

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 122** and ask **Question #1: If you could have a direct line to an authority figure in our society, who would you choose?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life on PSG, page 123** to the story about Abraham Lincoln and those who sought access to him. Remind group members that Lincoln's son, Tad, always had access to his father, the president.

SAY: "Today we will look at the reality that we have direct access to God as His people."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 123: As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to teach us what it means for us to be priests with direct access to Him at any time.

SESSION 4 I AM A PRIEST



The Point

As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.

The Bible Meets Life

We have different images of a priest, from an Old Testament high priest to a modern-day Roman Catholic priest to a religious figure in some cults and Eastern religions.

Most Christians would never consider themselves priests, but the Bible describes us as such. A priest is someone who goes before God on behalf of others, and a priest represents Christ to those same people. Peter wrote that such a priesthood is a characteristic of a follower of Christ.

The Passage

1 Peter 2:4-10

The Setting

The apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter to Christians in Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1-2), perhaps in AD 60-61. We know ancient Asia Minor as modern Turkey. Believers in this region were following in Jesus' steps by enduring suffering (2:21). Though their status was low in this world, Peter knew that they were a "royal priesthood" (v. 9) with the great privilege and responsibility of devoting their lives to God and declaring His greatness.

1 Peter 2:4-5

4 As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God—

5 you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

KEY WORDS: **Living stone** (v. 4)—Metaphor applied to Jesus based on His resurrection (i.e., He is “living”) and Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah as a “stone” (Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6).

Verse 4. The idea that all believers in Christ are priests is a wonderful distinctive of biblical Christianity.

1▶ We have entered this priesthood as we have **come to him**; that is, to Jesus. Figuratively speaking, Jesus is a **living stone**. He is “living” because He is risen from the dead. He is a “stone” in the sense of the foundation for believers’ salvation and for the spiritual household in which His people serve as priests. We who believe in Him have “come to him” and devoted ourselves to Him by faith. We continue to come to Him daily by faith as we “grow up” into our salvation (1 Pet. 2:2).

Of course, not all people come to Christ. He is also **rejected by people**. The people in Jesus’ hometown rejected Him (Luke 4:16-30). The leaders of the Jewish nation rejected Jesus and delivered Him to be crucified (Matt. 26:14-15; 27:1-2). Pilate, the Roman governor, rejected Him (27:26). After Jesus’ resurrection, His followers proclaimed Him throughout the first-century world to Jews and Gentiles alike. Many rejected Him. Today, many people still reject the Christ of the Bible.

But God’s judgment matters more than the judgment of people, and Jesus is **chosen and honored by God**. He was chosen in eternity past to be the Savior who would offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for sinners (1 Pet. 1:18-20; John 17:24). God has honored Him by raising Him from the dead, exalting Him to the heavenly throne, and giving to Him the name above every name (Acts 2:32-33; Phil. 2:9). Though people may choose to reject Jesus, God has chosen Him for honor. ◀

2▶ **Verse 5.** Jesus now lives to offer His life to others and if we have come to Him, then we also are **living stones**.

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Peter 2:4-5



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 128.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:4-5.

GUIDE: Refer group members to the author’s story on **PSG page 124**, that recounts what his father said to him when he was a sixth-grade boy about representing the family name.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on this page (**PSG, p. 124**) to explain that the phrase *living stone* metaphorically referred to Jesus.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to further explain the term *living stone* as it referred to Jesus.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** on page 129 and this page to explain what it means for believers to be “living stones, a spiritual house.”

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 124-125**, to the two primary functions of priests:

- *Priests have the privilege of coming into the presence of God.*
- *Priests have the privilege of representing Christ and serving others.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** to explain the phrase *holy priesthood* and a priest’s function. Include insights on:

- *Old Testament priests*
- *Priests in other world religions*
- *Holy means “set apart”*
- *Spiritual sacrifices*

Though we were once dead in trespasses and sins, we now live (Eph. 2:1,4-5). As Christ lives, never to die again, so we live eternally in Him! Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26). In a sense, a believer in Christ never dies. When the mortal body breathes its last, the spirit of the believer goes to be with the Lord. In the end, Jesus will raise and transform even our bodies to be in “the likeness of his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

As living stones, we relate to Christ and other believers to form a spiritual house. Jesus said He would “build” His church (Matt. 16:18). He referred to His own body as a “temple” (John 2:19-22). Paul wrote of believers being included in and growing into “a holy temple” and said that we are “being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22).

