



# The Reason for God

## Life Group Guide

**Hypocrites: How can I believe in Jesus when his followers don't live like him?**

**Matthew 7:15-27, Mark 7:5-7, Mark 10:42-45**

**April 27/28 weekend**

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### Connect with One Another

Welcome one another to Life Group! Feel free to ask the "Question of the Day" to get things started in your circle.

### Question of the Day

Do you remember the story of Little Red Riding Hood, specifically when she meets the wolf who has now disguised himself as her grandmother? "My, what big ears you have grandmother."

- What's the craziest, silliest thing you have ever dressed up to be (Red Riding Hood, a Superhero)? How did you adjust your character, actions or mannerisms to this character?
- Share this with your Life Group.

**Watch "The Reason for God: Hypocrites" video for this week, available either online or the DVD.**

For the next four weeks we're going to be looking at some challenges facing all of us when it comes to belief. We want to carefully examine what it means to live the gospel in thoughtful, credible ways which will point to the good news of Jesus for everyone. This will mean we live at the intersection of our heads, our hearts and our actions. What a powerful way to live!

As Brian said in the video, sometimes we can assume a character or fake who we are. We'll examine some passages of Scripture where Jesus calls this out and we'll learn what Jesus really wants to show us about the gospel. It's not about the costume we wear or the actions we do. It's not following the rules and it's not even being good. As Tim Keller says:

"If you think the Bible is all about you — what you must do and how you must live — then you do not need Jesus. All you need are the rules. There are only two ways to read the Bible: you can read the Bible as if it is all about you and what you must do to please God and be a good person, or you can read the Bible as if it is all about Jesus and what he has done for you."<sup>1</sup>

So let's read the Bible and look to see what Jesus wants to tell us about himself.

## Connect with Scripture

### *Behaviour and Belief*

#### **Read Matthew 7:15-27**

- Have someone volunteer as a reader or have everyone take turns reading a verse. Discern what your group is most comfortable with.
- After you read this passage, listen to the Holy Spirit for any moments, words or phrases in the text which jumped out to you. Make a note of them here:

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<sup>1</sup> The Reason for God Study Guide – Dr. Timothy Keller p. 73

Jesus warns us about imposters; wolves in sheep's clothing, hypocrites. How can you discern a hypocrite? (And don't just stop at the word "fruit".)

Let's examine the two other illustrations Jesus presents; vs. 21-23 and 24-27. What happens when we don't listen to and practice what Jesus says to us?

### **Look at Matthew 7:24 and 26**

- As followers of Jesus, we are being transformed from foolish to wise people.
- Can you look back and identify something in your life where you used to be foolish and you are now showing wisdom?
- Celebrate the growth you are seeing in others in your Life Group!

Mark Clark says:

"Jesus clearly taught that there are not only false *teachers* in the world who lead people astray into false doctrine and behaviour (Matthew 7:15-20), but false *disciples* in the world who lead themselves astray into false beliefs and false lives (vv. 21-23). This is why Jesus warns people not to judge Christianity by the morality of the people, who try to follow it, but to focus attention on Jesus himself – on his life, teaching and actions. Christianity is not good advice to help good people lead moral lives. It's good news about Jesus – who he was and what he did."<sup>2</sup>

### **Action or Attitude?**

#### **Read Mark 7:5-7**

- Have you ever been in a conversation with someone where they identified the church as hypocritical? How did the conversation go?

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017, p. 184

- Have *you* ever identified someone, or some practice, as hypocritical?
- Why did this bother you and what position of authority were you taking in that moment?

**Look at Mark 7:6-7**

- Have your lips mouthed the right words, but your heart expressed a different value?
- Is this an act of faith or an act of hypocrisy?

Tim Keller makes this excellent observation about the reality of people in churches:

“Our moral efforts are too feeble and falsely motivated to ever merit salvation. Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has provided salvation for us, which we receive as a gift... The mistaken belief that a person must “clean up” his or her own life in order to merit God’s presence is not Christianity. This means, though, that the church will be filled with immature and broken people who still have a long way to go emotionally, morally and spiritually. As the saying has it, “The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.”<sup>3</sup>

- What’s the difference between “going to church” and following Jesus?
- How would you explain the difference between asking a friend to go to church with you or to follow Jesus with you?

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, New York, Penguin Books, 2008, p. 54-55

***Hypocrisy or Humility?*****Read Mark 10:42-45**

Mark Clark says, "Christianity is different because it is the truth of a person who came humbly to die for his enemies."<sup>4</sup>

Often it's our lack of humility which reveals itself in hypocrisy. Throughout the Bible, God used leaders or important figures to serve his people. Yet many of these men and women had obvious character flaws.

