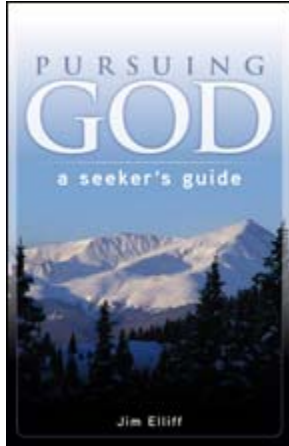


Pursuing God—A Seeker’s Guide

Online Study Guide



We are happy to offer you this companion study guide for *Pursuing God—A Seeker’s Guide* by Jim Elliff. Although this study guide is copyrighted, we give you permission to reproduce it for your small group or personal use. Copies of the book may be obtained through www.CCWtoday.org. We suggest that each person in the group have a copy of the book and the questions.

Jim Elliff will guide the discussion by presenting questions in the first person. This guide will cover eleven sessions plus an optional three weeks. It may also be used for mentoring individuals, and for weekly family discussions.

The optional three weeks are for talking through what is discovered in reading the gospel of John with the study aid, “Twenty-one Days with God.” The mentor/leader may simply go over the information and questions written down by the learners and look at some of the important stories and concepts in the gospel itself. This can extend the class or mentor relationship, or can be done privately. Because the gospel of John is so effective, it is best if the mentor/student relationship continue in some way, if at all possible.

If you are leading a group, please read the brief chapters of the book aloud in your meeting even though you will ask the group to read each week’s chapter prior to coming. Reading aloud will only take a little time and is essential for the best possible discussion.

Who knows what God will do as you meet together? If you are a leader, you will want your group to become aware of an unseen world that is every bit as real as the world they see with their physical eyes. Only the Holy Spirit can give them the ability to see into this realm. Please pray about this as you lead.

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Pursuing God—A Seeker’s Guide

Chapter One

So What’s the Problem?

A Brief Introduction to the Study:

There are only two requirements for this study: 1. You will have to be honest, and, 2. You will need to pursue a relationship with God. During these weeks you will be asked some questions that will probe you. No one ever came to Christ without painful honesty. Please do your best to say exactly what is true about yourself. God already knows who you are, but it will help you the most to be honest with Him, yourself, and the others in the group.

I have already assumed that you are, in some way, interested in a relationship with God. Some of you may believe you are true Christians already. Yet, I’m asking all of you to *pursue* Him. This will be seen in the way you ask questions and listen, and in the way you attempt to apply what you learn. So much is at stake. The losses are catastrophic, but the gains are eternal. Could anything be as important as knowing whether you are going to spend eternity in heaven or hell?

Now, let’s get started.

1. Have you ever had a *big* problem—or at least a problem that seemed huge at the time? Maybe you remember several. Briefly talk about an experience with the others—no intimate details required. [*Leader, see note at end of this section*]*
2. Begin by reading the introduction to the first chapter aloud (p. 8).
3. In the introduction I said that understanding and feeling intensely responsible for your predicament is essential to coming to Christ. Please describe the time you thought the most deeply about God, your sin, and your need for Him. If you have never had such a time, just be honest.
4. It’s not enjoyable to tell you about the problem between you and God, but I must do it. In chapter one, I list words that God uses in the Bible to describe how he sees you—dead, blind, lost and condemned. Read pages 9-11 aloud, ending just before the paragraph that starts with the words, “Trying to overcome . . .”
5. Discuss which of the four descriptive words (dead, blind, lost or condemned) should trouble us the most. Express your viewpoint and why you see it that way.

6. Describing some Christians before they were converted, the apostle Paul said, “. . . and you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Imagine standing with me around a grave where a mutual friend of ours is buried. We would all like to talk with him again. First, we will have to wake him up. How will we do it? We scream out his name and beat on the gravestone. But nothing happens. Suppose I preach to the corpse. Will that do anything? Not at all. Now, apply this to Paul’s phrase, “dead in trespasses and sins.” When the Bible speaks of a person being dead spiritually, what is that about? Are we actually as dead as a man who is in the grave? What does being “dead” mean? Explain.

7. The Bible also says that we are blind until God “opens our eyes.” Perhaps you have imagined what it is like to be blind physically, or maybe you *are* blind. Thinking carefully, fill in this statement. “To be blind spiritually is _____.”

8. Once, as a small child, I was separated from my father in a huge department store. No direction seemed right to me. If I went one way, I would soon stop and think, “This is not the right way.” But when I took another direction, the same awful bewilderment was there again. The Bible says that we are lost before we are found by God. Have you ever lost your way? In some detail, describe a time when you or somebody you know was lost. What feelings were experienced? What parallels are there between this and spiritual lost-ness?

