

Get Ready: Preparation Guide

Getting ready to lead an International Essentials session is simple. Each one-page outline can be used as both the leader's guide and as the students' worksheet. It includes directions and guided discussion questions. The discussion is designed to flow through four phases, as explained below.

Before you begin: *Pray*

Only God can empower you to have a successful session. Pray that God will help each person in your group to:

1. Attend the session.
2. Understand what is discussed.
3. Apply the main lesson in a specific way.
4. Share what they learn with someone else.

Four Phases of the Group Discussion Flow

CONNECT with Each Other

Connection: Begin by finding out how everyone is doing, checking on how their application went from last week, and praying together. International students value connection time, so take time to build cross-cultural friendships through love and trust (both for you with them, and for them with each other).

Discussion:

Our Lives – Use these questions to draw out personal experiences, to create an authentic atmosphere, and to help group members see the relevance of this lesson to their lives. Encourage them to share experiences from their time in America and from their home cultures.

Deeper Perspectives – Use these questions to move them from their personal feelings and experiences into foundational values and beliefs. As internationals, many of their views may not be based on biblical principles.

Transition: This statement or question eases the discussion into the Bible section, creating curiosity about what God's Word says about the issues they've begun to talk about.

Notes:

Use Examples - Be ready to use examples from your life as the group discussion proceeds.

Use Discernment – Use the connection time to assess everyone's spiritual condition. If there are a number of non-Christians present, your session may contain more basic explanations and you may need to be sensitive about prayer times, etc.

HEAR God's Word

Background: There will usually be a paragraph which you can read aloud that will give some good context to the Bible passage.

Passage: Have one or more of the group members read the Bible passage(s) aloud.

Discussion: The Bible discussion questions are designed to be open-ended and thought-provoking. They are also usually ordered to guide the group through the passage and from the theoretical to the practical. However, feel free to come up with your own questions, based on the spiritual interest and maturity of your group. Since your group consists of internationals, you may need to ask questions which clarify or ensure proper understanding.

Each Unit (group of five lessons) includes a Teacher's Guide, and that guide may include some alternative Bible discussion questions that you can use if you feel the need.

UNDERSTAND it

This "understand it" section has two parts: Summary and Clarification.

Summary: This part helps the group members to summarize the most important truths and principles in the lesson. Encourage the group to write down summary statements in the space provided. Give examples if they need help to think of good summary statements.

Clarification: This part offers a chance to ask questions if anything remains confusing and to vocalize what has made the deepest impression. Be patient. Encourage them to share, giving examples if they have a hard time getting started talking about these issues.

APPLY it to Life

This section also has two parts: Act and Tell. Both give them the chance to think and plan about how to apply what they've learned in the lesson

Act: Give everyone time to think and write then discuss and pray about what God may be telling them to do in the following week. We want to encourage the group to act upon what they have discussed and learned. Space is given to write these applications down. Occasionally, homework may be included to help them process the lesson's content or to prepare for the following week's lesson.

Tell: One great way to imprint the lesson in their hearts and minds in the following week is to challenge them to share what they have learned with someone who is not in the group (believer or preferably, a non-believer). Lead them and give them time to consider who that person might be and to pray together for him/her. Space is given for them to write that person's name down so that they will remember him/her later in the week.

After several weeks, see if some members of your group might like to lead their own groups. Look for people who are particularly faithful to attend and are excited about the discussion, application and sharing. (People they have been telling week-to-week may be willing to join their new groups.) Talk to them about how important it is for group leaders to be growing in their walk with the Lord. Inconsistency in their walk can undermine a person's credibility with group members. It is a privilege to teach people about God, but it is also an important responsibility.

If they are willing to accept that responsibility, give them copies of the Session Preparation Overview and the Sample Group Discussion Flow. Walk through these with them and answer questions. You might want to help them prepare a lesson. If possible, have them teach a part (or all) of one of your group sessions. Give suggestions afterwards to help them be ready to start a new group. Now you are getting seriously involved in spiritual multiplication. Before long, there may be several groups meeting because of how God used you in starting your original group. You will begin to identify with the Apostle John when he said in 1 John 1:4, "We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!"

International Essentials Leader's Guide

Lesson A: God

Bible Passages: Genesis 1:1-2:3

Session Objective: Establish a basic understanding of God's nature.

