

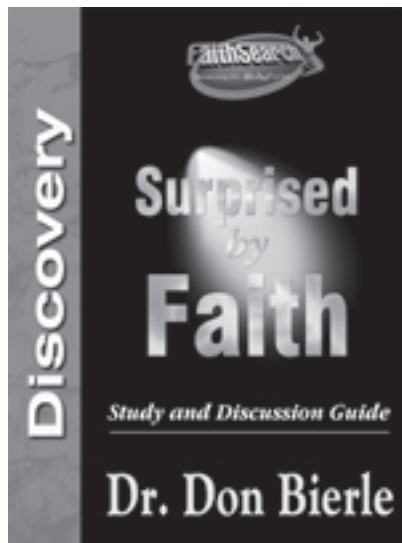
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 10

Discovering the “Ah-Ha!” of Life

Taking the First Step of a Faith Commitment to Follow Jesus



- Answer Key for the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*
- Teaching Helps for the Teacher/Facilitator of the *FaithSearch* Discovery Presentation



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PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL WITH EVIDENCE TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER 10

How Can I Know God

Discovering the Stumbling Block Along the Path to Faith

Getting Focused

Materials

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 10
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 6, pages 96-104; 117-121
- PowerPoint® slides: through to the end (slides 154-164)
Chapter review: slide 165; afterword: slides 166-171)

Key Points

1. Believing in God alone will not result in life after death in heaven
A common mistake made by “Christians” today is assuming they are right with God because they believe in Him. Many today know the story that Jesus died on the cross for humans to make their salvation possible, but assume that the result of eternal life is automatic for them if they believe in God. A personal conviction of sin, spiritual brokenness, and a commitment of obedience to Jesus is often missing.
2. There is a spectrum of unbelief and belief positions.
A better understanding of unbelief and belief results when careful analysis is done. Three different forms of unbelief exist, each with its own cause. This understanding enables specific action to be taken as antidotes to each condition. Even those who believe must be careful to avoid a counterfeit, known as contract faith.
3. We make a conscious choice and confession concerning Jesus as a first step of faith resulting in many spiritual changes.
Jesus made it clear that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no other access to the Father. Therefore, if we do not make a conscious choice and confession of Jesus (Romans 10:9-10) then we do not belong to God either (John 8:31-47). The Bible promises that when we do confess Jesus to be Savior and Lord, we experience the forgiveness of our sins, we become children of God, and we are given assurance of eternal life.
4. Regular Bible study and obedience to Jesus is the way to the abundant life that He promised.
Following Jesus is a life-long learning process which results in the Christian’s transformation into the likeness of his Savior, Jesus Christ. This is empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit through our study of God’s Word and results in the abundant life Jesus promised; i.e. a life characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Answers to the numbered, objective questions are available at the end of each chapter.

Glossary of Terms Used

Spiritual adoption; spiritual child: the position we enjoy by confessing faith in Jesus Christ and experiencing new life from the creative power of the Holy Spirit; because we are spiritually conceived by God, He adopts us and calls us family

Eternal life: a new quality of life; personal relationship and spiritual fellowship with God that begins with our spiritual birth and lasts forever

Assurance: the confidence which we have in Jesus' promise that He will come again and take those who believe in Him to be with Him in heaven forever

Decisional unbelief: an unbelief position of choice or decision; willful rejection

Here's where we're headed



The purpose of this section is to guide the participant to make their own *Ah-ha!* Discovery number one.

Subjective question on page 99
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 101
of the *Study Guide*

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha! The DISCOVERY #10

Taking the First Step of a Faith
Commitment to Follow Jesus

Introduction

First, though, you may have wondered if there is any proof of the reality of life after death. Read the discussion below to give you additional perspective on this important question. Write a brief answer of your own in which you identify which argument is the most convincing to you.

A brief response to this matter is found in the essay on page 100 in the *Study Guide*. Summarizing that information, there is circumstantial or indirect evidence for life after death; e.g. studies in the relationship between spirit and body (near death experiences) physiological studies, and unsatisfied longings or unfulfilled desires. These are not fully convincing for many people. There is only one form of direct evidence for life after death: the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Support for the reality of this is documented on pages 65-68 in SBF. Because of the evidence for the historical reliability of the New Testament records, the resurrection of Jesus is a well-documented event. Jesus Himself gave strong assurance to us that there is life after death. (See John 11:25-26; 14:1-3.) It seems there can be little debate—the resurrection of Jesus is the strongest argument demonstrating that there is life after death.

