

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to believe:

1. that Jesus Christ died in their place as a sacrifice of atonement for their sins
2. that their own death is not a punishment, but a means to sanctify them

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to thank God.

Theme: Thank God for the cross

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

- *The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is a proof of God's love for us.*

Romans 5:6-8

⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

- *The cross of Jesus is a satisfaction of God's holy and righteous wrath or indignation against our sins.*

Romans 5:9-11

⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we

have now received reconciliation.

The cross of Jesus Christ satisfies God's righteous demand to fully punish all sins. Because of this God is no longer angry with us!

- *Through the cross of Jesus God made peace with us.*

Romans 5:1-2

¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross restores our broken relationship to God. There is therefore not a single reason to keep on living separate from God.

- *The cross of Jesus sets us completely free.*

1 Peter 2:22-25

²²He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9). ²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

On the cross Jesus suffered for all our sins in the past, present and future. He carried our sins in our place. Therefore all our sins of the past, present and future have been atoned for. Therefore we are completely free to do what is right in God's eyes.

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to thank God (in one or two sentences) for what the cross has accomplished for you.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: The death of Christ

Read or explain in your own words.

1. Christ's death was completely willing

On a Friday in April of the year 30 A.D. Jesus Christ was crucified. The religious leaders of Israel delivered Jesus Christ into the hands of the Roman political leader.

Jesus Christ was thus condemned to death and crucified by both the Jews and the Gentiles (Acts 2:23; 3:15)!

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ died completely willingly (John 10:18a)! He was not murdered against his will, but willingly sacrificed his life for his friends.

2. Christ's death was an atonement sacrifice

Christ's death was a part of God's eternal plan for the salvation of his people. His death was absolutely necessary. It was the sacrifice of atonement for our sins. On the one hand, because God is perfectly holy and righteous, he demands that all people in history live holy and righteous as he revealed in the Bible. On the other hand he demands that the sins of all people in history be punished. Because not one single person can meet this righteous demand, God is angry against the sins of people.

Jesus Christ was the only One in history who lived absolutely perfect as God demanded (Hebrews 7:26-28). He was also the only One who paid for all our sins on the cross. His death on the cross completely satisfied God's holy and righteous demand to live perfectly as he demanded and to pay the punishment for all sins. Without this sacrifice of atonement no one can be saved. By faith in Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation a person is reconciled with God and consequently saved.

3. Christ's death was a substitution sacrifice

Without the death of Jesus Christ we would have to be punished with spiritual, physical and eternal death. Spiritual death of non-Christians causes separation from God and very much misery. Physical death of non-Christians separates their spirit from their body, separates them from their family and friends and finally separates them from going to God when they die. Eternal death in hell separates them forever from the loving and caring presence of God.

Jesus Christ died in our place, that is, he took our punishment of spiritual, physical and eternal death on himself. He took our position of complete unrighteousness and gave us his position of perfect righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin (or: a sin offering) for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 3:18a

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

4. Christ's death became our salvation and life

From what are Christians saved?

- A believer is saved from God's righteous wrath and punishment against sin. God declares him completely righteous and henceforth regards and treats him as perfectly righteous.
- He is saved from guilt and shame, that is, from a bad conscience and the disgrace of being condemned and rejected.
- Thus he is saved from the condemnation and rejection on the last judgment day. He is saved from eternal death in hell and instead receives eternal life by God's mercy and grace (Matthew 25:46).

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: The death of Christ and Christians

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| Day 1 | Psalm 22:15-19
Prophecy about the death of Jesus
(cf. John 19:18,23,28,34) |
| Day 2 | Mark 15:1-38
Jesus Christ is crucified |
| Day 3 ^{BS} | John 10:11-18
Jesus is not a victim |
| Day 4 | Romans 5:6-11
Why Jesus gave his life |
| Day 5 | 1 Peter 4:12-19
Also Christians must suffer and die |
| Day 6 | Ecclesiastes 12:1-7
What happens to man when he dies |
| Day 7 | 2 Corinthians 5:1-9
The deposit guaranteeing what is to come |
| Day 8 | Philippians 1:20-24
Where the believer goes after death |
| Day 9 | Luke 16:19-31
Where the unbeliever goes after death |
| Day 10 | Ecclesiastes 9:5-10
Dead people cannot make contact with living people |

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.

