

LEADERS NOTES FOR BEING SURE and GROW

BEING SURE

The theme for this series is having confidence in the different aspects of our relationship with God.

Many Christians, both new and old, lack confidence because they think it is arrogant to express it, or that it sounds like we are self-confident in our own goodness.

But the Bible views confidence in what God has done for us as normal, a sign of genuine faith, and a way of replacing guilt with joy.

So the goal of these studies is to give up any false hope of self-confidence, and rest securely in Jesus' work for us.

STUDY 1 – BEING SURE GOD HAS ACCEPTED US

Key point of this study is that we deserve judgement but are justified (declared right by God) by faith in Jesus, not by our good deeds.

This study looks at one of the most theologically rich, but also dense and complex passages in the NT – no pressure! For this reason, we need to spend time helping the group understand the terminology and untangle the meaning.

Introduction

Here are 2 ways you could introduce the study:

- 1) Begin by describing some scenarios where uncertainty in relationships exists..
 - a teacher who has no discipline or boundaries, and you can't figure out what they expect of you
 - parents who have no set rules and are vacillating in their responses, you are not sure they love you
 - remember your first boyfriend/girlfriend? - unsure what she/he thinks about you

What emotions and thoughts does this produce in you? (lack of confidence, stress, uncertainty, anxiety, no joy)

It's the same with God - if we have no confidence in what makes us acceptable to him, we will experience the same effects.

- 2) Start with a discussion about confidence
 - God expects us to feel a settled confidence in our relationship with Him
 - Sometimes in life we feel unconfident when we should feel confident
 - o Eg being worried about the safety of a plane flight
 - Sometimes we feel confident when we shouldn't be – "false confidence"
 - o Eg Feeling confident that the lottery ticket we buy will be the winner
 - Sometimes we feel confident when we should be confident - "true confidence"
 - o Eg My chair won't collapse
 - o Ask the group to think of/discuss other examples of "true confidence"
 - Ask: Can a person have true confidence about their standing with God; that God accepts them? If so, how?

Study questions

Questions 1 and 2 are designed to set up the huge contrast between the first 20 verses of Chapter 3 and the next 6 (ie our passage). The goal is to help them feel the hopelessness of verses 1-20. Points you could emphasise in discussion:

- a) The whole world is accountable, under judgement. No-one can keep the law, the situation is quite hopeless and depressing
- b) Is this judgement too harsh? Think about the evidence of sin you see in the world and your own life.
- c) The first step in having true confidence in our standing with God is – don't look in the wrong place! We cannot be confident in ourselves!

Romans 3:21-26 We have printed the passage in the book so that the group can underline and write on it as they go through it.

- a) Read through the passage together
- b) Give the group several minutes to underline or circle any words or phrases they don't understand or that they think are important.
- c) Then go through the passage, drawing out the meaning as you go. An effective method involves the use of flash cards. See *Being Sure Study 1 Visual Aid* in the Mission Resources (More2Life) of the EV website <https://evchurch.info/missionresource/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Being-Sure-Study-1-VisAid.pdf>
There you will also find a template of the cards that you can print off and cut out. But the template is also printed on the back page of the booklet if you choose to just look at it.
- d) Start by asking which word they think is the most important in the passage. Point them to the 'BUT' at the beginning. What's the effect of a 'but' in a conversation? Something is totally the opposite of what has come before. Give some examples of how a 'but' changes everything...
 - I was made redundant this morning, BUT I was offered a new job this afternoon
 - My doctor told me I have a tumour, BUT it is benign and entirely treatable.
 - If vv 1-20 showed us how hopeless we are in our standing before God, how would you expect the 'BUT' in v21 to change everything?
- e) As you go through, draw out the discussion about this new way of being 'right' using these points:
 - Why does God offer it? His grace – He is generous
 - Who paid for it? Jesus, on the Cross
 - What is the cost to us? It's a free gift
 - How do we get it? By faith in Jesus, not by keeping rules.
- f) Use Question 4 as a review exercise.

At the end of the study:

- you could use the flash cards (as described in the Visual Aid doc) to review the passage and consolidate/confirm the key point.
- Use the Backstage VIP Pass illustration

- Being a Christian is like winning a VIP pass to a concert, where you are allowed backstage after the concert to meet the band. You don't *deserve* to go backstage (you're not part of the band or support crew), you haven't *paid* to go backstage, but you can still be absolutely confident about going backstage Because you've got the VIP pass.
- Jesus gives us a VIP pass to be accepted by God. We haven't *earned* it, we'll never *deserve* it. But because of Jesus We've *got* it.

Indexed illustrations you could use:

- Bushfire
- Broken Bowl
- Hangmans Noose
- Courtroom and Judge
- Magnifying Glass

STUDY 2 – BEING SURE GOD FORGIVES US WHEN WE SIN

The key point of this study is that our STATUS before God is that He forgave us the debt of our sin through the death of Jesus, but our EXPERIENCE is that we continue to sin, and need to keep coming in repentance to God.