This entire unit precedes our traditional "follow-up" (Unit 2) because we want to make sure our international friends understand the basics of the gospel. These five lessons can also serve as a stand-alone study to investigate the Bible's main ideas. You may walk through this lesson one-on-one or in a small group. If you have already taught these ideas and if you know the person is a Christian, begin with Unit 2.

- Since the group may be meeting for the first time, be sure you get to know one another in the "Connect" section. The questions under Our Lives should be especially insightful.
- Avoid turning this lesson into a debate about evolution. The purpose is to understand what we learn about God in Genesis 1. Help the group to understand and appreciate God's eternity, power, creativity, and special design of humanity.
- Explain and emphasize what it means to be created in God's image. Theologically, the imago Dei is a profound and wonderful topic to consider.
- As you prepare, make sure to ask the questions intended to touch the learner's heart, not just the head (such as, "How could this help you when you feel worthless or don't like yourself?" under the "Hear" section.)

Lesson B: Sin

Bible Passages: Isaiah 6:1-10; 53:6; 59:1,2

Session Objective: Deepen the group's understanding of sin.

Even though this lesson uses three passages in Isaiah, you only need to look up Isaiah 6:1-10. The other two passages are written out in the lesson. We use several passages so the group has several Biblical images of sin: unclean lips, dull hearts, blind eyes, and lost sheep. These build up to the final passage (Is. 5:1,2): sin is separation from God.

- Use Isaiah's words to contrast God's holiness with our sinfulness. Explain these terms as simply as possible: holiness means God is absolutely perfect and sin means we lack God's perfection.
- The last question in the "Hear" section should be emphasized ("What can be done about this terrible separation?") Don't hesitate to let this question linger and hang until the next week. Tell the group to think more about this crucial question and explain that you will answer it next week.
- The questions under the "Understand" should be pondered. Make sure everyone has a pen to fill in the blanks. Ask everyone to write something in these blanks and share their answer with the group.

Lesson C: Jesus' Life

Bible Passages: John 1:1-18, 29-43

Session Objective: Appreciate that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man and understand why this is important.

Often we start lessons on Jesus with the cross. This lesson is designed to deepen the group's understanding and appreciation of the Incarnation: God becoming man. Jesus is fully God and fully man.

- In the first "Bible Discussion Question" draw the parallel between Genesis 1 and John 1. The parallel highlights that Jesus, the Word, is eternal because He is God.
- Make sure to spend adequate time considering this question: "Why was it necessary for God to become a man?"
- You might need to explain the role sacrificial lambs played in covering sin in the Old Testament. Jesus was the spotless lamb sacrificed for us and "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).
- In the "Understand" section help the group to articulate the basic concept that Jesus was fully God and fully man. If they don't understand this concept, review key verses from John 1.
- The first question in the "Apply" question contains some important homework. Recommend that the group read John over the next week and write down any questions they might have.

Lesson D: Jesus' Death

Bible Passages: Luke 23, John 20

Session Objective: Understand the reality and importance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

After establishing the fact that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, we examine the importance of His death and resurrection. Carefully pray, ponder, and prepare each section of this lesson because all the other lessons build up to it.

- Under the "Connect" section have everyone in the group answer the first discussion question. This question should deepen the level of authenticity, force everyone to consider a tough question, and make them appreciate what Jesus did for us. Also, read aloud and briefly discuss the quote from C.S. Lewis.
- Emphasize Jesus' words to the criminal in Luke 23:43. You can supplement the given questions with others: "What gave Jesus the authority to say this?" Or "How do you think this man felt after hearing these words?"
- Many international students will resonate with Thomas, who wanted proof of Jesus' resurrection. Give close attention to the question about Thomas and the link between seeing and believing.
- Don't skip the summary questions in the "Apply" section ask each participant to write something in the blanks here.

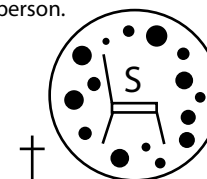
Lesson E: Faith

Bible Passage: Romans 6, Ephesians 2

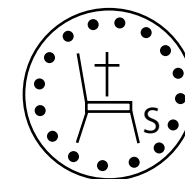
Session Objective: Realize how we receive God's gift to us: by faith.