Where Am I?

Because of widespread belief in the existence of God, people who hold that conviction may feel they are okay spiritually. They may wonder why there is a need for faith in Jesus as well. Their position is: "I already believe (in God)." Is belief in God—or believing that God exists—really enough? Is it the same as personal faith in Jesus? Formulate your own answer for someone who takes that position.

My answer is in the essay which follows this question in the *Study Guide*. In forty-plus years of ministry, this is

the most common mistake I know of which is made by “Christians.” When people say they are going to heaven, I often ask, “How do you know?” Typically I hear, “Because I believe in God.” Interestingly, when I point out what I say in the essay, they will then reply, “Well, sure, that’s what I meant!” In other words, many people know the story that Jesus died on the cross for humans to make their salvation possible, but assume that the result of eternal life is automatic for them if they believe in God. A personal conviction of sin, spiritual brokenness, and a commitment of obedience to Jesus is often missing. Some are “cultural Christians” only. They need to be presented with John 14:6 and Romans 10:9.

The Unbelief Positions (“No”)

As you reflect on your life, have you ever been at one of these positions? If so, describe how you felt at that time, and whether or how you came out of it.

In reality, we have all been at one or more of the unbelief positions. If we grew up in a Christian home we probably heard the truth about Jesus from an early age. Therefore, we don’t remember. On the other hand, some (even Christians) have gone through a time of skepticism later in life (often during the college years). Encourage the group to share their experiences with these positions from any time in their life; or perhaps they have (had) a spouse, son or daughter, uncle, etc. with whom they went through this. Try to spend some of the time discussing who or what helped them to advance to a belief position.

Do any of these positions describe where you are right now? If so, identify which one, tell how you feel and explain your reasons for being in that position.

This is a personal response. Again, encourage people to share honestly. Sometimes that will happen if you as the leader are willing to share any struggles or questions you had in your own faith journey. Try not to make judgments about comments made or feel that you must immediately try to solve any problems people may share. People will accept your help and comments more readily one-on-one rather than in front of a group. By leading a group you can open up wonderful opportunities to have a spiritual ministry in people’s lives on a private basis.

The Belief Position (“Yes”)

Take time to reflect honestly about your faith in Jesus Christ (or anticipated faith). Is there any sort of a “deal” with God in your heart? List any conditions or expectations you have of God.

This again will be personal. It would not be unusual if some would acknowledge expectations from their relationship with God. There is a fine line between the promises of Scripture (e.g. abundant life; fruit of the Spirit) and a “deal” a believer may feel within. The difference is whether the individual has truly trusted Jesus Christ unconditionally or whether they would become disillusioned if things don’t turn out the way they expect. It is okay to enjoy God’s blessing, but the blessing cannot be a condition for our following Him.

Subjective question on page 102 of the *Study Guide*

If there are some things you expect God to do or provide for you (i.e. making a contract or a deal) do you see how you could be tempted to doubt God's faithfulness if you don't get what you expect? Has that ever happened to you? Explain.

You must help your group understand that "deals" are initiated by us without God's agreement. In one sense, they are a way in which we are trying to be in "control." We want God to "play" by our rules. Let your group discuss this if they are willing to.

Subjective question on page 103
of the *Study Guide*

Explain how the Bible passages of Matthew 22:37 and Hebrews 12:2a help to direct your focus toward having genuine faith in God without conditions.

If Jesus is who He claimed to be (and we have demonstrated considerable evidence for that) then there is nothing more important than being in right relationship with Him. Because of what He has done to redeem us, we love Him and focus all our attention and motivation toward that relationship. We will spend eternity with Him in an existence too wonderful to even imagine. There is no temporal condition to compare with that! Yes, the teaching of these two Bible passages helps to keep a right perspective.

For Further Discussion

Since the Bible says that salvation is a gift from God, what does this tell you about retaining the assurance of eternal life—what is it dependent on?

Since my eternal life is not dependent on what I have done or accomplished, it must be based on what Jesus Christ has done on my behalf. The basis for my assurance then is completed and unchangeable. Since it is the power of God which has saved us by His grace, then it is the power of God which will sustain us in that salvation by His grace (see John 10, especially verses 25-29; also John 6:37, 39; Romans 8:28-39). Of course, we must realize that the true child of God does not look for ways to "cheat" or live carelessly because we now have "fire insurance" (Romans 6:1-7, 15 and 1 John 3:4-10). As true children of God, we are motivated to do good deeds because of our love for Him, and enabled to do so by the inner power of the Holy Spirit.

