

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.]*