

Simple Sundays

**Why Did God
Save Me?**



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Main Idea

God saves us; that is, God chooses us for fellowship with Christ, not based on our own attractiveness or good deeds but out of God's boundless grace. We live our lives in Jesus' name not to win God's approval but because it spills out of our gratitude for God's love.

You Will Need

Bibles, pens and paper, prize ribbon, gift

Faith Statement

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

The Bible teaches that humans separate themselves from God by their sin, and cannot, on their own, reunite themselves with God. Overcoming this separation from God is what happens when we are "saved." The term is always used in the passive voice because we cannot save ourselves; we must be saved by God. Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9). Quite simply, God chooses us, through Christ, to be sons and daughters. Though some may not choose to acknowledge it, every human being is created for relationship with God. The gospel assures us that, even before we have done anything, God mercifully comes to us.

God's choosing us is what theologians refer to as the doctrine of election. It is also sometimes called the doctrine of predestination (see Ephesians 2:10, and also Ephesians 1:3–6). We may ask, "But what if I am one of those unlucky persons who is not chosen?" On the one hand, this is a legitimate question—a question that those who earnestly seek the face of God have asked for centuries. Intriguingly, it is often the "believer" who is most concerned about the answer, but the mere fact that one has such a concern indicates openness to the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. While this response gives only a partial answer to the question of who is chosen and who is not, there is among Reformers a precedent for finding evidence of election in one's spiritual receptivity to God's saving work.

Furthermore, the doctrine of election is not meant to inspire debate over who is and who is not of God's kingdom. Rather, election intends to inspire joy in the heart of the believer. The purpose of the doctrine of election is to relieve our fears and to increase our confidence that even our worst acts of rebellion and sin are unable to undo the salvation God extends to us in grace. To believe that God chooses us is to have assurance of our salvation. To believe that God chooses us is to respond with joyful gratitude and faithful service.

You and Your Youth

This session calls the youth to incorporate their awareness of God's choosing them into a way of life compatible with God's invitation. In preparation, take time to center yourself in prayer, asking for God's direction in your own life. Then pray for members of the group by name, that they might hear the welcoming, accepting call of God in their lives.



Enter

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

Award or Gift?

Prize ribbon, gift

Greet the youth by name as they arrive. Ask where they saw God's commandments being followed this week. Ask them to name highpoints of the week. Discuss the highpoints that were based in their own achievement and those based solely in someone else's generosity. Show the youth the prize ribbon and the gift. Ask:

- What is the difference between an award and a gift?
- How do you get an award?
- When do you get gifts?

Confirm with the youth that awards are earned and gifts are offered freely. Explain that the word gift also means *grace*. Ask them to listen for a gift or a grace in the Bible passage today.

Opening Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus, and show us the way we should live. Thank you for being the way back to God for all humankind. Let us become more like you day by day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!



Explore

Study the Bible

Bibles

Introduce today's session using information from Background, then read the following:

Today's reading from Ephesians prompts us to ask "Why me?" We usually associate this question with Job rather than Ephesians because it's sort of question we ask when something bad happens to us that we feel is unfair. In that context, our question carries the meaning "What did I do to deserve this?" In Ephesians, however, we raise the question when something nice has happened, namely, our acceptance by God. When we receive the gospel, that is, the good news that God forgives us, we can also ask the question "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?" The Bible

teaches that we do not do anything to "deserve" God's love. God accepts us just as we are. Even when we disobey God, our disobedience cannot keep God from loving us, because God does not react to us like an ill-tempered parent. That is not to say that our disobedience is without consequences. When we disrespect God's laws for living a full life, we may open ourselves to the bad results of that choice. Yet, God does not abandon us. God saves us from ourselves, so to speak. God saves us for living fruitful, whole, complete lives in the world.

Form three small groups. Choose one of the following Scripture readings and questions. After discussion in the small groups, share with the whole group your discoveries and ideas.

Group 1 (Ephesians 1:4)

- When does God choose us and why?
- What does God choose us for?
- What are the elements of a holy and blameless life?
- What examples of a holy and blameless life do you find in your school, family, and church?

Group 2 (Ephesians 2:8–9)

- Based on this passage, how does one get saved?
- What is it about being human that makes us lovable to God?
- Why would God love us even when we do things that are unlovable?

Group 3 (Ephesians 2:10)

- Since we cannot do anything to gain salvation, why does it matter what we do at all?
- What is the basis for leading a life pleasing to God?
- How would a person act who wanted to live his or her life in Jesus' name?

Examine Our Lives

Bibles

In small groups, choose some portion of Ephesians 1:3–2:10 and act it out without using dialogue. Each small group should work together on the dramatization of their passage. Then, take turns acting these out for the whole group to see if anyone can guess which verse or verses are being portrayed.

After each small group has made their presentation, reassemble as a whole group to discuss the following:

- What difference does it make in the way you live your lives knowing that your salvation is in God's gracious hands rather than subject to certain works you have to do?



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 modify them to make them relevant.

Youth Issue

Consider the system of rewards and works in your school and the larger community. Discuss those situations where people receive awards, prizes, or special recognition for works.

- In what ways does the reward system improve, or diminish, the quality of life?
- What are the sources of self-worth in school, family, and church life?
- What similarities and differences do you find in each of these settings?
- How would a system of grace rather than works change things?
- Describe the grading system in your school. Describe the different ways people respond to it. In what ways does such a system improve learning or hinder it?
- What happens when you teach people to take pleasure in getting rewards rather than in the act of doing something itself?

Action Steps

Without mentioning the name of someone in particular, think of a person at school, or church, or in the neighborhood whose sense of self-worth has been diminished by too great an emphasis on achievement. Discuss together what you might do contribute to this person's greater sense of acceptance, value, and dignity.



Exit

Closing Prayer

God of power and majesty, we thank you that you forgive sins and accept us out of love and mercy. By your Spirit, may we live our lives in Christ's name. Amen!