

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Understanding the Essential Doctrines of Christianity

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Purpose

The purpose of this curriculum is to teach people the basics of the Christian faith in the context of a small group community.

The curriculum is set up for the seasoned believer, the new believer and the seeker. It is designed to take a person from the foundational issue—*What is my authority in life?*—to a basic understanding of the message of Scripture—*God is holy, we are sinful, Jesus is the solution.*

The Format

The curriculum is also designed around a catechismal format. A catechism ingrains doctrinal foundations in people through a memorized question/answer format. This study has a simplified catechism. Throughout the course, students should review the questions and answers that they have learned. For instance,

- Question: “What is my authority?”
- Answer: “The Bible is my authority because it is REAL—Revealed by God, Eternal, Accurate, and Life-Giving.”

The Need

Why is this important? Consider the following two paragraphs:

A recent Barna research survey revealed that only 9% of “born again Christians” held traditional biblical positions on key doctrinal issues (Barna, 2003). The current emphasis on experiential spirituality has produced a church “3000 miles wide and an inch deep.”

The Joint Statement on Discipleship at the Eastbourne Consultation declared, “As we face the new millennium, we acknowledge that the state of the Church is marked by growth without depth. Our zeal to go wider has not been matched by a commitment to go deeper” (Ogden, 2003).

Evangelical churches have contributed to this lack of biblical foundation by failing to teach people the basics of the Christian faith in a systematized fashion. Most evangelical churches have abandoned the concept of catechismal teaching—a pedagogical method that presents specific biblical doctrine in a format to be memorized.

A key part of Christ's commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is teaching—"teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you." Paul gives a similar commission to Timothy: "...The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

The early church obeyed the commission to teach through the process of catechism. "The early Christians practiced intensive catechism. They sought to resocialize pagans into a lifestyle, often rooted in the teachings of Jesus, which was practiced by believers" (Kreider, 1998). The purpose of the catechism was "to indoctrinate and to incorporate the new believer into the church" (Lacher, 1993). A catechism placed "emphasis on memorization and imitation" often through a question and answer format (Osmer, 1997).

Recent educational research has noted, "Internalizing the language, concepts and communicative norms of a particular field is crucial to the development of competencies in that field" (Osmer, 1997). In other words, people must know something before they can reasonably live it out.

Though reviewing memorized questions and answers can seem about as exciting as watching paint dry, it can be made into a fun exercise if variety is used (reviewing together as a class, reviewing one-on-one, etc.) and the purpose of the memorization is emphasized.

The Work

The value of the study guide is in the personal study of Scripture that is encouraged of each person in the class. The curriculum will seem intensive to some people who struggle with reading and studying or who are unfamiliar with the Bible. If you see someone struggling with the material, try your best to encourage them. There is no way to take the "work" out of work (and Bible study does require work, 2 Timothy 2:15) but consistent encouragement can help.

One suggestion is to split up each lesson into four or five sections and complete one section each day. Each lesson generally breaks down in the same way:

- Day One—Introduction and study of central passage.
- Day Two—Completing first half of the acronym.
- Day Three—Completing second half of the acronym.
- Day Four—Additional Reading and reflection.
- Day Five—Changed Hearts section.

Many people will simply slot out one to two hours during the week to complete the whole lesson. Either way works as long as people interact with Scripture and complete the material.

Leading the Class

There is no set way to lead this study. If people have done the work, then the goal of the community group time is simply to review the material and share together what has been learned and applied. It is also a time to reinforce the Q&A of the doctrine(s).

The following suggestions can help you as you lead each lesson.

WEEK ONE: Introduction

- Get to know one another in the class by having each person introduce themselves, where they were born, and their favorite dessert.
- Encourage each person to take the Pretest in the back of the study guide.
- Give the overview of the questions covered in the course. Ask, “What topic interests you the most?” Ask, “What are you expecting in this class? What do you hope to learn?”
- Emphasize the need for the study. Ask, “Do you agree or disagree with Lewis’ quote? Why or why not?”
- Go over the format of the lessons by walking through one of the studies highlighting the Scripture Exploration, Additional Resources, and Changed Hearts sections.
- Emphasize the benefits of the study. Have different people read the verses associated with each of the benefits of studying Scripture.
- Explain the process of the study and quickly review the summary of the SEARCH curriculum with all the questions and answers. Do not spend too long here since it may overwhelm some people.
- Ask people what comes into their minds when they hear the word “catechism.” Explain the history of catechisms as a way of making sure that new believers understood the basics of the Christian faith. Discuss how a catechism could be helpful and also how it could be potentially useless or detrimental (e.g., mere memorization with no impact on the heart).
- Touch on the different topics under the Preliminaries of the Study. Depending on the nature of your class, you may need to spend more time on some of these areas than on others.
- Give everyone a good charge to do the study on a weekly basis. Close in prayer.