9. The last descriptive word, “condemned,” is one of the most disturbing of words. It means that we are judged by God. I’m sure none of us appreciate being judged by others. But God is Creator and Ruler of the world, and He has every right to do so. He is never unjust. Did you know that God condemns those people in distant lands who have never even heard of Christ? A person is condemned both because he commits actual sins *and* because he is a sinner by nature. In fact, he actually sins against whatever he understands about God. Read Romans 1:18-21 below and dialogue about what this means.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (NKJV)

10. A “moralist” is one who seeks to live by God’s laws and counts on his good behavior and religious activity to make him acceptable to God. When Paul talks to “moralistic” persons, as he does in Romans 2 to the Jews of his day, he tells them that they do the same sins as do the pagans described in Romans 1:28-31. Read the description of the pagans that these moralists were judging:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

But, following the above passage, Paul says that the moralist is just as condemned as the non-moralistic pagan! Read Romans 2:1-3 below and you will see what I mean. God says both are condemned. Which of the two types of people, pagan or moralist, is more like you? Or, if you are already a true Christian, which were you most like prior to your conversion to Christ? Why do you say that?

Here is the passage:

[Speaking to the “moralist”] Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge [that is, judge the pagans], for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

11. Now, please read the rest of the *Pursuing God* chapter aloud.

12. Remember what God has done to solve our problem?

1) From eternity past He set His heart on those who will eventually believe.

2) He sent His Son to die in their place.

3) He pursues them by His Spirit, convicting them of their sin, teaching them about the nature of salvation, and drawing them to Christ’s beauty and worthiness. He makes Christ irresistible to them so that they will put their faith in Him. He is even the source of the faith they use, which is called, “a gift of God” (Eph. 2:8-9).

So, you can see, it is God who has the solution to our problem. The Bible calls those who are converted to Christ, “believers.” To the best of your knowledge, try to describe in some detail what you think that word means. I’m only asking you to verbalize your present understanding now. We’ll learn more about believing as we go along.

13. Before you finish, think about this. You must believe in Christ yourself! You may not feel your problem with God like others do, but you are just the same as everyone else (dead, blind, lost, and condemned) until you become a true believer.

Perhaps the leader of the group can share the story of his or her experience of coming to Christ.

14. Any more questions?

For the next meeting: Please read chapter two ahead of time.

**[A note to leaders: Unless the group is very small, some questions in the series might best be answered by having each person discuss them with a person next to him or her. To avoid rearranging chairs, you may even have them stand. If there are only two or three groups, then separate them across the room to reduce distraction. If there are several, it won't be necessary to do that. It is often best to say, "You have ___ minutes to discuss this." Start with a shorter time period. If it is apparent that more time is needed, you can add what is helpful as you see how it is going. At some point you will have to stop the groups by giving them 30 seconds and then telling them the time is up. Don't be afraid to interrupt the discussions.]*

Chapter Two

You Don't Look So Good

1. Please read chapter two of *Pursuing God—A Seeker's Guide* aloud. Perhaps you can share the reading.
2. This is a chapter that will be hard to accept. There is no question that the description given would be a mere insult except for one fact: *it is true*. This is God's view of every person outside of Christ and it is repeated in the Bible from the beginning to the end. I guess you would have to say that God does not have an optimistic view of man; He does not see him as starting out righteous or evolving into something better. So, instead of flattering you, I have decided to simply write the truth in the plainest way. Let's look now in some detail at the person we see in the mirror of the Bible. We'll be looking at the passage written out in the chapter you just read, Romans 3:10-18.
3. *You're not righteous* ("There is none righteous, no not one"). Most people would not believe this. In your opinion, why are most people so adamant to believe that they are inherently righteous?
4. There is an interesting verse in Galatians 3:21. It goes like this: "I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness comes by the law, Christ died needlessly." What do you think this means?
5. *You have no understanding* ("there is none who understands"). Of course, Paul means that the person without Christ has no real comprehension of the truths concerning salvation. There is a difference between knowing a few facts about Christ and salvation, and having true understanding. Re-read the section called *No Understanding*, p. 14, 2nd paragraph. Why do I assert that the professor did not understand?
6. *You have no desire for God* ("there is no one who seeks God"). In John 6:44, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." Here is the real problem. You must come to Him, yet you do not naturally seek Him. In your estimation, why is it that people are not inclined to actually seek Him? Also, how far can you go seeking peace, a good life, and heaven, and yet not be seeking God at all?
7. *You are rebellious* ("All have turned aside to their own way"). We just read that you cannot come to Christ unless the Father draws you. This verse ("All have turned aside . . .") puts the blame on the person who chooses to go his or her own way. If you come to Christ, God gets the credit (you would not have done it without Him drawing you to Christ), but if you just go your own way, then *you* are to blame.

Isaiah wrote: "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, every one to his own way . . ." (Isaiah 53:6). Is it possible to be religious and still be going your own way?

Jesus spoke His harshest words against religious people who would not believe in Him on His terms. Why do you think we are naturally rebellious?

8. *You have become worthless* (“together they have become worthless”). I have often looked at the rows of biographies in the bookstore. Most of these people were great in the eyes of their generation, but what about in the eyes of God? It is one thing to have a high value in the estimation of other humans, but it is another to be accepted by God. If you see yourself as God sees you (before genuine salvation), would you be inclined to have low self-esteem? Is that good or bad?

9. I also wrote about Romans 3:13-18. Please have someone read that again (p. 15). I said that this language seems untrue when you first look at it. It seems inconceivable to think of yourself or your kind neighbor as a murderer, for instance. Yet, remember, God sees the inner man and often describes us by what we are on the inside rather than what we appear to be on the outside. The lust, hatred, and selfishness of every person is usually concealed, but to God it is openly revealed. It is no wonder that God thinks of us as sinful people who deserve judgment and who have no hope of making ourselves any different apart from Him. It is not bad to feel hopeless if it drives you to God. You are in fact ruined by sin and you do deserve eternal punishment. Yet, nothing is impossible with God. Do you find it difficult to think of yourself in the way God describes you in this passage? Why or why not?

