussion question and no one immediately jumps in with a response, you might feel an irresistible urge to fill in the response yourself. If this is the case, try counting to ten silently before doing so to give participants a little time to consider their own response.

Below are some observations which may give you a more quality discussion time:

- Prepare in order to have a working knowledge of the material.
- Avoid asking questions containing their own answers, or yes/no questions.
- Moderate the discussion towards the main goal of the session.
- People learn best when they see relevance. Apply for personal meaning.

Priority of Prayer

In Romans 12:11-12 (NIV) Paul advises: “*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor; serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*” Throughout the Bible, prayer is emphasized as the key to the outpouring of God’s spirit in a given situation. As you lead your group through **FaithSearch** Discovery, plan to allow time in your own schedule for intercessory prayer by name for those in your group.

Application and Reflection

The goal of **FaithSearch** Discovery includes getting truth into the participant’s life. That’s why each chapter has application and reflection activities for each participant to complete. Make it part of your procedure at each session to invite participants to share what they have learned and what difference the study is making in their lives.

Spiritual Follow Up

It is essential that you anticipate following up your **FaithSearch** Discovery series with a nurture or discipling group. Anyone can participate, but all who responded in faith to follow Jesus Christ should certainly be encouraged to attend. **FaithSearch** recommends our *Growing Faith* publication, a discipleship manual which is the key to the experience of victory in the Christian life. It will deepen spiritual understanding and strengthen participants’ Christian walk. It is available by contacting **FaithSearch** International or going to the Web site, www.faithsearch.org. An excellent Leader’s Guide is also available for *Growing Faith*. It includes an orientation and training section, lesson plans, and answer key.

Be Encouraged

You are on your way! Don’t make it complicated. Just pray, prepare, and proclaim Him. Let God do the hard part.



DVD Overview (Discovery Numbers)

GOD

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| 1. Discovering that Everyone Has a Crisis of Purpose and Meaning | DVD 14:24 (min:sec) |
| 2. Discovering the Fingerprints of a Purpose-Giving God in History | DVD 15:41 |

BIBLE

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 3a. Discovering Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament (Part 1) | DVD 24:14 |
| 3b. Discovering Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament (Part 2) | DVD 16:24 |
| 4. Discovering Archaeological Evidence for the New Testament | DVD 13:34 |

JESUS

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 5. Discovering that Jesus Claimed to be God | DVD 14:15 |
| 6. Discovering Jesus' Miracles and Resurrection | DVD 19:04 |

FAITH

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 7. Discovering the KEY factor of a Valid Faith | DVD 9:50 |
| 8. Discovering the Life-Changing Dimensions of Faith | DVD 2:58 |

RESPONSE

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 9. Discovering the Stumbling Block of Faith | DVD 14:00 |
| 10. Discovering the "Ah-ha!" of Life | DVD 5:59 |

Entire Presentation: 2:30:28 (hr:min:sec)

Lesson Plans, Key Points, Questions and Answers for the *FaithSearch Discovery DVD*

Discovery ONE

Discovering that Everyone Has a Crisis of Purpose and Meaning

DVD Time: 14 minutes and 24 seconds

"Ah-ha!" Discovery One: Death is the ultimate and final conqueror if the finite world is all there is!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 1, pp. 15-20

Discovery Notes: Chapter 1, p. 3

Participant Guide: Chapter 1, pp. 3-4

Key Points

1. If nothing exists beyond chemicals, plants, animals, and people, then there is no answer to suffering and pain; we cannot know whether life has any ultimate purpose or meaning; and death wins.

In spite of negative impressions, nearly everyone longs for a faith that can explain *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 celestial “ball”—involved in a meaningless menagerie of activity from the cradle to the grave.



2. Only a God who is both infinite and personal can provide purpose and meaning to life.

Is the existence of God something you “just have to believe”—without reason or questioning? Is the idea of God just tradition? Although some might assume these are true, they’re not. If God were able to be seen, heard, and touched, then faith in God could be based on evidence. Is it conceivable that such a God exists? How would we know? In the next session we’ll explore the possibility of a visible and tangible God.

Questions and Answers

1. To which caricatures about faith mentioned in this chapter can you relate? How have caricatures and bad examples of religious people affected your attitudes and personal impressions of faith?

This will call for personal responses. Very often people with caricatures and “attitudes” about faith have gotten them from a single bad experience. They then generalize to thinking, “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 “throw out the baby with the bathwater.” One bad example of faith does not prove that the entire foundation of the Christian faith is false.

2. 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 question one? 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 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 which requires prayer to combat. This is why the book, *Surprised by Faith* (*SBF*) has been so effective. It provides the evidence to overcome ignorance and misunderstanding (chapters 1-5); and it exposes pride as the culprit in prejudice and denial (chapter 6). **IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE:** 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. Their view arises from a common mistake that it is a claim to good works or actions which makes a person good enough to be a Christian. Rather, the Bible says the Gospel of salvation is grace, a free gift, received through faith in Jesus Christ (see John 1:12; 3:16; Ephesians 2:8,9; 1 John 5:11ff).

3. 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 this country continue to indicate that over 75% of 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 keeping 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; a friend died in a war; has a mentally-challenged 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).

4. 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 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). This is different from fulfillment derived from finite power, position, or popularity. 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 Ernest Hemingway. We can only know true and ultimate value if there is an infinite and personal God who defines reality beyond 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 which annihilates us all.

5. 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 any certainty? The agnostic 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 answers to our origin and our destiny.

6. What are some common ways 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 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. 19-20). 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 seems not 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 American and European cultures.

7. Do you agree that the validity of the Christian faith can be explored rationally? Why or why not?

People will vary in their responses here. Many even in the church view faith as “blind” or accepted arbitrarily without reasons. It should be noted that we are not talking about “rationalism,” the view that the intellect is the only reality. The question is whether the Christian faith is consistent with reason and observable facts, that is, that it can be tested for legitimacy in a rational way. Consider the Apostle Paul’s comments about faith in 1 Corinthians 15:1-19 and Romans 10:8-17. His position in the former is clearly that if eyewitness testimony and the resurrection are not factual certainties, then our faith is in vain and worthless. In the latter passage he teaches that faith must have an object to be valid, and that faith is only as good as its object (you must know *about Jesus* before you can believe *in Him*). Discovery Seven will address this issue in greater detail (also chapter 4 in *SBF*). A final conclusion regarding this question should be delayed until then.

Discovery TWO

Proposing an Infinite Answer. Discovering the Fingerprints of a Purpose-Giving God in History

DVD Time: 15 minutes and 41 seconds

"Ah-ha!" Discovery Two: Christianity alone claims we can know that God exists because He came to earth physically as the man Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 1, pp. 20-31

Discovery Notes: Chapter 2, p. 4

Participant Guide: Chapter 2, pp. 5-7

Key Points

1. A purpose-giving God must be infinite and personal.

Only an infinite and personal God is capable of providing purpose and meaning to the finite. A finite god would itself be limited and dependent on something outside itself to give it ultimate purpose. An impersonal god would be incapable of verbally communicating purpose to humans or forming personal relationships with them. Only an infinite God—one who is complete and perfect—and a personal God—one with intellect, will, and emotion—is truly independent and capable of revealing ultimate purpose to the finite creation.

