

RISKS

INITIATES INTEREST

CCC JOURNEY GROUP CURRICULUM

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The RISKS series of studies provides an exploration of what it means to be an authentic disciple of Jesus. These studies organize the characteristics of a disciple by the acrostic RISKS. A disciple:

Relies on God
Initiates interest in the Gospel
 Serves locally and globally
 Kingdom investor
 Shaped into Christ likeness

This "I" study sets out to equip and help motivate authentic disciples of Christ to be intentional about indiscriminately initiating interest in Jesus' Gospel, or good news, through their everyday lives. In order to have maximum impact in our spheres of influence, there are three primary, overarching activities to which we must commit:

- Be a prayerful observer of life around us. God is at work all around us all the time. We grow in awareness of this phenomenon through praying and watching, expecting, listening for and following His promptings.
- Intentionally develop reciprocal relationships with people who are far from God. We simply share our real lives, eat meals together, hang out, work with and get to know real people on deeper levels. As our lives reflects the life of Christ more and more, people will want what we have. Are you in vital relationships with people who are not yet Christians where there is both give and take?
- Be actively involved in spiritual conversations with people. If people are going to get to know who Jesus really is, we will have to break the sound barrier. We have to help them understand who Jesus by verbally telling them about Him.

Within the pages of this guide are tools, self-reflections, scripture studies and exercises to help equip you with five images around one central message. The five images are those of sower, witness, peacemaker, seeker and apologist. The one message is the Gospel, or 'good news,' which is simply this: Jesus has made the kingdom of God accessible and everyone is invited to be a part of it, the opportunity of a lifetime.



STUDY 1 / SOWER



Van Gogh, Vincent *Sower with Setting Sun*, c. 1888, Oil on canvas, 64 x 80.5 cm, Rijksmuseum Kruller-Mueller, Otterlo

What images of initiating interest in the Gospel do the scriptures themselves give us? Jesus is our best starting point. The opening pages of the Gospel of Mark race along at a blinding pace. Jesus is introduced, baptized and tempted in the wilderness. He calls His first disciples, casts out a demon, heals scores of people, preaches in Galilee and cleanses a leper - all of which takes place in chapter one. By chapter four, He's built a buzzing reputation. People are flocking to see Him and hear what He has to say.

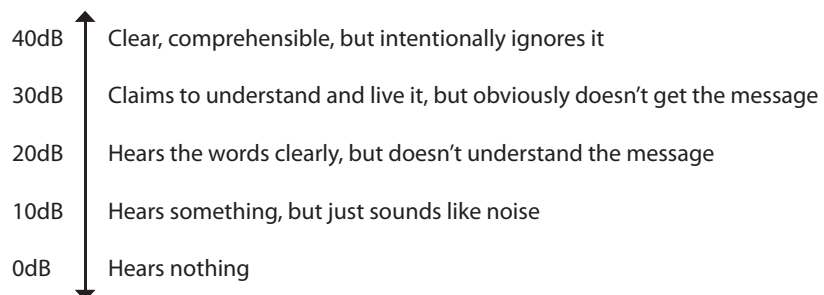
Jesus' first recorded sermon is an outstanding example of what it means to initiate interest in the Gospel. Unlike the Sermon on the Mount, His first sermon has a surprisingly simple message - one that's almost too easy to figure out. Notice how Jesus perfectly models what He is teaching about in the very process of telling this simple parable.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What struggles do people have in being able to hear what God is saying to them today?

Consider three or four people you know who don't yet know Jesus. These may be people far from God with whom you are in reciprocal relationships. Where would you place them on the Gospel Audibility Scale below? Write their initials along the arrow where you think they might best fit.

GOSPEL AUDIBILITY SCALE



Read Mark 4:1-9

1. If you were in Jesus' audience on this occasion and this was the first time you heard Him, what would you think of His teaching style? Do you think most people understood what He was trying to say about the kingdom? Why or why not?

New Testament scholar Gordon Fee writes the following about understanding parables:

"The best clues as to what the parables are is to be found in their function ... they do not serve to illustrate Jesus' prosaic teaching with picture words. Nor are they told to serve as vehicles for revealing truth – although they end up clearly doing that. Rather the story parables function as a means of calling forth a response on the part of the hearer. ... It is told to address and capture the hearers, to bring them up short about their own actions, or to cause them to respond in some way to Jesus and his ministry."

(How to Read the Bible for All its Worth)

2. Based only on what you see in this parable, what response do you think Jesus is trying to evoke by telling it?

3. Is the parable aimed at His audience in general or is it aimed at His disciples? Explain.

Read Mark 4:10-20.

4. Why do the disciples ask about the parables? What do you think they didn't understand?

5. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah in describing why He teaches in parables (v. 12). How is it that preaching the word creates "insiders" and "outsiders" to the secret of the kingdom?

6. According to Jesus' interpretation of His own parable, what is the main point about the kingdom He is making (vv. 14-20)?



7. Look back at the list of people you put on the Gospel Audibility Scale. What kind of soil does each represent and why? Pick one or two and share with the group.

8. In the parable, the sower scatters the seed indiscriminately, even on unlikely kinds of soil. What does this show us about the process of initiating interest in the Gospel with those around us today?

9. If a person is good soil, we simply need to be prepared to lead him or her to Jesus and help him or her grow as a disciple. The remainder of this study will help equip you to do just that. But what if they are not good soil? What does it look like for Christians to continue to sow the word in hard, rocky, weedy lives? Consider remaining prayerfully observant and cultivating real relationships in your discussion.

EXERCISE: THE 5X5 PRAYER CHALLENGE

Prayer is a powerful tool of cultivation, an essential part of initiating interest in the good news of Jesus through your life. Here is a tool to help you develop the habit of praying for people far from God who intersect your life.