- Can you give examples of people from the Bible who are thought of as great or important figures, but who were also broken or flawed in some way?
- How was Jesus different than everyone who came before him?

"Remember, the church is comprised of people who have come to a place where they are trusting Jesus to save them not because they are perfect already but because they are not."<sup>5</sup> says Mark Clark.

What do you think of this statement by Tim Keller:

"Why wouldn't a church be a place where you would find inconsistent, broken people, who don't always get it right?"

- Do you think your friends or family would feel this way?
- How could you help them to understand the truth of this statement?
- Is there something specific you need to develop in your behaviour or in your belief?

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017, p. 198

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 202

## Connect in Prayer

Now you can connect with God and with one another in prayer. It's certainly not mandatory that each person pray out loud, but a smaller circle may help give you confidence to pray if you want. You can keep your prayers brief, even just one sentence. It's not the amount or quality of our vocabulary which God wants to hear, he wants to hear your heart.

- Ask God to help you hear what Jesus is saying through his word and to put it into practice.
- Is there a particular area where you have struggled to do this in the past? Confess this to your Life Group and ask them to pray for you to become wiser in this area.
- Are you aware of anything in your life which could be seen as hypocritical and make it more difficult for people to see Jesus? What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to do in order to live a life aligned with who Jesus wants you to be?
- Pray for those who you know who struggle to engage with Jesus because of previous encounters with hypocrisy in Christians.

**Bible: Can the Bible be Trusted?**  
**Luke 1:1-4, Jeremiah 31:31-33, 2 Timothy 3:14-17,**  
**Luke 24:24-27, 2 Peter 1:19-21**  
**May 4/5 weekend**

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**Connect with One Another**

Welcome one another to Life Group! Feel free to ask the "Question of the Day" to get things started in your circle.

**Question of the Day**

Do you find it harder to trust now than in years past? In this age of phone scams, email phishing, identity theft and hackers, it's not always clear whether or not a piece of information is reliable and trustworthy.

- Have you received an email, phone call or text that looked like it could be the real thing, but when you went a bit deeper into it, you realized it was a scam? How did you decide it wasn't trustworthy?
- Have you ever warned someone else about an attempted scam?
- Share this with your Life Group.

**Watch "The Reason for God: Bible" video for this week, available either online or the DVD.**

We're continuing to look at some challenges facing all of us when it comes to belief. We want to carefully examine what it means to live the gospel in thoughtful, credible ways which will point to the good news of Jesus for everyone. This will mean we live at the intersection of our heads, our hearts and our actions. What a powerful way to live!

## Connect with Scripture

### ***Is the New Testament Accurate or Legendary?***

#### **Read Luke 1:1-4**

- Have someone volunteer as a reader or have everyone take turns reading a verse. Discern what your group is most comfortable with.
- What do you think Luke means when he says "an orderly account"?
- Why would he say this?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how certain are you about the Bible?
- What factors influenced your answer?
- Are you happy with your level of certainty and if not, what could you do to become more certain?

### ***Aren't the Gospels full of contradictions?***

- Gather into two groups.
- Have one group read Matthew 25:14-30 and the other Luke 19:12-28 in each smaller group.

Now have the Matthew group tell the story. Each time there is a different detail, the Luke group should interrupt with their version of the story. (Have some fun with this!)

- Once you've come to the end of the passages, ask yourselves, "Do these differences destroy the credibility of each account?"
- Why or why not?

Mark Clark says,

"We know that's how the rabbis taught in the first century. Jesus would have told the same parables multiple times in different settings, possibly using a different emphasis each time. The differences in the Gospels exist because Matthew

is likely using one version of the story told one day and Luke is using another."<sup>6</sup>

***What about conflicts or differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament?***

**Read Jeremiah 31:31-33**

- Can the covenant be changed and if so, how?
- Why is this significant to us? Why is this significant to God?

"Paul tells us that the Law was like a childminder or tutor that guides God's people for a time but then is superseded by Christ and the Spirit."<sup>7</sup> (Galatians 3:23-29)

**Read Acts 10:13-16**

- How would you feel if you were Peter at that moment?
- Can you think of something else in the Old Testament which no longer is essential because of Jesus?
- Could you name any "rules" or "laws" which we have created which still hinder us from sharing the gospel?

"Now that Jesus has come and completed his work, he has made all things clean. The rules have changed... you can't understand the Bible without understanding it as a story that progresses... Christians no longer live under the rules of the kingdom of Israel but under the rule of Jesus Christ in his new kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017, p. 73.