10. Many believe that they are good enough, or could become good enough, to deliver themselves from the power of sin and the condemnation they deserve. Others, as I have already mentioned, have become hopeless about their own ability to do anything to correct their situation on their own. Which is the better position, and why?

11. Perhaps someone in the group would be willing to describe a time when they have actually *felt* their inability to get to God on their own moral strength. Or, if someone in the group is already converted to Christ, perhaps he would be willing to describe how he viewed himself before coming to Christ. Don't hesitate to ask questions about how this person was thinking and feeling at that time.

12. Finally, let me just mention that I have had the experience of talking with many people around the world about Christ. Those who have come to Him and been converted have always wished they had done so earlier. Yet, before knowing about the intensity of their problem, they were unable to *want* Christ. The Spirit of God used the knowledge of the seriousness of the dilemma to bring them into that authentic relationship with Him. And this changed everything for them. If you are not yet sure you are truly converted, I hope this knowledge of your problem will do the same for you.

For next week: Please read chapter three.

Chapter Three

Is God Angry Anymore?

1. Do you ever get angry? Describe what is different about your anger and God's. Please illustrate.

2. I am sure that you would agree that at some point God shows His anger toward those who reject him—at least in hell. But when does God's anger begin? Only after you die? One minute before you die? A year before you die? When you are born? When you are old enough to know better?

3. Please read the chapter aloud.

4. There is an interesting passage in Psalm 5: 4-6 that speaks of God's anger. Here it is:

For you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

On the basis of this verse, do you think God loves "those who do iniquity?" For instance, does God love terrorists?

5. One of the most uncomfortable truths found in the Bible is the fact that God is angry with some people right now. I mentioned three passages (out of many) to show this. Please read those three passages found on page 17 aloud again. A lot of people will tell you that God loves you and never mention that He is angry every day with those who will not come to Him by faith. Have you thought about this before? Do you believe that God has often been misrepresented? What would your friends think if you told them that God actually is angry with people who are not Christians? Why?

6. God's anger grows with people who will not come to Him and persist in going their own way. Read what Romans 2: 4-6 states:

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds" . . .

Do you believe it is possible that God is angrier with some people alive now than others who are already in hell? Would it be true that He is angrier with *you* than others in hell now?

7. I mention three reasons why God should be angry with you. The first was because of the sheer number of your sins. How many sins would you guess that you commit every day, on average. Go ahead, guess. And don't forget your words, thoughts, motives, and attitudes. Have you ever been ungrateful, for instance, or ever complained, or been unloving? Remember those things you *should* have done, but didn't, as well as what you shouldn't have done, but did. Then multiply that number times 365 to get the amount for one year. What about ten years, and fifty years? Don't you think God ought to be angry? *[Leader, using a calculator for this one will make help!]*

8. Another reason God should be angry is because you have sinned against the highest being and the greatest command. Please read that section aloud again. (p. 19) Do you understand what I'm saying here? Try to explain it in your own words.

9. The final reason for God being angry is that you have sinned against God's greatest act of love, Christ's death on the cross. By not coming to Him on His terms you are saying with your actions that you don't actually appreciate His loving offer to you enough to do anything about it. Or, you are saying without words that it was unnecessary for Him to come and die because you plan to get to heaven on your own. Therefore, as far as your actions show, He came for nothing. I hope that I have not misrepresented you. Please put what you feel about Christ's death and your need of Him into your own words for the group. But remember, if you say you genuinely do appreciate his death and the offer of salvation by grace, yet have not come to Him, your actions speak louder than your words. Isn't that rebellion, and should it not make God angry with you? Hasn't God's loving good news become your bad news?

10. Finally, explain the idea of "propitiation." Do you believe that propitiation was necessary for you to have a hope of salvation and eternal life? If you believe it was, explain why in your own words.

11. Remember, there is hope for people like you and me.

For next week: Please read chapter four.

Chapter Four

If I Should Die Before I Wake

1. This chapter is about dying. Have you lost a friend or family member to death? If so, please tell us about it, that is, tell us how that person's death affected you?
2. Name five things you do to keep from dying.
3. Read the chapter aloud, along with the introduction to the chapter on page 20.
4. What do you think the Bible means when it calls death an enemy? Do you think of it like that?
5. Look at that verse in the middle of page 22. It is from Hebrews 2:15, and says that Christ came to "release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." In your opinion, what is the bondage that the writer of Hebrews speaks of? What is "release" from bondage?
6. I said that people who are not yet believers in Christ (and therefore not true Christians) have a lot of reason to worry about death. I went on to say that people who say otherwise "are only bluffing themselves. They either believe themselves to be invincible or they think that merely *saying* they are not afraid alters the facts. Both thoughts are deceptions." Actually, I could add a third: they may not believe there is anything following death.

So, either—

- a. you are a true Christian,
- b. you don't believe there is anything beyond death,
- c. you think you are invincible, or
- d. you somehow believe that *saying* you have no fear alters the facts about what follows death.

