

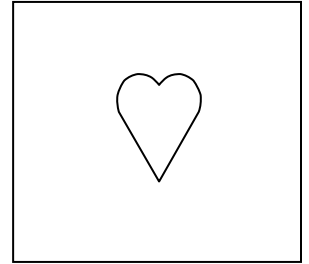
Session 6: Rescued? Why do People Call Jesus 'Savior'?

Who Needs a Relationship With God?

Revised 5.26.10

Introduction

The fireman rushes in six times, ignoring the flames. Each time he inhales more toxic fumes as he carries out the entire family, one at a time. He dies soon after they are rescued. The teenager says, "I didn't need to be rescued. I could have made it out by myself." The little kids had no idea of the danger they were in. The parents are filled with gratitude that he gave his life to rescue them. The oldest child dedicates his life to becoming a firefighter and rescuing others.



In this session we will explore one of the biggest themes in the Bible: God as a "rescuer" or savior. From beginning to end, God demonstrates His eagerness to help with people's problems, small or huge. But they first needed to realize they had a need, and that only God could solve it.

Nowhere is this more clear than in the person of Jesus. His very name means "savior", "God who saves", or "rescuer". But what does "savior" really mean, and why do I need one? What if I don't feel the need to be saved?

You'll be able to explore Jesus' most radical claims in His own words: That not only can He rescue us from visible problems, (physical, relational, and other issues,) He can rescue us from the greatest invisible problem of all; sin and separation from God. Through Him, we can begin a relationship with God. Without Him, we are in deep trouble, for now, and eternity.

"Whoa. Wait a minute, what do you mean, 'Begin a relationship with God?'"

These radical claims raise many questions for people like these:

Will, "I don't feel the need for a relationship with God. If I ever do, it will be my own way."

Sara, "I already have a relationship with God because I have lots religious information and experiences."

Mary, "It is not possible for a person like me to be connected to God."

Samuel, "Is it possible to think I have a relationship with God, when I really don't?"

You'll have a safe place to explore these life and death issues, and see some of God's clearest answers.

PREVIEW OF SESSION: CHART THE COURSE

Here is what to expect in this session:

1. **Connecting with others: Link up with a person and idea (pairs).**
2. **Reviewing past concepts: Where are we? (group)**
3. **Exploring the topic: Why Should I Start a Relationship With God? (group and pairs)**
4. **Teamwork/Prayer Partner: How can this topic affect your life this week? (group and pairs)**
5. **Assignment for next week: Be ready to report on this.**

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: LINK UP WITH A PERSON AND IDEA

Before we begin, briefly discuss the following in pairs:

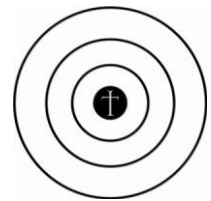
- Share one positive or negative experience from the past week (in any category).
- What was helpful from the last session?
- Any progress in understanding or applying it?
- see pages 4 and 5 for more

REVIEWING PAST CONCEPTS: WHERE ARE WE?

Of course none of this would make any sense unless; 1. There are some truly essential spiritual core issues, 2. Some invisible realities shape the visible world, 3. God really exists, and defines Himself in His terms, whether I agree with Him or not, 4. The Bible is reliable and inspired, 5. Jesus really demonstrates that He is truly God by His claims and credentials. So let's review these building blocks:

Session 1: *What Does It Take To Survive? Am I Ready?*

Success or survival in any difficult task requires a set of essentials—core things you must focus on (like a bull's eye). Mountain climbers have skills they learn before tackling the big climb. Doctors look for vital signs to assess someone's health. It is foolish to start these things without testing to make sure you are ready. And it is equally foolish to focus on secondary issues (high cholesterol) when core issues are wrong (no pulse). *Life is the same—including the spiritual world.* We all need certain spiritual essentials to make it in life. There are certain core questions we must focus on instead of other secondary things. We need to test ourselves or be tested by others in order to know for sure we are ready. And if we care about someone else, we will ask to be sure they have what they need too.