WEEK TWO: What Is My Authority? (1)

- Why start with the issue of authority? Q.2 of Westminster Catechism starts here. With so many different opinions on life/religion, you have to have some standard by which to evaluate them. The first step in playing a game is knowing what the rules are and following them. Whether we realize it or not, all of us choose some authority to govern our lives. Why do you believe what you believe?
- The five statements show the various authorities people rely upon: Subjective feeling, family tradition, science, church tradition, popular opinion. Ask, “What other authorities do people tend to depend upon?”
- As you go through the Scripture Exploration section, here are some things you may want to highlight:
 - The five characteristics of the blessed life in Psalm 1. How does this contrast with the world? What list of five things would the world compose?
 - Examine 2 Timothy 3:16 together. Give examples in your own life how the Bible is useful for teaching, reproving, correcting, and training.

- Observations on 1 Peter 1:23-25. The French philosopher Voltaire declared that Christianity would be destroyed in fifty years. Ironically, twenty years after his death his home was purchased by the Geneva Bible Society for the printing of Bibles.
- Highlight John Wesley's quote on the importance of the Bible being without error.
- Discuss the meaning of Jesus' words in Matthew 4:4. What did Jesus mean?
- Discuss the picture of being planted by rivers of water. What does this mean to the different people in your class?
- Review the question, *What is my authority?* And the answer, The Bible is my authority because it is REAL—Revealed by God, Eternal, Accurate, Life-Giving.
- Review Additional Resource section by focusing on final question: What evidences for inspiration are the most convincing in your own mind?
- In the Changed Hearts section, spend time sharing the different things people learned and how God's Word spoke to them.

WEEK THREE: Who Is God? (2)

- Have people fill in this blank, "God is _____"
- Discuss different views of God in society. The four statements describe a God who is tolerant goodness, unforgiving vengeance, an embracing feeling of love, and a supreme master. How do the people in your class tend to view God? What do they remember about their first impressions of God as a child?
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Spend time exploring Acts 17:16-34. It is a fascinating passage of Scripture as Paul introduces God to a people who had become totally distorted in their thinking about Him. Have people share their observations from the passage.
 - How did you respond the first time someone told you about Jesus? What do you think makes the difference in the different responses? (Acts 17:32-34)
 - Highlight A.W. Tozer quote at top of 2-3. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Agree or disagree? What the implications of this statement?
 - Have people individually read and meditate on Exodus 34:6-7. What attributes of God stand out?
 - Ask, "What aspect of God's love do you appreciate the most today?"
 - Emphasize the meaning of "Yahweh"—the central name of God.
 - Why is it important that God does not change?
 - Review Q&A. Who is God? He is HOLY—Holy, Omnipotent, Loving, Yahweh.
- Additional Resources:
 - What statements by Tony Evans did you highlight or underline?

- Some may struggle with the concept of holiness being the “centerpiece of God’s attributes.” Isn’t God love? Yes, but His love is only understood as an aspect of His holiness. God’s love is a holy love—a love far higher and different than what we experience on earth. God’s love is totally devoid of sin. It is pure love. When we think of God we have to remember His holiness otherwise we will tend to make Him into our image and picture His attributes as mere reflections of our own. “God is love” becomes “God does nice things to me so that we can have a good relationship.”
- Changed Hearts: Read and reflect on Psalm 145 together.

WEEK FOUR: Who Are We? (3)

- How would you complete this sentence: “I am _____.” According to the dictionary, you are basically an animal who can walk, talk, and hitchhike (because you have a thumb ☺).
- The various statements listed about the meaning of life were by George Burns, a NY taxi driver, Stephen Jay Gould (evolutionist), and Leonard Nimoy (Spock) respectively.
- Scripture Exploration:
 - What thoughts or questions emerged from reading Genesis 1-2?
 - Discuss the chart on relationship of God-humanity, man-woman, humanity-nature.
 - Discuss capabilities of Adam based on verbs in Genesis 2: tend/keep (15), [hear/obey (16-17)], called/gave names (19-20), slept (21), said (23), leave (24), be joined (24).
 - Why is man alone “not good”?
 - What do you learn about marriage from Genesis 2:24?
 - Highlight body, soul, and spirit of man.
 - What does it mean to “glorify” God? To glorify God is to let His attributes be known and seen. What would that look like in your daily life?
 - Review Q&A. “Who are we?” “We are DUST created in the Divine image, made for Unity, possessing a Spirit, and given a Task.”
- Additional Resources: What stood out to you in the reading? Emphasize the inherent value in every human being.
- Changed Hearts: Have people read their paraphrases of Psalm 139.