Over the next five weeks, take up the 5x5 Prayer Challenge. Pray and expectantly watch for what God is doing in the lives of people who need to hear the Gospel. Plan to nurture this intentional habit of prayer and watchfulness throughout this "I" study. (See the leader's guide for more instructions.)

Can you identify ways you might be Jesus to each of these people over the next week and coming months? Perhaps you will discover ways to deepen your relationships with some of them as you go about developing this prayer habit. Consider how you can avoid thinking of them as a project.

Next time, come ready share with your group anything you notice God doing around you as you are more prayerful and looking for Him. Even if you don't notice anything in particular, keep praying. Trust God to honor your prayers, which line up with His desire: people far from Him would begin to respond to Him.



Prayer Challenge

5x5x5x5 *Five Minutes a Day *Five Days a Week
*Five Seeking Friends *Five Weeks

1. _____ • Peace -John 14:27
2. _____ • Presence -Matthew 28:20
3. _____ • Purpose -Matthew 6:33
4. _____ • Power -Colossians 1:13
5. _____ • People -Romans 10:11-15

INITIATES INTEREST



STUDY 2 – WITNESS: JOHN 9:1-41

DISCUSSION

Whether it's told at bedtime, around the campfire or the water cooler, everyone has a story and most want to tell one. Have someone share a quick story from this last week of something out of the ordinary that happened to them.



Stories are powerful. True or fictional, stories can move you to action or to tears. Romeo and Juliet's tragic tale of love and fighting families still causes theater-goers to weep hundreds of years after it was written. How can we harness the power of a great story in sharing the Gospel with others?

When we are in relationships with people who are far from God and they see the fruit of the Spirit or smell the aroma of Christ in us, we will find many opportunities to share our personal stories of faith. We can initiate and be ready to enter into spiritual conversations as we are prayerfully watching for opportunities. We want to cultivate an openness, a readiness to share what God is doing in our lives as we listen both to people's interest and to God for His promptings.

A second biblical image of initiating interest in the Gospel comes to us from John chapter 9. The blind man's story is the center of this passage. This is the image of a witness called to the stand to defend his experience before hardened skeptics. The blind man's simple story of his encounter with Jesus becomes his best defense when put on trial.

Read John 9.

- 1) What is the blind man's story? (v. 11)

- 2) How many times did he have to tell it? Why so many times?

- 3) What point is Jesus making by healing this man? What is Jesus revealing about himself and the kingdom (v. 3-5)?



4) The man (as well as his parents) are immediately “put on trial” by the Pharisees. They are unable to answer some of the questions put to them (v. 21, 25, 27). Does this make them ineffective witnesses? Why or why not? How can this be an encouragement to us when people seem unimpressed or even hostile to our faith in Jesus?

5) The blind man had a unique encounter with Jesus that left him changed. “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.” Anyone who has ever had an encounter with Jesus is changed. Sometimes the changes are dramatic, like the blind man’s, but sometimes they are only noticeable over time. If you could summarize the essence of your personal encounter with Jesus in just a couple sentences, how would you put it? Have each person in the group share.

6) How does Jesus take the restored blind man beyond his physical healing (v. 35-38)? What does this tell us about the connection between the physical and the spiritual in the lives of people we try to reach?

7) The blind man becomes a witness trapped between the saving grace of Jesus on the one hand and the hard-hearted skepticism of the Pharisees on the other. As a Christ follower, God puts your story on display before a watching world to make a point. What spiritual point does your story make as you tell and live it?

8) What is it like for you to share your faith story with others? What would make it easier for you and more comfortable for you to talk about what Christ has done for you?

9) When is it appropriate to tell your story? Is this a relevant question to consider?

10) If you have ever felt your own story of how Jesus has changed your life is uneventful or uninteresting, how does that affect your ability to share the Good News with others?

EXERCISE:

Take some time this week to write down your story. Describe your life before you met Jesus, changes you are aware that He has made in you and what your life is like since Jesus intersected it. Every believer is on a different journey with God and in process, so every story will be different. Keep it to two pages single spaced, and make Jesus’ work in you the central theme. If you feel comfortable, come ready to share your story with the group next time.

For tips in writing your story, ask your discussion leader as well as



make a visit to this website:

<http://www.guide.gospelcom.net/resources/testimony.php>.

STUDY 3 – PEACEMAKER

Start by having two or more group members share their stories from last time or, if everyone is comfortable with it, pair off or in groups of three and have everyone share their stories one at a time. Give constructive feedback to one another. Consider if the way you've told your story would be useful for people you are praying for from your 5x5 Prayer Challenge.

Have you ever felt the tension that can exist between two people you care about? You long for them to understand each other, and wish you could somehow represent the other's heart to each of them and help them be reconciled.

As those already in a relationship with God, we notice around us a tension that exists. Things are not great between God and someone we care about. We know God's heart by first-hand experience; He has made peace with us and brought us into His Kingdom. Isn't there a way we could represent God's heart to those we care about and help them understand and respond to His heart of love? But what if that tension turns on us?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Think international relations for a minute. What is an ambassador's job? What are the qualifications one must have to be an ambassador? Are there any privileges/risks inherent in this job? In what ways can an ambassador fail or succeed?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 – 6:2

1. Paul is defending his role as a minister of the Gospel against criticisms from certain members of the church at Corinth. Why does he begin his defense with statements about God as the judge of mankind (v.10-11)?

2. Some people are getting confused about Paul's motivation in ministry. What ultimately drives Paul (v. 14-16)?

How do people around you respond when you take initiative in conversations that get at their spiritual needs? Do they readily understand and accept your real motives? Why or why not?