2. Christianity is the only religion claiming a God who is both infinite and personal, and is also able to be historically verified in the physical world.

Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism have a concept of god which is infinite, but not personal. Western religions, such as of Greek and Nordic peoples, have a concept of gods who are personal, but not infinite. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all claim a God who is both personal and infinite. However, Christianity is unique from the other two in claiming that the personal and infinite God became a human being and lived on earth.

3. Three conditions must be met to test the claim that Jesus is God.

The first condition that must be met to test the God hypothesis is the existence of trustworthy eyewitness records about Jesus. Are the New Testament writings—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—historically reliable? Second, there must be a method of proof which will lead us to a reasonable verdict about this hypothesis. A legal method would best fit our needs. Finally, the seeker after God must be honest and objective with the evidence. We cannot say, "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!"

Questions and Answers

1. Do you agree that God must be both infinite and personal in order to be adequate in solving our problem of the lack of ultimate purpose and meaning? Why or why not?

Answers here are personal views. Since questions 2-4 will help to clarify the position of *FaithSearch* on this subject, the intention here is to have enough discussion to make sure that everyone has an understanding of what is meant by the terms and the concept.

2. How many of the items in the list below are infinite?

Only one: Absolute God

How many are finite?

All the rest

| | | | |
|------------|------------|-------------|----------------|
| horse | automobile | tree | satellite |
| people | space | rock | absolute God |
| skyscraper | TV | electricity | relative value |



3. How many of the items in the list above are personal (with rational intellect, will and emotions)?

Two: People and God.

Do we know of any other personal beings in the universe besides these? [no]

Does this seem significant to you?

The origin of the personal nature of people (intellect, will, and emotion) is either from the impersonal chemicals by chance (undirected evolution), or we were created by an eternal and personal God in His image (designed with the same nature). A third alternative is to deny our personal nature entirely, i.e., we are only machines. The point being that the facts do not allow many choices about our origin.

4. How do your answers to the two questions above support the teaching in this chapter that God must have two essential characteristics (see Q. 1)? Explain.

The answers demonstrate that everything in the world is *finite* with only relative values and no ultimate purpose and meaning. Only if an *infinite* God exists can absolute values and ultimate purpose exist. For us to know whether God exists, and discover what He alone knows and understands, He must be personal so He can communicate these absolute values, and ultimate purpose and meaning to us who are personal beings in the world.

5. Muslims and Jews claim to know God through messages He gave to prophets, but Christians claim to know God because He walked the earth as a human. Why is the difference in these two claims significant when it comes to testing the claim that God exists?

This is the heart of how Christianity differs from all other religions (see *SBF*, pp. 24-26). The apostle John said that “*no one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only...has made him known.*” The claim that Jesus is the exclusive incarnation of God is testable because it took place in history. We can use legal evidence together with reason and logic to analyze the Christian claim that Jesus is God. If the conditions for a reasonable testing are satisfied (*SBF*, pp. 23-25) then faith in God can be reasonable through the following logic: 1) The New Testament writings can be demonstrated to be trustworthy first-century, historical records; 2) These records provide satisfactory eyewitness evidence of Jesus’ humanity (He ate, slept, grew tired, wept, etc.), and the truthfulness concerning His claim to deity (e.g., His resurrection from the dead); and 3) The existence of God is assured by His physical and personal appearance on the earth, and the final ascension of Jesus from earth to heaven.

6. Which can be used as evidence in a court of law: an eyewitness account or hearsay?

Eyewitness account

Why?

Because hearsay cannot be validated and the source is not available for cross-examination.

How is this important to the first condition needed to test legally the claim that Jesus is God?

We must be assured that the New Testament writings about Jesus are from eyewitness sources, not derived by hearsay in later generations.

Discovery THREE

Is the Bible True? Discovering Answers to Three Questions that Demonstrate Manuscript Integrity

DVD Time: Part 1 – 24 minutes and 14 seconds

DVD Time: Part 2 – 16 minutes and 24 seconds

“Ah-ha!” Discovery Three: The New Testament records in our Bible today are essentially unchanged from eyewitness accounts of Jesus!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 2, pp. 33-44

Discovery Notes: Chapter 3, p. 5

Participant Guide: Chapter 3, pp. 8-10

Key Points

1. There is a test for determining the integrity of ancient records. Determining the integrity of ancient records involves finding answers to at least three questions: 1) How *many* handwritten copies have been found? 2) How *early* are these handwritten copies? 3) How *accurately* were they copied?
2. The New Testament has far more integrity than all other ancient documents. The New Testament passes the integrity test with flying colors! 1) There are many more handwritten copies of the New Testament than any other ancient writing; 2) The earliest of these handwritten copies dates back to the eyewitness generation of Jesus; and 3) The New Testament we use today is not changed substantially from that written by eyewitnesses in the first century.

Questions and Answers

1. Discuss the significance of Luke’s statement in Luke 1:1-4 and Peter’s statement in 2 Peter 1:16 to the integrity of the New Testament text.

Luke said that he and others used eyewitnesses and eyewitness sources for the information about Jesus that they recorded. Peter claimed to be an eyewitness of Jesus. The conclusion would have to be that the records were compiled in the first century while the information could be verified.

2. How does the number of surviving handwritten copies of the New Testament compare with those of other well-known historical writings? (See p. 37 in *SBF*.) In what way does the large number of New Testament copies contribute to its integrity?

The number of manuscripts of the New Testament is extremely large compared to all other ancient writings. Refer to page 37 in *SBF* for some comparisons. The thousands of New Testament manuscripts are scholars’ delight. They provide a wealth of comparisons for restoring the original text. To illustrate with an extreme contrast, if there were only a single manuscript copy found for some ancient writing, it would be impossible to know what may have changed over the years of copying. It would be impossible to confirm its integrity. At the other extreme is the New Testament with thousands of manuscript copies, found in every century from the first all the way to the printing press in the fifteenth century. This evidence for integrity is the basis for statements like that of scholar Frederic Kenyon who said that “the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed” (see pp. 43-44 in *SBF* for quote and citation).

3. Did the information presented in this session surprise you? Explain.

Of course, the answers here will be personal. Most people today, both believers and unbelievers, express that they were not familiar with this evidence and were not even aware that this approach could be used to study the Bible. Some people who are familiar with this area of study, may say that our data is contrary to what they had heard before. It is the manuscript evidence that tends to destroy the skeptical foundation some people have. Generally, the reason most of us are so surprised is that it contradicts the popular notion that the Bible is mythological in origin and nature. It reverses what many of us have heard repeatedly in higher education, the press, and even in some churches and seminaries.



