



Ready with a Reason:
Searching Issues Part 1

A Granville Chapel Study Guide
Spring 1999

Study Schedule

The studies in this Curriculum should be done in the Home Groups before the Sunday sermon on the same topic. The schedule of studies for this Curriculum is as follows:

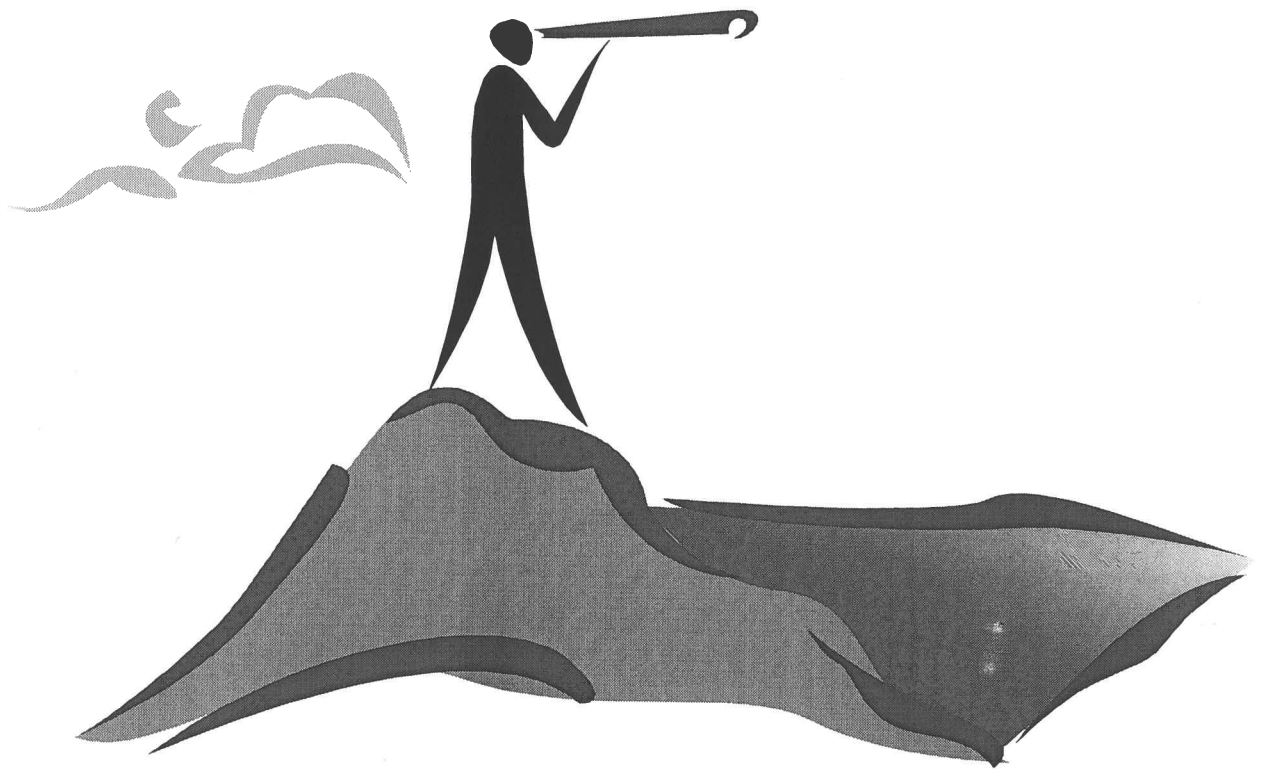
Week of

April 19	Study #1	Ready with a Reason
April 26	Study #2	Who is Jesus?
May 2	Study #3	Why Did Jesus Die?

The Curriculum following this one will deal with some of the main objections that people raise about the Christian faith. Some of them are intellectual issues and some of the moral. These are the 7 issues which are consistently raised by those attending ALPHA courses - Nicky Gumbel (speaker on the ALPHA videos) has written a book on these topics entitled **Searching Issues**. This book provides the background for the series listed below.

Week of

May 10	Study #1	Why Does God Allow Suffering?
May 17	Study #2	What About Other Religions?
May 24	Study #3	Is There Anything Wrong with Sex Before Marriage?
May 31	Study #4	How Does the New Age Movement Relate to Christianity?
June 7	Study #5	What is the Christian Attitude Toward Homosexuality?
June 14	Study #6	Is There a Conflict Between Science and Christianity?
June 21	Study #7	Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, and Irrelevant?