What difference does Jesus make in my life?

Subjective question on page 103
of the *Study Guide*

We have just concluded that genuine faith is focused on God, not on rewards or benefits which may come to us as a result. But if a confession of faith in Jesus Christ sets us free from our bondage to sin, and the Holy Spirit creates us anew and lives within us, then we really should expect to experience some differences in our life. Read page 103 in SBF and identify in your own words the differences you can expect Jesus to make in your life when you confess faith in Him.

The text (p. 103) lists two results which God promises. One is that we will maximize our potential as a person in this life. Because of the new creation of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of our sin, and the restoration to peace with God, we are set free emotionally, intellectually and morally. We are whole. The second result is the assurance of eternal life with God forever. This factor should give us greater endurance and faithfulness in this life as well.

Millions of people share their testimony of a changed life as a result of personal faith in Jesus Christ. But some may still say that religious experience is so subjective that it doesn't prove anything. How would you answer them?

The essay following this question in the *Study Guide* gives you some good ideas for your answer here.

A Personal Invitation

What is God's will for us? Has God told us what He desires for us? Read the two Bible passages referenced below and write down specifically what He says.

2 Peter 3:9

It is God's will that all would come to repentance (and He is patiently waiting for each unbeliever so they will not perish).

1 Timothy 2:3-4

It is God's will that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Application and Reflection

If you have not yet repented of your sin and confessed faith in Jesus Christ, are you willing to do so?

This is obviously a personal response. You could sensitively refer your group back to the quote above (Matthew 11:28-30) and sincerely appeal to them to yield themselves to a Savior who loves them. If you have any in your group who have not yet believed, it would be appropriate to remind them that if Jesus is God, then their eternal destiny rides on their positive response.

If you had previously made a personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ, explain below what brought you to that point and how it has changed your life. If it was a very recent commitment, explain how you expect it to make a future difference in your life.

This would be a great time to spend some sharing time with your group as to where they are in their own spiritual journey. Their responses will be personal, but you might be prepared to share from your own life.

At some time or another, nearly everyone seeks to understand more fully the concept of God as a Trinity. Some critics insist that Christians believe in three Gods instead of one. When does three equal one? Read the discussion below for insight into your own understanding and for greater capability of communicating to others what you believe.

This question and the essay following it are placed at this point in Discovery to encourage deeper thought and further development of faith. It would be a good example of the kind of Bible study your group could expect from a *Growing Faith* class. I have briefly presented some of my thoughts about the Trinity in the essay.

Author's Comments

Sharing testimonies can be threatening for some, and sometimes it can be "competitive." What I mean is that some won't share because they don't have a "sensational" story to tell. Emphasize that everyone's story is unique, but that they all should revolve

Subjective question on page 105 of the Study Guide

around recognizing our need for a Savior because we are separated from God by our sin. Try to avoid leaving the impression that others who are honestly seeking God should be trying to duplicate the experiences they are hearing. Remember, God's approach to each of us is unique and custom made. We cannot point to the testimonial experiences of others as "normal" for everyone. Second, we should not go seeking to have someone else's

Subjective question on page 105 of the Study Guide

experience because the experience is not the goal; rather it is to reach the goal of a restored relationship with God. Restored relationship with God is brought about by the confession of our sin and trusting Jesus Christ as

Subjective question on page 106 of the Study Guide

our Savior and Lord. When this goal is reached, then the experience of knowing God will vary but with similar spiritual insights and outcomes as others.

Subjective question on page 106 of the Study Guide

Bibla confirmation on page 107
of the *Study Guide*

Author's Final Comments

It is my prayer that you have been stimulated by **FaithSearch** Discovery—and that you learned a lot as well. We are always open to suggestions for improvement of the *Study Guide* or this Leader's Manual. It would be good to hear about your experience with Discovery, whether your own personal study or your group experience. Thanks for using a **FaithSearch** resource—spread the word to others. Your partnership helps to carry the Gospel with evidence to all peoples everywhere.

Confirming the Discovery

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided here in the margin. Write below how the main teaching of each relates to or confirms the discovery made in this chapter.

The summary which follows the verse listing in the *Study Guide* is the author's view of the main teaching of these passages. Refer to that for the answers to this section.

Looking Ahead

Related Reading

- Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), Chapter 12.
- Clark Pinnock, *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), Conclusion.
- Dennis McCallum, *Christianity: The Faith That Makes Sense* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1997), Chapter 10.
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), Conclusion: The Power of Faith, pp. 247-262.