WHAT’S UP?

Discovering the Gospel, Jesus, and Who You REALLY Are.

Deborah Harrell & Jack Klumpenhower
“Words can’t express how thankful I am for this curriculum. As a former middle school Bible teacher, I know how impossible it is to find truly gospel-centered material presented in a format that young people can process . . . and will find interesting at the same time. In a church youth culture awash with moralistic messages and frilly silliness, What’s Up? sets the standard of good news written for young minds. Seriously, I can’t recommend it too highly.”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, Author of Good News for Weary Women and coauthor of Give Them Grace

“What an amazing gift, What’s Up? is going to be for middle-school and junior-high ministry, and parents of fifth through eighth-graders. Debbie Harrell and Jack Klumpenhower have done an outstanding job of contextualizing the gospel of God’s grace for kids in one of the most vulnerable and formative seasons of life. I get excited just thinking about how this curriculum, in the hands of grace-loving leaders, will help disciple a new generation of gospel-equipped, Jesus-loving students. And let me add, the teachers are going to benefit just as much as the students. Great job, Debbie and Jack. More, more, more!”

Dr. Scotty Ward Smith, Founding Pastor of Christ Community Church; Teacher in Residence at West End Community Church; author of Everyday Prayers: 365 Days to a Gospel-Centered Faith

“Have you ever wondered how you could explain the great truths of the gospel to your children? What’s Up? takes you step by step with solid teaching, thoughtful questions, insights, and practical application—always leading you to Christ. It is a must-read for parents, teachers, young and old.”

Rose Marie Miller, Author of From Fear to Freedom and Nothing Is Impossible with God

“If you read Jack Klumpenhower’s book, Show Them Jesus, but didn’t think you could teach as well as Jack does—don’t worry. The What’s Up? curriculum and teacher’s guide give you everything you need to teach your middle school students the same amazing gospel lessons Jack presented in his book. You’ll have parents thanking you for the amazing way their kids are learning deep gospel truths like justification, adoption, how to recognize false repentance, and how to offer true forgiveness. It doesn’t matter what curriculum you are currently using with your middle school, put it on hold and get your kids through this material—that is what I am going to do at my church.”

Marty Machowski, Family Life Pastor and author of Long Story Short and Old Story New, The Gospel Story Bible, the Gospel Story for Kids curriculum and Prepare Him Room

“Preteens can be critics. It’s just part of how we grow at that age. Deborah and Jack know the best way to fight a critical spirit—a clear vision of Jesus, an honest assessment of our hearts, and a faithful commitment to working out the implications of the gospel in our relationships. What’s Up? is a clear and engaging tool for applying these truths to middle school kids.”

Jared Kennedy, Pastor of Families, Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, KY

“I love this study! Deborah Harrell and Jack Klumpenhower have done a fine job at communicating gospel-saturated truth for students and have given teachers a reliable and easy-to-use guide. What’s Up? is a helpful tool to faithfully plant and water the gospel of Jesus Christ in the hearts of students. If you are looking for a biblical, Christ-centered, and holistic study for teenagers, look no further!”

Brian H. Cosby, Author of Giving Up Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture and Rebels Rescued: A Student’s Guide to Reformed Theology; pastor and visiting professor at Reformed Theological Seminary
“Congratulations to Deborah and Jack for taking on the most challenging group of all—our kids. In What’s Up? they attempt to teach young people both the gospel and how to live out of the gospel. Why wait until we get locked into a pattern of performing or pretending? Why not be discipled in the gospel from the beginning? That is what these creative and engaging lessons do and do well.”

Stephen Smallman, Assistant Pastor, New Life Presbyterian Church, Glenside, PA; author of The Walk-Steps for New and Renewed Followers of Jesus

“Harrell and Klumpenhower’s What’s Up? middle school curriculum beautifully lives up to its subtitle: Discovering the Gospel, Jesus, and Who You REALLY Are. I love its thoroughness, flexibility, and teaching style. More importantly, its model of student discipleship (believe—don’t just try harder) coupled with the practical ‘make-it-stick’ section packs a powerful gospel-driven one-two punch. It should be required curriculum for all youth ministries!”

John C. Kwasny, PhD, Director, One Story Ministries

“What’s Up? is a curriculum that will challenge both students and teachers to delve deep into the definition, meaning, and significance of Christianity. It encourages students to look squarely into their hearts and discover whether or not they are truly living for themselves or for their Creator.”

Susan Wall, Children’s Ministry Curriculum Coordinator, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC
Teacher Guide

WHAT’S UP?

Discovering the Gospel, Jesus,
and Who You REALLY Are

Deborah Harrell and Jack Klumpenhower
# Table of Contents

Teacher’s Introduction........................................................................................................1
Dear Parent....................................................................................................................... 9
Introduction..................................................................................................................... 10

## Unit One: The Gospel

**Lesson 1:** Oh . . . Now I See .................................................................................. 12  
  Big Idea: Seeing Jesus
**Lesson 2:** That’s My Whole Life Story ................................................................ 30  
  Big Idea: The Gospel Story
**Lesson 3:** My Tongue Is Connected to My—What? ............................................... 43  
  Big Idea: Sin of the Heart
**Lesson 4:** Hmm . . . What Grades Do I Get? ............................................................ 55  
  Big Idea: Justification by Faith
**Lesson 5:** Presents? For Me?! .................................................................................. 68  
  Big Idea: Holiness and Fighting Sin

## Unit Two: Your Heart

**Lesson 6:** But I’m a Good Person .......................................................................... 84  
  Big Idea: Two Kinds of Repentance
**Lesson 7:** Do I Love God? Um . . . ........................................................................ 96  
  Big Idea: Big Forgiveness and Big Love
**Lesson 8:** Yes, I Worship Idols ............................................................................. 113  
  Big Idea: Real-Life Idols
**Lesson 9:** Look! Shark! ............................................................................................. 125  
  Big Idea: Confronting Unbelief
**Lesson 10:** That’s My Dad! ....................................................................................... 139  
  Big Idea: Living as God’s Child
UNIT THREE: A CHANGED LIFE

Lesson 11: Grrr . . . That Makes Me SO Mad! ................................................................. 157
    Big Idea: Resolving Conflicts

Lesson 12: I’m So Sorry—NOT! .................................................................................. 172
    Big Idea: False Repentance

Lesson 13: I’m So Sorry—Really! .............................................................................. 186
    Big Idea: Godly Repentance

Lesson 14: I (Gulp) Forgive You .............................................................................. 202
    Big Idea: Forgiving Others

Lesson 15: Let’s. Keep. Going. .................................................................................. 218
    Big Idea: A Lifetime of Faith
Welcome to *What's Up? Discovering the Gospel, Jesus, and Who You Really Are*! This study introduces the gospel to Middle School (5th–8th grade) students, and helps those who believe it to live out that good news of Jesus.