4. How well known do you think the evidence for the integrity of the New Testament is in society today?

This evidence is not well known at all, even in the Christian community. For several generations, Christians in this country have enjoyed a consensus that their message and the source of that message are true. As a result, there has been little training or attention given to apologetics, i.e., the reasons why the Christian claims are true. Until now, it had not seemed necessary. Now Christians find themselves needing to defend their views. But they do not know how, and many find their attempts at explaining their faith frustrating and ineffective. To communicate effectively with people in the technological and skeptical culture of today will require an upgrading of Christian understanding so they are able to explain to honest skeptics *why* Christianity is unique and true. Another explanation why the evidence is not well known may be the dependence that Christians have had upon personal experience alone to validate the truthfulness of their faith. Of course, a changed life is powerful evidence, but it is often viewed by those who are skeptical as quite subjective. Furthermore, the skeptic hears similar-sounding testimonies coming from cults and other religions—even from people in the sales meetings of some companies. To avoid confusion, the Christian today needs to combine objective, historical evidence with the power of personal testimony.

5. How does knowing that the New Testament has the best integrity of all ancient literature impact your interest to learn more about what it says?

This calls for a personal response and sharing. Often when we don't trust a source, we are reluctant to commit ourselves to it. This is true whether committing ourselves to another person or, in this case, the writings about Jesus. Our motivation to learn may be increased by knowing that what it says is about a real person who can make an actual difference in our lives. Furthermore, it is quite motivating to learn more about Jesus' teaching when we realize that we will stand accountable before Him someday, and live with Him forever!

Discovery FOUR

Is the Bible True? Discovering Archaeological Evidence that Confirms the New Testament is Historically Reliable

DVD Time: 13 minutes and 34 seconds

"Ah-ha!" Discovery Four: Archaeological discoveries have confirmed that the New Testament writings are historically reliable!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 2, pp. 44-57

Discovery Notes: Chapter 4, p. 6

Participant Guide: Chapter 4, pp. 11-13

Key Points

1. External evidence supports the historical reliability of the New Testament.

Over the years, archaeology has consistently supported the credibility of the New Testament. As more dirt has been overturned, more evidence has been found to show that people and places of the New Testament were real, and the events were described the way they really happened. Other ancient writings also confirm the accuracy of the New Testament.

2. Early manuscripts support the historical reliability of the New Testament.

Eyewitness accounts and very early dating of manuscripts provide additional confirmation that the New Testament is historically credible. Legends have never been shown to originate and be accepted as historically true in the same generation as the actual events. This is especially true when the records are tested with people living in the same area as the events themselves.

3. Knowing that the New Testament is historically reliable is the essential condition for testing the God hypothesis.

It can be demonstrated that the people of the New Testament, including Jesus, actually lived as the New Testament says they did. That does not necessarily prove that Jesus was the incarnation of God to earth. Some people claim that Jesus was simply a great moral teacher. The evidence that is considered in the next session will help us arrive at a conclusion concerning Jesus' identity.



Questions and Answers

1. Which evidence in this session, if any, was unexpected or came as a surprise to you? How did it affect your opinion or understanding of the New Testament?

This question calls for a personal response. Most of us are surprised that people and events in the Bible can be checked by archaeology at all. A number of specific archaeological finds are itemized in chapter 2 in *SBF*. Archaeological evidence usually elicits a greater response from us than manuscript evidence, perhaps because we understand it better. What we should understand from these evidences is that they validate that the Bible is writing about real people and real events, rather than myth.

2. Suppose you were a participant in an event that occurred twenty-five years ago. Can you remember the event sufficiently to detect a major fabrication of the event if it were presented to you verbally, or in print?

This is really an application of the issue raised in the last discovery. The Jews who lived in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus could very likely be able to detect a fabrication of His life. Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30. Peter began preaching details about Jesus within fifty days in Jerusalem (Acts 2:22-24); Paul wrote the first New Testament letters within seventeen years; and the first Gospel was penned within about twenty-five years. If they were fabricating stories about Jesus, such as His resurrection, surely the local Jews would be quick to object and point out that it never happened. Why? They were also eyewitnesses and knew better. Of course, this never happened which supports the truth of the accounts.

Would it be easier for you to detect the falsehood if it were an event to which you were an eyewitness; or if it were an event of which you had heard from your great-grandmother, which had occurred in her mother's lifetime? Why?

In a court of law, information gained by being passed from generation to generation is considered hearsay. It cannot be confirmed by eyewitness testimony. At least an eyewitness can be cross-examined to determine the consistency of their observations. If we were not eyewitnesses, we must accept the testimony on the basis of tradition. This is generally unacceptable as proof.

How does this weaken the allegation that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life are fabricated legends?

The early date of the New Testament writings supports the position that the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses or they consulted eyewitness sources. Even Luke (who was probably not an eyewitness of Jesus) says that his information was derived from eyewitness sources (see Luke 1:2). Since this is so, then these accounts can stand as legitimate legal evidence for Jesus. They are not hearsay. Prior to the early manuscript discoveries resulting from the last 100 years of archaeology, it was customary in critical writings to place the date of the New Testament composition in the second century, A.D. With so much time between Jesus and the New Testament accounts, it was said, it was not possible for eyewitnesses to have written them. Thus, it was alleged that the stories included considerable legendary material. The current dating of the New Testament writings within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses makes the allegation of their being a legendary account a weak one.

3. Based on the information in this session, how has archaeology supported the historical reliability of the New Testament?

Archaeology can provide convincing evidence for the Bible's historicity. It is a valuable revealer of ancient life and times, and confirms the underlying historicity of events, places, etc. For example, archaeology can provide answers to questions like: Is there a historic Jericho? Was it destroyed by invasion? Did the walls fall out? When did this occur? Likewise, archaeology can verify the historical existence of the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate; of the high priest Caiaphas; and of the Pool of Siloam.

4. Why is it so important for the argument of God's existence that the New Testament is a trustworthy, first-century, historical record?

It is the first condition for testing the God hypothesis (*SBF*, p. 27). Without the historically-valid New Testament records, the Christian claim that Jesus is God is reduced to experience and allegation, i.e., it has little advantage over the truth claims of other religions. Therefore the historical incarnation of God to earth would no longer be testable in a legal sense, and the way to know God with reasonable certainty would be gone.

5. How many of your friends and associates do you think are aware of the evidence for the New Testament that was presented in this session?

The responses here will be personal. Most of us will probably acknowledge that few of our friends know about this evidence.

Do you think this evidence would help them to be more open to the Christian faith?

This is a personal response again. None of us “knows it all.” If we each were to tell someone about one or two facts that we have learned, then many more would begin to be informed. We can make a difference. Furthermore, the book *Surprised by Faith* can be shared with others for a more thorough witness of the evidence. Finally, each of us could host this DVD in our own homes and invite our friends to hear the evidence. Eventually entire neighborhoods can be informed about the truth.