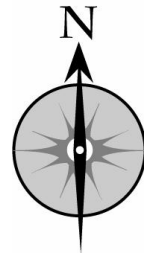
Session 2: *How Are My Foundations?*



When a contractor begins a new home, the first things he builds are the footings and foundations. If footings are not in place and a solid foundation not established, everything above the surface (walls, ceilings, windows) will be thrown off. There will be cracks, and people could get hurt. *Life is the same way—including the spiritual world.* When we have visible cracks in our lives (broken relationships, marriage conflict, financial trouble) we tend to try to patch things up above the surface. We fix the relationship, get a divorce and move on, get another job, etc. But the underlying causes of those cracks remain. Therefore, in order to go about life in a healthy way, we must be willing to look at our footings and inspect our foundations for flaws—or to have someone help us take a look under the surface. We must test our core convictions about God, the Bible, Jesus, etc. Even if we have already chosen to believe in Jesus, we may still have cracks that need to be fixed.

Session 3: *Is God Really There?*

Have you ever wondered if God is really there? Perhaps on the surface you believe in God, or if someone asked, you would say God does exist. But deep down, if you are really honest, do you wonder if God is just an idea people have invented? Have you created God in your mind, or did God really create you? Many have wrestled with this question, even those who have made religious commitments. *However, from the very beginning, God has made it clear that He is eager to reveal Himself.* In fact, he has revealed himself in five ways: Creation, the Bible, Fulfilled Prophecy, Jesus' Claims, and Jesus' Resurrection. And as He reveals Himself, He does so in a very personal, powerful, and passionate way. He declares to all people everywhere not only that He exists but also that He is reliable and wants us to know Him.



Session 4: *Is the Bible Worthy of My Trust?*

Bible filter graphic

Can we really trust the Bible, or is it just a book of fables and myths that ancient people wrote because they didn't know as much as we do today? How do we know an ancient book like this was reliably recorded, transmitted, and translated? Many have struggled to trust the Bible because they have never settled these questions once and for all. But we have ample evidence that the Bible is amazingly reliable and genuinely claims to be the words of God himself. But even if it is reliable, will you trust it when other "voices" disagree? This is an honest question for many of us. But it's sort of like not trusting your car manual because you don't know all the steps it took to get to you. You trust your car manual because you know it came from the car manufacturer. Who else are you going to trust on details in your car? In a similar way, when we see that the Bible is from God himself, we can naturally trust it because (as we learned in the last session) God is a reliable source.

Session 5: *Who Is Jesus Really?*

Who did Jesus claim to be, and how did he back up his claims? Why does Jesus produce such awe and love in some people while others hate or ignore him? The reality is that many people underestimate Jesus Christ. They have created a version of Jesus that is comfortable, politically correct, or easily dismissed. Or they have been confused by conflicting voices, and they don't know what to believe. But the Bible is clear: Jesus is God himself. And he came to rescue us from darkness and restore our relationship with the Father. He is truly more amazing than even many Christians realize. And he wants us to respond with awe, reverence, and trust. But why do people struggle to respond this way? Why is it they trust human doctors with their lives, but they resist trusting the ultimate Physician? Could it be that Jesus is even more worthy of trust than doctors? He has done more to back up his credentials than anyone.



Last session, we explored the many amazing things Jesus claimed about himself. He claimed to be the Redeemer, the Healer, the King, and "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus also claimed to be the Savior—he came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). In fact, his very name means "the Lord saves." But what does "savior" mean?

This next conviction will clarify the most life-or-death concept of all.

EXPLORING THE TOPIC: Rescued? Why do People Call Jesus 'Savior'?
Who Needs a Relationship With God?

Exploring the Topic: Overview

In order to explore this concept we will look at six things:

Warm-Up Questions:

1. Are there examples in my experience or in the natural world of someone who a) *was rescued*, b) *needed rescue but wasn't*, c) *needed rescue but didn't realize it*, or d) *thought they were rescued but weren't*?
2. Is rescue sometimes necessary regardless of opinions, and could this be true of the spiritual world as well?
3. What do I think about "lost" and "saved"? How did I form my opinion?
Am I willing to let God reshape my view?

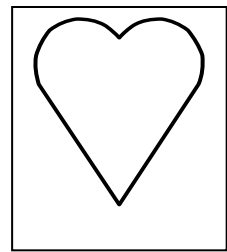
Core Questions:

4. Why does God have the right to define the terms of my relationship with him?
5. How does God actually define those terms? What does the Bible mean by "lost" or "saved"?
6. How do I put all this together? And how do I respond?

*For the rest of the session, you will explore the first 3 questions,
then the next 3 questions in more depth.*

Warm-Up #1: Examples From Our World: What Can We Learn Here?