Study #1

Ready with a Reason

1 Peter 3:15-16

Introduction

We are called to be ***building followers of Jesus together through our everyday relationships***. This means that every single one of our relationships is hallowed ground, a place where the Lord God chooses to make his presence known. It's his work, not our own. But he calls us to be ready.

With those who are currently not followers of Jesus we have the divine opportunity to give an answer for the hope God has given us - an answer that may at least create curiosity, urging people on to further exploration.

The Apostle Peter urged the believers of his day, even in the midst of possible persecution, to ***“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*** Peter knew from his own experience the real possibility of not being ready to give an answer (Mark 14:66-72). But he subsequently had experienced the hope of the resurrection as well as the filling of the Spirit - his readiness to give an answer on the Day of Pentecost speaks powerfully of these new realities (Acts 2). He also knew Jesus’ teaching about setting aside fear and bearing witness to Christ even when persecution looms (Matt. 10:26-33, Luke 12:2-12).

Most of us do not stand the risk of persecution, though skepticism, ridicule and hostility remain real possibilities. But in it all, Peter urges us to be ***ready with a reason***.

This first study explores the issue of readiness. The next studies look at 2 central issues to our faith, seeking to equip us with understanding so that we can indeed ***“give an answer to everyone who asks.”*** In the process, the hope is that we will be strengthened in our own understanding, growing in the knowledge of the Lord.

The Curriculum following this one will deal with 7 commonly raised objections to the Christian faith. Again, the hope is that we will be equipped and also personally strengthened in understanding. May the Lord do this word among us.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to ready us to give an answer ... and to cause us to look with eagerness for the opportunities.**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) How did you first hear the good news about Jesus? Was it a positive or negative experience? Why?

- (2) How do you personally respond to the idea of “evangelism”? Are you excited, terrified, confused, indifferent, or what? Why?

- (3) Read 1 Peter 3:15-16

What does it mean to “*set apart Christ as Lord*” in your heart? What connection does this have with being ready “*to give an answer*”? Does one necessitate the other? How does this relate to the issue of fear (v. 14)?

- (4) What is the “*hope*” that we have?

How is this different from (a) your own experience before knowing Christ, or (b) the people in the world around you? Have you experienced the truth of Paul’s description of “unbelievers” in Ephesians 2:12 (last phrase)? What direction does all of this give us in pursuing evangelism?

- (5) Peter mentions 3 qualifications necessary in “*giving an answer*”: gentleness, respect and a clear conscience. Why is each important? What happens when you give a perfect “*answer*” but don’t have one or more of these qualities?
- (6) There is no necessity to give a complete evangelistic message (altar-call included) every time someone shows the slightest interest. In fact, this may be entirely the wrong thing to do.

But supposing someone said to you:

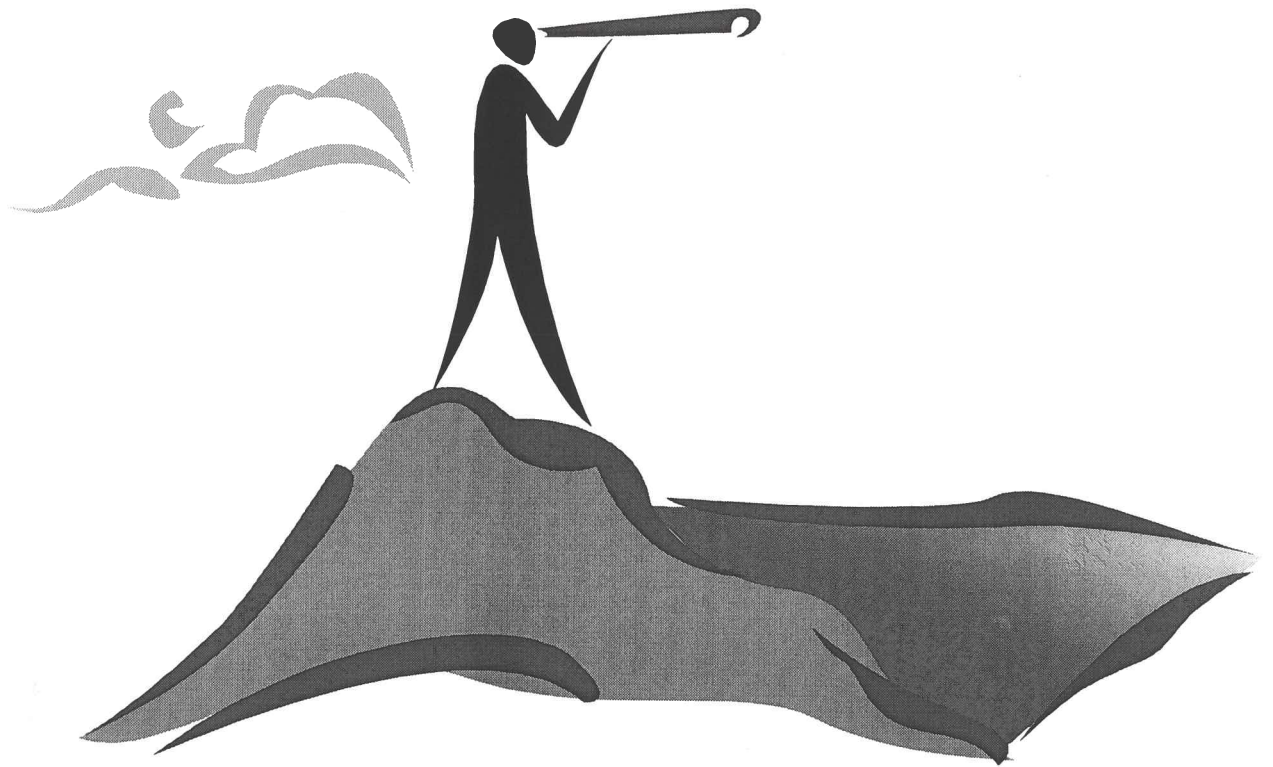
“I want to become a Christian. What do I need to know? What do I need to do?”
What would you tell them?

Brainstorm together and come up with a helpful and clear format for communicating the essential basics of the good news. (*You may want to use a whiteboard or piece of poster paper to write your brainstorming on. You also may want to break into groups of 3 and then share your answers together afterwards.*)

Prayer

Pray for each other that you would truly be ready to give an answer. Share together any situations where you are currently experiencing an openness to share the good news of Jesus.

You might like to take part in an experiment together. (Terrifying ? Exciting?) Pray that the Lord would give each of you at least one opportunity over the next week to share something of the good news. Continue to pray for each other during the week. Share your experiences next week.



Study #2

Who is Jesus?

Introduction

The question, "Who is Jesus?" single handedly drives the gospels. The question is the seed from which all the New Testament books grow. It is a question that must be answered by all people. No middle ground answer can be accepted. Either people believe Jesus was the Son of God, or they don't. Given that this question is tantamount to having faith in God, we must be prepared to give an answer to this question as well as help guide people through the Scriptures in order to give a basis for our answer. In

essence, we want to be able not just to speak the words, "Jesus is Lord and Savior" to people, but to be able to direct people to the gospels in order that Christ himself will warm their hearts into belief.

Therefore, this study is not a study based on one passage. Rather, this study is geared toward a comprehensive view of Jesus in the gospels. The goal of the study is to aid you in coming up with an answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" by digging in the Scriptures yourself. I have give you three questions which will lead you back into the Scriptures (mainly the Gospels for simplicity's sake) and three questions that will direct you to evaluate the information you discovered in the Scriptures about who Jesus is.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to walk away with a solid answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" so that you can use it to aid others when the question comes up in your conversations with nonbelieving friends.**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) What has been some of your experience in trying to explain who Jesus is to people who are not believers themselves?

- (2) What did Jesus say about himself? What does it mean? (The scriptures listed below each question are to help you get the ball rolling. They are not exhaustive lists, so feel free to keep digging on your own! You may want to break into smaller groups, each taking a portion of the list, and then reporting back to the whole group).

John 6:35
John 10:33
John 15:1
Matt. 11:28
Mark 9:37

John 8:12, 58-59
John 11:25-26
John 20:28-29
Matt. 12:8
Mark 14:61-64

John 10:7
John 14:6-7
Matt. 10:40
Mark 1:17

- (3) What did others say about him? Why?

Mark 1:11

Mark 9:7

Matt. 3:11-12

Mark 2:5

Matt. 1:16

Matt. 21:9

Mark 8:27-30

Matt. 1:23

Matt. 27:54

- (4) What are the things that we can point to that substantiate these claims?

