

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

*Who in the World are Christians Anyway?*  
Ephesians 1:1-2; 2:1-19

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

### **Gathering Time Leader:**

Prepare gift wrapped boxes to serve as an interest centre. These boxes may be empty or may contain special Scripture verses, words of encouragement or pieces of candy or novelties which can be given to participants.

### **Bible Study Leader:**

### **Worship Time Leader:**

Give the Ministry Moments information to someone to share with the group.

**Music Sources:**

**“All Hail, King Jesus”** *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, Expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, #1*

**“Great is the Lord”** *Marantha! Music Praise Chorus Book, Expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, #11*

**“Just As I Am”** *Baptist Hymnal, 1991, # 303*

# 1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

## ***Who in the World are Christians Anyway?***

### **Focal Text**

Ephesians 1:1-2; 2:1-19

### **Background Text**

Genesis 1:26-27; Matthew 16:13-17; John 3:1-16; Ephesians 1:1-2:22; Acts 11:19-30

### **Main Idea**

Christians are followers of Jesus who have been saved through a personal faith in Christ.

### **Question to Explore**

Who are Christians anyway?

### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the class to understand the biblical teaching of who Christians are, what they believe, and how they should live.

### **Gathering together:**

Arrange a focal centre with several brightly wrapped gifts. These can be empty boxes which serve only to draw attention to our emphasis today of God's great gift. They could also contain gifts you might want to give others in your home church—a special Scripture verse, a personal word of encouragement or a small candy or novelty.

### **First thoughts:**

Begin by encouraging the group to think of a special gift that they have been given. For example, a couple received, on their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, a table runner which contained the handprints of their seven grandchildren and 40 different reasons their grandchildren loved and appreciated them written carefully out by the oldest two of the grandchildren.

Allow time for sharing about some or all of the special gifts. Watch your time; this could become a lengthy exercise.

## **Closing the Gathering Time:**

We might answer the questions posed in our lesson title today “Who are Christians anyway?” with the words, “Christians are the recipients of God’s great gift of salvation”.

Today we will examine Ephesians 2:1-19 to discover how God’s gift of salvation is made available to us and to the whole world.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won’t need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

# 2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### *Who in the World are Christians Anyway?*

#### **Focal Text**

Ephesians 1:1-2; 2:1-19

#### **Background Text**

Genesis 1:26-27; Matthew 16:13-17; John 3:1-16; Ephesians 1:1-2:22; Acts 11:19-30

#### **Main Idea**

Christians are followers of Jesus who have been saved through a personal faith in Christ.

#### **Question to Explore**

Who are Christians anyway?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the class to understand the biblical teaching of who Christians are, what they believe, and how they should live.

#### **Introduction to your personal study:**

Sharing the gospel with a large group of high school students, I was telling them the basic story of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. I finished my talk with the challenge, “If you would like to know more about Jesus, feel free to talk to me afterwards, or find another Christian and ask them to tell you more.” Afterward, one young lady came and said to me, “You said to come talk to you or another Christian. I’ve been a Christian all of my life, but I don’t know any of those things you were saying about Jesus!”

People use the term “Christian” in different ways. To some being a Christian means a national distinction rather than a religious one -- “I live in a Christian nation, therefore, I am a Christian.” To others it is a religious cultural distinction (e.g. Christian, Muslim,

Buddhist, Jewish, etc.) that has much to do with family upbringing and culture, whether or not the person actually practices that religion. To others the title “Christian” stands for a deliberate personal choice they have made to follow Jesus. But what does the Bible say? How does God’s word define the term? Today’s lesson examines passages of scripture that specifically help us understand the true meaning of being one of God’s people, called a “Christian.”

## Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was a letter addressed to one church but meant to be sent to various churches around the province of Asia. As such, it does not address any particular error or problems in the Ephesian church, but it was written to instruct Christians in the churches of God’s purpose for them regarding their salvation. Thus Ephesians is wonderful instruction for all Christians regarding the nature of salvation, the community of faith called “the church,” and how Christians should live and act towards one another.