Personal Experience: In your experience, where have you seen someone in need of rescue? Did they realize it? What happened? Here are at least two examples. Discuss them with your teammate. And think of other examples from your own experience, which may help someone else understand the concept better.



1. Life-threatening illness: For example, a person with heart disease is in serious need of rescuing—a heart transplant. But he may not know it. When he does learn of his condition, he has a choice to make: Treatment will require the removal of the **diseased heart**, a new heart, months of therapy, and maybe all his financial resources. To reject the diagnosis and the offer of a new heart will mean certain death. Should he accept the diagnosis, and take steps towards the transplant?
2. Think of your own example: Think of a situation you have faced where hidden problems were not easily recognizable. Were they addressed? Or did they lead to devastating results?

The Natural World: Where in the natural world do you see principles about rescue? Discuss this as a group. Your leader will help the group identify a few key examples.

1. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: Carbon Monoxide is an odorless gas that is deadly. Many people have died from carbon monoxide poisoning before they even realized they were in trouble. They needed rescue and never knew it.
2. The Titanic: The makers of the greatest ship of its time tragically overrated their ship and underrated the danger of their journey. They were warned but stubbornly refused to admit their weaknesses. And the results were fatal.

Session Highlights

<Insert Lost/Saved Graphic>

1. *Key Questions:* Why should I begin a relationship with God?
2. *Key Scripture:* Romans 3:20
3. *Key Illustration:* Disease (X-Ray?)
4. *Key Faith Prayer:* “Lord, I choose today to believe your diagnosis: I am naturally sinful and need to be rescued.”
5. *Key Faith Step:* Accept God’s diagnosis and open yourself to his cure through Jesus Christ.

Warm-Up #2: Transition to the Spiritual World: Could There Really be a “Spiritual Rescue”?

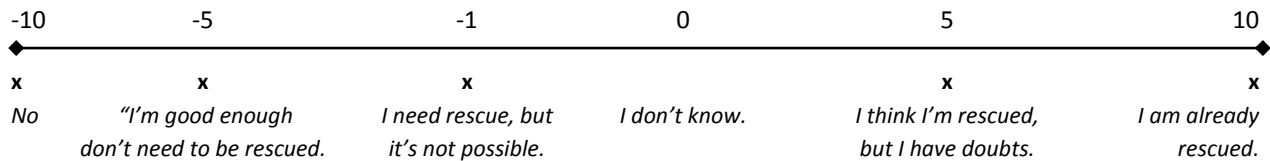
We have seen that in many situations we need to be rescued whether we know it or not. And sometimes we need to be rescued even though we don’t want to receive help. **Could this be true in the spiritual world as well? Is there a “spiritual rescue” that we need whether we know it or not, or whether or not we want to admit it?** Does it *really* depend on emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends, or is there something about us that really needs rescuing?

In session 5, we explored how Jesus claimed to be God himself and the “light of the world.” But he also taught that people need to be rescued. He was there to “seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). He illustrated this by calming violent storms and walking on water (Matthew 8:23-27, 14:22-33). **He wanted his disciples to see who he really was and to know that he alone could rescue them in far greater ways.**

Warm-Up #3: Inspecting My Foundations: What Do I Think About “Lost” and “Saved”?

The rest of this session will help you understand what the Bible says about spiritual rescue. But first, let’s look at your present opinion at this point in your journey. What do you think about this?

Do you need to be spiritually rescued? Put an “X” on the line to mark where you are today.



Why did you put your “X” there?

What would help you move toward +10?

Core #1: Why Does God Have the Right to Define the Terms of My Relationship with Him?

God has done his best to tell us two things.

One, **He loves us and he earnestly wants us to become his children.** He has used words and illustrations like *chosen, adoption, freedom, joy, peace, forgiveness, new heart, new life, and saved.* Isn't this what we've always wanted?

Two, **there's a huge problem. And the problem is us.** The words and illustrations he used are *condemned, sinful, perishing, guilty, broken, slaves, and lost.* But what does it mean to be “lost” or “saved?” Does God have the right to tell me under what terms I may have a relationship with Him? According to the Bible he does. It's as if God were right here saying to you,

“I love you deeply. I want you to be my child. In order for me to adopt you, you're going to have to face some difficult things about yourself and some hard realities about me. You can't become a child of mine until you admit that you're not. And I'm inviting you to explore the words I used and what they mean. If you will do that, I will show you how to begin a relationship with me.”