3. Paul says the Corinthians (and therefore, we, too) are ambassadors (v. 20). What is our job description?



4. What is reconciliation?

5. What spiritually qualifies us for this job (See also 2 Corinthians 2:17, 3:6)?

6. What personal characteristics enhance our credibility as ambassadors for Christ?

7. What are the privileges and risks associated with being an ambassador/peacemaker for the Kingdom?

8. Paul concludes with a rather bold exhortation for his readers to be reconciled with God because it is such an urgent matter (v. 6:2). When we share the Gospel, how can we be more urgent about the need to respond without being manipulative?

EXERCISE:

As ambassadors/peacemakers, we need to both represent God's heart and invite responses to Him. Ultimately, we want reconciliation to happen, but sometimes we get hung up on fears and doubts which can inhibit our desire to maintain relationships with people who are far from God in the first place. What keeps us from whole-heartedly embracing this job of ambassador?

Take the following Road to the Final Four Fears challenge. Work through the bracket comparing each set of fears. If one hang up is more of an issue to you than the other, then that fear "advances" just like in a tournament bracket. You may identify with more than can be advanced through the bracket system. Mark all that you identify with. Then, find out your top four. Show your completed bracket to the group and talk about why these things keep you from initiating interest in the Gospel with people in your life.

To whom are you an ambassador? Look for opportunities to develop yourself in this role. Are there steps you can take personally to overcome some of your fears? Is there a Spiritual Intersections course coming up at CCC or a Seeker Small Group Training course that you or your whole journey group could sign up for? What are some ways you can begin to encourage one another to overcome the fears you have identified?

Continue to nurture the habit of praying for your 5 x 5 people from lesson one in this series. Pray also for your own motivation and development as an ambassador.



INSTRUCTIONS: Work through this tournament of fears until you find our "Final Four." Show your completed bracket to someone else and talk about why these things keep you from initiating interest in the Gospel.

THE ROAD TO THE FINAL FOUR FEARS

THEY'RE FINE - My unsaved friends seem to be doing just fine without God

TF

TECHNOLOGY IS KEY - I don't understand why someone couldn't just do that online somewhere.

TK

FEAR OF OFFENDING - I hesitate to share with lots of people because I know they'll get turned off.

F0

PEOPLE? - I am great with computers, not people.

P?

HARD-SELL - People don't want to be argued into things - it just seems to come down to that in the end.

HS

SWAGART SYNDROME - Whenever I start talking about God my voice morphs into a televangelist.

SS

PERSONALITY MISMATCH - I'd take more initiative, but some people just aren't my type.

PM

MADE-UP MIND - I've stopped trying to take initiative with some people because they've rejected it.

MM

MYSTERY CHRISTIAN - People around me don't even know I'm a Christian or what my faith means to me.

CM

NON-CHRISTIAN FRIEND? - I don't think there are many non-Christians who would consider me a friend.

NF

EQUIPMENT - I don't have the right Bible to do that.

E0

TOUGH QUESTIONS - People have questions I won't know how to answer. Doesn't that do more harm than good?

TQ

FASHION CHALLENGE - I'm afraid my wardrobe will turn people off to what I have to say.

FC

PERSECUTION - I'm afraid of what it will probably cost me in my workplace or with my career advancement

P

HELL - I'm afraid I would screw it up so bad they would wind up in Hell.

H

INCOMPATIBILITY - I could never see this person becoming a Christian because of life-style issues.

I

REPUTATION - I'm afraid of what others will think of me if I start talking openly about God.

RP

TRACT-A-PHOBIA - I have a hard time using those little booklets.

TR

OPERATOR'S LICENSE - I don't have a Bible degree, so I shouldn't officially evangelize.

OL

TIME - I can never seem to make time for them (and the opposite is true, too).

T

SWEATY PALMS - I get so nervous I can't be myself when talking about God.

SP

ME, AN EVANGELIST? - I'm really not gifted in evangelism, I'd rather point people to someone who is.

ME

ARM CHAIR EVANGELIST - I can spot bad examples of evangelism others do.

AE

DON'T KNOW - I just don't know how to bring it up or what to say.

DK

APATHY - In the final analysis, I struggle to care enough to take initiative.

A

FINISH-LINE FEAR - I can't seem to get to the point where I actually lead someone to cross the line.

FL

THEOLOGICAL COP-OUT - I'm a Calvinist. Evangelism is God's job.

TC

PAST FAILURES - I tried that once and it just went nowhere. I haven't really recovered.

PF

BEEN THERE - "I led my neighbor's kid to Christ six years ago. I've done my part!"

BT

REJECTION - It's pretty humiliating to be pushed out of someone's life because you tried to share your faith.

RJ

ESCHATOLOGY - I know I'll be asked about the eternal destiny of pets.

ES

INTEGRITY - I've got some significant struggles myself. How can I share the Gospel?

I

STUDY 4 – THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Have you ever noticed that when you study a subject it gives you greater excitement to share it with others? The more you discover, the more you want to pass on. A deep understanding gives us greater confidence and expertise in sharing what we know. By contrast, a shadowy grasp of something makes us tentative and indifferent.



Learning the depths of the Gospel message is like deep sea diving. Once you've gone down to the bottom, discovered what's there and come back to the surface, you can't wait to tell others about it.

We serve others we're trying to reach by delving into the heart of the message ourselves. We must learn the language of God's forgiveness first-hand before we can begin to convey it to others.

This study is meant to take us to the depths, so prepare to be stretched. If Bible study were like a meal, the book of Romans would be the best steak dinner you could imagine. If it were like a menu of desserts, Romans 5 is a luscious cheesecake with an exquisite berry topping. This week's discussion will be a feast on the Gospel message: peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When we step back from this amazing meal, we'll look at a simple communication tool called One Verse Evangelism that will help us summarize the Gospel message and communicate it to others.

