

Simple Sundays

**Why Do We
Thank God?**



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Main Idea

Jesus does Simon Peter a favor in sending him to a fishing spot that fills two boats full of fish. Simon Peter feels so embarrassed by this generous gift that he feels unworthy to be in Jesus' presence. He asks Jesus to go away, but instead Jesus calls Simon Peter to be his disciple. Like Simon Peter, we must first recognize our need for a Savior before we can hear the Savior's invitation: "Follow me."

You Will Need

Bibles, pens and paper

Faith Statement

We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

It is difficult for many people who do not profess Jesus as Lord to accept that they have done anything so awful to deserve God's condemnation. While many places in Scripture help people in reaching an understanding of sin and condemnation, it is, in the end, a concept that makes sense only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). Once we have "ears to hear" the voice of the Spirit, many places in Scripture show the power of Jesus to forgive sin and to rescue us from condemnation. One helpful narrative in this regard is an encounter between Jesus and Simon Peter (Luke 5). His miraculous catch on the morning after a grueling night without so much as a nibble is a familiar story to many of us. If it were not so familiar, we would be more puzzled that Simon did not jump up and down for joy in response to what had to have been the catch of a lifetime. Instead of joy or gratitude or amazement, we hear embarrassment and unworthiness in Simon's reaction to Jesus' gift of fish. Simon utters one simple sentence, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (v. 8). Simon, recognizing the holiness of Jesus, is flooded with a sense of his own unworthiness. Simon's response is one of embarrassment in the face of extravagant, overflowing bounty. In effect, Simon says, "I am not worthy of grace."

Many of us identify with the embarrassment that comes in receiving a gift that we know we do not deserve. And so, Simon, faced with God's generosity, is humbled to realize the gap between his sinful nature

and the holy, righteous, and awesome nature of God. Inexplicably, God's grace fills the gap. Grace is what makes the difference between what we deserve and what we receive. We deserve condemnation. We receive redemption. Grace is the reason that Jesus stays with Simon even though he asks Jesus to go away. Grace is implicit in Jesus' invitation that Simon be his disciple.

Jesus extends this same invitation to us. In admitting our own sin and alienation from God, we, too, can experience the power, majesty, and love of God. We may feel the urge to say, as Simon did, "Go away from me," but Jesus will not leave us alone. Miraculously, Jesus fills our deepest longings so that we are full to overflowing and invites us to "leave our boats behind" for the joy of serving our now risen Lord.

You and Your Youth

This session explores the humility we experience in recognizing our sin and the surprise we feel in receiving God's gift of love. In preparation for this session, take time to center yourself in prayer, asking for the Spirit's guidance. Then pray for members of the group by name, that God's love would surround their lives and that, in response, they would find the courage to face the truth of their sinfulness.

 **Enter**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Enjoying Worship

Greet the youth by name as they arrive.

In pairs, talk together about your favorite part of Sunday worship. (Give at least three reasons.)

Then gather into a circle so that each person can summarize for the group what his or her partner enjoys about worship. As a transition into today's Bible study, ask the following:

- How many mentioned the Confession of Sin as a favorite part of worship?
- What exactly is confession of sin?
- What meaning does confession have for you?

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, giver of good gifts, we thank you for the abundance that you offer us. If we feel unworthy, remind us that you promise to love us, even before we have done anything to deserve it, and even after we have let you down. With the help of your Spirit, may we receive the forgiveness that is ours through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible**

The purpose in studying Simon Peter's response to Jesus in Luke 5:1-11 is to raise awareness of our own unworthiness and sin in the face of God's mercy. It is impossible to see our need for forgiveness unless we first admit our rebellion against God.

Study the Bible

Introduce the story of the call of Simon by paraphrasing the information from the Background and then read Luke 5:1-11.

Discuss the passage using these questions:

- How do you explain Simon's response to Jesus?
- How might your response to Jesus have been like or different from Simon's?
- Was Simon responding more to Jesus words, his actions, or his presence?
- Why all the fish? What could they mean?

- Did Jesus have to perform a miracle to convince Simon to be his disciple?
- How do you think Simon understood sin?
- How would you define "sin"?

Place a check mark next to the sinful actions described in these prayers that could apply to you. Mark a line through those actions that do not apply to you.

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.¹

Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our sinfulness, our shortcomings, and our offenses against you. You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love. Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we are ashamed and sorry for all we have done to displease you. Forgive our sins, and help us to live in your light, and walk in your ways, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior.²

Discuss:

- What specific things are confessed in these prayers?

- What does each prayer say that we should do about sin?

- What does each prayer ask God to do?

- What changes would you suggest, if any, to make this prayer your own? Share your responses with the group.

1. From the *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 53. Used by permission.

2. Ibid.

 **Express**

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If the youth do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant.

Youth Issue

Read the scenario below and then discuss it using the questions that follow:

Cherise is a friend of yours who accepted an invitation to attend church with you. Later in the week, you meet for lunch and she nervously raises the topic of sin. She admits that sin is not a word that anyone in her family has ever heard or talked much about. Cherise explains that they know what is right or wrong, but they don't get all caught up in religion. She feels her family is better than most of the other people in her neighborhood who only go after what they want without thinking of anybody else. She can't understand why she should have to confess anything to God when she is doing her best to live a good life.

- How can the idea of sin mean anything to people who don't see themselves as sinful?

- How could you explain to Cherise the confession of sin?

Action Steps*Bibles*

Begin by reading Deuteronomy 6:4. Let everyone say the verse together. As you sit comfortably, silently review the events of the preceding week. Pray that the Holy Spirit would be your guide as you remember thoughts or actions that are inconsistent with your belief that "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone."

As you reflect, wonder about the following questions:

- Is there something I rely on as though it were more powerful than God?

- Do I resign myself to some fate or failure because I am not sure that God has power over, or interest in, this aspect of my life?

- What is the most important thing/relationship in my life? How does God fit into my life in comparison?

Return to Deuteronomy 6:4. Let your mind slowly replay each word of the verse. Repeat the verse several times. Do not force anything. Ask God to be with you and to help you amend your life in the coming week. Thank God for the grace of forgiveness and renewed strength.

**Exit****Closing Prayer**

Close with the following prayer:

Forgiving God, heal our rebellious ways. Forgive us. Give us the new life and hope you promise through Christ our Lord. Amen.