When Peter was writing 1 Peter, the temple in Jerusalem was an impressive structure of literal stone. It was a physical house of worship. It pointed, however, to the figurative temple made up of Christ, the apostles, and all believers in Jesus. Every believer is a living stone in this spiritual house. ◀

3 ▶ In addition to being stones in the house, we are to function as **a holy priesthood**. This is a high privilege that may strike some as peculiar. Do you think of yourself as a priest? What does it mean to be a believer-priest?

Old Testament priests were descendants of Levi. They were set apart for the privilege and responsibility of entering the presence of God and representing others there (Deut. 21:5). The priests handled and offered sacrifices that the people brought to God (Lev. 4-7; Heb. 5:1). Priests functioned before God in the temple’s holy and most holy places (Lev. 16; 2 Chron. 3:8-10).

Within world religions such as Hinduism, priests are intermediaries between worshipers and the gods. The worshipers bring sacrifices in acts of atonement, petition, and thanksgiving. The priests receive the sacrifices and present them to the gods.

Peter meant that as believers we ourselves are set apart and “holy” through Christ. We have the privilege of coming into God’s presence. We have no need to seek out an earthly priest who will be a “go between” for us with God. We are qualified to **offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God**. We offer such sacrifices **through Jesus Christ** who gives us access to God.

What did Peter have in mind when he used the phrase “spiritual sacrifices”? Several passages of Scripture provide help in answering this question.

Hebrews 13:15 encourages believers in Jesus to “offer up to God a sacrifice of praise.” Hebrews 13:16 calls doing good and sharing with others “sacrifices” that please God. Paul urged believers to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1). Paul also referred to a financial gift as “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). King David recognized that “the sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit” and that God does not despise or reject a broken and humble heart (Ps. 51:17). Jesus taught that God desires mercy toward others over literal sacrifices (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). From these passages, we can conclude that we offer “spiritual sacrifices” when we praise and worship God, humble ourselves in confession and repentance, act in consecrated obedience, do good deeds, and share our resources with others.

Of course, the word “sacrifice” suggests denying one’s self or giving up something. King David would not offer to the Lord his God what cost him nothing personally (2 Sam. 24:24). We can embrace the cost with joy. For example, we can take delight in spending time and energy praising God during a worship service or preparing a meal to serve to a hurting family. We can give gifts of money eagerly and joyfully. The cost may feel significant at times, but as believer-priests, we need to be ready and willing to offer spiritual sacrifices that please God, whatever they cost us. ◀

1 Peter 2:6-8

6 For it stands in Scripture: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.”

7 So honor will come to you who believe; but for the unbelieving, “The stone that the builders rejected—this one has become the cornerstone,”

8 and “A stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over.” They stumble because they disobey the word; they were destined for this.

DISCUSS: Question #2

(PSG, p. 126): How should we understand the metaphors described in these verses?

(Alternate: What is your reaction to the idea that God has made believers into a holy priesthood?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we discover that Jesus is the foundation upon which we are to build our lives.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Peter 2:6-8



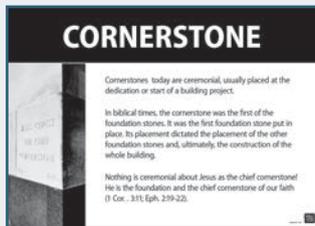
10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:6-8.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORD** on this page (PSG, p. 126) to explain the term *cornerstone*.

SAY: “Jesus is our sure foundation; He is the rock of our salvation. God will keep His promises to us in Christ.”

LEADER PACK: Point to **Item 9: Cornerstone** to provide a visual reference and more information about cornerstones. Ask volunteers to brainstorm what a “cornerstone” would be in modern construction.



SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to provide further information about the term *cornerstone*. Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 28:16. Share the following information:

- *Zion was a name for the city of Jerusalem.*
- *In the ancient world, the greatest care was taken in selecting, preparing, and setting in perfect position the primary foundation stone of a temple building.*
- *The stones in a temple structure “depend” on the cornerstone for direction and support. We depend on Jesus for salvation, for approval in judgment, and to include us in an eternal kingdom.*

KEY WORD: Cornerstone (v. 6)—Most important stone in the foundation of a temple or other structure. It determines the placement of all other stones included in the building.