GROUP DISCUSSION

How would your home-buying strategies compare if you were buying your dream-home, or if you were buying an investment house you want to fix up and sell for a profit?

Has it ever hit you that God paid way more than top-dollar for you when you were, to put it politely, quite a "fixer-upper"? How does it make you feel to know that by *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* standards, you are in reality a dream home choice for God? Romans 5 shows us what an unbelievable deal justification by faith in Jesus is. Knowing what God has done for us in Jesus is at the very heart of the Gospel and should give us a passion for sharing the message like nothing else. Begin your time in prayer and have someone invite God to open hearts and minds to His amazing love.





Read Romans 5:1-11

1. In the previous chapter, Abraham is mentioned as an example of someone who God found acceptable because of his faith. "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." In chapter 5, Paul talks about how this same stamp of approval from God is available to us today through belief in Jesus.

What does Paul mean by being justified through faith (vv. 1-2)?

2. List every result of being justified that you can identify in verses 1-5.

Would others, like your 5x5 people, be able to identify evidence of these in your life as they watch you? Discuss how these truths might evidence themselves in the life of a believer?

3. Why is suffering mentioned along with justification (v. 3)? How does Paul make a connection between rejoicing and suffering?

4. We are like a house that is in really poor shape on the day the purchase agreement is signed. God pays top dollar (Jesus) for us when we're far from being in "dream home" shape. What words and names for people does Paul use in verses 6-10 to describe our fallen condition?

Given this picture of what we're like before we're justified, what does this tell us about God's love for us?

Read Romans 5:12-17

5. Verses 12 – 17 comprise an extended contrast between sin and its consequences and God's gift of righteousness. How did sin get into our world and what has it led to?

6. If sin is so pervasive, why is this part of the message so awkward to bring up with people? Discuss strategies for talking with others about sin in a way that's honest and humble.

7. What is the gift? How is the gift the only perfect answer to the transgression?

EXERCISE:

What do we do with such deep and rich thoughts about God's love and salvation? There are at least two obvious applications:

1. Celebrating God's awesome grace is probably the first and most obvious response. Take some time to worship God in prayer as a small group. Thank Him for His love. Keep the passage before you as you take a few minutes to glance back through it and spontaneously speak out phrases of gratitude and worship.

2. Take the One Verse Evangelism Challenge. Your fearless leader will model what this is about and give you the resources to take with you. Romans 6:23 is a great single verse summary of Romans chapters 5 and 6. One Verse Evangelism is a bridge illustration tool for sharing the gospel message with others. Practice it with a flip chart like Pastor Ashton loves to use and get visual in your communication of the Gospel. See if anyone can learn it and share it with the group next week.

SEE THIS WEBSITE:

<http://www.navigators.org/us/resources/illustrations/items/One%20Verse%20Evangelism>.



STUDY 5 - SEEKER

Ask most people in highly engaged, evangelistic churches in America today, "What is a Seeker?" and you'll hear responses like: "lost people," "non-Christians," "not-yet Christians," "the un-churched," "people apart from God," "people not there yet, but searching," etc.

Yet, biblically speaking, somehow those identities don't fully fit. Sin is so awful that, if left to ourselves in our separation from God, we don't instinctively seek God. Consider passages like these:



Frank Wesley *The Forgiving Father*, c.1998, Woodblock print, 117 x 52 cm, Center for South Asian Studies at University of Virginia online gallery

"The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." Psalm 14:2-3

"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, Here am I, here am I. All day long I have held my hands to an obstinate people, pursuing their own imaginations." Isaiah 65:1-2

People aren't seekers. God is. He's been a seeker right from the start. He was the first person in scripture to lose something and have to go looking for it. Adam and Eve are hiders not seekers in Genesis chapter 3. It is God who calls out "Where are you?" Initiating interest in the Gospel involves yet another image in our understanding of evangelism: the image of a Seeker. How can we capture what it means to join God's searching heart for those who don't know Him? The secret is found in a collection of three parables Jesus tells to a mixed audience of the church and the un-churched.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Do you agree with the statement, "people aren't seekers"? If not, how do we explain the obvious signs of spiritual hunger we see, when scripture is so clear about mankind's depravity?



Do you remember a time in your life when you turned a corner from not seeking God to seeking Him intently? What was that like? What made the difference?

Read Luke 15:1-10

1. In these first two parables, how does Jesus picture what it's like for an owner to find something that was lost? In both cases, what is the reaction on the part of the finder?
2. Suppose you were one of those friends called to the scene when the lost item was found. If you were a shepherd who'd never lost a sheep (or a woman who'd never lost something valuable around the house) would you have any grounds for excitement? Why or why not?
3. What spiritual point does Jesus clearly draw from both parables (v. 7 and v. 10)?

Read Luke 15:11-32.

4. How is the third parable similar to the other two? How is it different?
5. Below is a timeline of the younger son's experiences. At what point along the line do you think the son becomes a spiritual seeker? Explain.



Father's thoughts and feelings...

Son's experiences....

At home growing less and less content.

Asking for his father's inheritance

Fleeing the farm for the city

Living it up

Running out of money

Feeding the pigs

Headed back home

Welcomed by the father

Reconciled with his brother

Back at work around the farm



6. At each point along the way, what do you think the father is experiencing? In pairs or as a group, fill in the blanks with adjectives that could possibly describe the father's thoughts and feelings.

7. What does the father in Jesus' parable teach us about God, the ultimate seeker?

8. Why does the older brother in the parable struggle to welcome back his prodigal brother? Of the people in Jesus' audience (v. 1&2), who is supposed to identify with the older brother and why?



9. Think about your attitude toward people who don't know God. What can you do to keep your heart more in line with the Father in the parable than the older brother?