Do you see any other alternatives? If so, what are they? Which category of thinking best describes most people you know?

7. Christ came, then, to release us from the fear of death! God provided for our freedom from fear by sending Jesus to die for sinful people like us. He provides a pardon for sin and a promise of eternal life in heaven after death for everyone who believes in Him. We may not love the dying process, but we do not have to be fearful about what follows. If a believer is thinking well and is aware of his benefits as a believer, he should die well. Of course, some true believers do have a weaker faith than others, but you should see a difference. Often people who die are drugged heavily, so you may not learn what you should from their experience. Have you ever known anyone in the dying process who expressed confidence in God about the future? Or someone

who was very old who was confident about going to heaven? Or, have you known someone who had no confidence about the future and expressed it in some way, verbally or otherwise? Please relate that to the group.

8. I once met an old man who was dying. As I attempted to tell him about what Christ had done and how he could become a child of God, he seemed quite willing to listen. I asked him specifically if he believed in hell. He said that he did. Yet when I urged him to avoid hell and go to heaven by believing in Christ, he said that he did not wish to do so at that time. I said that I did not think he was telling me the truth. I did not believe that he thought hell was real. Do you think he believed in hell? Why or why not?

9. I quoted this statement from Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die . . ." (John 11:25-26).

Can you explain what this means? Discuss these verses, trying to unlock Jesus' exact meaning.

10. I have often seen people wearing this saying on their clothing, "No fear." Do you think they do have fear, don't have fear, should have fear, or should not have fear?

11. Tell the group why you would agree or disagree with these statements:

- a. "If you are unconverted to Christ, not having fear is a deception."
- b. "Fear of death for the true Christian means that the Christian is being deceived."

10. Any more questions?

For next week: Please read chapter five.

Chapter Five

Sooner Than You Think

1. Please read the chapter aloud.
2. *Tempis fugit* is the Latin equivalent for our phrase, “time flies.” It might be stated this way: “time is a fugitive.” This chapter deals with this truth. The minutes and days you live are gone forever and each moment you are coming closer to the time of your death. The chapter is based on James 4:13-17. Please read that passage aloud.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

3. The passage puts you into the mind of businessmen who are planning a way to make a profit by going to another city and staying a year there, buying and selling. Surely you make plans sometimes. Is there anything wrong with that?
4. There are two absolutes that must be remembered whenever plans are made. The first is this: *You don't know what will happen tomorrow*. I had a friend in school when I was much younger who went swimming in the river after school one day. The next day he wasn't at school. When he jumped from the boat to swim ashore, he didn't make it. My other friend was unable to save him. In another case, a friend was driving while drunk one night and hit a telephone pole. He was instantly paralyzed. Has anyone in the group experienced a major change with no real forewarning, or do you know of such a situation? If so, tell your experience to the group. These experiences are important for us to consider so that we won't forget the first absolute.
5. The second absolute is this: *Life at its best is very short*. James puts it this way: Your life is but “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” That's a clear picture. However, it seems less a reality when you are young. Although some people never think of it, it remains an inescapable reality. For instance, when a girl starts 8th grade, she will have only 60 months until she will graduate from high school. If you are 50 years old, you will only have 180 months until you could retire at 65. If you are entering college, you will only have 48 short months until you graduate and on your on. Think how quickly a month goes by! Everyone feels differently about the relentless advance of time. Do you think of time as moving slowly or quickly? What were you doing 48 months ago? What do you project will be happening in your life five years from now?
6. OK, we've said that you have a short time to live and you really don't know what will happen tomorrow—you may in fact die. James tells us not only what we should not say

(that is, “I will do this or that”), but rather, what we should say. He puts it this way: “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (vs. 15). Here is a fact that trumps the other facts: Everything we do, and even the duration of our life, is entirely dependent upon God’s will! This includes whether we live or die and what we do or don’t do in the future. Remember that the time of your death will come right in the middle of your plans. Another verse that speaks of this is found in Psalm 139:16.

And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.

Also, note what Jesus said in Matthew 10:29.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.

Do you believe that it a good thing or a bad thing that God is in control of the moment you die? Explain your answer.

7. My friend who drowned was not a Christian. Suppose he had known then what he knows now. Describe in some detail what you believe would have been his attitude and interest in the issues relating to Christ during the year before he died?

8. I mentioned that we have one way to be secure in the face of the facts I’ve listed, and that is through correctly aligning ourselves with the one who controls the future. From the list below, which is the right way to become a true Christian, and which is insufficient or even wrong, in your opinion? Explain why or why not. Only one answer is right according to the Bible. *[Leader, you may want to ask the group to turn to a person next to them and explain their answer(s) first; then you can discuss the various views in the whole group.]*

- a. by believing that Christ is the Son of God, that He died for sinful people like me, and that He arose from the dead
- b. by deciding to obey God with all of my strength, asking him to forgive me when I fail
- c. by going to church and spending more time with Christians
- d. by trusting Christ on the basis of what He has done, and resting everything in Him for forgiveness and a future life in heaven
- e. by doing the best I can and then trusting that Christ will decide correctly when I stand before Him at the judgment

9. Any more questions?

For next week: Please read chapter six.