Verse 6. Jesus Christ is the foundation for our position as priests. This truth shines clearly as Peter set forth Old Testament **Scripture** to support what he had written thus far.

4 ▶ Peter first cited Isaiah 28:16. Isaiah, the 8th century B.C. prophet, was painting a word picture of a cornerstone being laid in the process of building a temple. God Himself was the speaker who said, **I lay a stone in Zion.** “Zion” was a name for the city of Jerusalem. Over time Zion became especially associated with the temple mount in Jerusalem. Jerusalem with the temple was the central location for the nation of Israel. People spoke of going “” (Isa. 2:3). New Testament writers used Zion as a symbol for the heavenly city that is home for all citizens of the eternal kingdom of God (Heb. 12:22).

The stone that God laid is **a chosen and honored cornerstone.** Peter referred to Jesus in verse 4 as a “living stone ... chosen and honored by God.” In the ancient world, the greatest care was taken in selecting, preparing, and setting in perfect position the primary foundation stone of a temple building. Such stones could be massive in size. The cornerstone had the honor of being the decisive component of the building. All other stones were properly fixed in relation to the cornerstone. Peter’s point was that God laid as the center and foundation of His kingdom the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Every person who is in the kingdom is built upon and in relation to Him.

As the cornerstone, Christ is fully reliable. **The one who believes in him will never be put to shame.** In a sense, the stones in a temple structure “depend” on the cornerstone for direction and support. We depend on Jesus for salvation, for approval in judgment, and to include us in an eternal kingdom.

Imagine a man who builds a house. He contracts for the foundation to be laid. The house then rises brick by brick on the foundation. The man loves his house. He and his wife enjoy showing it to friends. Over time, however, the foundation proves to be faulty. Walls crack and start to separate. The structure is unsound and dangerous to occupy. They are deeply disappointed. Their pride and joy has turned to shame. What a tragedy!

No such tragedy can ever come upon a believer in the spiritual realm. We have God’s own guarantee that we who

rely on His mercy in Christ for salvation will never be put to shame. God has proven His commitment to us in the death of Christ. He has proven His power in the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the rock of our salvation. God will keep His commitments to us in Christ during this life, in final judgment, and for all eternity. ◀

5 ▶ Verses 7-8. In fact, **honor will come to you who believe.** Peter's first readers were experiencing various trials and suffering (1 Pet. 1:6; 3:14; 4:12-19). That is, dishonor was coming to them from the world. The time would come, however, for them to receive honor with Christ as His faithful servants (1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 22:5). On the other hand, the end for **the unbelieving** will be dramatically different. They are headed toward spiritual destruction. Peter used Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14 to make this point.

Psalm 118:22 referred to **the stone that the builders rejected.** The religious leaders of Jesus' day were prime examples of unbelievers. They had responsibility as builders of God's kingdom, but they rejected Jesus. They rejected Him to the point of conspiring against Him to orchestrate His death. Their rejection, however, was not the final word. God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him. In so doing, God confirmed that **this one has become the cornerstone.** Both Jesus and Peter had used Psalm 118:22 when speaking directly to the Jewish religious leaders (Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11).

The truth is that all unbelievers are building their lives and personal kingdoms while rejecting the most important stone of all. Their judgment regarding Christ's value is not, however, the final word. God has the final word and He has declared Jesus the cornerstone of His kingdom.

Peter used Isaiah 8:14 to show that for unbelievers, Christ is a **stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over.** Stumbles and trips vary in severity. I could stumble on a sidewalk and skin a knee. Then again, I could stumble on a path alongside a high cliff and fall to my death. Peter had in mind something more like a fatal fall. Those who **disobey the word** of the gospel are stumbling headlong into judgment and eternal punishment (2 Pet. 3:1-9). The destruction of unbelievers is not a surprise, since **they were destined for this.**

What was "destined"? Some interpreters think Peter meant that the consequence of disobedience was destined. In other words, it was destined that disobedience results in stumbling. There is obvious truth in this idea, whether it was Peter's point here or not. Disobeying the call to Christ leads inevitably to a fatal stumble into judgment for anyone.

Other interpreters think "they were destined" means that those who disobey were themselves destined to disobey.