EXERCISE:

- This week as you pray for and watch for God's activity in your 5x5 people's lives, ask God to make your heart like His: a passionate heart that seeks to save the lost. If your outreach efforts have grown cold, admit it to God and ask Him to soften your heart toward those who don't know Jesus.
- What can you do this week to reach out and deepen a reciprocal relationship with someone who is far from God in your everyday life?
- Spend a few minutes sometime this week reading and praying through Ezekiel chapter 34. Ask God to make you a good shepherd, capable of leading people to the source of their real needs.
- Try one or more of these resources:
 - Training opportunities and resources for leading seeker discussions on CCC website at cccomaha.org/spiritualDiscovery/seekers
 - Reality Check Series, Lead Pastor Mark Ashton's seeker small group curriculum / Go to zondervan.com and search for "reality check Mark Ashton."
 - SaltShaker series by Becky Pippert / Go to ivpress.com and search for "saltshaker."
 - Groups Investigating God Series / Go to ivpress.com and search for "groups investigating God."



STUDY 6 – APOLOGIST



Raphael *St Paul Preaching in Athens*, c.1515, Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas, 390 x 440 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Judging from this classic painting of Paul in Athens, here's a top ten list for what it really takes to effectively defend the faith...

- 10) Overcome your fear of wearing a toga that clashes
- 9) Best work happens barefoot on marble
- 8) Require you audience to remove footwear as well
- 7) Keep arms in air for long periods of time
- 6) Wear generous quantities of Jack Black 'Pit Boss' antiperspirant
- 5) Memorize the Torah
- 4) Keep the halo subtle and tasteful, almost as if it were not there at all
- 3) Plant friends in audience who will appear amazed
- 2) Rent a great statue to have on hand (at least one guy who won't ask a tough question)
- 1) Seat the really grumpy people in the shadows.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What comes to your mind when you hear the word "apologetics"?

Read excerpts from Ravi Zacharias interview in *Outreach Magazine* with Jeannie Choi. What does Zacharias say is essential to effective apologetics?

For 34 years, Ravi Zacharias has been a leading voice in Christian apologetics, speaking around the globe and in notable academic institutions such as Harvard, Princeton and Oxford University. Highly regarded as an expert in defending the Gospel as truth...Here, he shares why he believes the Gospel remains the one true and effective apologetic.



Q: Let's talk about your title as an apologist. While many Christians would acknowledge that apologetics is an important field, few are actively engaged or well-versed in apologetics. How do we account for that?

A: The average churchgoer has gotten so accustomed to just believing with emotion, they have failed to ask themselves why they believe. As a result, we have squandered our own minds and insulted those who ask questions. And yet, there are large numbers of people who want answers. Wherever my team goes, whether it's Oxford University, Syria, Jordan or India, the auditoriums are full because people have a yearning and hunger for truth. So the question is not whether apologetics is or isn't relevant. I believe apologetics is indispensable. The real question is, are we going to do it well or poorly? ...

Q: Many people see apologetics as too combative. How would you advise pastors and church leaders to use apologetics wisely when trying to reach the unchurched?

A: It's important to understand that we are not offering apologetics as the main course. We are offering the Gospel, and apologetics is just the seasoning. If we ever think we can persuade somebody into believing, we're already on the wrong track. The apostle Paul brilliantly used apologetics on Mars Hill. In one simple address, Paul takes the Athenians from looking for the unknown god to the God of creation, to the God who revealed Himself, to the God who knew where every human being would be born. Paul took them all the way to the resurrection.

Now, apologetics helps you go past the prejudicial grid of the questioner. If you have a college-aged audience, and you start talking about the cross of Christ, you've already lost them. But if you take them through the questions of truth, justice, love and absolutes, and then clarify that the cross is where justice, love, mercy and forgiveness converge, suddenly you have an attentive audience. So apologetics simply clarifies the questions and gives clear answers, but the ultimate apologetic is the cross and resurrection....





Q: Some church leaders are saying that social justice is the new apologetic today and that in an increasingly post-Christian society, formal apologetics is losing its effectiveness. Do you agree?

A: These sentiments are very well-intended, but they are totally misinformed. Social justice is not a new apologetic. Amos talked about it thousands of years ago. Moses and Jeremiah talked about it. It is not a new apologetic; social justice is a balance in apologetics. We have an arm of our ministry, Wellspring International, that reaches the needy. We have built orphanages, helped women get out of the sex-trafficking industry and given scholarships. You cannot preach the Gospel without that touch or service. But you also must include the Word. The Word gives you the imperative to serve.

Most of us would readily admit we're nowhere near the likes of Paul or Ravi Zacharias. Knowing that often keeps us from taking initiative with others the way we'd like. "If only I knew more." "If only I could think on my feet like that Mark Ashton can." "If only I had a seminary degree." On and on we go with our own top ten list. The scripture we're going to look at in this discussion gives us a very different image of an apologist.

Instead of modeling our apologetics after the towering intellectual figure of the apostle Paul, let's take a look at a more down to earth apologist. The earthiest of Jesus' twelve disciples is our model: Peter the fisherman. Peter will show us that an effective apologist is the one with the brightest hope, not necessarily the biggest brain.

Read I Peter 3:8-17

1. Peter begins this passage with a picture of believers in community striving for holy living (v. 8-12). List everything in his picture of Christian community.

2. How can the quality of our lives as Christians be a foundation for the credibility of our witness to others?

3. What is Peter saying about the role of fear and suffering in being a witness to the world (v. 13-14)?

4. Notice what Peter says the antidote to fear and suffering is (v. 15). How can recognizing Jesus as Lord, put fear and suffering in perspective? What does it mean to do this?

5. The Greek word we derive our word “apologetics” from appears in verse 15. Peter says we are to always be ready to “give an answer.” Giving an “apologia” (literally “a reasoned response or defense”) is our last image in this series of what it means to initiate interest in the Gospel. According to Peter, why are we to be ready to give a response? What prompts the question in the first place?