The previous four lessons gave us information about God, ourselves, and Jesus' life and death. Now, we are confirming that the students have already placed their faith in Jesus OR challenging them to do so. You have NOT completed this lesson until you have given the students a chance to place their faith in Jesus.

- In the first section, ask everyone to describe the best gift they have ever received. Why was this gift so special? Why did they give it to you? Make the important connection between gifts and love (the quote from Napoleon will allow you to explain this fact).
- Some of the questions in the "Hear" section might be difficult to understand. Do not spend too much time on questions that might divert the group's attention from the main idea. If you cannot answer a question well put a small mark (*) by it. Then, explain that the rest of the lesson should clarify the question and that you will return to it at the end.
- To explain faith, use the example of giving someone a gift or life-saving medicine. They must take or receive the gift for it to become their own.
- To prepare for the "Apply" section review the diagrams in the "Four Spiritual Laws" or "Knowing God Personally" booklets. You must know how to draw and explain the diagrams of the two kinds of person.



Self-directed Life



Christ-directed Life

God Understanding who God Is

CONNECT with Each Other

Begin with Prayer

Group introductions: What is your name? Home country? Department?

What was your highlight of last week? What was the most difficult thing that happened?

Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions

Our Lives:

- Why are you in this group? What do you hope to get out of our time together?

- How would you describe God?

Deeper Perspectives:

- A.W. Tozer wrote: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

Transition

The Bible begins by describing how God created the world. We will learn much about God's character in this story.

HEAR God's Word

Bible Passage: Genesis 1:1 - 2:3

Background: Genesis, the first book of the Bible, begins with God describing the beginning of our universe. The focus of this lesson is to see what Genesis 1 tells us about God.

Let's take turns and each read one section: Genesis 1:1-12, 1:13-25, 1:26-2:3.

Bible Discussion Questions:

- "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Bible's very first sentence is foundational for everything that comes after it. This succinct beginning describes God and lays the foundation for how we should view reality.

Look at the verse closely by dividing it up into its three basic components, and discuss what each part tells us about God:

1. In the beginning
2. God created
3. The heavens and the earth

- How did God create the universe? Does anyone or anything else exist that has this kind of power?

Continue questions:

- Moving on through the rest of the Genesis 1 passage, what does God repeat at the end of each day of creation? What kind of value does this give His world?

- How does the creation of human beings differ from the rest of the world? What do you think it means for humans to be created "in the image of God"? How could this help when you feel displeased or unhappy with yourself?

- How is the seventh day different from the other days of creation (2:2-3)? If God is all-powerful, why did He rest on this day? What are the benefits of setting aside one day each week to rest and worship God?

- This passage claims that there is a purpose and design behind nature or "creation" because there is a Designer behind it. What evidence do you see in our physical world for God's design and purpose?

- If God really did create the whole universe, the world and us, what effect does that have on you? Why?

UNDERSTAND it

Summary

List 5 things you learned about God today.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Clarification

- Which of these 5 things surprised you most?

- Which of these 5 things comforts you most in a difficult situation you are facing in your life?

APPLY it to Life

Act

- The God who created the universe created you in His image? How will this change the way you view yourself and other people this week?

- Write down your specific actions to take from this study. In groups of two or three, share what actions you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

Sin Understanding our problem

CONNECT with Each Other

Begin with Prayer

How are you doing?

How did Application go from last week's lesson?

Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions

Our Lives:

- Do you think there will ever be a time in our world when war and fighting will cease?

- Why do some people and nations have so much materially and yet millions of people die of starvation?

Deeper Perspectives:

- The same selfishness and greed that leads to war and starvation lives in our hearts. How have you seen selfishness in your life this past week?

Transition

If God is so powerful and if His creation is good, why are there so many problems? What is wrong with the world? And what is wrong with me? The answer is sin. No one is perfect; everyone is selfish. Sin enslaves us all. The Bible makes this clear.

HEAR God's Word

Bible Passage: Isaiah 6:1-10

Background: God appointed certain men to speak His words to other people. These men, like Isaiah, were called prophets. In 740 B.C. Isaiah had a vision of God. In this vision, he sees the greatness of God. God gives him a message of bad news to tell others.

Bible Discussion Questions:

Read Isaiah 6:1-6.

- How is God described in verse 1? How do you feel in reading this description of God?