Many people think they can come to God on their own terms, as though God owes them something. They minimize God's holiness and maximize their own goodness. They assume that because they have not committed the more obvious sins like murder, God must accept them. They dismiss terms like “lost” and “saved” as judgmental or intolerant. And when they hear that God is willing to punish both major and minor sin, they think, “Who does God think he is?!”

Interaction Question: What do you think or feel about the above? Who do you relate to most?

Let's explore further why God and God alone can define the terms of our relationship with him.

Recall sessions 3, 4 and 5:

1. In session 3, we explored how **God** is very real and very reliable. We discovered that God created everything and has gone out of his way to make himself known in multiple ways. He created us and pursued us even when we ignored and rejected him. ***Who other than God could define the terms of our relationship? Oprah? A priest? A buddy?***
2. In session 4, we explored how the **Bible** is God's reliable Word to us. We learned that the Bible is an amazing book that is accurate, reliable, and inspired by God himself. It contains the truth about God, humanity, and the world like no other book. ***What other book than the Bible could teach us God's terms for our relationship?***
3. In session 5, we explored how **Jesus** is one with the Father and how he came "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus is the one true mediator between God and people. He is God's solution. ***Who better than Jesus could communicate the terms of our relationship?***

Can you see that God is the one and only person qualified to define the terms of your relationship with him? **God defines the terms of our relationship with him because he is God.** And he has chosen to reveal his terms in the Bible and through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

As you explore the rest of this session, you will see why we are in danger if try to define our own terms, and it turns out we are wrong, **Who are we to define the terms of a relationship we have rejected or resisted with our lives?** We have forfeited the relationship God intended to have with us. The only thing we deserve is death.

Interaction Question: Look over Core #1 above. Underline what you agree with, and put a "?" by the things you are not sure about. Then discuss your thoughts and feelings about them with your teammate.

Core #2: Input From God's Word: How Does God Define the Terms of My Relationship with Him?

God has done His best to clarify the terms for our relationship with Him. We can see this in the most famous verse of the Bible, John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

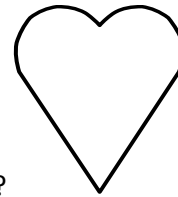
In the first line, Jesus describes **what God did:** *He loved the world so much that he gave up his Son.* In the second line, he describes **why God did it:** *so that people would not perish but have eternal life.* **Think about what this verse declares about those who do not believe: They are going to "perish."**

And in the next two verses, Jesus explains how grave the situation really is:

*“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands **condemned already** because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:17-18).*

Not only will people perish in the future, they are “condemned already”! Jesus did not come to condemn people. He came in order to save people who were *already* condemned, *already* perishing. In a very real way, **Jesus came to cure people from a deadly disease**. And here, Jesus makes clear that if they don’t receive treatment, they will die. They’re dying already. (Don’t forget that “they” refers to all of us.)

You may or may not feel this directly. You may not feel like you are condemned or sinful. And you may be aggravated at a God who questions your spiritual health. But just as a heart disease patient must trust his doctor’s diagnosis, we all must trust God’s diagnosis.



Interaction Question: What do you think, feel about the above?

I can’t be that bad! Look at all the good things I do!

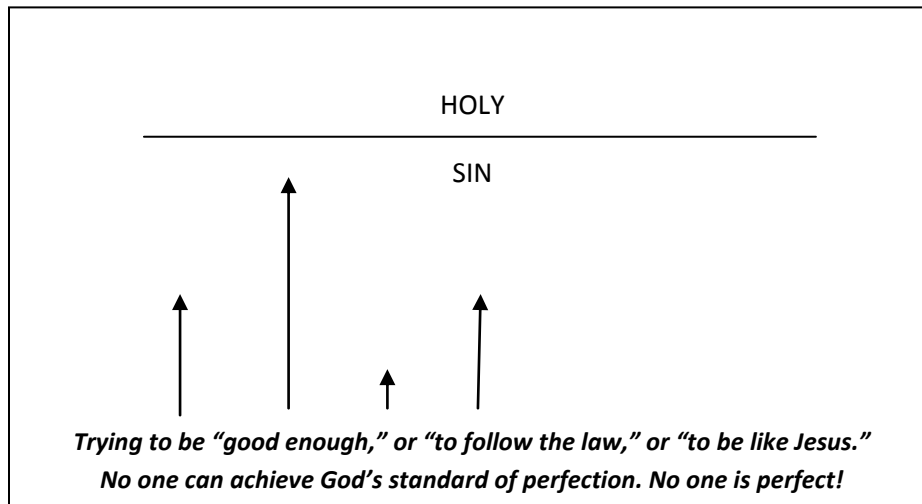
Before we move into the full diagnosis, we want to make clear that not every person is as evil or sinful as they could be. You may have done many good things regardless of your relationship with God. You may have solved many other problems, some with God’s help. Many have. How can your sin still separate you from God? Why can’t you solve your own sin and separation problem?

