

Study 4. We love getting better than we deserve (doctrine of salvation)

Big idea: we are saved by grace, from the death our sins deserve, in order that we might do the good works planned for us.

Opening question: Have you ever gotten out of trouble, or been let off the hook?

Some pastoral notes for leaders

Some people don't believe they are in need of saving. More often people will acknowledge that they're done things that they aren't proud of. The important thing is to help them see that even if they are upstanding people (by human standards at least), it is their relationship with God that is the main issue. (An analogy to human families might help here: you can be an exceptionally high achieving daughter or son, but if you ignore your father completely you can't expect to have a good relationship with him.)

Other people don't believe they are good enough for God. We need to help them see that salvation is a gift - not something they work for.

Observation and Interpretation

It's years after Jesus' death. Two of Jesus' early disciples, Paul and Silas, are in Jail for telling people about Jesus. This was before freedom of speech was a thing. And then something totally unexpected happens.

Read Acts 16:25-30

- Why do you think the jailer is so worried when the earthquake happens?
- His question in verse 30 is interesting. What does he mean? Saved from what?

Imagine that on the way home tonight you are hit by a bus, and die. You suddenly find yourself standing before your maker (God). He asks you a question: "why should I let you into eternal life?" Have a think about your own answer, or answers you have heard other people give to similar questions. What answers spring to mind?

The answer that the disciples give is incredible, and is one of the things that Christians really love.

Read Acts 16:30-34.

- What does it mean to be saved?

- What do the disciples say we need to do to be saved?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

- What are we saved from?
- Why did God save us?
- What are we saved to do? (What are we meant to do with our salvation?)

Read Romans 10:9

- How do we receive salvation?
- How does this passage make you feel?

Implications

If we are saved by grace does that mean we can do whatever we want with our lives (for instance, pursue a career in drug dealing and kidnapping) and God doesn't care?

Salvation under the Old Testament was conditional upon obedience to the law. You didn't need to be perfect, but you did need to take part in the whole system of sacrifices when you stuffed up. But we could never earn our way to God. He had to come to us and do it for us.

Romans 5:8-10 helpfully makes the connection between the punishment for sin, and justification by his blood (i.e. his sacrifice on the cross which fulfils the Old Testament sacrificial system). When we trust in Jesus we are justified - that is, we are determined to be in the right as far as God is concerned.

Good deeds are still a necessary part of the Christian life, but they flow out of this new life. The person who is saved can't help but be changed by the experience of God's love.

Belief is not really a work in itself. It is trust in the one who has done the work for us.

Why might this message be hard to swallow for some people?

If this is such good news, what holds us back from telling other people about it?

Prayer ideas

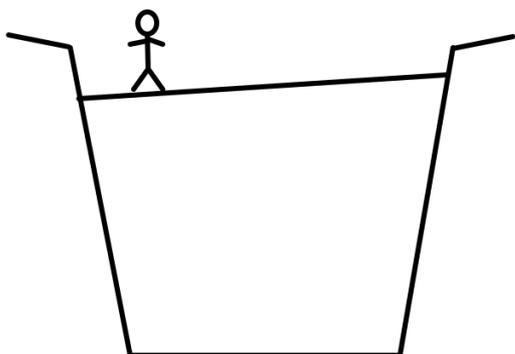
You could pray some kind of corporate confession, such as this one:

Heavenly Father,
 you have loved us with an everlasting love,
 but we have gone our own way,
 and rejected your will for our lives.
 We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
 For the sake of your Son who died for us,
 forgive us, cleanse us, and change us.
 By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you,
 and to please you in every way;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(from *Sunday Services*)

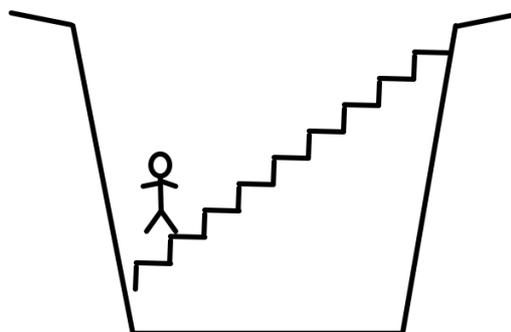
Diagram ideas

In some groups it may be helpful to use a series of diagrams to tease out misunderstandings of how salvation works. Try using these four pictures. Explain them as you draw them, and ask the group to show why according to the passages we've looked at they are wrong:



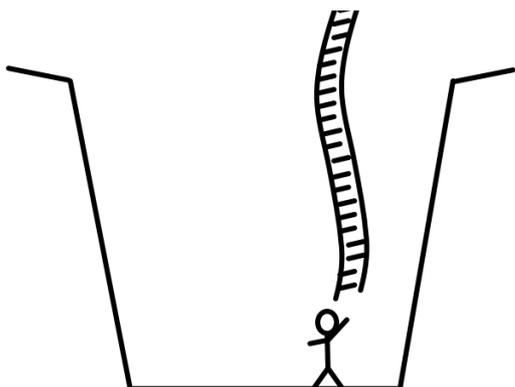
What the world thinks:

humanity isn't that far from God, we'll make it in the end, and if we do fall short it'll only be by a little way.



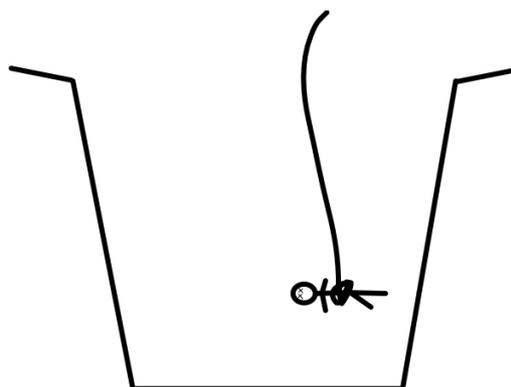
What the world thinks Christians think:

We need to work hard to climb out of the hole, by following all the rules



What Christians sometimes think:

God throws us a rope but it's up to us to hold on tight, or at least climb as much as we can.



What the Bible actually says:

Dead people don't climb. God saves us by grace.