If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: Life between death and resurrection

- What is the nature of physical death?
- Why must Christians still die physically?
- Where does the spirit (soul) go after death?
- What happens to the body during death?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- “Do you believe that Jesus Christ carried all your sins away on to his body onto the cross? (1 Peter 2:24).”
- “Do you believe that Jesus Christ died in your place and thus reconciled you to God? (1 Peter 3:18a).”
- Jesus says; “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). “Are you willing to take up your cross and follow Jesus, e.g. to die to your selfish ambitions?”

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

THE DEATH OF CHRIST 1 Peter 3:18a

For Christ died for sins once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
to bring you to God.

1 Peter 3:18a (NIV)

3. Memorisation of the Bible books

The first 7 letters of Paul:

Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

John 10:1-18

¹“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

2. Emphasis

Jesus Christ lays down his life completely willingly and in my place.

3. Explanation for the group leader

10:1-5. The Shepherd of the sheep.

In the first allegory, Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd.

In the Old Testament God promised that he himself would be the Good Shepherd who searches the lost sheep and brings the scattered sheep back to the sheep pen. He

would pasture them in a land of green pastures. He would judge the fat sheep that butt away the lean sheep. And he would place over them one shepherd, his servant David (a prophetic type for the Messiah), who would tend them and be their shepherd (Ezekiel 34:11-24).

➤ *The sheep pen*

A sheep pen is an enclosed wall built with branches or stones with an opening functioning as a door. During the night a doorkeeper sits in this gap to hinder the sheep from leaving the pen and to prevent predators from stealing the sheep. During the Day the shepherd leads his sheep out to green meadows and quiet waters.

The sheep pen is first a symbol for God's Old Testament people, Israel (10:1). 'The sheep that are not of this sheep pen' (10:16) are a symbol of God's New Testament people that come from the Gentile nations.

➤ *The thief and robber*

'The thief and robber' are symbols of false teachers, false prophets and deceitful leaders who want to harm the sheep (e.g. the Pharisees).

➤ *The man who enters by the gate*

The man who enters by the gate is the True Shepherd of the sheep. The meaning is that Jesus Christ came to Israel just as the Old Testament prophets predicted he would come.

➤ *The genuine sheep*

'The sheep' are a symbol for the children of God, i.e. Christians. They 'recognize' and 'acknowledge' the voice of the True Shepherd and they follow him.

➤ *The watchman or doorkeeper*

'The watchman or doorkeeper' recognizes Jesus Christ as being the True Shepherd. He is probably a symbol of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6; cf. Matthew 3:1-3; 11:13-14; 17:10-13; John 1:29).

➤ *The stranger*

'The stranger' represents a false teacher within the Church or a prophet from another religion. Genuine born-again Christians will never follow the false teachers or false prophets, but will run away (10:5).

➤ *The True Shepherd calls his own sheep by name*

Jesus Christ knows exactly which sheep belong to him (cf. 2 Timothy 2:19).

➤ *The True Shepherd goes ahead of his sheep*

The sheep follow Jesus Christ willingly, because he is a Servant-Leader and not an authoritarian ruler. Evil shepherds always walk behind the sheep and drive them to places they do not want to go or should not go.

10:6. 'This figure of speech' is an allegory. An allegory has several points of comparison (e.g. sheep pen = Israel, sheep = Christians, Shepherd = Jesus Christ, watchman = John the Baptist, thief = Pharisees). A parable has only one main point or message (e.g. a neighbour = the one who has mercy) (Luke 10:29-37).

10:7-10. The gate for the sheep.

In the second allegory, Jesus Christ is the Gate or Door for the sheep that leads to the Community of the saved.

Only Jesus Christ can save people. There is no other Gate (Door) in the world or in human history that leads to salvation! Jesus Christ is the only Way to God the Father (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is the only Name by which all people must be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

➤ *The gate for the sheep*

The gate is the gap in the wall of stone or branches through which the sheep enter the sheep pen. At the end of the Day the shepherd leads his sheep into the sheep pen through the gate. During the night the watchman or doorkeeper sits in the gate to protect the sheep. During the Day the shepherd leads his sheep out of the sheep pen to green meadows and quiet waters. In this second allegory Jesus Christ is the gate through which people enter the kingdom of God (the Church).