Paul describes our desperate need and inability to solve it in Romans 3:19-20 (emphasis added):

*“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. **Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law [that is, by doing good things];** rather, through the law we became conscious of sin.”*

Here’s the point: Because of God’s perfect holiness, every human being—no matter how many good things they do—are accountable to God for their sin—the bad things they do. Without Christ, we are condemned to death. We need to be rescued!

The following diagram will help you understand what this scripture says:



Because you can point to people around you who are more evil than you, it may be tempting to think God will accept you based on your goodness. You're at least better than them! But as the diagram shows and the verses below explain, God doesn't work that way. He stills loves us. But our sin separates us from Him.

According to the Bible, it is possible to be in denial or to be deceived, thinking you are OK with God when you really are not. See the scriptures and summaries below:

John 5:39-40 Know a lot about the scriptures, but refuse to come to Christ

Acts 26:9-21, Saul thought he was obeying God by capturing and killing those who believed in Jesus Christ, yet later God showed him he was separate from God...

Romans 1:18, people who suppress the truth, separate from God

Romans 2:3, 21 moral and religious people, judge others, stubborn hearts, yet separate from God

Romans 3:9-18,20, 23 Try hard to obey the Jewish laws, yet separate from God...

In the first column, describe your current view. In the second column, explore the Bible's diagnosis.

God's standard is perfection, so everyone who sins falls short. That's why it's not automatic to have a relationship with God even though we are all created and loved by him. Our sin separates us from him.

Interaction Question: What do you think, feel about the above picture and principles?

Diagnosis: A Spiritual MRI of All People Apart from Christ

In this section, you will explore the key verses that define our natural condition apart from Christ. Just as a doctor makes a diagnosis and describes a physical illness, Jesus and other biblical writers diagnose and describe our spiritual illness. They paint a disturbing picture of all people who do not have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. **The question is this: Will you accept their diagnosis or will you reject it?** Every time you have a question or objection, write it in the left column. Underline the statements on the right that seem important to you.

My Current Beliefs

What do you really think about the concepts of “perish”? What does it mean? Are you perishing? Why or why not?

How have you formed your opinion (e.g., family, teachers, culture/society)?

Were they reliable sources of spiritual insight?

Write your objections or questions in the space provided.

What Does “Perish” Mean?

The Bible describes three “dimensions” or “aspects” of what it means to “perish.” Explore each dimension below.

God uses many words to make the point unmistakable clear. Here are some others that refer to the same thing: lost, condemned, dead, separate from God, darkness

Dimension #1: Separate/Cut-off from God and condemned (present)

- You have sinned and therefore deserve death (Romans 3:23, 6:23).
- You have no hope apart from Christ, and no access to God (Ephesians 2:12).

Response: From 0-10, how sure are you that without Christ in your life you are cut off from God and condemned? Why?

Dimension #2: Enslaved by sin, unable to avoid sinning (present)

- You have a *tendency* to sin, and you often *commit* sin. Therefore, you are a sinner (1 John 1:8, 10).
- You are naturally and automatically sinful, which means without spiritual rescue you are dead in sin. You cannot avoid certain sinful behaviors. They have deceived and enslaved you (Ephesians 2:1-3, Titus 3:3).

Response: From 0-10, how sure are you that the above statements accurately describe you apart from Christ? Why?

Dimension #3: Permanently separate from God, in agony (future)

- Apart from Christ, you will not see life. You will receive God’s wrath (John 3:36).
- Without spiritual rescue you will be sent into eternal punishment, which is described as a lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46, Revelation 20:15).