6. Our fear is usually that we’ll be asked a tough question we don’t have the technical expertise to answer. How is this kind of “defense of the faith” different?

7. Hope, not knowledge, seems to be the key. What else does Peter have to say about hope in his letter (read 1 Peter 1:3-5, 13)?

8. As a group, brainstorm a list of things people in your group could do to develop a more winsome and visible hope.

9. Hope naturally leads to opportunities to talk about our faith. Telling others about our relationship with Christ leads to questions about what we believe. As you’ve shared your faith with others, what questions typically come up? List them.

EXERCISE:

We can’t be an expert on every question people may ask us, but we can learn how to work with questions people have. This week, as you intentionally seek to initiate more spiritual conversations with people around you, try the following assignment. Have each member in the group ask a non-Christian friend the following question: “If you could ask God one question that He would have to give you an answer for, what would it be?” Follow that question with this one: “That’s interesting – why have you always wondered about that?” That is a two question conversation that most people will gladly have. Next time you’re with someone in your Journey Group, talk about how your conversation went. Meanwhile do a little research on your friend’s question by talking to a pastor, looking some information up on the



SOME RESOURCES ON QUESTIONS:**APOLOGETICS BOOKS AND BOOKLETS**

Here are some apologetics works for reference to particular questions your seekers might have:

GENERAL WORKS, BEGINNER LEVEL

Give Me an Answer / Cliffe Knechtle / IVP

Know Why You Believe / Paul E. Little and James F. Nyquist / IVP

The Case for Christ / Lee Strobel / Zondervan

Making Your Faith Your Own / Teresa Turner Vining / IVP

Letters from a Skeptic / Gregory A. Boyd and Edward C. Boyd / David C. Cook

More than a Carpenter / Josh McDowell / Tyndale

GENERAL WORKS, INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Scaling the Secular City / J.P. Moreland / Baker Academic

Reasonable Faith / William Lane Craig / Crossway Books

Hard Sayings of the Bible / IVP

Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties / Gleason Leonard Archer / Regency Reference Library

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth / Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart / Zondervan

SPECIFIC WORKS, INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED

Darwin's Black Box / Michael J. Behe / Free Press

Mere Creation / William Dembski / IVP

Is the New Testament Reliable? / Paul Barnett / IVP

Straight and Narrow? (On the homosexual issue) / Thomas E. Schmitt / IVP

Portraits of Freedom: 14 People Who Came Out of Homosexuality / Bob Davies and Lela Gibert / IVP

The Cross of Christ / John R. W. Stott / IVP

ICE BREAKER BOOKS

The Complete Book of Questions / Garry Poole / Zondervan

201 Great Questions / Jerry Jones / Zondervan

The Book of Questions / Gregory Stock / Workman Publishing Company

Ice-Breakers and Heart Warmers / Steve Sheely / Serendipity

Jump Starts and Soft Landings / Steve Sheely / Serendipity

Small Group Idea Book / Cindy Bunch / IVP



OTHER GREAT BOOKS

The Journey Bible / Zondervan
Introducing Jesus / Peter Scazzero / IVP
Jesus the Radical / R.T. France / Regency College Publishing
Who is this Jesus? / Michael Green / Regency College Publishing
Jesus With Dirty Feet / Don Everts / IVP
The Smell of Sin / Don Everts / IVP
The Jesus I Never Knew / Phillip Yancey / Zondervan

BOOKLETS ON VARIOUS ISSUES FROM IVP (to read or give to seekers or new believers)

Absolute Truth / Mark Ashton
My Heart-Christ's Home / Robert Boyd Munger
The Gay Debate / Stanton Jones
Homosexual Struggle
Finding God in the Storms of Life / Bill Hybels
Becoming a Christian / John R. W. Stott
Jehovah's Witness / Wesley P. Walters
How to Study the Bible / Jack Kuhatshek
The DaVinci Question / James Emery White
Loneliness / Elizabeth Ruth Skoglund
Quiet Times for Christian Growth / Kelly James Clark
One Catholic to Another / Peter Kreeft
The Scandal of Jesus / Vinoth Ramachandra
Islam and Christianity / Donald S. Tingle
Encouraging New Christians / Michael Griffiths
The Judas Gospel / Nicholas Perrin
How to Hear God / Bill Hybels
Eating Disorders / James Alsdurf
Are all Religions One? / Douglas Groothuis
Designer Sex / Philip Yancy
The Evidence for the Resurrection / Norman Anderson
Why I Believe in Christ / Charles W. Colson
7 Lies about Sex / Alice Fryling
Jewishness and Jesus / Daniel C. Juster



TOUGH QUESTIONS LIST

Please check which questions you have and place a 1, 2, and 3 next to your top 3 questions in order of what you would like to have answered first. Add any additional questions that you have in the space on the right or on the back.

HOW DOES ANYONE KNOW GOD EXISTS?

- Is anybody out there?
- How can anybody be sure God exists?
- What is God really like?
- How can rational people believe in miracles?
- How can a person get to know God?
- Does God care what happens to us?

IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY?

- Who was Jesus?
- How is Jesus different from other religious leaders?
- Did Jesus really claim to be God?
- Why focus on Jesus' death?
- Isn't the resurrection of Jesus a myth?
- What difference does Jesus make?

HOW RELIABLE IS THE BIBLE?

- Where did the Bible come from?
- Isn't the Bible full of myths?
- What about all those contradictions?
- Hasn't the Bible changed over time?
- Why should I trust the Bible?
- Is the Bible really God's book?

HOW COULD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING AND EVIL?