Works:

Mark 2:5

Mark 6:30-44

John 11:38-44

Matt. 25:31-32; 40, 45

Mark 4:35-41

Luke 9:37-45

John 2:1-11

John 5:1-9

Words:

Luke 10:25-39

Luke 6:27-42

Matt. 5:1 - 7:29

Character:

Luke 23:34

Matt. 4:1-11

Matt. 27:11-14

Resurrection:

Matt. 28:2-7

John 20:19-31

Acts 1:3

Mark 16:4-7

John 21:1-14

Luke 24

Acts 10:41

- (5) Why is the resurrection so important? What does this single event tell us about who Jesus is? How does this event separate him from all other people?
- (6) If Jesus is the divine Son of God, what are the implications for you?
- (7) How might you help reveal Jesus to others you know? (Use the time to think strategically about how you would guide someone through an answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?")

Some further things to think about:

What are the barriers to communication?

What are the bridges to communication?

Prayer



Study #3

Why Did Jesus Die?

Introduction

The cross is at the very centre of our faith. For that reason alone it is important for us to come back to it time and again to have a fresh look - the view never grows old.

But it's also important for us to revisit the cross as we seek to ***“always be prepared to give an answer ... for the hope that you have.”*** Has the truth of the cross so gripped our minds that we could effectively communicate it with someone who asks? Has its truth so gripped our hearts, transforming our attitudes in the process, that someone would ask us to give the reason for the hope that we have?

- ⇒ The aim of this study is to be gripped afresh by the wonder of the cross and in turn be able to communicate its reality to others

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) Things loom large and significant as a child. What was your most unforgettable experience of punishment (justly given) as a child?

- (2) What would people around you today identify as some of their greatest needs?

What do the Scriptures say is really the greatest need of all people today? (Romans 3:10-18, 23; 6:23a; John 8:34 ... refer to any other Scriptures you think might be helpful) Do you believe this? How could you effectively communicate this truth to someone who was ready to listen? What objections might they have? What helpful response could you give?

Is it necessary to understand the blackness of sin before you can appreciate the reality of the cross? Why or why not?

- (3) The most basic point about the cross is that Jesus took our place. John Stott has called it the *"self-substitution of God"*. Read 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 (Martin Luther called this latter scripture *"the Wonderful Exchange"*).

What strikes you? What do you discover (rediscover)? What did the cross accomplish? What is different as a result? How much do these truths impact your daily experience? What difference should they make?

What illustrations might effectively explain this self-substitution to someone who is seeking? What objections might they raise? How could you clarify the issues?

- (4) There are 4 key images the New Testament uses to describe the results of the cross in our lives. Each comes from a different area of daily life in New Testament times - the law court, the slave market, the temple and the family. Read the Scriptures. What are the implications of each image? What insights do you gain? *(You may want to break into groups of 2-4 to research each image and then report back to the larger group.)*

Law Court Key word: Justification Scripture: Romans 5:1, 6-9	
Slave Market Key word: Redemption/Ransom Scripture: Mark 10:45, Romans 3:24, Colossians 1:13-14	
Temple Key word: Sacrifice Scripture: Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-14, 19-22	
Family Key word: Reconciliation Scripture: Romans 5:10-11	

Which image impacts you most? Why? How could you live more centred in the reality of this truth?

Which image would you find most helpful in communicating the truth of the cross to someone else? Why?

Prayer

Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?



Introduction

Can anyone seriously believe the story of a resurrection from the dead? Doesn't such a story deserve to be immediately ruled out of court?

Listen to a few of the many opinions validating the resurrection offered by scholars who have carefully evaluated the evidence (compiled by Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense):

- (1) Professor Thomas Arnold, for fourteen years headmaster of Rugby, author of the three-volume *History of Rome*, holder of the chair of modern history at Oxford:
I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.
- (2) Brooke Foss Wescott, English scholar (and textual critic):
Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ.
- (3) Dr. Paul L. Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University:
If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy or archaeology that would disprove this statement.

The Christian faith stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection. Take a look at the evidence.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to see the necessity of the resurrection and be assured of its historical reliability**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) Can you think of a time when you heard news that was "too-good-to-be-true" - but indeed **was** true? How did you react? Share your stories.