## Focusing on the Meaning:

### “The Saints in Ephesus” (1:1-2)

Paul began his letter by introducing himself as “***an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God***” (v. 1). An “apostle” literally means “sent one.” It is a term used in the New Testament of Christian missionaries or messengers of the churches (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:6; Acts 14:14; 2 Corinthians 8:23). Here, however, Paul used the term in its narrower sense, as someone who had received his commission into service directly from Christ (e.g. Paul and the Twelve). Paul’s apostleship was “by the will of God,” not as a result of his own desire or choosing (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1).

The recipients of the letter were “***the saints in Ephesus***” (v. 1). The recipients are all called “saints,” a term literally meaning “holy people,” people who are “set apart” for God’s service. They were “***the faithful in Christ Jesus,***” people who had placed their whole-hearted trust in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. This is the description of *all Christians*, not some select few whose lives are memorialized in stained glass. These saints were living people, declared holy when they accepted Christ as their Savior, not hoping to be declared such after their death. Christians are not declared holy because of the kind of life they have lived, but because their sins have been forgiven and wiped away by the blood of Christ who now stands in their place. As those who have placed their faith in him, they seek to live lives that are faithful in Christ Jesus, demonstrated by their obedience to him and their love for each other (cf. 1:15; 1 John 4:7-11).

It is also significant that the term “saints” does not occur in the singular (i.e. “saint”) in the Bible. Saints are always found in groups, saved people made for fellowship with God and each other. A good description of one of these groups of saints is the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30). They had a heart for preaching the good news to everyone, both Jews and Gentiles (11:20), receiving the teaching from God’s word (11:23, 26), and remaining true to the Lord (11:23). This group clearly heard from God’s Holy Spirit to send out Saul/Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). These believers in Antioch were indeed “disciples” (i.e. followers) of Christ, seeking to be faithful and obedient to him, and rightfully called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). True Christians demonstrate their commitment to Christ by the kind of lives that they lead (Matthew 7:21).

Paul continued his greeting to these saints with **“grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”** (Ephesians 1:2). This is far more than a mere formality. He wished for them God’s “grace” which are his blessings that none of us could ever deserve, as well as his “peace,” which literally means “wholeness with nothing left out.” These things can only be found in a relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **“You Were Dead in Your Transgressions and Sins” (2:1-3)**

In the rest of Chapter 1, Paul launched into an extended praise to God for his eternal purpose of salvation (1:3-14) as well as a prayer for the saints that God would grant them spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:15-23). In Chapter 2, Paul reminded the saints of their own personal salvation experience. **“You were dead in your transgressions and sins”** (v. 1), that is, before they met Christ they were spiritually dead people. “Death” means separation. Physical death is separation of the soul from the body (2 Corinthians 5:8). Spiritual death is separation of the soul from God. If a person is spiritually dead when they die physically, they will experience “eternal death,” or the “second death” (Revelation 21:8). People who are alive physically but who do not know Jesus personally are literally walking dead people, separated from God because of their personal sins. They follow **“the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air”** (v. 2), enslaved to the devil and to their own sin. As such, they deserve to experience God’s **“wrath”** (v. 3). They do not need counselling, a handout, or a self-help course on how to live. Dead people cannot help themselves. Their only hope is resurrection.

### **“By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith” (2:4-10)**

But God has **“great love for us”** and he is **“rich in mercy”** (v. 4), so he entered into our hopeless existence, raised spiritually dead people, and **“made us alive with Christ”** (v. 5). This is totally undeserved love, amazing grace, on his part. And only by this **“grace you have been saved”** (v. 5). God **“raised us up”** and **“seated us with him in the heavenly realms”** (v. 6), giving us a new life and a new status in heaven. These terms are all in the past tense, stated as completed action for these Ephesian

Christians. They do not have to wait until they die for this to happen. The moment someone responds to God's grace in faith they receive a new life and a new home in heaven.