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 5 on this page and page 134 for details about "the stone that the builders rejected." Ask a group member to read Psalm 118:22. Make the following points:

- *The unbelieving are headed toward spiritual destruction.*
- *In the passion of Jesus the religious leaders were the prime examples of unbelievers, those who rejected Jesus.*
- *The one thing all unbelievers hold in common is rejecting Jesus, the most important stone of all.*
- *For unbelievers, Jesus is a stone to stumble over or trip over, a fatal fall.*
- *People choose to say yes or no to the gospel invitation.*

DISCUSS: Question #3

(PSG, p. 127): In what ways do people stumble over Jesus and His message today?

(Alternate: How should these verses influence our understanding of those who don't know Jesus?)

TRANSITION: “The next verses mark a clear distinction between those who reject Jesus and stumble over Him, and those who respond affirmatively to the gospel with all of its privileges.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Peter 2:9-10



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:9-10.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** on this page and page 135 to explain the Old Testament terminology and images in this passage:

- *a chosen race*
- *a royal priesthood*
- *a holy nation*
- *a people for His possession*

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 128): Which of the descriptions of God’s people in verse 9 resonate most with you?

Would this interpretation be a denial of people’s personal responsibility to make a real choice for Christ? No. Scripture teaches both that God sovereignly works out His will even through human disobedience and that people are truly responsible for their choices (Acts 2:23; 13:46-48). If Peter did mean that the unbeliever’s disobedience was in God’s plan, he was not suggesting that unbelievers are less than responsible moral agents.

People truly choose to obey or disobey the gospel invitation. Do you need to encourage one of the members of your group to believe in Christ? Why not make time after your next group meeting or in the coming week to talk with that person about trusting in Christ? Christ is the sure foundation both for every believer’s salvation and for every believer’s priesthood. ◀

1 Peter 2:9-10

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

6 ▶ Verse 9. The rich Old Testament terminology and images continued to guide Peter as he described our priestly position and responsibilities. In verses 9-10, Peter drew from Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; and Isaiah 43:20-21.

Through Christ, we are **a chosen race**. God chose Abraham and his descendants. He has chosen us as well (1 Pet. 1:1; Eph. 1:4).

We are **a royal priesthood**. What is the significance of the word *royal*? Peter wrote elsewhere of the “eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). We are a “royal” priesthood because we serve the King of an eternal kingdom.

When God was about to give the Ten Commandments, He signaled His intent for all His people to be priests before

Him: “Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6).

Of course, Israel did not keep the covenant, but God was determined to fulfill His purpose of having a people who would serve Him as priests. As we discovered in our study of 2 Corinthians 3:4-12, God established a new covenant. Under this new covenant believers are **a holy nation, a people for his possession** and God has given us His Spirit so we can fulfill His will in serving Him as priests. ◀

7 ▶ God’s will is that we **may proclaim the praises** of which He is worthy. Some translations have “the excellencies.” God’s excellencies and worthiness of praise are seen in that He **called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. In creation, God called light out of darkness (Gen. 1:2-3). In the exodus, God called Israel out of bondage in Egypt and delivered them by His mighty hand. God has brought us as Christians out of darkness into “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col. 1:13).

If He has “called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light,” then we have seen His excellencies and we can declare His praises. We are called and commissioned as priests to proclaim God to the world. We are His witnesses. We are also called to proclaim Him to one another as His worshipers. ◀

8 ▶ **Verse 10.** Truly, God has dramatically changed our status and experience through Christ. When we were unbelievers we were **not a people** in the sense of having a recognized and right standing in God’s sight. But through Christ we have become **God’s people**. God has committed Himself to us. We are committed to Him. Though all people belong to Him and are accountable to Him (Ex. 19:6; Ps. 24:1; Acts 17:28-29), we are God’s people in a special and wonderful way.

Likewise, there was a time when we **had not received mercy**. We deserved judgment for our sin. Apart from Christ, judgment and punishment are exactly what we would have had. Through Christ we **have received mercy** because He bore our sin in our place (1 Pet. 2:24).

We have so much to proclaim! We are authorized as God’s priests to proclaim God and His saving work to one another and to the world. ◀

GUIDE: Refer group members to the story on **PSG pages 129-130** about Jose Henriquez. He was light in the darkness to the thirty-two Chilean miners trapped in 2010.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** to reinforce the truth that believers have been called “out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 8** to explain that, as unbelievers, we were not a people, but as believers, we become God’s people.

DISCUSS: Question #5
(PSG, p. 130: **What are the practical implications of these verses for believers today?**)

(Alternate: What do these verses teach us about the relationship between God and His people?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity **“Representing Him”** on **PSG page 130**.