Response: From 0-10, how sure are you that without Christ you will be permanently separated from God? Why

*Summary: These scriptures can be summarized in **five statements** which spell out God's diagnosis of all humans apart from Christ.*

1. Sin is an internal attitude, a tendency to sin, which separates us from God.
2. Our internal sin attitude is the source of outward sinful behavior.
3. Therefore, our sinful behavior is a symptom of our separation from God and our sinful attitude.
4. Sin is dangerous and deadly, hard to recognize, and we become slaves to it more than we know.
5. Sin has consequences, some invisible, like our separation from God, now and for eternity.

Some consequences are more visible, shown in our attitudes, words, behaviors and relationships. Only a Savior who is qualified can save us from these consequences.

Interaction Question: Look over Core #2 above and these five statements. Underline what you agree with, and put a "?" by the things you are not sure about. Then discuss your thoughts and feelings about them with your teammate.

Faith Response: Will I Accept God's Diagnosis?

What do you think of God's diagnosis? Is it something you reject? Do you have questions? Or do you see yourself more clearly now than ever? Perhaps God has shown you the deep-seated reasons for some of your struggles. Maybe your visible problems have invisible sources and solutions. Now is the time to respond.

In the space below, write **a personal response (a prayer) to God** about his diagnosis of your spiritual condition apart from Christ. (Be honest. If you disagree, tell him why. If you agree, ask him what you should do next.) *Write at least three sentences...*

Treatment: A Cure for All Who Trust Christ

Here's the Good News. Although all people are desperately in need of spiritual rescue, there is a cure! God has made a way for you to receive treatment and be healed. ***We will explore the cure in more depth in Session 7***, but here is a **quick preview**:

Dimension #1: The diagnosis is "separate/cut-off from God and condemned." The cure is to be ***freed from the penalty of sin***, reconciled to God, forgiven, and made spiritually alive (Romans 5:1, 10-11, 8:1, Ephesians 2:4-9, 13).

This dimension deals with our sinful condition. We are adopted, become children of God, friends with God and are enabled to live a truly new life.

Dimension #2: The diagnosis is “enslaved by sin, unable to avoid sinning.” The cure is to be **freed from the practice of sin**, learn to avoid sin, and pursue righteousness (Romans 6:11-14).

This dimension deals with our sinful choices and practice. We are freed from sinful behavior patterns and enabled to pursue a righteous life flowing from a new character.

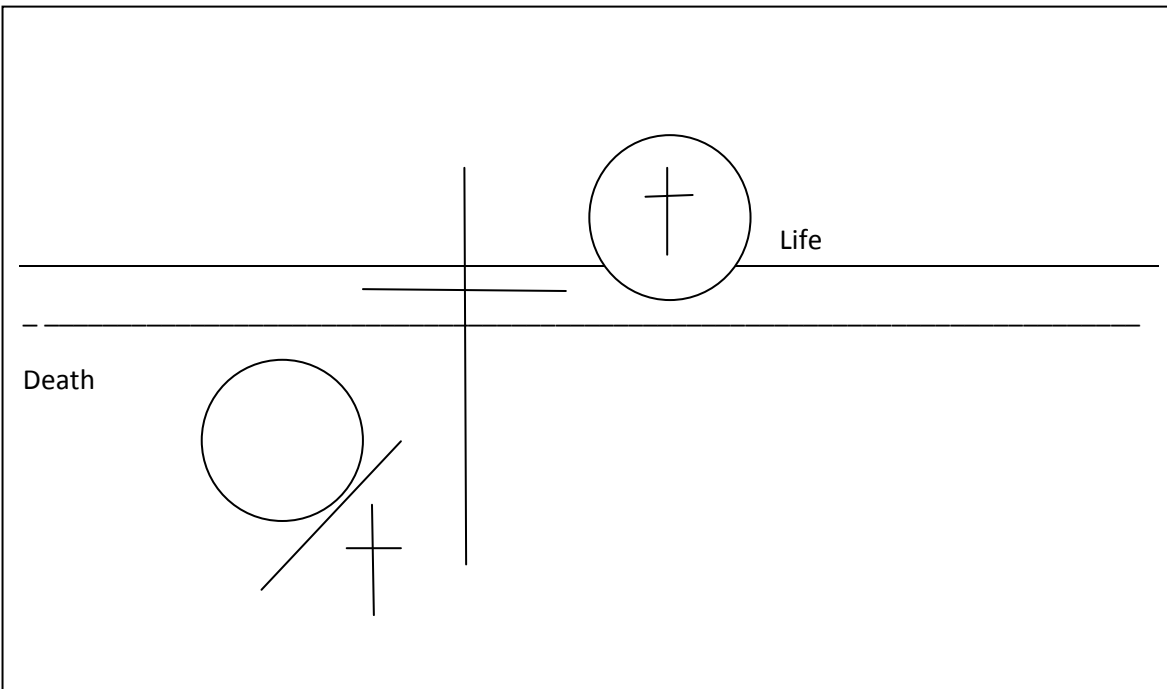
Dimension #3: The diagnosis is “permanently separate from God, in agony.” The cure is to **be freed from the presence of sin**, permanently united with God in eternal joy (John 5:24, 10:28, Rev.21:3-4).