Jesus stated that every person must experience this individually and of their own choosing. He stated to Nicodemus, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). He said that **"whoever believes in him [i.e. Jesus] shall not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16). As individuals made in **"the image of God"** (Genesis 1:26-27), each person has the ability, the freedom, and the responsibility to make their own decisions in matters relating to God. Jesus asked his disciples, **"Who do other people say that I am?"** (Matthew 16:13). When they replied with the different responses other people had made, Jesus then asked them, **"But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"** (Matthew 16:15) Jesus asks each person today that same question. Every person must make an individual response to him. Each individual must make their own personal choice regarding Jesus to gain "eternal life," otherwise they will indeed "perish."

Only by God's **"grace you have been saved,"** but every person must receive God's grace personally **"through faith"** (v. 8). More than simply believing with one's mind, faith is grasping him out of desperation. It is a determined choice of the will, a deliberate decision to give Jesus control of one's life from now on. Faith trusts Jesus with a desperation that knows that salvation is possible by no other way. It is clinging for one's very life and receiving his gracious gift as a dying (or dead) person with no other hope. Earlier in Ephesians Paul described how this act of receiving salvation takes place. First, "you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation," then you believed, and God marked you with the seal of his Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). In the ancient world a seal was a mark of ownership. Thus Paul meant that by believing in Jesus a person changes masters, or become "God's possession" (1:14).

By no means is this act of believing or "faith" considered some kind of work we have done. Salvation is **"not from yourselves, it is the gift of God"** to be received; it is **"not by works, so that no one can boast"** that in any way we are able to save ourselves (2:9). After being saved, then may people simply live however they want to live, and God expects nothing out of their conduct? Absolutely not! In saving us God has remade us, **"for we are God's workmanship,"** masterpieces of his saving power. We were **"created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"** (2:10). Salvation is all of God's grace. We live lives of obedience to his will out of our gratitude for what he has done for us. True saving faith will demonstrate itself in obedient living (1 John 2:3-6).

### **"Fellow Citizens with God's People" (2:11-19)**

Paul then described to Gentile Christians their former existence before God saved them. They were **"uncircumcised,"** demonstrating that they were not of the covenant people of God (v. 11). They were **"separate from Christ,"** without a relationship with God. They were **"excluded from citizenship in Israel,"** out of fellowship with God's

covenant people. They were **“foreigners to the covenants of promise,”** that is outside of God’s means of salvation. As such, they were totally **“without hope and without God in the world,”** a totally hopeless existence (v. 12). But God changed everything with his tremendous **“But now”** (v. 13). Now everything is different. **“In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ”** (v. 13). God made his salvation possible “in Christ Jesus” and “through the blood of Christ.”

Christ has taken away the distinction between Jew and Gentile and **“has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility”** separating the two (v. 14). **“His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two”** (v. 15), so that no one would claim any longer “I am a Jew” or “I am a Gentile,” but instead claim a new title, “I am a Christian”. He has created a bond deeper than any ethnic or cultural distinction, because he has made them into **“one body,”** bringing reconciliation among them **“through the cross”** (v. 16). Now in the church, “the body of Christ” (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16), there is no distinction among the members, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Because of this, no matter a person’s background, when they place their faith in Jesus, they are **“no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household”** (v. 19).

### **Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:**

These passages display the Bible’s definition of what it means to be a Christian. Christians are persons who have been made “holy” by God’s grace, not by their works. God extended his grace towards them in the person of Jesus Christ, and individually they have placed their faith in him. Out of gratitude for his gracious salvation, they become faithful followers of Jesus, seeking to do his will. In God’s family, he makes no distinction of a person’s race, gender, or background. He makes them all into “one body,” and they are all “members of God’s household,” having “seated us with him in the heavenly realms.” For people who previously were “dead in their transgressions and sins,” that’s good news indeed!

### **For Personal Reflection:**

1. **What have I learned from this study?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Who in the World are Christians Anyway?***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

**Begin by helping the group locate the *Focal Text* in their Bibles. Also, share with them the *Main Idea* to be learned from the Scriptures, and the *Questions to be Explored* by the group.**

#### **Focal Text**

Ephesians 1:1-2; 2:1-19

#### **Background Text**

Genesis 1:26-27; Matthew 16:13-17; John 3:1-16; Ephesians 1:1-2:22; Acts 11:19-30

#### **Main Idea**

Christians are followers of Jesus who have been saved through a personal faith in Christ.