The gospel says believers are joined to Jesus. *He* is their identity. Young people who know this good news are confident and secure in him. They aren’t batted around by the praises and put-downs bombarding them from the outside. They’re renewed *from the inside*.

As a *What’s Up?* leader, you have the opportunity to be part of that process. Your job is to help your students see Jesus. You’ll encourage them to believe his gospel—at the heart level. You’ll show them how being joined to him breaks down those outside pressures they feel. You’ll help them connect the gospel to daily life.

**WHO IS THIS STUDY FOR?**

Because *What’s Up?* is about believing and living out the gospel, it’s good for both students who aren’t yet believers and believers of all maturity levels. A basic knowledge of the Bible is helpful and the lessons assume that most students will have this. Yet the lessons also define key terms and provide background information in order to help students who may not have had much Bible exposure or are exploring Christianity.

- Unbelievers will learn about Jesus, the salvation he offers, and his call to believe the gospel. They’ll also get a look at what many gospel presentations to unbelievers miss: how believing leads to huge changes in how they live and relate to God and others. They’ll be prepared to choose Jesus with an understanding that the gospel is not only a way to be forgiven, but also a transforming truth to live out.

- Believers will develop a deeper appreciation for the gospel and how to apply it daily to their lives. They’ll be challenged to believe *more fully*. Don’t be surprised if students who’ve professed faith for years tell you that the course is giving them new, deeper insight into the condition of their hearts, all Jesus has done for them, and the implications of living out the gospel.

*What’s Up?* is designed for group study. Sharing with others is an important part of the learning process, so the lessons will be most helpful if students have others to work and learn alongside of them. A student can do the study alone, but in that case *your role* as leader and mentor becomes even more important. You’ll need to be prepared to do every part of the study with the student and to share experiences with the material even more than you ordinarily would with a group.

**WHAT SUPPLIES ARE NEEDED?**

Each student will need:

- **Student Guide**. Students should be reminded to take home their copy of the *Student Guide* each week to complete the Make It Stick assignments and bring them back to class the following week for discussion.

- **Bible**. The lessons mostly use the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible.

- **Pen or pencil**.

1
Most importantly, *What’s Up?* is committed to the “supplies” the *Holy Spirit* provides. These are less tangible than the lesson pages and pencils, but you’ll find them to be the guiding principles behind the approach to all the lessons. These supplies from the Spirit are:

1. **The Word of God.** The Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible. These lessons will use the Bible to teach and will get students reading the Bible.

2. **Prayer.** The Holy Spirit helps believers pray. The lessons and assignments in *What’s Up?* will include lots of prayer.

3. **The good news of Jesus.** Jesus and his cross are the central message of God’s Word, and the Holy Spirit loves to tell about Jesus. These lessons will keep calling students to believe in Jesus and all the blessings that come through him.

4. **Other believers.** The Holy Spirit makes believers part of God’s family. These lessons get students sharing with a group, talking about their faith with others, and learning from you, their leader and mentor.

**HOW IS THE COURSE ORGANIZED?**

*What’s Up?* comprises fifteen lessons that are grouped around three themes or units.

**UNIT ONE: THE GOSPEL**

Lessons 1 through 5 explain the good news of Jesus. They cover sin and its effects, the person who saves us from sin, and the key aspects of that salvation.

**LESSON 1: OH . . . NOW I SEE**

*Big Idea: Seeing Jesus*

Everyone has an idea of who God is and what it means to be a Christian. This first lesson looks at some of the “blurry” ideas we can have about believing in Jesus, and replaces them with the clear truth about the who, what, how, and why of the gospel.

**LESSON 2: THAT’S MY WHOLE LIFE STORY**

*Big Idea: The Gospel Story*

The gospel takes place within the story of creation, fall, and redemption in Jesus. It’s easy to think big parts of this story don’t directly involve us, but this lesson shows how every believer in Jesus has been a part of the story right from the start—and will be forever.

**LESSON 3: MY TONGUE IS CONNECTED TO MY—WHAT?**

*Big Idea: Sin of the Heart*

The things we say reveal that our outward sin bubbles up from deep in our hearts. This lesson reveals how we tend to want to prove ourselves right, but can’t earn our salvation by being good enough for God. We need a change only Jesus can give.
LESSON 4: HMM . . . WHAT GRADES DO I GET?
Big Idea: Justification by Faith

If we think we can make ourselves “right” by the things we say or do, we’re fooling ourselves. Only the righteousness God gives in Jesus can ever make us right in his eyes. This lesson shows how we get this by faith in Jesus; a faith that deepens throughout our lives.

LESSON 5: PRESENTS? FOR ME?! 
Big Idea: Holiness and Fighting Sin

This lesson teaches that God’s grace to us doesn’t end with our justification. He also makes us his holy children. All his gifts to us give us confidence and power as we work, with him at our side, to fight sin in our lives.

UNIT TWO: YOUR HEART

Lessons 6 through 10 take a closer look at the heart conditions behind our behavior—both sinful behavior and godly living.

LESSON 6: BUT I’M A GOOD PERSON
Big Idea: Two Kinds of Repentance

Often, we may think only “sinners” like the prodigal son need Jesus. But this lesson shows how “older brothers” who are trying to prove themselves to God by being good need to repent as well. Both are given grace by a loving Father.

LESSON 7: DO I LOVE GOD? UM . . .
Big Idea: Big Forgiveness and Big Love

When we sin, we have two choices: we can ignore and hide our sin or we can admit it. This lesson teaches that when we learn to admit we’re big sinners—who know we have big forgiveness in Jesus—we end up with big love for our Savior.

LESSON 8: YES, I WORSHIP IDOLS
Big Idea: Real-Life Idols

The sins we struggle with show that we have idols in our life. This lesson looks at the things we’re tempted to love, trust, or fear more than God—and how Jesus is better than any of those idols.

LESSON 9: LOOK! SHARK!
Big Idea: Confronting Unbelief

It’s easy to notice surface sins and try to overcome them, but unless the idols beneath the surface are killed, sin won’t be defeated. This lesson examines the dangerous unbelief that lurks below the surface of all our idols and surface sins, and how deeper faith in Jesus is a key part of battling sin.

LESSON 10: THAT’S MY DAD!
Big Idea: Living as God’s Child

We claim to be God’s children, but how often do we act like a son or daughter of the King? This lesson helps us to delight in what it means to have God as our Father, replacing orphan-like behavior with attitudes that fit a child of the King.
UNIT THREE: A CHANGED LIFE

Lessons 11 through 15 examine some of the daily-living results of having a heart that’s gripped by the gospel.

LESSON 11: GRRR . . . THAT MAKES ME SO MAD!

*Big Idea: Resolving Conflicts*

Our sinful desires often lead to conflicts with others. This lesson gives practice in thinking like a child of God, so that from his fatherly promises we draw courage and confidence to resolve those conflicts.

LESSON 12: ‘I'M SO SORRY—NOT!’