LIVE IT OUT**5 minutes**

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**
As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 131)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

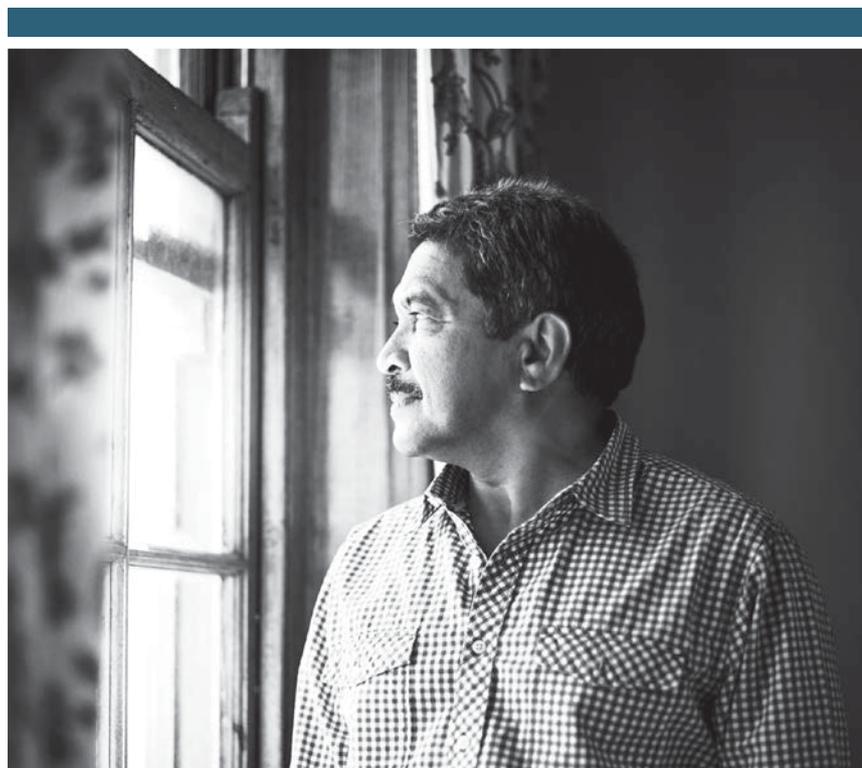
GUIDE: Remind group members that, as God's people, we represent Him to people wherever we go. This is one of our responsibilities that come with the benefits of being His people.

PRAY: "Father, thank you for calling us out of darkness into Your marvelous light. May we shine as lights for You as Your representatives."

LIVE IT OUT

How can you serve Christ this week as His priest and representative?

- ▶ **Express thanks.** Thank the Lord for saving you and including you in His royal priesthood. Thank Him for empowering you and equipping you to live on mission and in service to Him.
- ▶ **Pray for others.** Interceding for others before God was a part of the priest's duties. Contact family and friends and ask how you can be specifically praying for them. Make a prayer list, and regularly intercede for others in prayer.
- ▶ **Proclaim Christ.** As a priest, you represent Christ to others. Identify one way you can "proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Stones that are part of the foundation of Herod's temple at Jerusalem.

Peter wrote to early believers reminding them that Jesus was the "chief cornerstone" and the stone "the builders rejected." He also referred to those believers as "living stones" who were in the process of being built into a "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5,7). Why would such metaphors have been effective with his readers?

The Scripture is full of metaphors. Listeners could identify with the story and its components more readily than with some dry, highly obscure religious speech. One more common biblical metaphor involved construction terminology; specifically, building with stone.

As a metaphor, the Jewish religious leaders who sought to build their own kingdom upon their vanity, authority, and tradition would eventually reject this cornerstone. Jesus' work was to come to earth to build a spiritual kingdom as His Father commanded (John 3:17). Therefore, the "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5) referred to those who were, are, and will be born again.

The living stones become a "spiritual house" (v. 5) through the work of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All followers of Jesus Christ are a continuation of this building metaphor—for each individual living stone is to build upon God's original design using the cornerstone as a point of reference and origination. The structure continues until Christ "relocates" His spiritual house to a permanent and final location—heaven (John 14:3).

The excerpt above is from the article "Building Stones and Stone Buildings" (Spring 2011), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Direct access to God is possible when Jesus becomes the foundation of your life, when you are called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.