Discovery FIVE

Is Jesus Really God? Discovering that He Often Said So!

DVD Time: 14 minutes and 15 seconds

“Ah-ha!” Discovery Five: Eyewitnesses testified that Jesus claimed to be God!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 3, pp. 59-65

Discovery Notes: Chapter 5, p. 7

Participant Guide: Chapter 5, pp. 14-16

Key Points

1. Jesus claimed to be God.

The New Testament cites many occasions on which Jesus claimed to be God. Responses of those who heard Jesus firsthand reinforce the fact that his claims about Himself were extraordinary. People around Him were clearly astonished. Some even considered His claims blasphemous and determined that He should be put to death.

2. Jesus claimed to be able to do what only God could do.

The fact that Jesus did indeed believe He was God is backed up by His claims that He could do things that only God could do—such as forgive sins and raise the dead. In our day people would be prime candidates for psychiatric care if they said the kind of things that Jesus said.

3. Jesus backed up His claims.

Jesus demonstrated His authority to forgive sins and to remove the consequences of them. He chose to do this by healing a paralyzed man who the Jewish people believed was afflicted because of sin. If He could remove the consequence of sin, they reasoned, He must have removed the sin that caused it. The Jews who witnessed this event responded with amazement and in praise of God.

Questions and Answers

1. Do you agree that whether or not Jesus actually was God is the most significant issue of Christianity’s validity? Why or why not?

There are several reasons why this is true. From the perspective of our thesis in this study, it is critical because Jesus is our historical contact with an otherwise invisible God (review *SBF*, pp. 20-22, 26-27). Because of Jesus’ incarnation, Christianity’s claim for God’s existence becomes testable using historical evidence. This separates Christianity from all other religious truth claims about the existence of God. Some Christian people object though, stating that they do not need all this evidence and reason complicating their faith. They pride themselves that theirs is a simple faith based on the inner testimony of assurance by the Holy Spirit. Certainly the testimony of the Holy Spirit within is a valid claim, but we ought to be concerned with our effectiveness in communicating the truth of the Gospel message to those who are honest skeptics in our contemporary, post-modern society. As long as the people to whom we share our faith do not have any objections, we may be okay in expressing only

the “what” of the Gospel. What if the honest skeptic says they have trouble believing the Bible, or that they doubt Jesus is God? To answer their objections we must be prepared to tell them *why* it is true. Unfortunately, those of us who don’t feel that “why” explanations are necessary, often walk away from a person with honest objections, concluding that they have a hardened heart and are unwilling to accept the truth.

2. Jesus made claims like “I am not of this world” and “I give eternal life.” Imagine yourself making similar claims to your friends and family. Describe how you think they would respond. Do you agree that His statements are not what you expect “normal” human beings to say?

If we were actually to do what the question suggests, it would give us an experiential appreciation of the extreme nature of what Jesus said. Your family would likely either laugh or cry. They would assume you were either joking or had lost your mind! Indeed, if much of what Jesus said would come out of our mouths, we would be considered as prime candidates to be locked up or given psychological treatment. Albert Schweitzer was so overwhelmed by the extraordinary statements of Jesus that he addressed his M.D. dissertation at Strasbourg in France to how Jesus could make such claims and still be considered sane.

3. As illustrated in this session, Jesus made several statements claiming deity. How did the reactions of those who heard Jesus reinforce that He actually was claiming to be God (see John 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:30-31)?

As recorded in John 5:17-18, the Jewish leadership was so incensed by Jesus’ statements that they felt justified in seeking His death. The only basis in the law for this would be blasphemy, that is, Jesus’ claim to be equal with God. That must be what they understood Jesus to be saying. Likewise, their reaction in John 8:59 was to stone Him to death because He claimed the name of God for Himself, that is, “I AM.” Again, they spoke the same language and shared the same culture—they should know what He said and what it meant. Similarly, their reaction to Jesus’ statement in John 10:30 was to stone Him to death because of blasphemy: “...You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God” (v. 33). Clearly, the reactions of Jesus’ own contemporaries reinforce the position that He really was claiming to be God.

Why is it reasonable to conclude that Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah was also a claim to be Divine? (Read endnote number four on page 153 of SBF).

Jesus demonstrated His familiarity with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah when He identified Himself with the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-2 (recorded in Luke 4:18-19). This means He also knew that the “glory” of Galilee and the “great light” they would see was none other than the child who would be born there (Isaiah 9:1-2, 6). And this child would bear the names “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father” (v. 6). During Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin, they asked whether He was the Christ (Messiah). He not only acknowledged that to be true, but He went beyond and quoted a prophetic passage from Daniel regarding the “Son of Man” (Luke 22:66-69). The Sanhedrin understood this to be a claim to be God as indicated in their question, “Are you the Son of God, then?” Jesus replied, “Yes, I am.” Clearly, Jesus connected His claim to be the Messiah with His claim to be Divine.

5. How did the information in this session impact your understanding of who Jesus is?

This calls for a personal response and will vary within the group. Hopefully, those of us who were uninformed about what Jesus claimed, or had misconceptions about His statements, will consider changing our attitude and response toward Jesus and the Christian faith.

6. Share the following passages of Scripture for further evidence of Jesus’ claim to be God.

Psalm 49:7 with Mark 10:45

Jesus claimed that He gave His life as a ransom for sin, but God says in the Psalm that no man can redeem the life of another or ransom them. Jesus must be claiming to be more than a man.

Matthew 28:18

“All authority” includes everything. No man could say this and be considered sane.

Luke 4:8 with John 9:38, Matthew 14:33 and 28:17

Jesus cited Scripture stating that we must worship only the Lord your God—and then in His ministry accepted worship several times. This is incredible hypocrisy, or else He meant us to understand that He is God.

Luke 5:20,21

Jesus put Himself in God's place to forgive sin which was between a man and his God only. The man did nothing to Jesus; he may not have even known Him. What did Jesus have to forgive him for? Nothing, unless Jesus was God.

John 5:17,18; 10:30

God established the Sabbath as a day of rest. Jesus claimed authority over the Sabbath and redefined its meaning. By doing so He was claiming the authority of God and being equal with God.

John 8:53-59

Jesus claimed the Holy name of God (I AM) for Himself and He claimed to be pre-existent as well. Only as God could He claim this.

John 10:27,28

Jesus claimed He could give and guarantee eternal life to His followers. Only God would have such knowledge, power, and authority.

Discovery SIX

Revealing the Truth about Jesus. Discovering that Jesus' Miracles and Resurrection Substantiate His Claim to be God

DVD Time: 19 minutes and 04 seconds

"Ah-ha!" Discovery Six: The compelling evidence of Jesus miracles and resurrection from the dead confirmed His claim to be God!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 3, pp. 65-79

Discovery Notes: Chapter 6, p. 8

Participant Guide: Chapter 6, pp. 17-19

Key Points

1. Jesus backed His claims to be God with miraculous feats.

Jesus claimed to have all authority in heaven and earth—and demonstrated it in His ministry. According to eyewitnesses, He demonstrated authority over the spirit world by casting out demons, over physical death by raising people from the dead, and over natural laws by subduing storms. As illustrated in the last session, He also demonstrated authority over the moral realm by forgiving sin and its consequences.