***The Significance of the Old and the New Testament*****Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17**

- How did Timothy come to know the Holy Scriptures?
- What Scriptures would he have known?
- What impact did these early Scripture lessons have on Timothy?
- As an Aunt or Uncle, Parent or Grandparent, what are you doing to teach the Scriptures to those in your sphere of influence?
- Do you have any practices or ideas which could encourage others in your group to do this too?

***How is Scripture used in Scripture?*****Read Luke 24:24-27**

Jesus tackles unbelief on the road to Emmaus using Scripture. Unlike other major religions, the Bible doesn't tell us that we should memorize it to gain favour with God. The mere memorization of Scripture does nothing to change our hearts. Our hearts are changed when we open our lives up to God and seek to understand him by his Spirit using Scripture.

- Have you ever had a similar experience as those on the road to Emmaus, where you “knew” Scripture, but it wasn't connecting with your current reality and understanding?

The Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the New Testament says,

“Moses and the Prophets” is a shorthand way of describing the Old Testament—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The whole Old Testament points forward to Jesus the Messiah. The early church recognized the suffering of the Messiah in passages like Psalms 2; 16; 22; 118; Isaiah 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the New Testament, Copyright © 2002.

**Read 2 Peter 1:19-21**

- What does this passage say about the reliability of the message of Scripture?

Each book of the bible is a reflection of the context and the author(s) divinely chosen by the Holy Spirit to reveal God's truth. This is one simple reason why the Psalms are different than the gospel of Mark or Paul's letter to the Galatians.

- How does what you have engaged with in Life Group today help you to be better equipped to follow and share the gospel?

**Connect in Prayer**

Now you can connect with God and with one another in prayer. It's certainly not mandatory that each person pray out loud, but a smaller circle may help give you confidence to pray if you want. You can keep your prayers brief, even just one sentence. It's not the amount or quality of our vocabulary which God wants to hear, he wants to hear your heart.

- Ask God to help you hear what Jesus is saying through his Word and to put it into practice.
- Is the Holy Spirit prompting you to engage with Scripture in any specific way this week?
- Do you know someone who struggles to accept that the Bible is true and that God's Word is alive? Pray that the Holy Spirit will open their heart and mind to receive God's message of love and wisdom.

**Exclusivism: Aren't there many ways to God?  
Matthew 9:2-8, Hebrews 1:1-3,  
Matthew 25:31 – 33, 46, Matthew 7:22-24  
May 11/12 week**

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**Connect with One Another**

Welcome one another to Life Group! Feel free to ask the "Question of the Day" to get things started in your circle.

**Question of the Day**

No one likes to be left out, excluded, or made to feel that they don't belong. Most of us can remember the sting of being picked last for a team, not being invited to a party, or seeing something posted on social media where we felt we had missed out. These negative separations make it particularly difficult for people to engage in a conversation about faith when beliefs could differ.

- Why do you think people today are so insistent that all religions are equally valid?<sup>10</sup>

**Watch "The Reason for God: Exclusivism" video for this week, available either online or the DVD.**

We're continuing to look at some challenges facing all of us when it comes to belief. We want to carefully examine what it means to live the gospel in thoughtful, credible ways which will point to the good news of Jesus for everyone. This will mean we live at the intersection of our heads, our hearts and our actions.

In the video, Brian pointed out that we're not accepted by God on the basis of our moral performance, wisdom or virtue, but

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<sup>10</sup> The Reason for God Discussion Guide, Copyright © 2010 by Redeemer City to City and Redeemer Presbyterian Church p. 26

because of Jesus and what he has done for all. Today we'll examine passages of Scripture which will help us understand why Jesus is incomparable, and therefore, why he is able to make an exclusive claim for life and salvation.

## Connect with Scripture

### ***Authority...***

#### **Read Matthew 9:2-8**

- Have someone volunteer as a reader or have everyone take turns reading a verse. Discern what your group is most comfortable with.
- Why did the teachers of the law object to what Jesus said, and why was this a problem for them?
- What authority does Jesus claim in this story?
- Why does this authority matter in Matthew's situation? Why does this matter when people question Jesus' validity in 2019?

### ***Authenticity...***

#### **Read Hebrews 1:1-3**

- If Christianity is to have validity, it must be authentic. Circle the verbs in these verses.
- Go through each verb and discuss how each verb contributes to the authenticity of Christianity?

### ***Eternity...***

#### **Read John 8:58**

- What does Jesus claim about his eternal existence in this verse?
- How does this compare with the founders or prophets of other religions?
- Why is this significant?