- The seraphim (6:2) are glorious angelic beings with remarkable power—indicated by six wings—who are devoted to praising God. These perfect, superhuman creatures humble themselves to worship God. Read what they say in verse 3: What does "holy" mean? What about "glory"? Who is "the Lord of Hosts"?

- Isaiah sought to live a pure life before God but what is his attitude toward God? Why? What does "unclean lips" (v. 5) mean?

- Why does the fire ("a burning coal") do to the man? What is "sin"? Why does it need to be atoned for?

Continue questions:

Read Isaiah 6:1-6.

- What message does God give Isaiah to tell others?

- Why do people hear but not understand, see but not perceive? What prevents them from being healed?

Isaiah 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way."

- According to this verse what is the essence of sin? How do you see this in your own life?

Isaiah 59:1,2 "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."

- What causes a separation between God and us? What can be done about this terrible separation?

UNDERSTAND it

Summary

- How would you summarize what we learned today:
About God?
About all other people?

Write important points down.
God:

Me and all other people:

Clarification

- What left the deepest impression from our lesson today?

- What surprised you most from our lesson today?

APPLY it to Life

Act

- In the coming week, how can you develop the same kind of humility before God that we saw from Isaiah and the seraphim?

- Write down your specific actions to take below. Then in groups of two or three, share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

God becomes Man

Understanding the Life of Jesus

CONNECT with Each Other

Begin with Prayer

What was the highlight of the past week for you?

How did Application go from last week's lesson?

Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions Our Lives:

- If you were the all-powerful God of the universe and wanted to reveal yourself to those you created, how would you do this?

Deeper Perspectives:

- Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette: "As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating that, measured by His effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet." Why is this true?

Transition

- All people are polluted by sin. No one is perfect. We might be good when compared to other people but we always fall short compared to God. God is totally pure. Our impurity separates us from God. God is separated from the creatures He loves and created in His image. How can the relationship between God and man be restored?

HEAR God's Word

Bible Passage: John 1:1-18, 29-34

Background: Before meeting Jesus, John was a fisherman. When Jesus said, "Follow me" he laid down his nets to follow Jesus. He became one of the twelve disciples and was called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." John writes his gospel ("good news") about Jesus because we want people to believe in Jesus and have life (John 20:30-31). He begins by explaining who Jesus is.

Bible Discussion Questions: Read John 1:1-9.

- What does the first words of verse 1 remind you of? Why did John make this parallel?

- Who is "The Word"? How long has He existed? How is he described in verses 3-5?

Read John 1:10-19

- Did the people recognize Him (verses 10-11)? Why not?

- What happens to those who believe in the Word (v. 12)? How is this possible?

- Verse 3 says the Word created the world then verse 14 says He became part of creation. Why was it necessary for God to become a man?

Continue questions: Read John 1:29-34.

- John calls Jesus the "Lamb of God"? What role do lambs play in how Jews approach God?

- How is it possible for one man to take away the sins of the world?

- In this scene we see God the Son being baptized, God the Spirit coming in the appearance of a dove and God the Father saying "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (see Luke 3:22).

We believe that God is three persons--in one essence. This 3-in-1 and 1-in-3 is called the Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit.

1 Peter 2:22 "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."

- Jesus can take away sin because He was sinless, perfect in every way. Why is this unusual?

UNDERSTAND it

Summary

- If one of your friends—who does not know Jesus—asked you to describe Jesus, what would you say?

Summarize John 1 in these lines:

Clarification

- What amazes you most about God becoming a man?

- What surprised you most from our lesson today?

APPLY it to Life

Act

- In the coming week, how can you grow in your understanding of who Jesus Christ is?

- Write down your specific actions to take below. Then in groups of two or three, share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

The Cross

Understanding Jesus' Death & Resurrection

CONNECT with Each Other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to Life

Begin with Prayer

How is your research/classes going?
How did Application go from last week's lesson?
Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions

Our Lives:

- Think of the person you love most in the world. Would you be willing to die for them? Why or why not?

Deeper Perspectives:

- C.S. Lewis: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." If someone claims to be God they must be a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Do you agree?

Transition

- Jesus claimed to be God. But what proof does He offer? And what does this do for me?