2. The evidence shows that Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic.

Jesus either is God or He isn't. If He lied about being God, He was the greatest liar that ever lived as measured by the number of people who have been deceived. Liars, however, do not willingly become martyrs. Jesus died for His claim. Besides, His character throughout the historical accounts supports His being a person of the highest virtue and integrity. It's inconceivable that Jesus could sustain a committed following on such flimsy fabrication. On the other hand, if Jesus really thought He was God, but wasn't, He'd have to be severely mentally deluded. Yet He manifests no symptoms of psychiatric disorders—rather that of wonderful mental health.

3. Evidence for Jesus' resurrection is compelling.

The evidence affirms the physical resurrection of Jesus. No one has ever been able to disprove that the tomb of Jesus was empty three days after His death. Hundreds of eyewitnesses testified that they saw Him alive after His death. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the reality of the resurrection is the transformation of the disciples. Immediately following Jesus' death, they were afraid and went into hiding. After seeing Jesus alive, they boldly proclaimed their belief that He is God—even being willing to die for their conviction.

Questions and Answers

1. What are some positive character traits we look for in others, and in ourselves?

Perhaps the fruit of the Spirit would be a good place to start here: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Other traits that some may add are a sense of humor, tolerance, honesty, loyalty, etc.

Would integrity and trustworthiness be among them?

Most would agree that these are nearly universally desirable.

How do we know when these are present?

Usually we demonstrate them in our life action. As people get to know us, they find out what character traits we actually have. In other words, people really know us by our *walk*, not just our talk.

How do these observations relate to this session about Jesus' ministry?

The longer people got to know Jesus, the more they became convinced He was who He claimed to be. His divine qualities were evident in His walk.

2. Suppose you were told of a spectacular account of someone who was healed of terminal cancer, but you had not witnessed it yourself. On what basis or for what reasons might you accept the credibility of the account—that it really happened?

Since it is a historical event that is not repeatable, we would have to use the legal method of persuasion. This consists of examining all forms of evidence to see if it convinces us beyond a reasonable doubt that the healing actually took place. The evidence will consist of weighing the credibility of the witnesses, as in question one above. You would gather x-rays, lab tests, and other evidence to determine whether there was any cancer there before. You would cross-examine the attending physicians and ask for their medical judgment that the patient is now cancer free. You may even look for precedents of such healing and interview others who claim a supernatural healing as well. Whatever else you may pursue, eventually you will have to come up with a verdict that represents the most reasonable conclusion to the matter. This same process is also involved in determining a verdict about who Jesus is.

3. Eyewitnesses to Jesus reported that He had authority over demons, death, sickness, and nature; and that He could forgive and remove the consequences of sin. Why are these statements important for determining His identity?

Jesus' claims to be God are hollow without the actions backing them up. Repeatedly, Jesus referred to His miracles as evidence for who He was (John 5:36; 10:25, 37-38; 14:11; Matthew 11:1-6, 20-24). Even the apostle John includes miracles ("signs") in his Gospel account as evidence for the reader to believe in Jesus (John 20:30-31). Bernard Ramm (*Protestant Christian Evidences*, [Chicago: Moody Press, 1953], p. 142) states a relevant point here: "Miracles are believed in non-Christian religions because the religion is already believed, but in biblical religion miracles are part of the means of establishing the true religion." If Jesus is truly One (equal) with the Father, there could be nothing over which he did not have authority, including the demons (spirit realm), death (eternal realm), sin (moral realm), and nature (physical realm). That is, in fact, what He demonstrated in His ministry.

4. Many of Jesus' contemporaries were skeptical about His claims to be God, but eventually moved from unbelief to faith. Using your discussion in the previous questions and the biblical passages below, discuss the role of evidence and reason as a basis for faith in Jesus.

Thomas (John 20:24-28)—Changed from skepticism to faith when he saw the evidence of visible nail marks in Jesus' hands, and the wound in His side. Saul, who became the apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-20)—Changed from skepticism to faith when he saw the evidence of Jesus' physical appearance to Him on the Damascus Road. Many of Jesus' contemporaries changed their minds when confronted with the evidence (see John 11: 45-48). That evidence was in the form of Jesus' claims and His actions (miracles). However, His resurrection was the critical and unique evidence that Jesus is who He claimed Himself to be. The title, "Lord" (translates the Hebrew for "God" in the Old Testament) became the most common title of Jesus only after the resurrection.

What does this suggest about the nature of faith?

This question anticipates the discussion of faith in the next “Ah-ha!” Discovery. The definition of faith given there will contend that faith requires an object in which to place one’s trust. To trust that object requires knowledge of the credibility of that object. The nature of faith referred to in this question is that it is based on evidence or knowledge concerning Jesus. The evidence we have covered in this Discovery gives people a reasonable basis on which to trust Jesus as the object of their faith.

- 5. What were the reactions of the people of Jesus’ day to His miracles? (See Luke 7:16; 8:25; 8:33-37; John 6:14-15; 9:30-33; 11:43-45.) What do their reactions tell you about the frequency of miracles in their experience? Do the people ever connect the ability of Jesus to do miracles with the idea that He must be God?**

When Jesus raised the young man at Nain from the dead (Luke 7:11-16), the text says that “fear gripped them all” and they immediately attributed this to God. It seems obvious this was a unique experience for them. In Luke 8:25 we find the disciples wondering who Jesus could possibly be since He has power to control nature itself. Those people who witnessed Jesus exorcise demonic spirits from a man to make him well (Luke 8:26-39) became frightened (v. 35). When Jesus fed 5,000 families with five barley loaves and two fish (John 6:5-14) they immediately identified Him as the “Prophet who is to come into the world” (v. 14). The fact that Jesus healed a man born blind (John 9:1-12) was seen as evidence that He was from God (v. 33). Finally, Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-45) convinced many of the Jewish religious leaders to turn and follow Him in faith (v. 45). In all these cases the miracles were responded to as evidence that Jesus was from God or was God. They were so unique in their experience that there was no mistaking their significance of authenticating Jesus. Ultimately it was the miracle of His own resurrection and subsequent appearances for forty days that became overwhelming evidence for His deity.

- 6. Based on the evidence of Jesus’ actions presented in this Discovery, can you think of other options that could be attributed to Jesus other than the three listed (liar, lunatic, or Lord)? If so, explain and discuss.**

The most common additional answer that someone may offer is that Jesus is a legend. Of course, the person will not usually call it that. Typically, they think that the stories of Jesus are myths resulting from oral tradition or embellishments the church added to the records later (see question 2 in Discovery 4 for a response to this view). Some may also suggest that Jesus was only a prophet. Of course the answer to this is that Jesus never claimed to be only a prophet, but God. If He were only a prophet, He would be stoned to death because He claimed credit rather than attributing it to God. Otherwise, there is usually not much argument with the logic here. The options given here are based on evidence and arrived at by logical deduction. If we do have another idea, we need to ask what evidence there is to support that view.

