

# *Power for Daily Living*

## **Session 1: God at Work**

### **Introduction**

Think of a situation when you were helpless, when you were not in control. Here's an example:

Paul and Cindy were driving along a deserted stretch of highway when their car began to cough and choke. It sputtered to a stop just as they came to an abandoned stretch of road about 15 miles from their house. Paul looked at his watch. It was 1:30 a.m. There were no phones, no houses. There were no cars passing by on the road. They opened the hood, and the mystifying complex halted any attempt to fix the car. They looked at each other in the dim moonlight and wondered, "What can we do?"

1. What about you? In writing on another sheet or in small groups describe your helpless situation.
2. What words did you use to describe your feelings in that situation?

### **While We Were Helpless**

3. The amazing starting point of the Christian faith is this: we are helpless! Look at 1 Corinthians 12:3. Summarize what the passage says about God's part in our believing. What about our part?
4. See 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Compare this passage to the one above. Discuss the "actor" and the "receiver" according to the text. What does the text say about our part in believing?
5. In John 15:16, Jesus clearly indicates who chooses whom. Talk about what it means to be "chosen." What does that "choosing" say about our ability to "come to faith"?

### **The Spirit's Call**

The Christian faith begins with the affirmation that we human beings cannot save ourselves. But there is more! The Christian recognizes the biblical truth that a person can't even believe on his or her own. It's not within his or her power to believe in Jesus Christ—or even come to Him. The Spirit of God calls a person to Himself. But how does He do that? Certainly not through a phone call or some kind of a mysterious summons to the throne of God. Here's the first major point at which Christianity differs from every false religion. It's God-centered, God-originated and God-initiated.

6. Study Romans 10:14–17. Put the text into your own words. Then discuss the role of the Gospel ("Good News Message") in our believing. Why is it so important?

### **A Call for Sinners**

Remarkably, God's love for us was "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). It was for sinners—for helpless, separated-from-God people—that Jesus died. Perhaps that is also why Jesus used "birth language" to describe Baptism to one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus.

7. Read John 3:1–5. Nicodemus came to Jesus one night—a time when his religious friends wouldn’t see him. Nicodemus was interested in what Jesus was doing. But Jesus had a surprise for this learned man who wanted to discuss religious philosophy with Him. Jesus said that if Nicodemus wanted to see the kingdom of God, he would have to be born again—actually, “born from above.” What was Nicodemus’s response to Jesus revelation? Why do you think he reacted as he did?
8. It was then that Jesus took the miracle of birth and elevated it to supernatural heights. He said that a person could not enter into God’s kingdom unless he (or she) was born of water and the Spirit. What do you think Jesus was referring to? Why “water” and “the Spirit”?
9. Jesus compares Baptism to birth. Look over the passages above that talk about our part and God’s part in our coming to faith. Why is birth a good comparison for the way God works in Baptism? Why can life after Baptism be called “new life”?
10. Some Christians talk about being “born again.” We all were “born again” in Baptism. We were given new life by the power of the Spirit. What does that “birth” mean to you? How would you describe what happened to you in Baptism? How is the effect of your Baptism still with you?

### **For Forgiveness and Life**

11. Read John 3:16–17. Summarize the truths of the verses.
  - a. Tell one another: Who is the actor? Why does He act? What is our reaction? What is the result?
  - b. Rephrase the verses in your own words. Why is this text called “the Gospel in a nutshell”? What does it have to do with Baptism?
12. With Baptism comes forgiveness of sins. Only God can give that gift. At the end of his sermon at Pentecost, Peter clearly links Baptism with forgiveness of sins. Read Acts 2:38–39.
  - a. Summarize the major points of these verses. What is Peter telling us?
  - b. Read Acts 2:41. What was the response of those who received Peter’s message about Christ? How does that compare with our response?
  - c. How much did the Church grow that particular day? What does that growth say about the power of the Gospel?

### **Baptism Alive**

13. Acts 2:42 tells about the growth that follows Baptism. Name the four activities of the Christian that are given in the text.

14. Birth is not an end in itself. People are born so they can grow up. Scripture says that Christians are to grow in both the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). According to Matthew 28:19–20, what other important task should be part of a disciple’s life?
15. In every church, there are members who are growing in Christ, and there are those who are caught in a rut of empty religiousness—just going through the motions of the Christian life. What are the implications of the birth of Baptism and the growth in Christ for your life? How are the activities listed above happening in your life?

### **Baptism as Renewal**

As growing children of God, we are often caught in the temptation to rely upon ourselves. The story is told of the little boy and his father taking a walk on a cold, icy, wintery night. The boy insisted upon holding his father’s hand. The father said, “Let me take your hand.” “No,” said the boy, “I want to take yours.” But, as the boy reached up, he could only reach far enough to grasp one finger of his father’s hand. As they walked along, the boy slipped and fell. His strength was not great. Besides, he was only hanging onto a part of his father’s hand. The man picked up his son and grabbed his hand saying, “This time I will hold onto you.” The boy reached out his hand, and the father put his big, strong hand around it.

**Take this point home:** That’s what faith is all about. It’s not reaching out and trying to grab hold of God. It is letting God take hold of you.

### **Summary**

No one can make himself or herself a child of God. God does that. Jesus’ death on the cross has made forgiveness available to all. That forgiveness becomes personal as the Spirit works faith in individual hearts—in Baptism by the power of the Spirit through the Word, people are born again of water and the Spirit. Baptism is not just an event. It’s a way of life—a life filled with the power of God’s grace.

### **Prayer**

I yield You hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it has pleased You to regenerate me with Your Holy Spirit, to receive me for Your own child by adoption, and to incorporate me into Your holy church. I most humbly beg You to grant, that I being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, and being buried with Christ in His death, may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin. As I have been made partaker of the death of Your Son, may I also partake of His resurrection; through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. (Johann Gerhard, 1582–1637)

Close by singing or reading in unison “Baptized into Your Name Most Holy” (LSB 590).

1. Baptized into Your name most holy,  
O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
I claim a place, though weak and lowly,  
Among Your saints, Your chosen host.  
Buried with Christ and dead to sin,  
Your Spirit now shall live within.
2. My loving Father, here You take me  
To be henceforth Your child and heir.  
My faithful Savior, here You make me  
The fruit of all Your sorrows share.  
O Holy Spirit, comfort me  
When threat’ning clouds around I see.

3. My faithful God, You fail me never;  
Your promise surely will endure.  
O cast me not away forever  
If words and deeds become impure.  
Have mercy when I come defiled;  
Forgive, lift up, restore Your child.
4. All that I am and love most dearly—  
Receive it all, O Lord, from me.  
Let me confess my faith sincerely;  
Help me Your faithful child to be!  
Let nothing that I am or own  
Serve any will but Yours alone.