*Big Idea: False Repentance*

We can feel sorry about sin—and even stop some sin—but that’s not necessarily true, godly sorrow and repentance. This lesson shows the selfishness behind false repentance and makes us long for deeper, true repentance.

LESSON 13: ‘I'M SO SORRY—REALLY’

*Big Idea: Godly Repentance*

True repentance sounds hard and often feels impossible. But it’s not impossible for a child of God, and because of the rich love of our Father, it brings lasting joy. This lesson gives examples of true repentance and encourages us to practice it daily.

LESSON 14: I (GULP) FORGIVE YOU

*Big Idea: Forgiving Others*

One test that God’s grace has made an impact on our hearts is our willingness to forgive. If we’ve been forgiven so much, won’t we gladly forgive others? This lesson shows how God’s grace enables us to forgive even horribly means things done to us.

LESSON 15: LET’S, KEEP, GOING.

*Big Idea: A Lifetime of Faith*

Faith isn’t just something for the start of the Christian life. It keeps going and growing. This lesson reminds us of many of the important things learned during this course. It helps us consider how to keep going, resting always in Jesus, with the work of faith.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL THE LESSONS TAKE?

If you have 90-minute class sessions, use option 1. If sessions are shorter than 90 minutes, for example, if the curriculum is used in a Sunday school hour, use option 2.

**Option 1**

Use this option if you have 90-minute class sessions. A full hour and a half provides plenty of time for discussion and prayer, which are important aspects of the course. The sharing and prayer involved in each lesson also mean that smaller groups (or less talkative groups) will tend to finish the lessons more quickly than larger groups. This leader’s guide contains time estimates at the beginning of the main parts of each lesson to help keep you on schedule. These assume a fairly large and talkative group.

**Option 2**

If the class session hovers around one hour, most lessons can be divided and presented in two sessions of 50–55 minutes each. The leader’s guide notes the optional break point in each of
those lessons and gives instructions on how to wrap up the lesson for the time being and restart it at a later date. Lessons that can be divided are noted with an asterisk in the course overview chart below. If you choose this option, What’s Up? will encompass 26 class sessions rather than 15.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

Option 1: Fifteen 90-minute lessons

Option 2: Twenty-six 50-minute lessons (divided lessons noted with asterisk [*])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson No.</th>
<th>Lesson Title</th>
<th>“Big Idea”</th>
<th>Key Bible passages</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Make It Stick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>Oh . . . Now I See</td>
<td>Seeing Jesus</td>
<td>Luke 2:10–11; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4</td>
<td>Who, what, why, and how of the gospel; blurry vision</td>
<td>Get to know Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>That's My Whole Life Story</td>
<td>The gospel story</td>
<td>Romans 5:12–6:14</td>
<td>Gospel storybook: dying every day</td>
<td>Watch Your Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3*</td>
<td>My Tongue Is Connected to My—What?</td>
<td>Sin of the heart</td>
<td>Luke 6:45; Genesis 3 (Adam and Eve and the fall); Exodus 32 (Aaron and the golden calf)</td>
<td>Tongue sin motives; Watch Your Words assignment heart attitudes; praying Psalm 139</td>
<td>Watch Your Words (part 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>Presents? For Me?!</td>
<td>Holiness and fighting sin</td>
<td>Ephesians 6:10–18 (The whole armor of God); Psalm 103</td>
<td>Presents from God; using God’s armor</td>
<td>Interview an older believer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6*</td>
<td>But I’m a Good Person</td>
<td>Two kinds of repentance</td>
<td>Mark 1:15; Luke 15:11–32 (The parable of the lost sons)</td>
<td>Sinners and self-justifiers; lost son character sketches</td>
<td>Spend time with your Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>Do I Love God? Um . . .</td>
<td>Big forgiveness and big love</td>
<td>Luke 7:36–47 (Jesus, Simon, and the sinful woman); 1 Corinthians 15:1–4</td>
<td>Two choices when you sin</td>
<td>Admit your sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes, I Worship Idols</td>
<td>Real-life idols</td>
<td>Exodus 20:4–5; 1 Kings 18 (Elijah and the priests of Baal); Acts 17:16–34 (Paul in Athens)</td>
<td>What are your idols?</td>
<td>Notice your idol worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9*</td>
<td>Look! Shark!</td>
<td>Confronting unbelief</td>
<td>Genesis 12:10–19 (Abram in Egypt); Acts 5:1–10 (Ananias and Sapphira); Mark 7:21–23</td>
<td>Shark Figure; praying from Ephesians 3:14–19</td>
<td>The Shark Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>That’s My Dad!</td>
<td>Living as God’s child</td>
<td>Galatians 3:26; 2 Samuel 9; 16:1–4; 19:24–30 (David and Mephibosheth)</td>
<td>Benefits of being God’s child; living like a son or daughter</td>
<td>Think Like a Son or Daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11*</td>
<td>Grr . . . That Makes Me SO Mad!</td>
<td>Resolving conflicts</td>
<td>Genesis 37–50 (Joseph and his brothers); James 4:1–2</td>
<td>Heart conditions that lead to conflict</td>
<td>Pray for someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I’m So Sorry—NOT!</td>
<td>False repentance</td>
<td>2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 Samuel 15 (Saul disobeys God); Matthew 27:3–10 (Judas has remorse); Micah 6:6–8</td>
<td>Right and wrong ideas about repentance; blurry vision</td>
<td>How I respond to correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14*</td>
<td>(Gulp) Forgive You</td>
<td>Forgiving others</td>
<td>Matthew 18:21–35 (Parable of the unforgiving servant)</td>
<td>Forgiveness stories</td>
<td>Pick a favorite thing you’ve learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Let’s. Keep. Going.</td>
<td>A lifetime of faith</td>
<td>Genesis 22 (Abraham’s test of faith); Galatians 3:26–27</td>
<td>The journey of faith; clothed with Christ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT ARE THE LESSONS LIKE?

Most lessons will have three segments, “Before You Begin,” “Today’s Lesson,” and “Make It Stick.”

BEFORE YOU BEGIN includes a review of the previous lesson and a chance to discuss the assignments students worked on since then. Since What’s Up? is about a student’s whole life—not just lesson time—the material includes ways to practice faith during the week. Your time with your students will start by discussing how this is going.

TODAY’S LESSON. Lesson time will usually begin with a hook to get students interested, and will include several discussion and workbook pages. What’s Up? consists of guided lessons. As you work through the lessons with your students, there will be activities, discussion questions, and prayer to keep everyone engaged. Your students will often be writing and drawing on their lesson pages: underlining, doodling, matching, writing answers, and drawing pictures. Urge your students to do it all—and model this by marking on your own pages along with them. The pencil work (even if it seems easy) helps students to notice key points in each lesson. The mix of reading, writing, listening, discussing, and doing—using both words and pictures—provides a variety of learning styles to fit all students.