Chapter Six

A Thief in the Night

1. Before we read this chapter, list quickly several words or phrases that could substitute for the word, “sudden.”
2. I used to travel in the former Eastern European countries when they were under the control of Communist dictators. Some of my Christian friends had spent time in prison for their faith. Their stories were similar. All of a sudden armed police would appear at their door and then whisk them away to a mock trial and prison sentence. Without any preparation, everything in their life changed, that is, everything but their relationship with Christ. Some of your friends, or even you yourself, may have had a “sudden” change enter into your life. If so, please tell the group about it. What kind of emotion does the word, “suddenly,” stir up in you? Why do you find it easy or hard to deal with sudden reversals?
3. Please read chapter six aloud.
4. The apostle Paul told his disciples that Christ would come again. Here is just one place he talked about that unusual future event.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

What do you think is the point of using the term “twinkling of an eye”? Who do you think he is specifically talking about when he says that the dead will be raised and all of us will be changed?

5. The coming of the Lord will not be such a positive thing for those who are not believers in Christ. Read what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

Perhaps you live with a sense of peace and safety. That is, you feel comfortable and safe, with little conflict or trouble in your life at present. It is at just such a time that Christ will come. And if a person is not right with God, the “sudden destruction” will enter in right at this point. You will not escape. Do you think this is fair in the case of people you know? Explain your answers.

6. There may be several truths that Paul wishes to make known by using the words, "thief in the night." Please name some.

7. How should a believer think about all of this? Would that believer have any regrets if he or she were suddenly taken away to be with Christ? Name any regrets, and also name as many benefits as you can.

8. Have you ever thought that you will be able to change things in your relationship with Christ just before you die or Christ comes? Forget it. It probably won't happen. There are two reasons. First, if you are headed in the wrong direction, loving your independence from Christ and pursuing your own desires, then most likely you will have less real desire to become a Christian *then* than you do *now*. Secondly, it is reasonable to think that you may well not have any time at all for considering a change in your life. Death may be sudden or slow, granted. In the later case, you may have some time to think, it is true. But you may be addled because of medicine, or so concerned with the next breath that you cannot think. If a fatal calamity comes, or if the second coming of Christ happens first, you have zero time to think things over. When it happens, it happens.

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being "totally sure,") how ready are you for Christ to come back, and why do you feel that way? Please be honest. *[Leader, unless the group is very small you may wish to have the persons in the group answer this one with only one other person. Stress honesty.]*

9. Finally, let's hear from the leader of the group, or your mentor, about how he or she feels about the suddenness of Christ's future coming.

For next week: please read chapter seven.

Chapter Seven

The Power of God

1. Several years ago in a small plane I circled three times over the great Victoria Falls at the border of South Africa and Zimbabwe. I don't think I had ever before seen such power. On another occasion I stood in the back of an open truck during a buffalo stampede. Dust flew as the ground was pounded by Cape Buffalo who were being routed from the watering hole by an angry bull elephant. At other times I have met powerful people, and witnessed powerful transformations of society. Power comes in many forms. Before we read the chapter, quickly relate to the group some of the most powerful things you have seen.

2. Read aloud the introduction to the chapter and then chapter seven, *Gospel Equals Power*.

3. The Bible teaches that God's power is needed for changing people like you and me. What are some reasons power is needed for making a person a true Christian? Think deeply about this.

4. The verse I quoted in the chapter is found in Romans 1:16. It goes like this:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Here Paul says that the gospel [that is, the good news about Christ's death, burial and resurrection for sinful people] is "the power of God to salvation." What do you think that means? In other words, how could the gospel equal power?

5. When we think of God we have to think in more than one form of power. He is powerful in nature, creating and sustaining the world (read Colossians 1:15-16), and He is also powerful in accomplishing His decrees (read Isaiah 46:9-11) He is powerful in influence as well (read Proverbs 21:1). The gospel, when God chooses to use it in a person's life, is irresistibly powerful by being attractive beyond our ability to ultimately resist. Of course, it is the nature of every person to resist God as we saw in Romans 3:11-12, "There is none who seeks God. They have all turned aside." Yet, when God wishes, He uses His power of influence to make a person want Christ above all other things. In John 6:37, 44-45 we find Jesus saying this:

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. . . . No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

Look at this passage carefully. How is God's power being exercised? Try to explain and discuss what God is saying about his power to draw people to Himself. Also, how does the Father's teaching and the human communication of the gospel correspond? Don't some people hear the gospel who do resist?

6. How do you know if you are being drawn to Christ?

7. The gospel is powerful to change us as the Spirit applies it and the Father Himself teaches us through it. The apostle Paul knew about this power firsthand. He once persecuted the Christians, but then was totally changed by the power of God and made to be an instrument in God's hands to change others. Do you really believe that God can do this to anyone? If not, who would be an exception? What about a person who is dying, and has been evil all of her life?

8. Has God convinced you that coming to Christ by faith is the only way to be in God's family? If not yet, in what ways have you seen God's power influencing you so far? If you are a believer already, how did you see God's power at work in you related to your conversion?

For next week: Please read the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

Destroying the Future

1. I've seen a lot of divorces in my life. I'm sure you have seen plenty also. One of the leading reasons for divorce is sex prior to marriage. Why do you think that is so?
2. Do you believe that a person who is active sexually outside of marriage or even a practicing homosexual could be converted? Please explain your answer.
3. Read chapter eight aloud.
4. Paul paints a dismal picture in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Why does Paul say, "Do not be deceived"?