Introduction

Many years ago, when the American evangelist, Billy Graham came to Australia, he asserted in a TV interview that he was confident and sure he was going to heaven. The TV interviewer was shocked, and asked him how he could be so arrogant and claim that he was such a good person. Is this an arrogant claim? Graham responded by saying he was not claiming to be good, rather that he had been forgiven by God and that he continued to sin, but God had promised to keep on forgiving him. Billy Graham was making a point about the difference between his STATUS and his EXPERIENCE.

Have somebody read the first box. Have the group underline all the 'new' things in the Christian life.

Study Questions

Question 1 looks at Ephesians 1:3-7 as a statement of our STATUS. All these things are true of us, because God has achieved them for us and declared them to be true. (Keep this section brief). Confirm by reading second box.

Questions 2-9 focus on our EXPERIENCE. As you go through them keep emphasizing the difference between their STATUS and their EXPERIENCE.

Summary

- We are accepted by God as His children – forgiven, redeemed, holy, adopted.
- We will continue to sin because we are still part of the fallen, sin-ridden world
- We can be confident that God forgives all our sins because of
 - God's character and promises
 - Jesus' advocacy and atoning death
- Continue to deal with sin by repentance and faith

Indexed illustrations you could use:

- Living Moral Lives
- Archery
- Throne
- Pirate Ship
- Lord of the Rings
- Dirt in Eye
- Lost on Bushwalk

STUDY 3 – BEING SURE GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS

Key Point: Because of our new STATUS as the dearly loved children of our Heavenly Father, we can approach Him and be heard by Him

Introduction

Imagine you have a son or daughter who is a model child – obedient, keeps a tidy room, is patient with their siblings, is respectful to you. BUT they never communicate with you, never speak to you or ask you for your help. How would that make you feel? What would you think of that son or daughter?

The same is true for our relationship with God. If we truly love him, we will want to talk to him. This is called praying.

Question 6

You could do Question 6 using flash cards. See *Being Sure Study 3 Visual Aid* in the Mission Resources (More2Life) of the EV website <https://evchurch.info/missionresource/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Being-Sure-Study-3-Visual-Aid.pdf>

Question 7

Have the group write out a simple prayer and have those who want to, to pray out loud.

STUDY 4 – BEING SURE GOD IS WITH US

This is a new study in this series, designed to highlight the person and work of the Holy Spirit, particularly before we meet him in Study 5. We cannot cover all aspects of his work in this one study but want to focus on his presence with us.

The key point is that the Holy Spirit is given to us by the Father and the Son to be our comforter, our counsellor, our advocate – ie God with us, now that Jesus has returned to his Father.

Introduction

You could begin by describing a time when a much loved family member or friend moved away so that it would be difficult to see them again, and how you felt. I realise the best scenario is when someone dies, but this may provoke an emotional reaction for some people. So it may be best to stick with the moving away example.

Acknowledge that the Trinity is a difficult idea to get our heads around, even after many years as a Christian! Do not worry if you cannot intellectually grasp it – that is normal. See the illustrations in the Leaders Resources page <https://evchurch.info/missionresource/ev-ministry-teams/life-and-more-to-life/more-to-life/leader-resources/>

Question 7 You could skip this question if you are pressed for time – its just a helpful point to stress the connection between loving and obeying.

Indexed illustrations you could use:

- Lighting man
- Batman and Robin
- Auction Stand

STUDY 5– BEING SURE GOD IS CHANGING US

The key point is that The Spirit wants to change you – making you more like Jesus, having the values of your new family. Christians live in a struggle between two natures. Our responsibility is to feed the new nature.

Introduce study by asking group what is something you would like to change about yourself. Why is it so hard to change?

Or, What different ways do people try to improve themselves?

God also wants us to change. He wants us to grow up as Christians and become mature. God offers profound and lasting change, and the power to make sure it happens.

Question 1 – after reading the passage give the group several minutes to fill out the table either on their own or in pairs.

Question 2 is an opportunity for the group to articulate how one is more appealing than the other!

Question 3 - the important thing about verse 9 to stress is that all Christians have the Holy Spirit. Not an extra step that needs to be taken.

Question 4 - the focus here is on what we do. Regarding the ‘family’ language - We are to take on the values of our new family. God’s values! God’s goal is that we become a family of people who lovingly serve each other.

Question 5 – our responsibility is to feed the Spirit nature and starve the sinful one. See the ‘Two Dogs’ illustration in the Leaders Resources.

The last text box is important to introduce the sanctification term to describe what we have talked about in this study. It will be used next week.

STUDY 6– BEING SURE GOD IS PROTECTING OUR FAITH

The key point is that God’s power protects our new faith in Christ, enabling us to stay close to him amidst all the troubles and temptations in life. We should expect life in this world to be difficult. Hardships have a purpose – to refine our faith.