This dimension deals with our future state. We are permanently reunited with our Creator—a relationship we were created for that brings eternal joy and true wholeness.

You will look at this cure in more detail in the next session. For now, think about what they might mean to your life right now.

Explore this question: *How might you or your life change if this cure became a reality? Write your thoughts and discuss with your teammate*

Core #3: How Do I Put All This Together? And How do I Respond?



Faith Response: Responding in the Biblical Pattern

You may be wondering how to respond to all of this. We will explore this more thoroughly in our next session. But for now, this is too important to delay some beginning steps: The Bible presents a simple but profound and life-changing pattern for how God wants you to respond to his Word. Read each step and if you are ready, pray each prayer.

1. **Step 1: Accept God's Diagnosis.** Recognize that without Christ, you are lost and separated from God. Pray something like this: *"Lord, I never realized how lost I was.. I know now that I am unable to save myself from my sin or its consequences. Forgive me for all that I have done or thought that was against you."*
2. **Step 2: Trust God to rescue you and give new life.** Pray something like this: *"Lord, I cannot save myself. I desperately need you to rescue me. I know that just as you rescued your disciples from storms, you can save me and give me new life. I want this life."*
3. **Step 3: Trust God to live that life through you.** Pray something like this: *"Lord, I need to be changed from the inside out. Live the life of Jesus out through me and empower me to become who you want me to be."*

A Word of Encouragement

Wherever you are today, God wants to meet you. If you are not ready to pray these prayers, respond to God with whatever you have. He welcomes your scrutiny and will help you understand his Word if you ask him. Your teammate may be able to help as well.

TEAMWORK/PRAYER PARTNER: HOW CAN THIS TOPIC AFFECT YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK?

Discuss the following with your partner. Start now, and check in with each other through the week.

1. *General:* What is most helpful from this session? What is difficult? How clear am I?
2. *Specific:* How does this affect specific areas of my life?
3. *Faith steps:* How much do I live as though this is true? What practical steps do I need to take in order to live according to reality? Who else can I share this with?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK: BE READY TO REPORT ON THIS.

Before next week's meeting, do the following to help you further understand and apply this session.

1. *Keep Your Eyes Open*: Look for other things in your life or the natural world around you that deal with rescue. Write down any examples you see.
2. *Reinforce Your Learning*: Review God's diagnosis and cure for all people. Look up each scripture, read it, and ask God to help you understand it.
3. *Apply the Reality Principle*: What are your emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends saying about lost/rescued (left column above)? How do those things stand up to the claims of Scripture (right column above)? Write your thoughts and observations below.

What my emotions, circumstances, and cultural trends say:

What the Bible says:

4. *Share With Someone Else*: If you are convinced of the reality of your need for a relationship with God, *share this with someone else*. If you are not, *ask someone else what they think*. It will help you to talk this out with others who are interested in the topic.

Forecasting Session 7: How Does a Relationship with God begin?

Okay, so if I need a relationship with God, how do I get one? How do I get rescued? What do I need to do and what does God do? And what happens when I am rescued?

In the next session, we will explore **how to actually start a relationship with God**. In preparation, consider these questions:

Bring **illustrations** of small steps that lead to BIG RESULTS: birth, marriage, citizenship, military,

1. What do you think God expects from you in order to have a relationship with him? What happens when you start that relationship?
2. How did you form your beliefs?
3. Do your actions reflect these beliefs?