MAKE IT STICK. Lessons end with instructions for practicing faith throughout the week (or however long it is) until you meet again. It’s important for students to do these assignments, which is why it’s important for YOU always to do them too. Although each student does the work individually, Make It Stick is a group activity that’ll always be discussed and applied when the group meets. Your experience doing the assignment needs to be part of that in order for you to fully lead that discussion. By joining in that way, you’ll also be demonstrating that the practice of faith is a lifetime habit that older believers must engage in every bit as much as young ones.

HINT: Make sure each student has a take-home folder for keeping track of Make It Stick assignments. It will help the assignments to get done. We understand, however, that sometimes pages still get lost, folders get forgotten, or students simply choose not to do the work. When this happens, be understanding. Try to involve all students in the Make It Stick discussions even if some failed to complete their pages. You may want to have extra Make It Stick pages on hand for such students to look through or jot thoughts on as they arrive. Your students will appreciate that kind of positive approach to Make It Stick.

This leader’s guide includes answers to the exercises in the guided lessons and important themes for you to draw out in discussions. It also alerts you to points in the lesson where you should be prepared to share a personal story. The answers are there to make sure you understand the points each lesson is making. But it’s always best to read through the leader’s guide and become familiar with those points ahead of time, rather than looking up “correct answers” while you and your students are working through the lessons.

WHAT IS THE TEACHER’S ROLE?

Your job is to guide students through the lessons and discussions. You may find it helpful to use a whiteboard to take notes during discussions, review key points made in the lessons, or write out answers that appear only in your leader’s guide. Keep your students engaged. Challenge them to think through the material they’re learning. What’s Up? is not so much about memorizing verses and facts, but about examining the heart. Everything your students learn about the gospel should be connected to their hearts—which connects to how they live each day. Here are some practices that will help:

- Make time for discussions in each session, and share plenty of examples from your own life to illustrate both sin and growth. You need to live “unveiled” before your students. The lessons in What’s Up? often bring up sin. This is not for the sake of grim brooding, but rather because we believers are confident in our holiness in Christ. This confidence makes us eager to root out sin so we can fight it. Christians grow. Secure in Jesus, we are unafraid to drag sin out into the open where it’s easier to kill. By modeling this as a leader, you can introduce your students to a lifetime of honesty about their struggles that will help them grow within the Christian community.
• Make prayer central to your sessions with students. Each lesson includes specific times to pray, but you should always be ready to pray more than in those designated spots. If the group or an individual student expresses frustration or concern, that’s a good opportunity to take a moment to pray for help. Likewise, if someone tells a success story, that’s an opportunity to thank God. Model faith in God and gratitude toward him—not trust in our own abilities—by being a quick-to-pray leader.

• Pray regularly for your students on your own, also. Only the Holy Spirit can open hearts to see God’s truth, and only he can bring real growth in your students’ lives. Practice what these lessons teach by trusting not in your own ability as a leader but in God’s ability to work through you.

• Be aware that there will be struggle. Some students might be indifferent. Others may be so used to pretending their way through the Christian life, or performing for God, that they will have a difficult time being honest about their faith. When you detect this, keep pointing them back to the gospel. The confidence that in Christ believers are already perfectly, totally loved as children of God can overcome pretending and performing.
HOW WILL MY STUDENTS GROW?

The discipling model used throughout What's Up? recognizes that your students must grow from the inside—by believing the gospel more deeply—rather than by just trying harder to be good outwardly. You may be unfamiliar with this “believe” model. Perhaps you’re used to simply helping students discover how they ought to obey God and urging them to do it. If so, it’s important that you understand how the “believe” model works.

Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29). Belief in the gospel of Jesus is the soil from which all other obedience grows. This means you will be reminding your students, again and again, to believe first of all. As they believe more deeply in all it means to be joined to Jesus—putting their trust in him rather than in their own performance—they will gain the security, confidence, gratitude, and love for God needed to follow him with abandon.

The following chart, adapted from other Serge materials, summarizes the difference between the “try” model and the “believe” model used in What’s Up? The “try” model tends to produce self-concerned Christians who are either proud when they perform well or worried when they fail. The “believe” model tends to produce Christ-centered Christians who feel free of the need to make themselves look good—and spend their lives making him look good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The TRY Model</th>
<th>The BELIEVE Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Focus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Behaving on the outside</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Believing on the inside</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Change at the fruit level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Change at the root level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Getting one's act together</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Obedience from the heart</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Chief Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outward holiness and discipline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Inward love of God and others (1 Timothy 1:5; Galatians 5:6; Matthew 22:40)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Power</strong></td>
<td><strong>Human effort and moral willpower (Galatians 3:3)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Faith in Jesus supplies the Spirit (Galatians 3:5)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;To obey, I try&quot;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;To obey, I trust&quot;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Dynamic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Buck up! Try harder, get committed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Believe, submit, trust</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;I'm a disappointment&quot;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>&quot;I am God's child!&quot;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Principle</strong></td>
<td><strong>My obedience to God leads to a relationship with him.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>My relationship with God leads to obedience to him (John 15:5).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Motivation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Duty, guilt, pride</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Love</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Determination to be right and look good</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Passion for the glory of God</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holiness Is . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Keeping the rules; doing more for God and doing it better</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Loving like Jesus as I believe the gospel more (John 13:34; Romans 13:8f)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;The Flesh&quot; Can Be . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conquered through self-discipline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Conquered through gospel faith, although I'm humbly aware that my flesh hasn't lost its power</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Leader Must . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Model success and competence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Model repentance and trust in Jesus: &quot;I will boast in my weakness so that the power of Christ may rest on me&quot; (2 Corinthians 12:9).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Student Must . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Become a model of how to do more and do it better</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Become a big repenter—loving, bold, gracious, and full of faith (1 Timothy 1:15)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from a chart by Johnny Long based on material from Serge's Grace4Life course.

You are embarking on a teaching experience that aims at the heart and constantly points students to Jesus. You will be showing them the Savior who heals all hurts and fills all longings. With each lesson you’ll get to say, like John the Baptist, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). What a breathtaking job you have!
Dear Parent,

Welcome to *What’s Up? Discovering the Gospel, Jesus, and Who You Really Are*. This study is designed for middle school (5th–8th grade) students. It encourages them to believe the good news of Jesus and live it out.

We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with you in the discipleship of your child. *What’s Up?* is designed for a group study and each lesson builds on the others. If your child misses a session, he or she can complete the missed lesson at home, but may need some parental guidance and support. Likewise, if your child wants to do *What’s Up?* individually, you (or some other adult mentor) should become the “group” and review the lessons alongside your child.

In either case, if you think you will be guiding your child through some lessons, you should obtain a leader’s edition of *What’s Up?* The *Teacher Guide* contains instructions and explanations that help you through the lessons and activities. The *Teacher Guide* also gives detailed explanations of what your child will be learning and how the group sessions are conducted. Even if you don’t plan on leading your child through any of the lessons, having your own copy may help you follow up on the teaching at home without having to look through your child’s student workbook, which may contain private reflections.