Discovery SEVEN

What Makes Faith Valid? Discovering the Teaching of the Bible on this Often-Misunderstood Subject

DVD Time: 9 minutes and 50 seconds

“Ah-ha!” Discovery Seven: Christian faith is valid because its object, Jesus Christ, is certain!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 4, pp. 81-94

Discovery Notes: Chapter 7, p. 92

Participant Guide: Chapter 7, pp. 20-22

Key Points

1. Impressions of faith in society are often based on caricatures and stereotypes.

As indicated in the first session, many people base their impressions of faith on caricatures of faith, not the real thing. They then generalize that all people who say they have faith are unreliable, fanatical, or unreasonable.

2. The Bible identifies the principles of personal faith.

According to the Bible, faith has three components: 1) Knowledge; 2) Will; and 3) Response. In order for faith to be valid, there must be **knowledge** of a dependable object. Then the **will** must be in agreement *with* the object. Finally, genuine faith requires a **response** or commitment *to* the object.

3. True biblical faith includes a miraculous component.

The Bible describes a miraculous component of faith, referred to interchangeably as the gift of the Holy Spirit and new life from above. The Bible says this new life comes by being born of the Spirit or by receiving the Spirit (see John 7:37-39).

Questions and Answers

1. Having learned about the three components of faith, discuss how a person's commitment to become a Christian can be considered rational (based on an informed choice).

We will need to understand that evidence and reason are not the same as faith. According to the apostle Paul (Romans 10:13-17) Christian faith cannot even start without knowledge of its object Jesus Christ. We must use our mind and interact with the evidence to determine if Jesus is a worthy object of our faith. We also must determine why we should believe in Jesus instead of other religions and religious leaders. The fact that Jesus came into history means that we can analyze and test the legitimacy of His claim to be God. On that rational foundation, faith is not blind, nor is it an irrational leap into the dark. Rather, it is an informed choice. (See question 3 below for related information.)

2. Identify some of the criteria you would normally use to determine whether or not something is trustworthy? Then list some of the evidence supporting the worthiness of the Christian faith. How does this evidence compare to what you have relied on to respond to other situations that involved trust?

The basis on which we choose the objects of our trust may certainly vary. None of us wants to be accused of believing in something that has clearly been shown to be foolishness. Therefore, objects of faith must be credible as demonstrated by some set of reasonable criteria such as consistency. That is why we spent so much time in this study establishing that Jesus was credible in His claims. That will determine the legitimacy of our faith in Him, not whether we are emotionally sincere. The list of evidence supporting the Christian faith will include factors like the credibility of the eyewitness Gospel sources and the extent of archaeological confirmation of historical accounts. These are objective factors and are of the same nature as factors we rely on for most any situations calling for trust.

3. *FaithSearch* demonstrates that the Christian faith is reasonable. Suppose a friend said to you, "If I had reasons, I wouldn't need faith." How would you answer?

He had missed an important point. Evidence and reason are needed to discern the difference or legitimacy of various objects that compete for our commitment. Why trust Jesus rather than Mohammed, Buddha, or Joseph Smith? Without apologetic support, this choice becomes arbitrary. John W. Montgomery in *Faith Founded on Fact* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1978, p. 40) is clear on this point: "Evidently, what is necessary for effective Christian witness in a pluralistic world is an objective apologetic—a 'reason for the hope that is in you'—that will give the non-Christian clear ground for experientially trying the Christian faith before all other options. Absolute proof of the truth of Christ's claims is available only in personal relationship with Him; but contemporary man has every right to expect us to offer solid reasons for making such a total commitment. The apologetic task is justified not as a rational substitute for faith, but as a ground for faith; not as a replacement for the Spirit's working, but as a means by which the objective truth of God's Word can be made clear..." (1 Peter 3:15; John 16:8). Without this perspective, the faith of our friend could be just sentimentalism, sincerity, or even bias. It is the faith he/she grew up with (tradition) or accepts on the basis of someone else's authority. In contrast, evidence can establish a faith that is validated by truth and is personally owned.

4. Universalism teaches that all people are saved and God will accept them into heaven regardless of their response to Him. How does this undermine the significance of each person's free will? If Universalism were true, discuss how that would impact the definition of faith developed in this session?

If personal choice is a factor in having genuine biblical faith, then saving faith is limited to those who respond to Jesus' call to follow Him. Not responding is a "no" response. The point should be made that if God were to include everyone in heaven, whether they have chosen to trust Jesus Christ or not, then the significance of

humankind as a free agent is eroded. Our choices would not matter to God. As the Bible teaches, the choices we make are so important that they can actually impact our eternal destiny. Of course, the definition of faith as a “commitment-making process” would also be eliminated.

5. Which of the three components of faith is most often neglected by religious people? Why do you think this is true?

The third component (response) is often omitted. We think that if we “know” and “agree” with truth, then that is the end of the matter. Stopping after being “willing” in the faith triangle can be just good intentions. The Word of God insists that you only *know* something if you also *do* it (or obey it) (see James 1:22; Mt. 7:21; 21:28-31). The omission of this third component is also part of the basis for the accusation that Christians are hypocrites. When Christians do not walk the talk, they are guilty of false faith. The reason for this failure is that the disciplined life of obedience is a lot harder, is easily ignored, and takes years for consistent maturity.

6. Does including the third component (response) in the definition of faith support the unbiblical teaching that good works are necessary so you can earn heaven? Try to make a case for a “no” answer to this question.

The critical issue here is how to come into a saving relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, “knowledge” is concerning Jesus; “will” is concerning a conviction to acknowledge personal sin and Jesus as Savior; and “response” is concerning a prayer of commitment and following Him. Some people find it simpler to combine will and response to equal following Jesus. People often conveniently equate faith with intellectual assent without any thought of a changed life of obedience. Jesus said, “Follow Me,” which certainly calls for a response to His person and teachings. This is what James 2:14ff is addressing as well. There is no thought here that good works are added to faith in order to be acceptable to God. Rather, one’s response is a product of “knowledge” and “will,” and qualifies them as genuine works of the Holy Spirit within. Another difference from good works is in the sequence of the three steps: “Response” cannot be considered first because it puts the focus upon us, and our merit before God. When it follows the other two components of the faith triangle, the focus is upon Jesus Christ (initial salvation) or the Word of God (spiritual growth process). The “response” becomes the expected action derived from a proper understanding of Jesus and His Word. The three components apply to Christian growth as well. For example, once we have trusted Jesus Christ, the three components are applied to spiritual growth. We may read that we are to forgive one another (Colossians 3:13). This is “knowledge” concerning God’s Word. We must decide (“will”) if we agree with God and then do it (“response”). We are to set our minds on things that are true, pure, excellent, etc. (Philippians 4:8 = “knowledge”). Unless we choose that (“will”) and act upon it in practice (“response”) it is not a step of faith. Faith growth occurs as we study the Word of God and obey it. Thus, our faith potential is in proportion to our *knowledge* of the Word of God. Our faith walk is in proportion to our *obedience* to the Word of God. It is not biblical faith until it is true in our lives! Of course, it is the power of the Holy Spirit within us that makes spiritual growth possible at all.