5. Why do you think Paul mentions these particular sins? Are you OK if you commit other sins as long as you stay away from these? Why or why not?
6. Paul has more to say about sin and being in the kingdom of God. Read this:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. 1 (Corinthians 6:11)

Obviously Paul is speaking to people who *used* to be fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, etc. There is so much hope in these words, for it means that God can convert anyone. Do you see anything in this passage that makes you think you could continue in such a sinful lifestyle once becoming a Christian?

So, do you have to clean your life up to come to Christ? Why or why not?

7. The passage teaches that God can give you a brand new beginning. He washes you, sanctifies you and justifies you by the Spirit. These words are important. To be washed means that you are cleansed from your sins, no matter what they were. To be sanctified means that you are set apart to God as His own possession. To be justified is a courtroom word. It means that, even though you are a sinner, you are declared to be right with God on the basis of what Christ has done for you.

Concerning the last word, think of two ledgers. On the one is your sin and on the other is Christ's righteousness. In justification, your sin is put on Christ's ledger and Christ's

righteousness is put on your ledger. It is “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned and “just-as-if-I’d” kept the law. On the basis of Christ’s righteousness you are accepted by the Father.

Suppose Christ walked into this room and said to you, “You are now washed from your sins, set apart as mine, and declared righteous before My Father.” How would this impact you? Do you think a person who has experienced this could casually continue in his sin?

8. At the end of the chapter I talked about scars. There will likely be some if you have lived a life of disobedience prior to coming to Christ—and we all have! But this does not mean that you are bound to the old desires you used to have or that you can never be free from such a lifestyle of disobedience. Discuss how scars have shown up in your life if you are already a believer, or how they can be seen in others who are Christians. What is the benefit or harm of these scars?

9. Do you think it is possible for any person to come to Christ and be the same as before? Explain your answer. Should we call a person a Christian if he or she not been changed morally?

Note: We have said that we should never lose hope, for even the most sinful of people may be changed. And we have said that we cannot be so arrogant as to believe that we can hold on to our sins when we come to Him. Salvation is about being free from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the even the presence of sin in the future. The true believer has now been given the Holy Spirit to reside within him so that he can experience freedom from sin daily. We all know that the Christian will not be perfect until heaven. Yet, nobody may come to Christ and hang on to a lifestyle of sin at the same time. They come to Christ with a profound change of mind about sin. This is called repentance. We will discuss that in the next chapter.

For next week: Please read chapter nine. The next two chapters will be very important for you.

Chapter Nine

The Change of Mind

1. Please read the introduction to chapter nine on p. 44.
2. This chapter is extremely important for helping you understand the proper response to Christ. It will also have the benefit of helping authentic believers think through these foundational truths more precisely. It is well-known that there is a proper way to present yourself to a great person such as a king or queen. God is greater than all. Nobody will be allowed to present himself to Him in just any way. Please read p. 45 aloud. We'll read the rest of the chapter in a moment.
3. The story I told about the young man who died was more moving and difficult than I was able to convey in such a short space. I certainly did not want to tell him the wrong thing. I'll admit that I *wanted* to tell him that he could come to Christ with his affection for his sin anyway and Christ would change his desires *after* he was converted. I did not, however. I still believe I gave him the right answer. Can you put into your own words my answer to this man? Why did I say that coming to Christ while simultaneously cherishing sin is like trying to fly an airplane in two directions?
4. Now read the rest of the chapter.
5. It is important to distinguish between repentance itself and works of repentance. Repentance is a change of mind, a profound change of heart and attitude about sin, but the *works* of repentance are those actions coming from a truly repentant person—the fruit of true repentance. Sometimes people do not emphasize repentance because they think those who do are describing repentance as some sort of work that earns salvation. In other words, they think we are saying that a person becomes a Christian by changing his *behavior* and acting differently, rather than by changing his *mind* about his behavior, and putting his entire trust in Christ. What's the difference between these two, in your own words?
6. The story of the young man who came to Jesus (pages 46-47) shows why repentance is so necessary. Restate for the group just why Christ did not accept him.
7. In John 2:23-25 we find these words:

Now when He [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

This passage is instructive. Please answer these questions about it.

- Were Jesus' signs done in order for people to see and believe in Him?

- Are people supposed to believe in Christ, and isn't this what the crowd did?
- The word "believe" in the phrase, "Many believed in His name," and the word "commit" in the phrase "Jesus did not commit Himself to them," is the same Greek word. Why did Jesus not commit Himself to these people who believed?
- The passage says that Jesus "knew all men." What is the significance of that phrase?

8. It appears that the people of John 2:23-25 were *unrepenting* "believers." Do you think there are many unrepenting "believers" in the professing church today? And if so, how did that happen?

9. Repentance is not a dutiful discipline. When a person is properly convicted by the Holy Spirit, he is *thrilled* to repent. He loves leaving his sin. Paul puts it this way:

For godly sorrow [conviction] produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Can you explain this verse? And what is the sorrow of the world that leads to death? How can you tell the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? Why is true repentance not to be regretted?