You may find that *What’s Up?* challenges your child to live as a believer in ways he or she has seldom considered before. There will be Make It Stick assignments for home that require prayer, Bible reading, discussions with others about Jesus, and more—often on a daily basis. Your support and encouragement will be important if your child is to get the maximum benefit from these assignments. It may help to ask your child about these assignments during the week or to remind him or her to bring the *Student Guide* to each class.

Our prayer is that throughout the *What’s Up?* study you and your child’s love for Jesus will grow. May God bless and encourage you as you study together.

Blessings in Christ,
Debbie and Jack
INTRODUCTION

IS WHAT’S UP? FOR ME?
Yes, it’s for you if you want to learn more about Jesus or grow in your life with him. Maybe you only know a little bit about the Bible, and want to learn what believing in Jesus means. What’s Up? will teach you what it’s all about—and show you how to get started, if that’s what you decide. Or maybe you’ve heard and read the Bible so much that you know every story by heart, but now you want to live it out. What’s Up? will help you look to Jesus and delight in all he’s done for you—and believe!

BUT WHAT IF I ALREADY BELIEVE?
That’s great! But faith must always grow. You know that you often fail to be kind in how you treat your friends, classmates, parents, and teachers. What’s Up? will teach you not to hide or ignore that sin, but to admit it and trust Jesus. You’ll learn to enjoy how he always forgives you. You’ll believe more deeply that he died for you and made you God’s holy, ever-welcomed child. You’ll learn to live the way someone who believes those things ought to live. That’s growing in faith!

WILL IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE?
Oh, if you come to know you’re God’s child, it makes all the difference. It gives you love for your Father so you want to live for him. You’ll see how much he cares for you and for everything you do, so that you become excited about life with Jesus. It also gives you confidence that God is on your side—even when you fail! You can stop being scared of God when you’ve sinned and instead go to him for help. You’ll not only learn to resist sin that way; you’ll learn to constantly trust and live close to Jesus. What’s Up? won’t just change how you think as a child of God. It should also change how you act as a child of God.

WHAT WILL I BE DOING?
You’ll work through your lesson pages with a Bible and a pen or pencil. What’s Up? will guide you as you rely on God to help your faith grow. You’ll spend much time using the tools he gives you to help you learn. Here’s what you’ll use:

The Bible. God speaks to you through the Bible. These lessons will use the Bible to teach you and will get you reading your Bible.

Prayer. Prayer is how you talk to God and ask him for help. Since you need God’s help to grow, the lessons and assignments in What’s Up? will include lots of prayer.

The good news of Jesus. Jesus and all he does for us are the main message of the Bible, so What’s Up? will keep mentioning this good news again and again. You need to keep remembering and believing it.

Other believers. God makes believers in Jesus part of his family so they can help each other grow more faithful. These lessons will get you sharing with a group, talking about your faith with others, and learning from an experienced leader.
WHAT IF I DON’T HAVE A GROUP?

The lessons are designed for group study. Sharing with others in a group will be the best way for you to learn the most from What’s Up? If you don’t have a group, you can still do the study by yourself, but even then you need to find an adult leader to be your mentor and guide you through the lessons. That person will be who you share with—and will also share their stories with you. This kind of sharing is an important part of What’s Up?

WHAT WILL THE LESSONS BE LIKE?

Most lessons will have three segments:

BEFORE YOU BEGIN. Since What’s Up? is about your whole life—not just lesson time—you’ll start by talking about your life! You share what you’ve learned and how you’ve been practicing faith since the last time your group met.

TODAY’S LESSON. Lesson time will include several discussion and workbook pages. What’s Up? keeps you doing stuff all through the lesson. You’ll be writing and drawing on your lesson pages: underlining, doodling, matching, writing answers, and drawing pictures—that kind of thing. You’ll also read from the Bible, discuss the lesson with your group, and pray.

Important note: You might think discussing your faith and praying is TOO HARD. Try it anyway. It gets easier with practice, and it’s an important part of Christian growth.

MORE important note: You might think underlining, circling, and writing answers on your lesson pages is TOO EASY. Do it anyway. Of course it’s easy, but it’s the best way for you to notice what you’re learning—like taking notes. (Besides, you get to write, draw, and doodle on your lessons, which is sweet!)

MAKE IT STICK. Here you’ll get directions for practicing what you learned during the week. It’s important to always do the Make It Stick assignment during the week. It’s what makes What’s Up? about your whole life. Plus, you’ll be reporting how it went the next time you meet with your group. Even though Make It Stick is something you’ll do at home on your own, it’s still a group activity that’ll end up helping the whole group when you discuss it together later.

ANOTHER important note: Make It Stick is practice. What’s Up? is a discipleship course. It trains you in how to live. That’s why daily practice, and sharing with your group how it went, is so important.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I EXPECT?

Expect God to work in you. He loves you. Jesus died on the cross to save all who believe in him. “He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds” (Titus 2:14 NLT). Start praying now that God will use What’s Up? to help make everything that verse says true of you. God is determined that his people will grow. Look forward to it.
NOTES TO THE LEADER

LESSON GOAL
Students will see that Christianity is about good news—the gospel—and that this news is first of all about what Jesus does for us, not what we must do for God.

SUMMARY
This lesson begins by giving students a chance to say what they think God and Christianity are all about. This exercise not only introduces the topic, but also gives you the opportunity to begin learning how each student approaches God and faith. The lesson uses the theme of “clear vision” and “blurry” vision to talk about right and wrong ways to think about the gospel.

In PART 1, Clear Vision, students examine Bible passages that tell about the gospel.

★ The gospel is about Jesus (Whom is it about?)
★ The gospel is about God’s plan for salvation. (What does Jesus do for us?)
★ The gospel says our salvation is a gift from God; we cannot earn it. (How are we saved from sin?)
★ The gospel says we are saved because God loves us. (Why does God save us?)
★ Our response to the gospel should be to believe in Jesus. (How do I respond?)

PART 2, Blurry Vision, examines our wrong ideas about Jesus and salvation. You will see some familiar, blurry ways of thinking, and diagnose what’s missing from view. You will have a chance to share how you sometimes fail to see the gospel clearly. You will pray for better vision.

SUPPLEMENTAL FIGURE
You’ll be using the Blurry Gospel Vision Figure in part 2 of this lesson.

YOUR PREPARATION
STUDY. Read through the lesson and teaching notes and make sure you understand it all before class begins. Also be prepared to explain the gospel, and what’s entailed in believing it, in your own words. Keep this in mind: Lessons like this one that explain the gospel are ideal for both believers and unbelievers. Some of your students may not yet have faith in Jesus. This lesson will show them what it means to believe. Other students may already be believers. This lesson will encourage them to sharpen and deepen their belief. It is not necessary for you to identify nonbelievers and target them for special treatment. Both kinds of students must be encouraged to believe the gospel—whether for the first time or more deeply. Be prepared to talk to all your students about what this means. It’s about faith (trusting Jesus, not your own goodness) and repentance (living for Jesus, not yourself), and it’s for everyone, all the time.