- (2) Break into 3 smaller groups and research the following accounts of the resurrection: (1) Matthew 28:1-20 & Mark 16:1-8, (2) Luke 24:1-49, (3) John 20:1-31. How do different people react to news of this event? What details do you notice that lend credibility to the story?

Not all of the accounts are exactly alike - some details differ. Is this a problem? Why or why not?

- (3) To discount the resurrection it is necessary to come up with an alternate explanation for the empty tomb. Here are the major attempts to do so:
- (a) Jesus didn't really die, but simply swooned, reviving later
 - (b) Jesus did die, but the disciples later stole the body
 - (c) Jesus did die, but the authorities removed the body.

How could you respond to a friend who argued one of these positions?

- (4) Not only is there an empty tomb to account for. There are also the alleged appearances of the risen Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Other appearances are detailed in the Gospels. The possible explanations for these appearances are:
- (a) the disciples and others deliberately fabricated the stories
 - (b) the disciples and others hallucinated the appearances
 - (c) Jesus really did appear to them.

Discuss the possibilities, bearing in mind the fact that many of the disciples (including the converted Saul/Paul) later died for their faith in the risen Christ.

- (5) Skeptics might argue the whole story is pure myth, evolving long after the actual life of the historical Jesus. But the resurrection was central to the church's preaching from the start (see Acts 2:22-24). In fact, Paul claims the Christian faith would be worthless were it not for this key event (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). The resurrection is not an "add-on" - it's woven into the very fabric of our faith right from the beginning. Without it Christianity would never have come into existence at all!

Do you agree with Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17 & 19? Why or why not? How could these verses help you explain Christian faith to a skeptic?

- (6) We've looked at the facts. How do they apply? What hope does the resurrection give? What difference could it make for you here and now?

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Introduction

On the Day of Pentecost, after Christ's resurrection, the people of God were forever transformed. The *"promise of the Father"*, the Holy Spirit himself, was poured out into the lives of each and every believer. Until that time the Spirit's anointing had rested on only a select few (prophets, priests, kings, specially chosen individuals). Now, as prophesied by Joel, the Spirit was poured out *"on all people ... on my servants, both men and women."*



The impact is immediately apparent on that very first day - followers of Jesus are empowered, the world takes notice, truth is magnified, people are drawn to Christ.

The world still needs the attention-riveting activity of the Spirit. The church still needs his empowering presence. Thank God he is still sent to indwell every follower of Jesus! May we so grow in awareness of his power and presence that our lives may invite the world around us into the spiritual reality they long for.

⇒ **The aim of this study is to be gripped by the reality of the Spirit in our lives**

Group Study

Community Building

- (1) How did you first become aware of the Holy Spirit? What was your concept of him? How has it grown?
- (2) People today are craving more than dry spiritual doctrine. They yearn to experience spiritual reality. What signs (good and bad) do you see of this in the world around you? What signs do you see in people you know?
- (3) The Scriptures in the following questions provide insight into the reality of the Spirit's activity in our lives - read, reflect, rejoice.

Read John 14:15-23. There are 2 key Greek words in verse 16. One is the word "another" - it means "another *of the very same kind*". What are the implications? How does verse 18 tie into this? Is the Spirit some kind of impersonal force? What do we learn about the Spirit and how we are to interact with him?

The other key Greek word is "Counselor". It's the word *parakletos* - "one called alongside to help". If you have several different translations look at the different English words used to translate the richness of this one Greek word. What does it mean for the Spirit to be our "Counselor, etc."? What experience have you had of this role of his in your own life?

- (4) Read John 14:25-26 and 16:12-15. What is another role Jesus indicates the Spirit has in our lives? How does he carry this out? Is "truth" merely head-knowledge? How have you experienced this role of the Spirit in your own life?
- (5) Read Luke 24:45-49. What an awesome phrase: "*clothed with power from on high*". What does it mean? How was it experienced by the early church on the Day of Pentecost and thereafter? (see Acts 4:5-8ff, 4:31, 11:22-24, 13:4-9ff, etc.)

What does it mean for us today? Share stories of times you have been most aware of this "power from on high".

- (6) What aspects of the Spirit's role in your own life would you most like to grow in over the next year?
- (7) How could an awareness of the Holy Spirit impact someone you know who is not yet a believer but is yearning for spiritual reality?

Prayer Pray especially for issues arising out of Questions #6 & 7.