10. *[If you are in an intimate group, you may discuss these final questions openly. In some cases the leader may decide to ask for quiet reflection only.]* Here are the final questions:

- Are you a true repentor?
- Is your mind changed about sin?
- Do you despise your sin and want to leave it?
- If you do not repent, what will happen?

For next week: Please read chapter ten.

Chapter Ten

Trying or Trusting?

1. You are about to read an explanation of the concept of faith in Christ. You must listen and think carefully. Many have misunderstood salvation due to wrong ideas about this issue. Please read chapter ten aloud.
2. At the beginning of the chapter I quoted only part of a clarifying verse, Ephesians 2:8-9. Let me give you the whole verse now:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Paul is talking to people that have already become Christians. He is telling them *how* they came to Him—by faith and not by works. Why do you think God rejects the “works” way of salvation?

3. The Bible teaches that justification is through faith. Justification means that the believer is declared righteous before a holy God, even though he is sinful, on the basis of Christ and what He has done. He comes to God in Christ’s righteousness which is given to him as a gift. That may seem confusing at first. Let me state it again. To be received by God, you must have righteousness. You don’t have that in yourself because you are sinful. Yet Christ gives you His righteousness which is received by faith. Clothed in His righteousness, you are accepted by God. So, you are declared righteous with the righteousness of someone other than yourself. Does this make sense? Please take a few moments to discuss this until you understand it clearly.
4. I also quoted a passage about Abraham. Let me give you the fuller quotation now. It is found in Romans 4:1-5.

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. . .

Now, to understand this passage, answer these questions: Why was Abraham’s “righteousness” not acceptable to God? Will there be any people who boast in heaven? If not, why not? What is the plain teaching of this passage about how we are justified?

5. Paul is adamant about this truth—that is, that faith in Christ is the only way to be accepted by God. In one place Paul says this:

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

Either a person tries to come to Christ by the law (that is, by trying to do what God says to do and not do what God says not to do—by trying to earn salvation by his or her works), or through faith. Law and works go together and grace and faith go together, as we learned from the previous verses. You either trust yourself to have the works of obedience that will make you acceptable to God, or you place your trust in Christ and receive salvation as a gift of grace. One is the impossible way, and the other is the possible way. What does “set aside the grace of God” mean? And what does it mean: “Christ died in vain”?

6. Do you think I’m too strong when I say that trying to be a Christian is an insult to God and is a way of despising what Christ has done on the cross? Are there no good works that God accepts to help you be saved?

7. Now, let me take a moment to discuss this important idea: Whose right is it to determine which way is acceptable for salvation? I hope the answer is easy for you to figure out. The answer is, of course, God. It is His prerogative to determine the way of salvation for any person. He made us, we have sinned against Him and deserve nothing but hell, and He alone can give us forgiveness and eternal salvation. God alone has the right to determine which way is the right way to be saved. So why do so many people believe they have a better idea? That is, why would so many disregard God’s way and prefer their own way?

8. Some people are very actively pursuing the wrong way of salvation. It is hard to convince them to consider something else. Hear what Paul said, for instance, about the moralistic Jews. (The problem can be in Gentiles as well as Jews, of course). Paul longed for them to see the right way of salvation.

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:1-4)

In what way did the Jews disregard God’s way of obtaining righteousness which is through faith or belief in Christ? How is it possible to be so active and excited about the wrong thing? Do you think this is happening among any people you know? Is it possible for a whole church to have the wrong ideas about salvation? If so, do you think those groups ought to be called “Christian churches?” Whatever your answer, certainly there should be a sadness, like Paul had for the Jews, when we think of groups of professing Christians who do not understand grace and faith, but persist in the law/works view of salvation.

9. This has been a pivotal chapter for you and any person who is seeking to be sure that he or she is a true Christian. In this last moment, please discuss anything that is not clear. Don't hesitate to ask any related questions. Understanding faith and justification is essential.

For next week: Please read the final chapter carefully.

Chapter Eleven

What Shall I Do?

1. We have come now to a most important chapter for you. Before you read the chapter, please discuss among yourselves what you have learned so far from all that you have read and talked about over the last few weeks. If possible, do this in pairs. You might think of these words as you discuss briefly what you've learned: sin, death, heaven and hell, justification, repentance, faith, and works. Or, you may just wish to look over the table of contents and talk about the chapter that you found most helpful. *[Leader, you may only want to take 3-5 minutes for this.]*

2. Now, please read aloud the introduction and the chapter.

3. What is the most straightforward answer to the question: "What must I do to become a true Christian?"

4. In the Bible you will find the words "repent" and "believe" (sometimes called "faith" or "trust") over and over again. The faith you have must be a repenting faith. That is, when you come to Christ, you come rejecting your life of disobedience and self-reliance. You do not come to Christ all cleaned up, but you come willing to be changed and desiring freedom from your sin and all that it causes. Your mind will be changed about your sin. Sin brings hell, but it also causes you much pain on the way to hell. So, you must come with a "repenting faith" in Christ. You are turning away from a life of independence to a life of trust in Christ.

But behind all of this is the work of God. In fact, one way of seeing salvation is from God's perspective. I said this:

A seeker becomes a true Christian because *God* does something, creating desire for Him and distaste for sin. If God is at work, you cannot help rejecting your independence and coming to Him. You will place your trust in Him because there is nothing else left to trust. You will love Him because He is irresistible to you.