BE READY TO SHARE. One of the features of this course is honest, open discussion about our own sins, faults, and questions. Encourage your students to share openly by participating yourself. In this lesson, you’ll have an opportunity near the end to tell what sort of “blurry vision” of the gospel you sometimes fall into. Be sure you’ve looked at the examples ahead of time and are ready to share which one is most like you. Have a specific example of how it applies in your Christian life and how you need to constantly work to improve your “vision” in that area.

PRAY. The first class session usually sets a tone for those to come. Ask your Father to make your students eager to hear the gospel and willing to share openly. Pray that the Spirit would penetrate the hearts of your students—and your own heart—with his good news.
ONE God. There is only one God. He’s a spiritual being, and he created everything that exists.
- God is eternal. He was never created. He has always existed and always will exist.
- God is all-powerful. He knows and controls everything.
- God is holy. He’s perfect and pure of any evil, which he calls “sin.” He never sins and can’t stand sin.

THREE persons. Even though God is only one, he exists as three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person is all the way God (eternal Creator, all-powerful, perfect, and holy). These three persons . . .
- Communicate with each other.
- Make agreements with each other (they never disagree, because God is one).
- Love each other (perfectly, of course).

Our Savior. The three persons work together in everything, including acting together to save us from our sin. They each have a special role in saving us.
- The Father lovingly ordered our salvation and sent the Son to be our Savior.
- The Son accomplished our salvation by taking the punishment that we deserved for our sin.
- The Holy Spirit changes us so we can be saved by believing that the Son died for us. He also teaches us to resist sin and live for God.

Jesus. To be our Savior, about 2,000 years ago the Son became a human being—without stopping to still be all the way God too. He was born and took the name Jesus. Jesus is both God and also all the way a man! As a man, there are things about him that ordinarily wouldn’t be true of God.
- Jesus got tired, hungry, and thirsty. He also has every human emotion (but only in non-sinning ways, since he’s still holy God).
- Jesus was tempted to sin, like we are (but he never did sin).
- Jesus suffered and died before being raised to life again.
Now tell the rest of the group what you learned from the God Fact Sheet. What was really interesting to you? Was anything confusing?

Give students a few minutes to share and to get used to talking about God. This is also a chance for you to learn where they start in terms of Bible knowledge.

The information about the Trinity is included here because, without it, students sometimes remain confused every time Jesus or the Holy Spirit is mentioned. If they find the Trinity to be too hard a concept to grasp, you can try to answer their questions briefly but don’t get bogged down in that. To avoid the most obvious errors about the Trinity, you need to be clear that:

★ God is one individual.
★ Yet he exists as three persons.
★ The whole of God, not just part of God, is in each person.

Regarding Jesus:
★ He is one person but has two natures.
★ He is totally God and also totally human.

You may want to explain that these truths are mysteries that are hard for us to fully understand. Assure your students that as they learn more about God, they’ll become more comfortable with these ideas.

PART 1: EXACTLY THE RIGHT WORD

(25 minutes)

When Jesus lived on earth, he picked a word to explain what his work was all about. He chose the word “gospel.” It means “good news.” In those days, no one had ever used that word for religion! It was used for good news brought by a king’s messenger—like news of a battle won. It was news everyone would be glad to hear and let change their life. Our Bibles sometimes use the word “gospel” and sometimes say “good news,” but they’re the same thing.

Point to remember: “Gospel” means GOOD NEWS!

Let’s see what the Bible says about this good news.

You may have heard about the angel who told shepherds about baby Jesus. That angel was being a messenger, bringing good news—the gospel!

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10–11)

Find “good news” in those verses and circle it. Then find the word “Savior” and put a star next to it.

Finally, underline the part of the angel’s message that tells WHOM the gospel is all about.

Let students share openly. Don’t judge answers as better or worse at this point.
The missionary Paul wrote about the gospel in the Bible. Read what he said.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

Again, circle the word “gospel.”

Find the part where Paul says the gospel is about being saved and put a star by it.

And underline the sentence that tells WHOM the gospel is about and what he did for us.

The gospel is news about the Christ (that’s a title for JESUS). It’s about how he SAVES US.

You’re ready to start filling in your “clear vision” view of the gospel. Start by writing WHOM the gospel is about on the blank eyeglass lens that follows.

Students should see that the gospel is about Jesus, or the Christ. If any are confused by the term “Christ,” you can explain that it means “anointed” and is a title for Jesus, like “president” might be a title for a nation’s leader.
Students should see that the gospel is about salvation. Jesus saves us.

Now fill in WHAT Jesus does for us in the gospel. (Hint: It’s what you put the stars by in our verses.)

TALK ABOUT IT
Most of the time, do you feel like you need Jesus to save you from anything? Why or why not? When do you most feel like you need a Savior?

Some students may deeply feel the weight of their sin and their need for Jesus, while other students may have never even considered it. Encourage them not just to give an answer they think is “right,” but to consider whether or not they daily realize their need. At this point, you don’t need to “beat them over the head” with their sin if they have little awareness. Simply accept that this is often the case and tell them that noticing their sin will be a big part of these lessons—because we want to be honest about ourselves and come to appreciate how important Jesus is.
Remember that “sin” means we do evil things that are against God. We deserve to be punished.

Find Romans 3:23–24 in your Bible. Read it to learn more about what it means to be saved. Then write an answer to the question below.

**HOW are we saved from sin?** Is it because we earn it by being good and not sinning, or is it a gift God gives us through Jesus? Fill in the eyeglasses with your answer.

Salvation is “by grace” or “as a gift” or “not earned.”

Now read one more Bible verse that tells about being saved. Look up John 3:16 and answer the two questions below.

**WHY did God decide to give his Son, Jesus, to save us?**

**HOW do you respond in order to have eternal life?**

Believing in Jesus includes:

- **Trusting Jesus** instead of trying to be good enough to save yourself.
- **Living for Jesus** and obeying him instead of living for yourself.

Now use your answers to fill in the last parts of your gospel vision. Start by writing **WHY God saves us, as a gift, through Jesus**.

God’s reason for saving us is his love.
Finally, write what you do to respond to this good news.

Students should see that belief in Jesus is how to respond to the gospel. If they aren’t sure what this means, point them back to the line that explains how belief in Jesus means two things: trusting him (which the Bible also calls “faith”) and living for him (which the Bible also calls “repentance”). The terms “faith” and “repentance” will be introduced and taught in more depth later in this course.

Now let’s combine what you’ve learned about the gospel with what you know about God:

GOD IS HOLY. He hates sin. Since you’re a sinner who does wrong every day, you need to be saved from sin to be accepted by a holy God.

GOD IS FAIR. He punishes sin. Sinners must die. So you must be punished unless someone else who’s perfectly good takes your place as a substitute.