- Where did evil come from?
- Why doesn't God do something?
- Why do innocent people suffer?
- Is the devil for real?
- How could a loving God send people to Hell?
- Is there really a Heaven?

DON'T ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO GOD?

- Don't all religions teach basically the same thing?
- Isn't it enough to be sincere?
- What's so different about Christianity?
- Aren't Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses Christians too?
- Is Jesus really the only way to God?
- What happens to people who've never heard of Jesus?



DO SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE CONFLICT?

- Isn't Christianity based on blind faith?
- Why are so few scientists Christians?
- Doesn't the Big Bang disprove a Creator?
- Doesn't evolution contradict Genesis?
- If the Bible is true, why isn't it more scientific?
- Won't scientific progress make God unnecessary?

WHY BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

- Why would anyone think I'm not a Christian?
- What's the big deal about sin?
- Why can't I make it on my own?
- Why is Jesus so important?
- Can someone like me really change?
- How does someone actually become a Christian?

WEBSITES

gospelcom.net/stonecroft - Stonecroft has a great history of reaching women through Friendship Bible Coffees and medium-sized events. Many of their resources can be found on their website under "Bible Studies."

neighborhoodbiblestudy.org is a website by Neighborhood Bible Studies, a ministry to reach seekers in neighborhoods that has been around forty years. Tips for leading studies and lots of guides are available.

textweek.com/movies/titleindex.htm - This website is a stroke of genius. It makes the bridge between current movies and spiritual themes and is great for icebreakers, openers and illustrations for your group times.

gospelcom.net/iv/biblestu/index.html - Check out the InterVarsity website for seeker studies and movie/Bible studies designed by InterVarsity staff.

<http://bible.org/> - This site is a great resource with a wide range of Bible study tools as well as helps in answering questions about the Bible's reliability.

str.org/site/ - Stand to Reason, Greg Koukl's apologetics ministry website, has lots of great information on a broad sweep of topics like ethics, theology, issues in culture, etc

leestrobels.com/index.html - Lee Strobel's page is very video driven with hundreds of short pieces on specific issues people encounter in sharing the Gospel today.

apologetics.com - This site has lots of MP3s and articles on helpful topics.



STUDY ONE - LEADER'S NOTES:

This series will feature five images of what it means to initiate interest in the Gospel. Each image comes straight out of a New Testament text and will develop one clear idea for your Journey Group to explore. Each study will also have a practical application that connects with the image. In addition to exploring the theme of how to share our faith, we must not forget about our message. This is why a sixth study appears among the images focusing on the Gospel itself.

Introductory Discussion and the Gospel Audibility Scale

The first couple of questions get the group thinking about what it means to hear the message and common barriers to understanding it. Encourage the group to speak personally in response to the first question. It's not necessarily aimed at non-Christian barriers to hearing God. The second question turns the corner to help the group members think about their not-yet-Christian friends and family. Don't spend lots of time on the chart at the beginning of the discussion. Guide the group to work on their own until they have several people's initials on the scale then move on. When you get to question 7, people will have a chance to talk about their friends. If there are non-Christians in your group, they're probably comfortable enough sharing about themselves or their friends. You might want to make a comment or two that can help them not feel on the outside of the discussion or talk with them beforehand.

Question 1

Help the group experience a fresh reading of the passage, as it may be very familiar to many. Make sure to just read the first half of the passage for questions 1-3.

Question 5

The following comment from Gospels scholar Craig Blomberg might be helpful to you as the leader. See also Mark 4:21-25.

"Jesus intended his parables both to conceal and to reveal. ...Just as God called Isaiah to pronounce judgment on the Israelites in response to their prolonged disobedience (Mark 4:12 quotes Isa 6:9-10), Jesus' speaking in parables proves cryptic to outsiders to the kingdom as God's response of judgment to their freely chosen rebellion. And it is not that they fail cognitively to understand Jesus' claims; even the Jewish leaders who plotted to kill him can explain his meaning well enough at that level (Mark 12:12). Rather the understanding that outsiders lack is the full-orbed biblical meaning of understanding – that which consistently refers to people being willing to act on their knowledge. Those who are not Jesus' followers do not understand volitionally; they are unwilling to become disciples. From an eternal perspective that is the only kind of understanding that ultimately matters." (*Preaching the Parables*)



Question 7

Here is where the discussion turns outward from the text to real life. As you ask the question, set the example first, then go around the whole circle having everyone share. Encourage people to be brief.

Question 9

Many people are discouraged with their own witness precisely because one or two attempts to talk about God have not gotten them very far. Help the group think creatively about how to keep taking initiative with people and not write them off if they seem disinterested at first. Talk about ways in which difficult soil could be worked by God, circumstances changing in their lives or friends persistently and gently taking initiative with them.

The 5x5 card.

This is a tool for prayer over the next five weeks. Be sure you leave enough time for people to fill out the card and take it with them. The challenge is to pray for these five things (The Five P's) for five minutes a day for five weeks. If people can't think of five people, that's fine. They can leave a blank space or two, but challenge everyone to pray for God to also bring new people into their lives in the coming weeks. Be sure to start next week with a brief sharing time. Ask, "what happened with the people on your 5x5 card last week?"

STUDY TWO - LEADER'S NOTES

The big take away from this passage is that God saves us and puts our story on display to communicate the Gospel. One of the very best ways to grow in initiating interest in the Gospel is telling our story. Most don't feel they have a dramatic story, so they underutilize their salvation experience in evangelism. Lead the way in making this study practical for people and write out your story.

For the exercise, go the web site yourself and use the information you read there to summarize a list pointers on how to write your story. Feel free to include things you've discovered from your own experience. Make a resource sheet you can hand to your group. As a follow-up to this study, make some time to have a couple of people in the group read their stories. Encourage them to keep it short.