### ***Finality...***

#### **Read Matthew 25:31–33, 46**

- According to Jesus’ words in these verses, there is a finality to life and eternal destiny. This final judgement will be based upon decisions made and actions taken on earth. How does Jesus’ claim of finality impact the importance of a conversation you may have about faith with a friend or family member?
- Is this important information for them to know and understand? Why or why not?

### ***Singularity...***

#### **Read Matthew 7:22-24**

- Think back to your “Question of the Day” conversation. If all religions are equally valid, then how is it possible for Jesus to make the claim he makes in these verses?
- Is following Jesus one of any number of reasonable options, and if so, what would the outcomes be?

#### **Reread Matthew 7:24 and continue to verse 27**

- What outcome can be expected if we do not put Jesus’ words into practice?
- As you have come to understand the authority, authenticity, eternity, finality and singularity of Jesus, how would you communicate this to someone in a conversation about belief systems?

## **Connect in Prayer**

Now you can connect with God and with one another in prayer. It’s certainly not mandatory that each person pray out loud, but a smaller circle may help give you confidence to pray if you want. You can keep your prayers brief, even just one sentence. It’s not the amount or quality of our vocabulary which God wants to hear, he wants to hear your heart.

- Ask God to help you see the wonder and beauty of salvation.
- Ask God to give you grace, wisdom and confidence to have conversations with your friends and family about how God accepts sinful people and gives us his healing and salvation.
- If there is a particular area where you struggle in your faith, confess this and ask God to strengthen you and have someone in your group pray for you.

## **Diving Deeper...**

If you have extra time, or over your coffee and dessert, continue with this conversation:

Here are four objections that are raised regarding Christianity's claim to be the only way to God. Read them aloud.

- A. "All major religions are equally valid, produce much wisdom and happiness, and basically teach the same thing."
- B. "Lots of good and intelligent people differ with the Christian viewpoint, so it is arrogant to claim that Christian beliefs are the only true ones."
- C. "You can't hold people responsible for rejecting Jesus when they have never heard of him."
- D. "Nobody can know whose religion is true, so Christianity can't claim it is the only true way."

Talk about how you would handle each particular objection. You may want to break into smaller clusters to discuss this. After a few minutes share your answers with the group.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Reason for God Discussion Guide, Copyright © 2010 by Redeemer City to City and Redeemer Presbyterian Church p. 27

## **Hell: How is God full of love and judgement at the same time?**

**Does he actually send people to hell?**

**May 18/19 week**

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### **Connect with One Another**

Welcome one another to Life Group! Feel free to ask the “Question of the Day” to get things started in your circle.

### **Question of the Day**

There are things in life we don’t always want to deal with, aren’t there? I don’t think anyone enjoys cleaning toilets! Most people don’t look forward to regular medical tests, but they’re important and can even be life-saving.

Personally, I’m not a big fan of the dentist, and I’m guilty of procrastinating when I book my appointment. Maybe the recently passed Income Tax deadline is another thing you were tempted to avoid because it can be unpleasant?

- What’s something you tend to ignore, avoid or procrastinate on and why?

**Watch “The Reason for God: Hell” video for this week, available either online or the DVD.**

There are things we avoid because they’re simply not fun tasks. Then, there are things we avoid because they make us uncomfortable. Families or friends can go for days, months, even years avoiding a topic of conversation. Today’s Life Group topic may be one of these subjects for you. We get a sense of discomfort when we talk about hell. We’d rather just believe that it doesn’t matter that much, or that it will somehow turn out ok, like the couple on the TV show did with their finances.

Mark Clark says, "not liking something is not a sufficient way of discerning what is true and false."<sup>12</sup> This is so important to understand. My opinion about something doesn't impact whether it is true or not.

Let's place our preconceptions of hell and of God's plan against the clarity of Scripture and see what God wants to teach us as we connect with Scripture and listen to His Spirit.

## Connect with Scripture

### *Is it Real or a Metaphor?*

#### **Read Luke 16:19-31**

- Have someone volunteer as a reader or have everyone take turns reading a verse. Discern what your group is most comfortable with.

One of the first questions we can ask ourselves about hell is found in this teaching of Jesus.

- Is Jesus proposing the concept of "karma" in this story? Is everyone entitled to have a nice life, either now or in eternity? Why or why not?

#### **Read Luke 16:30 again**

- What is the key action that the rich man is asking his brothers to do? And what does it mean?

Jesus points out that repentance is the action determining someone's eternal destiny. This has nothing to do with wealth or comfort. Jesus is saying that repentance is the entrance to the kingdom of God.