7. Faith is identified in the SBF text as a “commitment-making process,” that is, involving knowing, willing and responding. Think through this as you apply it to starting a fast-food restaurant.

What would you do first to determine whether the restaurant is a good idea?

You would conduct market research on the eating preferences of people in the area, the number of competing businesses already operating, availability of a building site and financing, etc.—gather the facts to get the knowledge you need for an informed decision.

What must you do next to get started on the project?

Based on the knowledge from the market research, you must choose whether or not to go forward with the restaurant.

What is the last step in the process of getting a fast-food restaurant open?

To have a business you must respond by doing what is appropriate to the choice that has been made, for example, building, hiring, contracting for services and food, etc.

Do you think there are parallels to establishing your faith in Jesus Christ?

Yes, the marketing research is equivalent to the “knowledge concerning Jesus” component of the faith triangle. When people got acquainted with Him, He called them to follow Him. To do this, we must be willing to make an

affirmative choice. We then respond to confess faith in Him as Savior and to obey Him as Lord. This is a spiritual commitment-making process somewhat comparable to the steps of starting a business, building a house, or changing jobs.

Discovery EIGHT

A Miracle of New Life from Above. Discovering the Life-Changing Dimensions of Faith

DVD Time: 2 minutes and 58 seconds

"Ah-ha!" Discovery Eight: Becoming a Christian is a miracle of new life from the Holy Spirit resulting in a new relationship, freedom and hope!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 8, pp. 94-102

Discovery Notes: Chapter 8, p. 10

Participant Guide: Chapter 8, pp. 23-26

Key Points

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

Being a Christian is more than subscribing to a certain set of religious beliefs. It is a NEW RELATIONSHIP which allows God's spirit to live in you, and confirms God's promise to return for you. Rather than being based on a set of rules, it brings NEW FREEDOM. As a Christian, you are saved by grace, not by works, and you are freed from the consequences of sin. Finally, you have a NEW HOPE—the assurance of eternal life in heaven.

2. There are objective realities to faith.

Although faith is subjective, the objective realities include the person of Jesus Christ and the observable results in a person's life. Both can be evaluated. For example, the objective reality of a changed life can be tested in two ways. The first test is to consider the number of people who claim the same result in their life. For instance, if millions of people say they have experienced inner peace, love, and joy after becoming Christians, it gives their faith credibility. The second test is to observe the behavior of those who claim to be Christians. Is their life more "Christ-like" than it was before they became Christians? If so, it helps confirm the power of faith to transform lives.

Questions and Answers

1. Three life-changing dimensions of the Christian faith were identified in this session. What are they?

- A new relationship (Holy Spirit within)
- A new freedom (forgiveness by grace and power over sin)
- A new hope (assurance of eternal life in heaven)

Discuss how these life-changing dimensions about becoming a Christian are the same and different from your previous understanding. How do you respond to them: excited? skeptical? accepting?

The question is asking for your own 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 that 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 that can open the possibility of experiencing these positive life changes.

2. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would indwell all who believe and follow Him (John 7:37-39). Discuss this life-changing truth as you respond to the following questions.

What is the miracle that God does in us? (John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:3, 23)

The miracle of spiritual regeneration or new life from above.



What results when the Holy Spirit comes into our life? (John 1:12,13; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

We are declared to be the children of God because we have been conceived with new life by the Spirit of God.

Why is a miracle 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. We need to be redeemed from our bondage to sin and death and adopted into the family of God. This can't be done by reforming our own lives but requires a supernatural work of God (Titus 3:4-6).

How does this teaching prevent anyone from claiming that they are a Christian and going to heaven because they have tried to live a good life? (Ephesians 2:8,9)

No one is saved because they believe that God exists or by doing good deeds. We are saved by the confession that Jesus Christ's death on the cross was for our personal sin, and His physical resurrection was a historical fact. Upon this confession, the Holy Spirit indwells us and creates the new life within as indicated above.

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. This is confirmed repeatedly in the New Testament, for example, 1 John 5:11-13 and Titus 3:4-7. See also Jesus' own challenge to the Jewish leaders that their belief in God (John 8:41) did not mean they "belong to God" or even "know Him" (John 8:47, 55). The importance of the truth in question two cannot be overemphasized, i.e., the need for spiritual regeneration or new life from above. If we only acknowledge the intellectual aspects of Christianity, we will miss the life-changing power of it. Becoming a Christian involves a miracle 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. We must not neglect the life-changing dimensions of faith. Perhaps we may feel that this subject is too strong a contrast with the scientific and historical approach taken earlier. Or we 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 that you study, or a consistent theory, or even a nice idea. Christianity works!

3. Is becoming a Christian more of a reformation, or a transformation? Discuss which image below is most appropriate to becoming a Christian:

- a. Remodeling an old house, or
- b. Metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly

Read the following passages from the Bible to help in determining your answer:

Romans 6:4

We have new life in Christ that is compared to being raised from the dead.

2 Corinthians 5:17

We are a new creation—old things are gone, new things have come.

Galatians 5:22-25; 6:15

We are a new creation and manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit within us, not the flesh which has been "crucified."

Colossians 3:1-17

We have "died" and Christ is our new life. We are to manifest the fruit of our new self which has been created after God's image.

Biblically, becoming a Christian is definitely a transformation, not a remodeling. Note the passages above. 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 be saved. Christianity teaches that people must acknowledge their sin and die to self's ability to earn God's approval. Obviously the first message is more appealing. The best that other religions can promise, however, 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).

Discovery NINE

How Can I Know God? Discovering the Stumbling Block Along the Path to Faith

DVD Time: 14 minutes and 0 seconds

"Ah-ha!" Discovery Nine: Pride keeps more people from faith and forgiveness in Jesus Christ than any other factor!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 6, pp. 119-126

Discovery Notes: Chapter 9, p. 11

Participant Guide: Chapter 9, pp. 27-29

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 that keeps us from a relationship with God. A refusal to say "I'm sorry" to God about our sins and 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 the Christian faith involves moving from "pro" status to "sinner" status, that is, recognizing our pride of self-sufficiency and acknowledging our sinful nature which separates us from a holy God. When spiritual brokenness occurs in a person's life, our perspective also changes from viewing Jesus as only a human teacher to a commitment to Him as the Lord of our life.