WEEK FIVE: What Is Our Problem? (4)

- According to TV advertisements or political campaigns, what are the biggest problems facing our country? Our world? Your family? Your own life? All of the problems that we identify are simply a symptom of the real problem—we are spiritually dead and slaves to sin.
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Share thoughts and questions from Genesis 3.

- How does the serpent portray God?
 - Highlight the effects of sin in humanity's relationship with God, with one another, and with the world.
 - Emphasize the nature of sin and the meaning of "total depravity." Our whole being is impacted by sin (e.g., hearts, minds, wills).
 - What happens to Adam and Eve's relationship after their fall into sin? How do you see this play out in marriage relationships (or any kind of relationships) today?
 - Discuss and make observations on Eph. 2:1-3. Emphasize what it means to be spiritually dead. This is the worst kind of deadness even though we cannot see it.
 - Highlight the final statement on 4-4. This addresses the age-old question of why there is suffering in this world.
 - Review Q&A. What is our problem? Our problem is sin which has brought the COST of Corruption to our nature, opposition to one another, Separation from God, and Trouble to our world.
- Additional Resources: Ask the questions at the end of the article. Emphasize the pervasive nature of sin and how we all contribute to the mess the world is in.
 - Changed Hearts: Encourage a time of personal reflection and confession. Breaking up into pairs or groups of three to cover this final section may be the best way to end the class.

WEEK SIX: Who Is Jesus? (5)

- What was your first impression of Jesus as a child or young person? Why? Our picture of Jesus must come from Scriptures. Spend time discussing observations from Luke 1:1-4
- Scriptural Exploration:
 - Highlight the various titles/names of Jesus in John 1.
 - Which title particularly catches your attention? Why?
 - Why was a virgin birth necessary and important?
 - Why did Jesus need to be a man with similar experiences to us? (Hebrews 2:17-18)
 - Emphasize the meaning of the title "Christ."
 - Emphasize Jesus' words in John 5:19-23 as a way of indicating the fact that Jesus was God in the flesh.
 - Highlight the use of both Jesus and God as our Savior in the book of Titus.
 - Review Q&A. Who is Jesus? He is *ichthus*—Jesus, Christ, Gods' Son, Savior.
- Additional Resources: The C.S. Lewis article is a good explanation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and a good defense of the historical accuracy of the gospels (Lewis being a renowned literary professor at Cambridge University). What stood out to people?
- Changed Hearts: Emphasize that a realization of Jesus' identity calls for a response of worship, submission, and adoration. Discuss the "I am" statements of Jesus.

WEEK SEVEN: What Did Jesus Do? (6)

- How is Jesus portrayed in movies or TV shows today? How would you evaluate the statement of Jesus in the CBS miniseries? What is missing?
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Spend time reflecting on and studying Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This passage itself could take up the whole class. Using a whiteboard to record all the observations about Jesus from each section of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is very helpful.
 - Why do you think Jesus is described as “the man of sorrows”?
 - According to Isaiah 53, what is the purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry?
 - Why is Jesus’ sinlessness so important?
 - Could Jesus have been killed as a baby and still been our substitute sacrifice? Why or why not?
 - Discuss observations from 2 Corinthians 5:21.
 - Discuss observations from 1 Corinthians 15. Make sure to emphasize the core elements of the gospel.
 - What picture of the future kingdom encourages your heart the most (Isaiah 11)?
- Additional Resources: What stands out to you in Josh McDowell’s article?
- Changed Hearts: Reflect on Revelation 5. Perhaps sing a song together or listen to “Revelation Song” by Phillips, Craig, and Dean. Spend time in small groups praying for those who do not know Jesus.