GOD IS LOVING. He gave his Son, Jesus, to be that someone else. Jesus was punished instead of you—in your place!—if you believe in him. This means you can be accepted by God even though you sin.
Discuss the three points listed above. Which do you most often hear people talk about? Which are new to you or are ideas you don’t think about much? Explain why all three are important.

Help students to see how all three ideas are necessary to the gospel. It may be helpful to review the points by writing out a simple chart like the one below. Your student may be able to fill in the right half of the chart that tells what the gospel means.

### GOD IS . . . THE GOSPEL MEANS . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God is</th>
<th>The Gospel Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holy and without sin</td>
<td>I am a sinner. I need to be saved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair. Sin must be punished.</td>
<td>I need someone to take the punishment I deserve for my sin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>God sent his son, Jesus, to take the punishment I deserve.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Yourself

Circle the believer in each pair of students who has “clear vision” of the gospel, and tell why.

Use this “test” as one more opportunity to discuss key points of the gospel with your students. For each set of statements, ask the group which student sees the gospel clearly and have a student or two explain why.

**Good News**

“Christianity is mostly about what I have to do for God.”

“Christianity is first of all about good news of what God does for me!”

The gospel is first of all news about what God does for us. This doesn’t mean that our obedience to God is unimportant, but our obedience flows from the work of Jesus on our behalf. His work is primary.

Why?
"I'm a far worse sinner than I thought. I offend the holy God so often! No matter how hard I try, I can't make myself good enough for him."

"As long as I try hard to be good, God shouldn't think of me as too bad a sinner."

The key here is to understand that God is holy—perfectly good—so that our sins are rightfully a great offense to him.

"God accepts me because Jesus is good, and I belong to Jesus. He took the punishment I deserve."

"God accepts me whenever I'm good like I should be, and he gets grumpy with me when I'm not."

Although our behavior varies in its acceptability based on how good we are, God's eternal acceptance of us is based on the goodness of Jesus—and that never changes. The good works we do as believers are only truly good and only please God at all because we are joined to Jesus. And even then, we're not counted righteous (justified) because of those good works but rather because we belong to Jesus and he is good.
Believe it!

“I need to obey Jesus better if I want him to like me.”

Believing in Jesus means that now I both trust him and live for him eagerly, every day. It changes everything!

Believing in Jesus means that now I can go on with my life and hardly have to think about my sin anymore. I’m glad it’s so easy and doesn’t require much change!

Your students may think that the freeness of the gospel means they can go on with their lives and just forget about their sin, but such thinking is wrong. Belief in Jesus is such a change of life that, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, it brings transformation into people who fight against sin and live for God. It changes everything.

A believer is eager to please God, but that good behavior flows from Christ’s love to him. It’s not a scheme to earn or merit God’s favor.

WHY?

Jesus loves me. He died for me! Now I obey him because he means everything to me.

Why?
OPTIONAL STOPPING POINT

If you're stopping the lesson here for today, send your students home with something to think about and prayer.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Tell students: This week see if you can remember the five questions about the gospel and their answers. Here they are again:

★ Who is the gospel about? (The gospel is about Jesus.)
★ What does Jesus do for us? (He saves us.)
★ How does Jesus save us? (Our salvation is a gift from God; we cannot earn it.)
★ Why does God save us? (Because he God loves us.)
★ How do I respond? (By believing in Jesus.)

Quickly write down the answers if you have to. Learn them and be ready to answer those questions at the start of your next class.

PRAYER

Pray together that the Holy Spirit would help bring you and your students a deeper understanding of the gospel.

When you restart this lesson later, begin with review.

REVIEW

Ask students the five questions they responded to last time. Review the answers. Also ask: Did you learn something new about the gospel that you didn’t know before? Do these answers change the way you view Christianity?
PART 2: BLURRY VISION

(40 minutes. Leave plenty of time for discussion and prayer at the end of this part of the lesson.)

Seeing the gospel clearly is like an eye exam. Even if you already know about the gospel, sometimes your vision can get “blurry.” So now, you be the eye doctor. For each student, find what that student can’t see about the gospel.

Maybe it’s . . .

☐ What a big sinner they are
☐ How God accepts them because of Jesus, not how good or bad they are
☐ How Jesus loves them and died for their sin
☐ How believing the gospel means a new, changed life

Then, once that student has a “prescription” to see the gospel more clearly, describe how you think their life will change.

THE SMUG STUDENT

“Sometimes I sin, but I’m better than most people. I study the Bible and I obey at school; and I’m sure God has noticed. There are bad people who need Jesus much worse than I do. God is glad that I’m one of the good guys!”

BLURRY VISION

This student can’t see (check what applies):

☐ They’re a big sinner just like everyone else.
☐ God accepts them because of Jesus, not how good they are.
☐ Jesus loves them and died for their sin.
☐ Believing in Jesus means a new, changed life.

PRESCRIPTION

THE GOSPEL SAYS: You’re a big sinner too. God only accepts you because of Jesus, not how good you think you are.

LIFE WITH GOSPEL VISION

When you see the gospel, you’ll stop bragging and being proud. You’ll quit trying to prove how good you are. Instead, you’ll . . .
The student can’t see they are a big sinner like everyone else. But those with gospel vision will become humble, will treasure Jesus, will readily confess their sin, and will learn to love “bad” people. Any of these or similar thoughts make good answers. (Your students may also think another item on the checklist applies. That’s okay. Just make sure they recognize that understanding the gospel includes knowing that one is a hopelessly big sinner.)

THE NERVOUS STUDENT

“I get worried when I think about Jesus. I know he wants me to shape up and live better, and I’ve tried. But I’m pretty sure that I’m not good enough and God stays pretty unhappy with me. When I sin, I try to make it up to God by doing something good. I’ll keep trying and hope God will be okay with that.”

BLURRY VISION
This student can’t see (check what applies):

☐ They’re a big sinner just like everyone else.
☐ God accepts them because of Jesus, not how good they are.
☐ Jesus loves them and died for their sin.
☐ Believing in Jesus means a new, changed life.

PRESCRIPTION
THE GOSPEL SAYS: You don’t have to earn your forgiveness. God accepts you because of Jesus. It’s free!

LIFE WITH GOSPEL VISION
When you see the gospel, you’ll stop worrying and being secretly scared of God. You’ll quit doing good things only because you feel pressure. Instead, you’ll . . .

The student can’t see that God accepts them because of Jesus. But those with gospel vision will have confidence in Jesus, will learn to rest in God’s love, will love God back, and will be eager (not feel pressured) to obey God.
"I just LOVE doing good things at church and with Christian friends. It’s fun to help out, be part of youth events, and work on projects that make the world better. Everyone says I’m doing great and I feel good about that. I don’t know if I’m really doing those things for Jesus, but I sure enjoy them!"