#### **Questions to Explore**

Who are Christians anyway?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the class to understand the biblical teaching of who Christians are, what they believe, and how they should live.

#### **Connect with Life:**

As the group gathers, ask them the question: “What do many people think a ‘Christian’ is?”

Discuss for a few moments the different ways people use the term “Christian.”

Then say “Now what does the Bible say a Christian is?” Explain that today’s lesson will seek to find an authoritative biblical answer to the question, “Who are Christians anyway?”

## Guide the Study:

### 1. “Christians” are “saints” – people who have been made holy (1:1-2).

Have someone read Ephesians 1:1-2.

Seek an answer from someone for this: “According to verse 1, what terms does Paul use to describe these Christians?” (saints, faithful in Christ Jesus)

Then ask: “What does the term ‘saint’ usually mean in the way that most people use it?”  
Explain that the term literally means “holy people, set apart for God’s service.”

Call for a response: “According to this verse, how many people in Ephesus does this term ‘saints’ refer to?”

Request a response: Are these “saints” people who have died and have been declared such by the church or the pope?”

Explain: Saints are people who have been made holy because they are forgiven by the blood of Christ. They have been made holy because they are “the faithful in Christ Jesus,” those who have placed their faith in him.

If needed, have them turn to Acts 11:19-30 and 13:1-3 to see the church at Antioch faithfully living out their faith and being obedient to God’s direction.

Note: “It was in Antioch that these followers of Jesus were first called ‘Christians’ (11:26).

### 2. “Christians” have had a personal experience of God’s saving grace (2:1-7).

Have someone read Ephesians 2:1-7.

Invite answers to this question: “What does the term ‘dead’ mean to you?” Be ready to explain the different types of “death” the scripture describes (from the teacher preparation material).

Now question the group: “Do dead people have the ability to help themselves? What is their only hope?” (resurrection)

Ask the following questions:

“According to verse 5, what did God do for these spiritually dead people?” (made us alive)

“According to verse 4, why would he do that?” (because of his great love, and he is rich in mercy)

“According to the end of verse 5, what does the Bible call this?” (God’s grace, his undeserved love)

Have someone read verses 5-6 aloud once more, then ask, “According to how Paul described the salvation experience, what verb tense did Paul use, past, present, or future?” (past) Point out that past tense means that the moment someone responds to God’s grace in faith, salvation is a completed action.

Call for an answer: “What would the phrase, ‘God raised us up’ mean?” (resurrected us, gave us a new life)

Then ask: “How about the phrase, ‘seated us with him in the heavenly realms?’ (has given us a new home in heaven)

### **3. “Christians” have received God’s grace through a personal act of faith (2:8-10).**

Have someone read verses 8-10.

Ask: “According to verse 8, when God extends his saving grace towards us, what should our response be?” (faith) Be ready to explain what “believing” or “faith” means.

Have the group look at Jesus’ discussion in John 3:1-16. Point out that Jesus insisted that each person have a personal salvation experience (“No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again,” John 3:3). He stated, **“Whoever believes in him [i.e. Jesus] will not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16).

Have them look at Jesus’ discussion in Matthew 16:13-17. Note that Jesus first asked what other people said about him (v. 13), but then he asked them individually, **“But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”** (v. 15).

Point out that as individuals made in the image of God, each person has the ability, the freedom, and the responsibility *to make their own decisions* in matters relating to God. Jesus asks each person today the same question he asked his disciples (“Who do you say that I am?”), and they must make their own individual response to him.

Invite an answer for this key question: “According to John 3:16, what must every person do personally to have eternal life?” (believe)

### **4. “Christians” are grouped into a community of faith (2:11-19).**

Have someone read Ephesians 2:11-12.

Ask them to list the terms and phrases Paul used to describe the Gentile Christians before they were saved (uncircumcised, separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God in the world).