WEEK EIGHT: How is One Saved? (7)

- Who first shared the gospel with you? How did you respond?
- Why do you think so many people think salvation is by good works? One of the main purposes of the Sermon on the Mount was to shatter people’s perception that entrance into God’s kingdom would be by “being a Pharisee,” working an outward righteousness with no real inward change.
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Review the story of Naaman. It is a good story to draw observations and insights from. What do you learn from the story of Naaman? What makes his story such a good picture of the simplicity of salvation?
 - In what ways do we tend to ignore, justify, or excuse our sin?
 - Discuss observations from Titus 3:4-6.
 - Our response to God’s gift of salvation can be expressed in different ways—believe on Jesus, receive Him, repent, come to Him, call upon His name, etc. Which one of these responses seems to capture your own response to Jesus the most? Why?

- Additional Resources: What stands out to you from Stott’s article?
- Changed Hearts: Spend time reflecting on and rejoicing in the things that are true about you in Jesus Christ. What encourages your heart the most from Ephesians 1:3-14?

WEEK NINE: Who Is the Holy Spirit? (8)

- Read the opening paragraphs of the lesson. What thoughts or pictures come into your mind when you think about the “Holy Spirit”? Did you grow up in a church that called him the “Holy Ghost”? How did this impact your view of Him?
- Have you ever thought of the Spirit as being “shy,” not wanting the attention on Himself? The Spirit is a “behind-the-scenes” worker, seeking to glorify the Father and the Son. You can use the example of a spotlight to illustrate this point.
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Go over the chart from John 14-16. What do you learn about the Spirit from Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse?
 - Emphasize A.W. Tozer’s quote in the notes section.
 - If the Spirit is the revealer of truth, can a person know anything true about God without some work of the Spirit? Why or why not?
 - The blasphemy of the Spirit can be a confusing and controversial topic. But if people can only come to Jesus through the ministry of the Spirit, then to blaspheme Him, to basically tell Him to “shut up!” is to commit the one sin that can’t be forgiven—rejection of the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.
 - What does the Spirit do in our hearts the moment that we trust in Jesus?
 - How does the Holy Spirit help us live the Christian life?
- Additional Resources: What stands out to you from Swindoll’s article? What does filling of the Spirit look like in our daily life?
- Changed Hearts: Encourage everyone to make the prayer for the filling of the Spirit part of their daily morning practice. Also encourage daily morning Bible reading since the Spirit always works in concert with God’s Word.

WEEK TEN: What Is the Church? (9)

- What was your early experience in church? Boring? Exciting? Confusing? What pictures come into your mind when you hear the word “church” today? Why?
- What does it tell you about the church that we are called the “bride of Christ”?
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Discuss observations from Acts 2, the “birthday” of the church. What was the early church devoted to? What does this tell you about the priorities of the church?

- What advantages do you see to a spiritual temple as opposed to a physical temple?
- How should we live as God's temple?
- What all can you learn about the church from the analogy to the human body?
- Make sure that the idea of the "invisible" nature of the church is clear. This means that only God sees who are truly His. There is no "visible organization" that one can belong to that equates with salvation.
- Why do you think meeting together as believers is so important? How have you benefited from the love and support of believers in the past?
- Why is unity so hard to achieve and preserve?
- Go over the BUILD acronym. Built on Jesus, Unified in the Spirit, Invisible in nature, Loving God and one another, Declaring Christ to the world.
- Additional Resources: What stands out from the Communion of the Saints article? This article is written from a Reformed standpoint so there may be some things that people have questions about. Make sure to emphasize the main point of being in fellowship with each other in a local church.
- Changed Hearts: What spiritual gift(s) do you seem to have based on the questions at the end of the study? How can you use this gift in CBC?

WEEK ELEVEN: What about Baptism and Communion? (10)

- Were you baptized as an infant? Were you baptized as an adult? How important was baptism in your own life? What were your early experiences and impressions regarding communion?
- Go over the quiz on baptism and communion to highlight the different views on them.
- Scripture Exploration:
 - What do you learn about baptism from Matthew 3, the first mention of baptism in the Bible? One main point is that water baptism is a symbolic act pointing to a greater type of baptism.
 - Look up the verses in Acts that talk about the action that preceded baptism. This will highlight the importance of believer's baptism.
 - Look up the verses that indicate that baptism was by immersion.
 - How is baptism a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus? How is it a picture of being "immersed" into the body of Christ?
 - Talk about the analogy of baptism and a wedding ring.
 - Discuss what you learn about communion from 1 Corinthians 11.
 - In what ways have you celebrated communion that have been particularly meaningful? Why do you think it was so meaningful in this way?
 - Go over both acronyms for baptism (DIP) and communion (CUP).