BLURRY VISION
This student can’t see (check what applies):

- They’re a big sinner just like everyone else.
- God accepts them because of Jesus, not how good they are.
- Jesus loves them and died for their sin.
- Believing in Jesus means a new, changed life.

PRESCRIPTION
THE GOSPEL SAYS: Jesus died for you. He loves you that much! He’s the best reason to serve God.

LIFE WITH GOSPEL VISION
When you see the gospel, you’ll stop doing godly-looking things just because they’re fun, or because people are watching. Instead, you’ll . . .

The student can’t see that Jesus loves them and died for their sin. Make sure your students recognize that this student is really doing all those good things for himself, not because Jesus is his Savior. Those with gospel vision will do godly things because they’re committed to Jesus even when it isn’t fun. They will thankfully live for him even when no one else is watching. They will become selfless.

NOTE: Your students may argue that it’s good to enjoy doing good things. They’re right about that, of course. Try to help them see, though, that the ALL ABOUT ME student is only doing things he’d enjoy anyway even without Jesus. The gospel must bring repentance: those who believe the gospel change how they would otherwise live and do so out of their gladness in Jesus. Even though the ALL ABOUT ME student is outwardly more godly than the EASY LIFE student (discussed next), neither is repenting because of Jesus.
THE EASY LIFE STUDENT

“I sin quite a bit, but I don’t worry about it. God forgives me, like he’s supposed to. Pretty easy, huh? I guess I appreciate Jesus for that. But I don’t understand people who say they love to worship him and pray or change their life for him. That’s never happened to me.”

BLURRY VISION
This student can’t see (check what applies):

- They’re a big sinner just like everyone else.
- God accepts them because of Jesus, not how good they are.
- Jesus loves them and died for their sin.
- Believing in Jesus means a new, changed life.

PRESCRIPTION
THE GOSPEL SAYS: Believing in Jesus means your life isn’t about yourself anymore. You don’t trust yourself. You don’t live for yourself, either. You change so that you trust and live for Jesus, instead.

LIFE WITH GOSPEL VISION
When you see the gospel, you’ll no longer have a self-centered life that finds Jesus boring. Instead, you’ll . . .

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

The student can’t see that believing in Jesus means a new, changed life. But those with gospel vision will repent of their sin, will be thankful to Jesus and eager to serve him, will pray and grow as believers, and will become joyful over Jesus and find worshiping him to be a thrill.
"Yes, sometimes I sin, but I'm better than most people. I do Bible studies and I obey at school, and I'm sure God has noticed. There are bad people who need Jesus much worse than I do."

"I don't always admit it, but I'm secretly worried that I'm not good enough for God. When I sin, I try to make it up to God by doing something good. I'll keep trying and hope God's okay with that."

"I don't worry about my sin. God forgives me, like he's supposed to. Pretty easy, huh. I appreciate Jesus for that, but I don't understand people who say they love to worship him and pray. That's never happened to me."

"I don't always admit it, but I'm secretly worried that I'm not good enough for God. When I sin, I try to make it up to God by doing something good. I'll keep trying and hope God's okay with that."

"I just LOVE doing good things at church and with my friends. It's fun to be part of youth events and to do things that make the world better. Everyone says I'm doing great—so I guess I am!"

"I just LOVE doing good things at church and with my friends. It's fun to be part of youth events and to do things that make the world better. Everyone says I'm doing great—so I guess I am!"

"I don't worry about my sin. God forgives me, like he's supposed to. Pretty easy, huh. I appreciate Jesus for that, but I don't understand people who say they love to worship him and pray. That's never happened to me."

"I just LOVE doing good things at church and with my friends. It's fun to be part of youth events and to do things that make the world better. Everyone says I'm doing great—so I guess I am!"
Looking at the Blurry Gospel Vision figure, think about each student with “blurry vision.” Which one is most like you? Once you pick which one you’re most like, circle it, and share your choice with the group. Explain how your way of thinking about God is sometimes like that blurry vision.

Encourage students to carefully read through the descriptions again and pick the one that’s most like them. They may have a hard time picking just one, but encourage them to think about their hearts and zero in on the choice that best describes them. Being forced to choose one main tendency will help them to consider the question carefully, and their choice will guide their prayer that’s coming up.

**SHARING OPPORTUNITY:** This discussion is the first of many in the course that requires students to admit their shortcomings. It’s essential that you, as the leader, show that this is okay by sharing which student you’re most like and by participating in prayer the prayer that follows, asking God that you too would better see the gospel.

**PRAY ABOUT IT**

Remember how the Holy Spirit helps us believe the gospel? Everyone needs clearer gospel vision—even people who’ve believed the gospel for many years! So now, ask God to help you. Pray with a friend or by yourself. Here’s how to do it:

Look back at the type of blurry vision you circled. Then look at the final box labeled “your life with gospel vision.”

Pray for the things written in that box to happen to you. Pray that the Holy Spirit will change you so that those things become true of you as you learn and believe the gospel through these lessons.

You can either say your prayer aloud or write it out in a few sentences below.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

*Take this prayer time seriously. It sets the tone for the rest of the course, and it is one way we practice believing the gospel. Applying the lessons in this course is not first about our efforts, but rather about relying on God’s work in us—so we will pray often!*

**NOTE:** As you learned what believing the gospel means, you may have thought to yourself: “Hmm, I’m not sure I’ve ever actually believed the gospel.” If that’s the case with you, consider becoming a believer. You can start believing (by trusting Jesus to save you and deciding to live for him) at any time—the sooner the better! But as you’ve learned, it’s an important decision that you need to consider carefully and take seriously. The rest of our lessons will help you learn more about what it means to be a believer.

The rest of the lessons will also speak to you as if you already are a believer. Those who believe in Jesus are forgiven, have become God’s children, have eternal life—and more! These lessons will help believers to believe these things more deeply, so they can grow. If you actually aren’t a believer yet, you too can learn about Jesus and all he does for us. Our hope is that you will come to believe for the first time—and then keep believing more deeply all your life.
MAKE IT STICK:
GET TO KNOW JESUS

(Take 5 minutes at the end of the session to explain the coming week’s “Make It Stick” exercise.)

INSTRUCTIONS:
Fill out this Make It Stick page during the week.

Don’t forget to bring your Student Guide back next time you meet.

If you have time, go ahead and get started now.

Jesus isn’t just a way to be forgiven and accepted by God. He’s also a person—the best person you could ever know! So before the next time you meet, practice getting to know Jesus better by reading about him in the Bible and noticing what kind of man he is.


Then, on the lines below, write words or short phrases that tell what kind of person Jesus is—based on just this one, short story. Look closely at the details in the story and fill out as many lines as you can. It might help to consider these questions:

**What abilities does he have?**
**How does he treat people?**
**What does he feel?**
**What are his attitudes?**
**What surprises you about his behavior?**
**How is he different from you?**

(You don’t have to answer each question. Just use them to help you think of some words that describe Jesus.)

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Be ready to share what you noticed about Jesus the next time you meet.