Bible Passage: Luke 23, John 20

Background: Luke was a Gentile (non-Jewish) physician who was not one of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life. He carefully gathered information from the apostle Paul and other eyewitnesses to write a detailed historical document about Jesus.

Bible Discussion Questions:

Read Luke 23:32-49.

- What is crucifixion? What kind of people did the Romans crucify?
- Jesus is crucified between two criminals. One soldier insults him; the other asks (verse 40) "Don't you fear God?" Why should someone in this situation fear God?
- Describe the attitude of the two criminals toward Jesus. What do you think they believe about him? If the criminal is guilty, how can Jesus say that they will be together in paradise (v. 43)?
- Given his circumstances, what is surprising about the way Jesus prays (v. 34)?
- In verses 44-49 Luke records a number of unusual things that occurred after Jesus died. What caused these events?

Continue questions:

Read John 20:1-10, 19-31.

- What do Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter find in the tomb where Jesus was buried?
 - How do the disciples feel and act in verses 19,20? Are they expecting to see Jesus?
 - What does Jesus say and do when He appears? Why?
 - What conditions did Thomas set before he was willing to believe Jesus was alive? What did Jesus say in verse 29 about "seeing" and "believing"? Since people do not "see" Jesus alive today, how can you believe?
- 1 Peter 2:22: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."*
- Romans 5:8,9: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."*
- How are we saved (justified) with God? How does this make you feel?

Summary

- If someone asked you why did Jesus die on the cross, how would you answer?

Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?

Clarification

- How does it make you feel to know that Jesus died for you?

- What surprised you most from our lesson today?

Act

- How do you need to respond to the death and resurrection of Jesus? What needs to change in your life?

- Write down your specific actions to take below. Then in groups of two or three, share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

- Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

- Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

Faith

Receiving the Gift of Life

CONNECT with Each Other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to Life

Begin with Prayer

What have you been doing for fun this semester?

How did Application go from last week's lesson?

Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions

Our Lives:

• What is the greatest gift you have ever received? How did you feel after receiving that gift?

Deeper Perspectives:

• Napoleon Bonaparte: "I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him." Why do people love Jesus so deeply? And why are they willing to die for Him?

Transition

• If your best friend wrapped up a gift and gave it to you, when does that gift become yours? When you accept it! How do we receive the gift of life that Jesus offers to us through his death and resurrection?

Bible Passage: Romans 6, Ephesians 2

Background: Paul was a brilliant Jewish scholar who persecuted Jesus' followers . . . until Jesus personally appeared to him. Meeting Jesus Christ transformed Paul. He became the greatest missionary in history. He went to many cities in the Roman Empire and began new churches (communities of people who follow Jesus). He then wrote letters to these churches. Our verses today come from letters (epistles) that Paul wrote.

Bible Discussion Questions:

Read Romans 6:23: What is God's gift to us?

• When you work hard at your job, you expect a paycheck. Your wage is what you rightfully deserve. What do we rightfully deserve because of our sin?

• What is death? How have you experienced this death in your own life?

• How does God give us the free gift of eternal life?

• What do we owe God for this gift?

Continue questions:

Read Ephesians 2:4-10: What saves us?

• God is rich in mercy and loves us with a great love. How does this make you feel about God? Have you ever experienced this kind of love from another person?

• Paul contrasts death and life in verse 5. Why are we dead? What makes us alive?

• How are we saved? What can we do to earn this?

• According to verses 9 and 10, what kind of attitude should this gift of God produce in us?

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Romans 10:9: "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

• What does it mean to believe in Him?

• How does this reverse our state (from death to life)?

Summary

• What must someone do to be saved?

How would you describe grace to a friend? Faith?

Grace: _____

Faith: _____

Clarification

• How does it make you feel to know that you cannot earn your salvation, it a pure gift from God?

• What amazed you most from our lesson today?

Act

• Draw two circles below. In each circle draw a simple chair at the center.

In the first circle put your name on the chair and put a cross (to represent Jesus Christ) on the outside of the circle. In the second circle put the cross on the chair and your name in the circle but below the chair.

These circles represent two kinds of lives. The first is a life without Christ and the first is a life entrusted to Christ.

• Which circle best describes your life?
• Which circle would you like to represent your life?

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer (prayer is talking with God). God knows your heart and is not as concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of prayer. If you want to turn to God from self and trust Christ to come into your life, let's pray!

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?