STUDY THREE - LEADER'S NOTES:

Group Discussion

Make sure the group mentions the following: a thorough knowledge of the foreign policy of the home country, ability to speak language of the foreign country, negotiating skills, careful not to exaggerate or overpromise, persistence in getting to the bottom line, etc.

Question 1

One of the biggest hang-ups with why we aren't bolder in our witness is fear. A healthy view of what it means to fear God is rooted in a right view of His holiness. A person who rightly fears the Lord is free to be more bold, not out of self-confidence or pride, but out of a right view of self and God.

Question 2

We are also prone to polarize love and speaking difficult things to people. Sometimes those driven by passion for the Gospel can be unloving, but love never means holding back on the truth even if others don't understand our motives at first.

Question 4

Our jobs as ambassadors really involve a ministry of peacemaking. We want this picture of a peacemaker to be in people's minds.

Question 6

Good listening skills need to be exercised well and liberally, and we must develop our character (inner life) to match our words and intentions, so we understand and live Kingdom values.

EXERCISE

Have fun with the Final Four. Some of it is kind of silly, but it is a fun tool for talking about fears without it becoming another guilt-trip. Conclude the time with group prayer for one another in overcoming common barriers like these.



STUDY FOUR - LEADER'S NOTES:**Introduction**

Have fun with the house metaphor. The idea is that we'd make sure we optimized both scenarios: paying only as much as we needed to get what we wanted. With our dream home, we'd be willing to pay more, but we'd be highly selective about the quality. With an investment property, ideally we'd buy something dirt-cheap that has problems but not expensive problems to fix. When we think about what the Gospel is about, God takes the opposite strategy. He gets much damaged property that He has to do a lot of work on and pays an extremely high price for it. It goes totally over the top that He's actually willing to take up residence while the remodeling is taking place. You could have someone share about an episode of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* that they thought was particularly memorable.

Question 1

Justification is a big word. You might be able to help the group with this definition:

justification, justification by faith. A forensic (legal) term related to the idea of acquittal, justification refers to the divine act whereby God makes humans, who are sinful and therefore worthy of condemnation, acceptable before a God who is holy and righteous. More appropriately described as "justification by grace through faith," this key doctrine of the Reformation asserts that a sinner is justified (pardoned from the punishment and condemnation of sin) and brought into relationship with God by faith in God's grace alone.

(S. Grenz, D. Guretzki and C.F. Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*)

Question 2

Make sure the group mentions these points: peace with God, access to God's grace, the hope of God's glory, growth in character (v.4), the presence of the Holy Spirit and God's love poured into our hearts. You might want to have a flip-chart and write them down as they mention them. This is also a good time to reinforce the 5X5 card they filled out the first week.

Question 3

Suffering might seem like a little detour in Paul's thinking, but its well worth a few minutes to bring out that connection. The incredible benefits of justification and salvation are not without the character-producing presence of trials and suffering.

Question 4

Make a second list with the group – this is a great inductive Bible study technique that builds good observation skills. Make sure the group doesn't miss things like: powerless (v.6), ungodly (v.6), sinners (v.8), under God's wrath (v.9) and enemies of God (v.10).



Question 6

People universally struggle to talk with non-believers about sin. Have everyone generate two ideas for how to talk about sin (give the group a few minutes of silence to do this). Then go around the whole group and have everyone read their two ideas. Ideas will probably include things like:

- Be transparent about the fact that Christians struggle with sin too
- All sin is bad. There is not a hierarchy of acceptable sins that builds up to unpardonable sins.
- Affirm that the church has at times blown it in talking about sin with grace and forgiveness in mind.
- Simply asking people, "so, how would you define sin?" or "do you consider yourself a person who struggles with sin? How do you find forgiveness or peace when you know you've blown it?"

EXERCISE

Come to this discussion ready to demonstrate the One Verse Evangelism bridge illustration. Here's your chance to lead your group in one of the more intimidating challenges we all face: summarizing and communicating the Gospel message. Read the attached article on One-Verse Evangelism and practice on your family or friends the week leading up to your small group. It will feel a little weird, but it will give you greater confidence in communicating the Gospel.

STUDY FIVE - LEADER'S NOTES:

Introduction

The introduction to this lesson is meant to help pry us loose from how we're used to thinking of the word "seeker" and make a case for a more theological understanding. If God is the ultimate, original seeker, then growing in evangelism becomes a process of becoming like God in our inner attitudes. It's okay if the group has some tension over the definition of a seeker; we're just going to stretch that definition to a better starting point of God himself.

Ask the entire group to share their answer to the question about a turning point from not seeking to seeking. Have group member revisit their story shared from the second study and see if they can recall a transition point like this.

Question 3

The group can't miss this point: repentance is part of what it means for someone who is lost to be found by God and brought back to Himself. The most appropriate response to spiritual rebirth is joy and celebration. If the group gets this point, it sets the stage for question 8 where we see that people who don't share the heart of an eagerly seeking father can't enter the joy of someone lost being found.

If you have a great lost and found story, this would be a great place to share it. It has to be a story of something of incredible value to you.



Question 4

Similarities: lost and found items again, celebration, unsettled person till what was lost was found, etc.

Differences: the father doesn't really go looking for the son, but agonizes till he's back, the scale of what is lost is increasing throughout the three parables (one out of a hundred, one out of ten, then one out of two). The contrast between fellow shepherds and girlfriends on the one hand who readily share the joy of the find, with the older son who is conflicted over his brother's return and his father's joy

Question 5

Get a little imaginative with the timeline. This is meant to help the group enter into the inner world of a father who has lost and found his son. To make the timeline more real, you might conjecture that from start to finish the son was away from the home for a year. How would the loss weigh on the father over a protracted experience of estrangement? The loss factor and joy factor are tied into the compassion of the father. Help the group see this creatively.