➤ *To be saved*

Christian salvation means that Christians have a personal and confidential relationship with Jesus Christ in which Jesus Christ knows them by name and they know him.

➤ *All who ever came before me*

This refers to the false religious leaders of Israel (e.g. false prophets, corrupt priests and wicked kings) that throughout the Old Testament period have tried to lead God's people astray.

➤ *To enter through Christ*

There is no other way for anyone to be saved. There is no other way to become a part of God's saved people (the kingdom of God or the Body of Christ) (Luke 13:22; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

➤ *To come in and to go out to find pasture*

This means to follow Jesus Christ as his disciple when he moves, lives and works among the unbelievers in the world.

➤ *I have come that they may have life to the full*

The purpose of the first coming of Jesus Christ to this world was to give his people eternal life and to give them abundant Christian life.

Discuss with one another what ‘an abundant Christian life’ is.

10:11-15. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

➤ *The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*

The salvation and preservation of the sheep becomes the Shepherd’s main concern. He proves this by laying down his living life for his sheep (John 10:11; 1 John 1:7). , Although the death of Jesus Christ is sufficient for everyone in the world, Jesus Christ dies effectively only for his own sheep (10:11)! Not one of his sheep will be lost (John 17:12)!

➤ *The hired hand abandons the sheep*

The hired hand has no concern for the sheep. Just like the Pharisees and Sadducees in the time of Jesus, so modern members of religions and cults have no real concern for the sheep. The purpose of the false religious leaders is to draw people into their organisation in order to increase the numbers of their organisation. The false religious leaders force people to contribute money so that they may prey on them. The false religious leaders occupy high positions so that they may exercise authority (power) over the people and control their daily lives. But when ‘the wolf’ comes to destroy, they abandon the people and run away. Christians should never bind themselves to such mercenaries! They should not serve them.

➤ *Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and they know him*

Jesus knows his own sheep by name and his sheep know him, just as God the Father knows Christ and Christ knows God the Father. ‘To know’ is here much more than theoretical knowledge. It is a lasting, personal and confidential relationship (John 17:3). But Jesus says that he does not know people who are religious, but have no personal and confidential relationship with him and who do not do the will of God the Father as revealed in the Bible (Matthew 7:21-23).

10:16. The Good Shepherd has other sheep in other sheep pens in the world.

➤ *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.*

The sheep pen mentioned in verse 1 refers to the nation of Israel (cf. Matthew 10:5-7). The other sheep pens mentioned in verse 16 refer to the Gentile nations in the world (cf. Matthew 28:19). Jesus Christ is not the Messiah and Saviour of the Jewish *nation* and also not of the Gentile nations. He is the Messiah and Saviour of his own people, that is, of believers coming from every nation on earth, including Israel (Matthew 1:21)!

The believers coming from the natural nation of Israel were the first sheep of the Shepherd, but not the only sheep. Since the first coming of Christ believers from all other nations in the world have joined his sheep. Thus, God’s Old Testament people (spiritual Israel) were continued and enlarged (extended) to include the believers from the Gentile nations. Although there are many sheep pens (nations) in the world, there is only one Shepherd (Christ) and only one flock (the Christian Church)!

➤ *There shall be one flock and one shepherd*

God does NOT have two different peoples: the Jews and the Christians. Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of the one flock of sheep (the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, the worldwide Church). And Jesus Christ is the King of the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; cf. Revelation 1:5) and the Head of one Body (Ephesians 1:22). The Bible does not teach or even tolerate different ‘denominations’ (John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4)!

10:17-18. Jesus Christ lays down his life willingly and freely.

➤ *I lay down my life*

No one took the life of Jesus from him – instead, he laid it down on his own accord! He gave his life completely willingly and freely as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of his people (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18a). Jesus Christ is the only One in history who has received authority from God to lay down his (human) life as a sacrifice of atonement for sins. No other prophet or religious leader has received such authority or even claims to have received such authority. Some false religious prophets even deny the death of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

➤ *I take up my life again*

Jesus Christ is also the only One in history who has received authority from God to take his life up again, that is, to stand up from the dead. No other prophet or religious leader has received such authority and history shows that they all still lie in their graves!

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.