- How would you describe repentance to a friend of yours?

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017, p. 130

- Would this be an uncomfortable conversation?

“Jesus was the most loving man who ever lived and yet he spoke more about hell than anyone else. He experienced it himself— on the cross. Jesus was separated from his Father— he knows what hell is like and he does not want anyone to be there.”<sup>13</sup>

### ***Is it Fair?***

One of the most common objections to hell is the philosophical question of “how bad?” “How good do I need to be to get into heaven? How bad are those other people who should go to hell?”

You often hear people say things like, “Surely all good, decent people can find God and go to heaven.” How would you respond?

### **Read Romans 2:5-8**

- What is the meaning of being repaid “according to what they have done” (Romans 2:6)?
- What constitutes rejecting truth (v. 8)?

Tim Keller says this:

“In some ways, the fairest understanding of the afterlife is the Christian one, which says God gives you what you want. If you want to live with God forever, that’s heaven, and you get it. If you want to be your own person, your own savior, your own lord, that’s hell, and you get that— and you stay wanting it; you do not suddenly change your mind. In Ezekiel 18:30 God says, “I will judge you, each one according to his ways.” But the verse goes on with God pleading with his people: “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses.... Why will you die? ... I take no pleasure in the death of anyone.... Repent and live!” (Ezekiel 18:30–32).”

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<sup>13</sup> The Reason for God Discussion Guide, Copyright © 2010 by Redeemer City to City and Redeemer Presbyterian Church p. 82

## ***Is there Justice?***

Look at these verses to see whether heaven or hell are just outcomes for people.

### **Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10**

- How do you genuinely feel about entrusting God to be the one who carries out justice? Would you rather have him do this, or someone else, and why?

“God’s justice is active, not passive, and when we violate it God will judge. But what these verses also show is that God wants people to repent and turn to him— that he does not want anyone to perish.”<sup>14</sup>

When Paul was presenting the gospel in Athens, to people who had no frame of reference for Christianity, he spoke of their religiosity and how it fell short.

“For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising [Jesus] from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

Jesus is the difference maker in the eternal destiny of all humanity. It is not because we measure up or are “less bad” than others. There must be justice or there can be no fairness.

### **Read Revelation 20:12-15**

- In this gathering of “great and small” on what basis was each person judged?
- Is this appropriate justice? Why or why not?

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<sup>14</sup> The Reason for God Discussion Guide, Copyright © 2010 by Redeemer City to City and Redeemer Presbyterian Church p. 84

Look how the good news of the gospel makes salvation available for everyone:

“Christians believe that no one goes to heaven or hell by being compliant with Christian ethics— by being moral and good, or not. The essence of sin is loving anything more than the true God, and by essentially being our own “god”— that is, trusting ultimately in our own wisdom and ability. Even if you believe in God and are very good and moral, you may be doing it as a way to earn your own salvation, so that God will be obligated to bless and help you, and take you to heaven. The fact is, all of us— religious and irreligious, moral and immoral— are trying to control our own lives rather than rely on God. Everyone is doing this and we will not “find God” until we admit this spiritual condition and seek pardon and change through Jesus.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***Is there Mercy?***

If God’s plan for salvation is not clear, then hell is unjustified punishment. God extends his mercy to us so that we can know his love.

#### **Read Romans 5:6-8**

- What stands out to you in these verses?

#### **Read Hebrews 9:27-28**

- How does God show mercy in these verses?

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 85)

Tim Keller notes that because of God's mercy, even at creation, everyone is given freedom to choose heaven or hell.

"This is God's plan and design for us from the beginning. It is helpful to note amid all the theological and philosophical points that could be made around this topic that this is also a personal question for people. It is about their own personal choices as well."<sup>16</sup>

God loves us enough to engage with us and to give us the power of choice. The reality is that each person's choice will lead to each person's consequence.

## **Connect in Prayer**

Now you can connect with God and with one another in prayer. It's certainly not mandatory that each person pray out loud, but a smaller circle may help give you confidence to pray if you want. You can keep your prayers brief, even just one sentence. It's not the amount or quality of our vocabulary which God wants to hear, he wants to hear your heart.

- Ask God to help you see the importance of eternity for everyone.
- Thank God for his gift of Jesus to become our righteousness and salvation.
- Ask God to give you boldness to engage in a loving, meaningful conversation about eternity with the person he is putting on your mind and heart right now.

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<sup>16</sup> The Reason for God Discussion Guide, Copyright © 2010 by Redeemer City to City and Redeemer Presbyterian Church p. 35

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