- Additional Resources: What did you learn from Erickson’s article? It is a more technical article with lots of information. It may be interesting to some and boring to others but it does a good job of covering the different views of baptism and communion. Here is where people’s church backgrounds may be an interesting item of discussion.
- Changed Hearts: Encourage people to share their experience with believer’s baptism...and encourage those who are still considering it to go ahead and follow through. Spend time talking about the importance of having “clean accounts” in the body of Christ. If people have an unresolved issue with someone, encourage them to try to resolve it, as much as they are able (cf. Romans 12:18).

WEEK TWELVE: What Role Do Angels Play? (11)

- What do you think of when you hear the word “angel”? Why?
- Go over the quiz on angels. Where do people pick up their views on angels?
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Go over the 2 Kings 6 story. This is a good story from which to draw observations and insights. Do you think Elisha saw these angelic forces all along or did he just know by faith that they were there? What does it mean to see things spiritually?
 - Go over the Preliminary Observations to clarify what the Bible says about angels.
 - Angels are “serving spirits.” Have you ever stopped to consider that there are angels right now appointed to help you? How would knowing this change the perspective of your day?
 - Angels are not only watching over us...but also watching us! What do you think goes through their minds when they are watching our lives...particularly here in America?
 - Discuss Satan’s fall in Isaiah 14. How is pride the root of all other sins?
 - What weapons does Satan use against us? Which is most effective in your opinion?
 - Satan is a defeated enemy. We do not have to fear Him. But we do have to respect his power and be aware of his schemes against us. Discuss 1 Peter 5:8-9 and what this looks like in your daily life.
 - Go over the acronym SPIRIT—Serving spirits, Powerful beings, Involved in our lives...but some Rebelled against God, Interfere with our lives, and are Triumphed over in Christ. This may be one of the harder ones to memorize. Use the opportunity to go over all the acronyms again.
- Additional Resources: What stands out to you in Neil Anderson’s article? What aspect of Ephesians 6 encourages you the most? Challenges you the most?
- Changed Hearts: What are our weapons in defeating the power of Satan? How important do you think it is to memorize Scripture and to speak it out loud?

WEEK THIRTEEN: Where Are We Headed? (12)

- What do you think life will be like in 10 years? Why do you think we humans are so “future-oriented”? Obviously our pets don’t seem to be too concerned about the future.
- Discuss the importance and uniqueness of prophecy in the Scripture. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the things that assure us of the accuracy of the Bible’s predictions for the future.
- Scripture Exploration:
 - Go over Daniel 9. This may be the hardest passage in this study to try to understand but if you work through it slowly then it is also one of the most amazing passages in Scripture. If nothing else, emphasize the amazing aspects of the prophecy mentioned on page 12-3.
 - The different views of the end times again may be confusing to a lot of people. Emphasize the one clear truth that Christ is coming back. The pre-millennial standpoint was the standpoint of the early church. It emphasizes that God still has a plan for Israel and that Christ will physically reign on this earth for 1000 years.
 - Discuss 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. How do these two passages comfort us and encourage us in the present? How important is it to have a future hope? What is the opposite of having hope?
 - How will the Anti-Christ deceive people? How do you see our world being set up for his coming deception?
 - Discuss the second coming of Christ in Revelation 19 and Isaiah 2.
 - How are people judged at the Great White Throne judgment? What do you learn from this fact?
 - Go over the acronym REST—Rapture of the church, Emergence of the Anti-Christ, Second coming of Christ, and Throne judgment of God.
- Additional Resources: What encourages you the most from Lucado’s article? It is good to emphasize this article after spending so much time in some of the particulars of the end times. Sometimes we get caught up in speculation and the mysteries of Revelation rather than simply remembering that, in the end, Christ wins and death is defeated! What other hope do we really have in this world?
- Changed Hearts: Emphasize the importance of purity, perseverance, and praise. Perhaps play the Mercy Me song, *I Can Only Imagine*, as a way to end the time.

At this meeting or at a follow-up meeting:

Review all the twelve doctrinal questions and answers from the study. See if people remember all the acronym answers. Encourage people to take the doctrinal test again and see if they have a better handle on doctrine. Also encourage them to complete the Post-Study Evaluation. Discuss ways that the study has been helpful in their personal lives.