What can you see in yourself? Is God doing something to attract you to Christ? Do you find yourself hating the lifestyle you once loved? Please explain to the others what you think God is doing in you.

5. As I said, you must repent and believe. Even though the words "repent" and "believe" are often found alone, one always implies the other. In other words, you must "repentingly believe" or "believingly repent." In the final analysis, you are turning from something bad to something, that is, *someone*, who will give you more than you can ever deserve.

It may surprise you to find that you could come to this position in a moment of time. By that I mean, as you are reading, listening, thinking, you may, in fact, find yourself in this new way of seeing things. Describing his conversion, the author and Oxford professor, C. S. Lewis, said that he was “surprised by joy.” That could happen to you.

Another may come to Christ in a more deliberate manner. That is, he or she may go to God in prayer and express repentance and faith. God, of course, knows our hearts and can see our repentance and faith whether it is articulated well or not—or even at all. You must not make the mistake of thinking that becoming a Christian is some sort of formula, that is, the right words said to God. But if you quit your independence and fall over into Him by faith, you are a true believer. In one sense, believing in Christ is like quitting. You drop into his arms, so to speak, precisely because you can no longer sustain yourself in your independence. You stop trusting yourself and start trusting solely in Christ for your salvation.

I said this in the chapter:

When the question is put to you, now that you have read and thought this through, do you have to say, “I do, in fact, trust Christ, and I do, with joy, reject a life independent of Him?” Can you say, “I place no hope in anything else other than Christ for my salvation?” And, are you willing and quite happy for this benevolent God to be the master of your life without rebellion? Do you desire to follow Him, whether difficult or easy, throughout your entire life?

Attempt to express your answers to these questions to the group to the best of your ability. But above all, tell the truth. If you are not inclined to trust Him, then just say so. You may express something short of true salvation. Talk about how God is dealing with you now. In other words, are you a true believer? Or, are you close to becoming a true believer? It is perfectly permissible to express your current thoughts and even to express doubts, questions and concerns.

6. I listed a few actions you may wish to take if you think you have become a true believer. Let's take a minute to list them.

- Talk to a believing friend, pastor, or mentor so that he or she can help you take your first steps as a believer.
- Expect to see the evidence of a change in thinking, behavior, and attitudes. Expect genuine holiness, but not perfection.
- When you sin, deal with it by asking God to give you the help you need. You are a lifelong repenter.
- Find a good church where the Bible is taught, and the right view of becoming a Christian is believed and encouraged. Make sure that this church is serious about God and the Bible.

- Read the Bible and pray. I have provided a special guide through the gospel of John to get you started. Some of the groups will continue on using this guide together and discussing what is discovered. This is helpful even if some of the group have not yet believed in Christ. This is one of the most important things you can do. If you are not continuing as a group for the next weeks, at least, if possible, work with a mentor. Or, if this will not be possible, just use the guide personally. You will want to make Bible reading a lifelong habit. It is in the Bible that you will find the way to live out true Christianity.
- Be baptized. You will find this mentioned repeatedly in the Bible. You will not be baptized as a way to become a Christian, but rather as a way to show openly that you have already been changed. A pastor will be helpful on this issue. In the New Testament, believers were baptized *after* they were converted to Christ. This is an exciting drama and celebration. You should invite all the friends and family you can to watch your baptism.
- Tell others about Christ. You might find that introducing them to *Pursuing God—A Seeker’s Guide* will be the best way to do that. In fact, I do not doubt that you could join with your mentor and help lead a group of your friends through this book.
- Attempt to live by the Great Commission of Christ as found in Matthew 28:19-20.

This will be a good time to talk about these items I have just mentioned in the group. Look them over again. What questions do you have about them? Leader, please add whatever you can to help the group understand the beginning steps of a Christian. Perhaps some others who are true believers can also help. Now is the best time to get your questions answered.

7. Finally—

Let me say to you who have believed in Christ that I am excited for you. Others of you may not be there yet, but there is real hope. Your interest in Christ is a good sign that your conversion may not be far away. Continue to pursue God. This is likely, in itself, an indication of God at work in you. And don’t forget that there is much more to find out in the book of John and the Bible as a whole. Let the Word of God guide you and the Holy Spirit empower you through the exciting life ahead.

Do you need more help?
Do you have further questions?

Jim Elliff provides a web site with many resources to help you understand the way to Christ. On it you will find these useful tools:

The Dialogue on Christianity—a short nine chapter book containing a dialogue between a seeker and a true believer.

The Eaglet—a simple and colorful way to understand the gospel originally written for children. Many adults have found Christ through this short work, however.

Wasted Faith—an audio reading by Jim Elliff of a booklet that explains the difference between true faith and false faith. This may also be ordered in written form.

The Brockton Dialogues—stories that convey the gospel.

Questions and Answers for the seeker.

Audio messages by Jim Elliff on the way to relate to Christ.

The stories of people who have come to Christ.

Many other articles and helps for those who want to know Christ.

All this may be found at
www.WaytoGod.org

Jim's largest site, for believers and leaders, is www.CCWtoday.org. The study guide is found on this site under *Online Resources/Book Discussion Guides*.