Introduction - You could ask what have been the difficulties/struggles you have faced so far as you have investigated the Christian faith. Relate some of your struggles.

Question 3. A helpful illustration here is the minefield illustration

Living as a Christian is like walking through a minefield. Our goal is to safely reach the other side of the minefield, where we will be home with God and His people forever. God promises to get us safely there. How?

He doesn’t give us a map of where the mines are, or of the safe route through, or of all the different terrain we’ll have to negotiate.

Instead, Jesus says, “Follow Me”. He leads us step by step safely through the minefield to the other side. We completely depend on Him each step of the way. At the same time, our responsibility is to stay close to Him. If we go running off in another direction, there will be disaster for our faith. But if we keep trusting and following Him, He will bring us safely through.

This illustration demonstrates the dual agency of Christian life:

- Our complete dependence and focus on Jesus for every step of the Christian life. He saves us.
- Our responsibility to keep our focus and trust on Jesus for all our steps. We are saved by faith.

LEADERS NOTES FOR GROW

This series is designed to help the participants think about, and act on, a life of following Jesus. It will be helpful to emphasise that the Christian life is one of continual growth and persistent following! We never stop growing.

STUDY 1 BEING PART OF GOD’S FAMILY

Key Point: Following Jesus and growing as a Christian means actively participating in God’s family.

Introduction: a discussion on the question... do you have to go to church to be a Christian? Accept all views expressed and explain that you will return to the question at the end of the study. Read first blue box.

Study Questions

We have printed Hebrews 10:19-25 in the book with coloured wording so that participants can more easily see the logic of the passage.

Question 1 will alert us that this not a passage for individuals, but for a community.

Question 7: The answer is...“we keep each other warm by staying close together”!

At the end of the study, ask the introductory question again. How would you answer it now?

STUDY 2 TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS

Key Point: Talking about our new trust in Jesus may be scary, but it is the way that God uses to help our family and friends hear the gospel.

Introductory question Ask the group what the reaction of their friends and family has been to the news that they have become Christians/now going to church/are studying the Bible? How have they themselves felt?

Point out that the feelings of fear or embarrassment are normal reactions. Share your own experiences and responses.

Question 5 is designed to help the group articulate in a practical way how they can ‘give a reason for the hope they have’. You may need to ask some follow-up questions to help them not be too ‘heavy-handed’ or too vague in their responses.

STUDY 3 LISTENING TO GOD SPEAK

Key Point: The normal way God speaks to us is through His word, and we should be looking for ways to incorporate regular reading of the Scriptures into our lives.

Introductory question: What have been your experiences of reading the Bible? Share your own struggles with reading the Bible in the early stages of your Christian walk.

Question 1 A follow up question here might be... What do you think it means to be ‘wise for salvation’?

Question 7 Make this part as practical as possible, trying not to put too high expectations on them. Acquaint them with the Growth Group study booklets for the current term, bringing some along if possible.

Indexed illustrations you could use:

- Word and Holy Spirit
- Law of Moses and School Principal
- Bible as a Letter

STUDY 4 LIVING BY FAITH

Key Point: Living by faith means trusting God to supply us with what we need, and that this means we need not worry or be anxious.

Introductory Question: What do you worry about? Try to draw a distinction between **genuine concern** that might stimulate us to action (for a child's health, or that I will be late for an appointment if I miss the train) and **worry/anxiety** that overwhelms a person. See the first box.

Indexed illustrations you could use:

- Abseiling and Dental Floss
- This/thick Ice
- Elevator
- Chair

STUDY 5 GROWING IN GENEROSITY

Key Point: Because God has been generous to us, we as his followers should be generous with what he has given us. In particular we need to be giving to the cause of the gospel because only Christians will give to this.

Introductory Question: What are some of the worthy causes in our world that we can give our money to? How would you rank them?

After Question 2, at the second box, it would be helpful to have a map to show the places mentioned

STUDY 6 SERVING IN THE FAMILY

This is a new study in this series as we try to point these new Christians to serving in church from the get-go.

Key Point: Because we follow a Saviour who served us and we are part of the body of Christ (church), we are to serve one another by using the gifts God has given us.

The first box – comment here that it is not only other Christians we serve, but all people – just like Jesus did.

Study questions: There were many passages we could have used, but chose firstly John 13 as it stresses that we follow and imitate Jesus who served us in his life and death. The second passage we focus on is Romans 12:1-8.

In the box after question 7 the study looks at different aspects of 1 Corinthians 12. Only do Questions 8 and 9 if you have plenty of time.

Question 1 The striking thing about these verses is that Jesus knew who he was (God), and that God had put all things under his power. Then verse 4... "so" (as a result of all that power what did he do?) He got some water and knelt down and washed dirty feet like a slave... Wow!

Question 10 (at the bullet points) allows you to discuss some practical outcomes of serving. Be ready with some examples of ways of serving. Or you may like to invite a member of the Ministry team to come along and have some input.