Point them to the first two words in verse 13, **“But now.”** Ask: “What is Paul’s point by using that phrase?” (now everything is different)

Have someone read verses 13-16, and ask them to list the terms and phrases Paul used to describe the new situation “in Christ Jesus” (brought near, peace, the two are one, destroyed the barrier, abolishing the law and its commandments, created one new man out of the two, reconcile both of them to God, put to death their hostility).

Ask: “What is Paul’s point?” (we have been brought close to God, have been brought close to other Christians)

Urge someone to suggest an answer for this: “What is the ‘one new man’ and ‘one body’ Paul spoke of?” (the church)

Tell the group: When God saves someone he places them into a family of faith, or body of Christ, called **“the church”** (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16). It is God’s intention that every Christian be joined to a local body of believers. This is a given basic in the lives of Christians beginning with all of the stories of persons accepting Jesus as Saviour recorded in the New Testament.

Read verses 17-19, and ask: “What are the benefits Paul described for those in this ‘one body’?” (peace, access to the Father, citizenship, membership in God’s family)

## **Encourage Application:**

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Have the group bring their own applications from this passage by asking them the following questions:

**“In light of what we have learned today from God’s word,**

What am I supposed to believe?

What am I supposed to do?

Is there a promise I need to claim?

Is there an example I need to follow? or avoid?"

Close in prayer.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***Who in the World are Christians Anyway?*** **Ephesians 1:1-2; 2:1-19**

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

#### ***Saints Anonymous***

Most youth would not be comfortable with being called a saint. Discuss what the word means in your youth context.

What is the Biblical meaning of the word 'saint' in Ephesians 2:19. This will have been discussed in the Bible teaching time.

Are you more comfortable with the Biblical understanding of who a saint is? Even if you still don't want to be called a saint, do you understand the powerful implications that having been set apart by his grace means?

If you have never accepted Christ as Saviour, would you consider his free gift of salvation today?

**Worship Time** (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Who in the World are Christians Anyway?*****Ephesians 1:1-2; 2:1-19****Beginning the Service:**

Sing “All Hail, King Jesus” *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, Expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, #1*

“Great is the Lord” *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, Expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, #11*

**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, is a strange blend of ancient and modern. Rugged cobblestone roads wind through the city, and Spanish colonial buildings stand next to modern, concrete structures. Outside the city, mountains encircle Suyapa Basilica, home to the country’s patron saint, the Virgin of Suyapa.

Hidden within the city’s borders is the National Prison of Honduras, home to some of the country’s most violent gang criminals. Honduras averages one gang-related homicide per day.

Pray for Honduran Christians who strive to make a difference in the lives of those whose are involved in gangs.

(See *Missions Mosaic*, April, 2005, p. 30 for more information).

**Sharing Guide:**

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God’s call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

## Christians Have Received a Great Gift

A unique picture has appeared in a number of publications. It shows a baptism which took place on a July Sunday afternoon in the chilly water of the Bow River in southern Alberta, Canada. Dave Wiggins, was baptized by Pastor Hamish Buntain. Both were very cold as Pastor Hamish immersed Dave in the river water fed by glaciers, but the exultation in both of their faces is evident in the photo taken at the moment that Dave was raised from the water “to walk in newness of life”.

It had been a long journey for Dave. Perhaps it began when Dave’s son, Trevor, attended the Grade 5 Sunday School class in a new little church. Dave would bring Trevor to Sunday School and pick him up afterwards. Trevor was a faithful attendee and when he entered grade 7, he decided he wanted to stay for the worship service. He asked his stepmother, Christine, to attend with him. Trevor proudly escorted his stepmother to the front row of seats and sat with her through each Sunday morning service. Soon God began to awaken in Christine the memory of commitment and relationship to Him that had been a part of her youth and young adulthood and she became vibrantly committed to the Lord. She began praying for Dave as well as for many others in the church and community.

Dave, however, remained uninterested. A job loss related to health problems led him to despair. Pastor Hamish had given him a New Testament and suggested that he begin reading in the book of John. The New Testament had been left unread, but for some reason Dave took it along on an out of town trip. One night, alone in a motel, Dave began to read. He read and read until God’s grace broke through his despair and brought him to repentance and salvation.