3. The people whom God used in the Bible 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).

Questions and Answers

1. According to this session, why is a faith response to Jesus Christ such a difficult thing? Asked another way, what is the "bottom line" that keeps us from knowing God? Do you agree that refusing to acknowledge sin is a stumbling block to experiencing a relationship with God? Explain.

For the difficulty, see the answers to the questions below as well. It involves admitting 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—I am captain of my own ship; I report to no one; and I can make it alone. It is 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 must become totally dependent on God to take away my sin (1 Peter 3:18). This is the moral issue of question three and is 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. 126). The discussion of questions three and four partially address this "bottom line" concept. The path to genuine faith involves a change from pride to humility. We can see this throughout the Bible. Read the following Bible passages to verify this for yourself: 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.

2. Can you relate to any aspects of Moses' life journey from being the palace pro to becoming a lowly sheep herder? Share and discuss.

This is a personal response. We need to think about times in our life when we 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 failing marriage, lost job, or tragic accident.

3. Identify and discuss some examples of wrongful pride you have observed or heard about. Would you agree that pride is essentially competitive? Based on these examples, do you think of pride as an intellectual issue or more of a spiritual matter?

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 about questionable activities. It is not just the highly visible 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 was right when he 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 so 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. 94-98, 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. Many of us will indicate that we have intellectual reasons that make us hesitant to become a Christian. When these are honest, they should be researched and discussed openly. Even when the intellectual factors are addressed and satisfied, however, a moral factor will often remain. This moral factor entails agreeing with God concerning my sin which separates me from Him, and that I am unable to be righteous other than through faith in Jesus Christ who died in my place. Because this is a threat to a 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 my personal sin is not acknowledged, neither will I 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 we will respond in faith to Jesus.

4. Two key questions were identified in this session: “Who am I?” and “God, who are You?” Discuss why these are important questions people must ask and honestly answer along the path to faith. Share where you stand in relation to these questions.

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 even to consider a response to the teaching in *FaithSearch* Discovery. If I see myself as the self-sufficient “pro” or someone who “knows better,” then the thought of spiritual brokenness will seem to be wimpy or a response for the weak. We will feel that it is for those who are not handling life very well, but since we are successful and climbing—why do we need it? From the perspective of the Christian faith, we are not being realistic. We are in denial about the big picture, including eternity. We are acting as if we are 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 that “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.

Read the following Bible passages and record what God says about the subject of pride. Discuss.

Proverbs 8:13

God calls pride an evil, and He hates it.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride is blind to reality and leads to error and personal destruction.

1 Samuel 2:3

God knows our speech and heart, and will judge pride.

Micah 6:8

God desires that we walk humbly with Him.



1 John 2:16

Boasting and pride are not of God, but of the evil world system.

Mark 7:21-23

The human heart is evil, which includes pride.

James 4:6

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

1 Peter 5:6

We are commanded to be humble before God.

Discovery TEN

Discovering the “Ah-ha!” of Life. Taking the First Step of a Faith Commitment to Follow Jesus

DVD Time: 5 minutes and 59 seconds

“Ah-ha!” Discovery Ten: I can experience a vital relationship with God and the assurance of life after death by a confession of faith in Jesus Christ through prayer!

Surprised by Faith: Chapter 6, pp. 126-138

Discovery Notes: Chapter 10, pp. 12

Participant Guide: Chapter 10, pp. 30-32

Key Points

1. Recognizing and acknowledging pride is the first step in applying the spiritual principle.

None of us can receive the gift of faith until we acknowledge our pride, admit our need for God, and move to a place of humility. According to C.S. Lewis, “Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...Now what you want to get clear is that pride is essentially competitive...it is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began...” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan], pp. 109, 111).

2. Humbling ourselves before God results in many spiritual changes.

The Bible promises that when we confess Jesus to be Savior and Lord we experience the forgiveness of our sins; we become children of God; we have peace with God and no longer fear judgment; and we are given assurance of eternal life.

3. The human will is disposed against commitment to God.

Jesus holds out the invitation to every person to accept the free gift of salvation which He provided us through His death and resurrection. However, our human will, because of sin’s effect, wants to remain independent and resists submission to God. Only the Holy Spirit can cause in us a desire for God and the conviction to say a prayer of commitment to Jesus Christ.

Questions and Answers

1. What if someone said, “Becoming a Christian is the easiest thing in the world.” What do you think they mean by that?

Salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). It needs only to be accepted. Review *SBF*, pp. 96-98, concerning God’s grace rather than our efforts. Becoming a Christian is easy because Jesus did the difficult or impossible part.

2. The Bible describes salvation as a gift from God. What does this tell you about receiving and retaining the assurance of eternal life—what is it dependent on?

Since my eternal life is not dependent on what I have done or accomplished, it must be based on what Jesus Christ has done on my behalf. The basis for my assurance then is completed and unchangeable (see *SBF*, pp. 132-33).



Since it is the power of God which has saved us by His grace, then it is the power of God which will sustain us in that salvation by His grace (see John 10, especially verses 25-29; also John 6:37, 39; Romans 8:28-39). Of course, we must realize that the true child of God does not look for ways to “cheat” or live carelessly because we now have “fire insurance” (Romans 6:1-7, 15 and 1 John 3:4-10). Rather, as true children of God, we are motivated to do good deeds because of our love for Him, and enabled to do so by the inner power of the Holy Spirit.

3. What is/was the “bottom line” in your life?

This may have variations for different people, but the focus for everyone should still revolve around recognizing our need for a Savior because we are separated from God by our sin. We should all share from our own unique experiences, but also should avoid leaving the impression that others who are honestly seeking God should be trying to duplicate the experiences they are hearing. First, this is because God’s approach to each of us is unique and custom made. We cannot point to the testimonial experiences of others as “normal” for everyone. Second, we should not go seeking to have someone else’s experience because the experience is not the goal, but rather the result of having reached the goal of restored relationship with God. Restored relationship with God is brought about by the confession of our sin and trusting Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. When this goal is reached, then the experience of knowing God happens in people’s consciousness—manifested uniquely by God in their lives but with similar spiritual insights and outcomes as others.

If you have already made a personal commitment to Christ, explain what brought you to that point and how it has changed your life.

This question and ones that follow are asking for each person to share where they are in their own faith journey. *FaithSearch* Discovery should have helped each person to understand and respond to Jesus Christ.

If it was a very recent commitment, explain how you expect it to make a difference in your life.

If you have not yet made a commitment to Christ, discuss what is holding you back.

The following Bible passages reinforce the Christian teaching that salvation is a gift. Discuss.

1 John 5:11-13

Eternal life is given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:8,9

Salvation is a gift from God, not a result of works.

Romans 3:20, 22-24

All have sinned. No one can save themselves with works. We are saved as a gift by God’s grace through Christ’s death.

Romans 6:23

Sin means death, but eternal life is a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ.

Titus 3:4-7

Salvation is not by deeds we do, but by the miracle of regeneration through God’s grace.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Salvation is the result of a new birth made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection and is by mercy alone, not works.