It was a happy day in the life of that small congregation when Dave was baptized. The passage we are examining in today’s study seemed written all over his face as he was raised from the water. ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*** (Ephesians 2:4-10).

Let us think together of some of the marvelous teachings of this passage.

### 1. God is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.

That night in a motel room away from home, Dave didn't much feel like he was loved. But God entered that room and surrounded him with love and in His mercy led him to repentance and salvation.

A young woman grieved the suicide of her father. She had not been taught much about God, but somehow she knew He was real. Like Dave, she was alone in a room – her university dormitory room. She cried out to God saying, "I have to know if you are real; I am not leaving this room until I know if you are real." She was in her room for three days – days in which the God of the universe – rich in mercy and love – revealed Himself to her in her aloneness and grief.

## **2. Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).**

Perhaps the greatest misconception about Christianity is the idea held by many that to become a Christian, one must achieve a certain kind of moral life. Sometimes people don't desire to give up certain pleasures. Others cannot break the hold of addiction in their lives. Others simply don't feel they are good enough to meet the standards of the Christian life.

Jesus would reach out to each one of these saying, "even when you are dead in your transgressions, I want to be your Saviour." The faithful testimony of many Christians is just that – Jesus found them in sin and despair and saved them. Being made alive in Christ meant that they then had strength to deal with the issues of wrong living, addiction or life trauma that seemed so impossible to deal with prior to knowing Christ. God's grace empowered them to begin a life devoted to purity and holiness. For some freedom from sins of the past was immediate; for others, the journey was an ongoing commitment to him – a **"taking up of the cross, daily, and following him."** (See Luke 9:23)

## **3. Salvation is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.**

Works vs. grace is an ongoing tension in the Christian life. Sometimes we say as James did **"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."** (James 2:18b)

There is no doubt that the Christian life must result in a life filled with both moral purity and good works. James continued in Chapter 2:26 to say **"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."** He had started this discussion with asking the question about the validity of telling a brother or sister **"Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed"** (James 2:16) while doing nothing to help the needy person secure food, clothing or shelter. Such an action would be meaningless and would, in fact, invalidate the good wishes that were given.

For our faith to be known as genuine, it will result in practical, helpful assistance to our neighbours – both near and far. But, regardless of how generous or how frequent that

assistance may be, it will not save us. However pious our actions may seem in terms of attendance at religious functions or attention to religious deeds, we cannot be saved through these means.

Salvation is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Our human nature would be glad to lord it over others if we gained salvation by the good things we do. Only when we understand our own neediness and God's goodness in saving us can we admit that we have not earned our salvation. Perhaps this is harder for those people raised in godly Christian families to realize than it is for those who as adults first come to Christ. Every faith community needs to have the witness of adult Christians whose lives have been radically transformed by the goodness of Christ from darkness to light. They serve to remind the whole church of how, in fact, each one has been transformed only by the goodness of Christ.

### **Call to Commitment:**

Our study and worship today serve to emphasize these key principles of the Christian life.

God is rich in mercy.

Even while we are yet sinners, Christ's love and mercy is available to us.

Salvation is a gift of God given to those who acknowledge Christ as Saviour, repent of sin and confess their trust in him.

Billy Graham is an American evangelist who has preached around the world beginning in the 1950's and continuing even after the beginning of the new millenium. Hundreds of thousands of people have heard him preach and many have responded to the message. Although he was raised as a farm boy, his ministry led him to associate with some of the world's most powerful people. From the beginning of his ministry to his most recent sermon he basically preached the truths we have examined today:

God is rich in mercy

Even while we are yet sinners, Christ's love and mercy is available to us.

Salvation is a gift of God given to those who acknowledge Christ as Saviour, repent of sin, and confess their trust in him.

When the invitation to salvation was given at a Billy Graham Crusade, the choir often sang the old hymn "**Just as I Am**".

### **Concluding the Service:**

Let us sing it to conclude our worship time and respond to it either for our first time salvation experience or as a renewal and recommitment to the One who provided the great gift of salvation.

**“Just As I Am”** *Baptist Hymnal*, 1991, # 303