



# Exploring Spirituality: Why Would I Want to be Saved ?

Meeting with Jesus

**iFOLLOW**

The iFollow Discipleship Series



## About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

### Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

### Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

### Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

### Credits

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# Why Would I Want to be Saved?

*This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus*

## Learning Objectives

1. Understand that “salvation” is often used in ways that are not correct
2. Learn the original meaning of the word
3. Discover much fuller meanings of salvation in Sacred Scripture
4. Look at three stories that show important metaphors for salvation here and now

## Content Outline

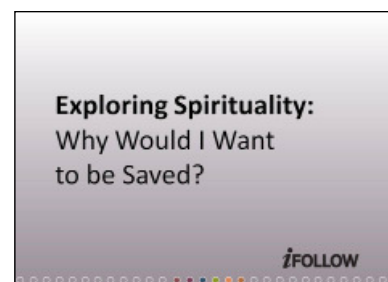
- A. In or out
- B. Salvation in this life
- C. A New Testament story
- D. Other salvation metaphors
- E. Social dimensions of salvation
- F. Three stories about salvation and human response
- G. Conclusion

## Background Material for the Presenter

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human being because even though it is a very large mammal its throat is very small.

The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human being; it was physically impossible.

The little girl said, “When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah.” The teacher asked, “What if Jonah went to hell?”



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The little girl replied, “Then you ask him.”

Many people grow up with a fairly defined view of life: Do good and you go to heaven, do bad and you go to hell. So the basic human problem is trying to do good and trying to not do bad. Your outcome is all about how well you do with one or the other. Some simply give up on the exercise and throw away the whole concept.

Perhaps you’ve had the experience of being confronted by a well-meaning Christian with the blunt question, “Are you saved?” The question most often means, “Are you confident that you’ll go to heaven when you die?” The implication is that the most important thing about life now is to concern yourself with the afterlife. Getting saved means securing your future in the next life.

Theologian and scholar Marcus Borg once stated in response to a question following one of his lectures, “If I were to make a list of Christianity’s ten worst contributions to religion, on that list would be popular Christianity’s emphasis on the afterlife.” Not that the afterlife is wrong. But that the almost exclusive obsession with it is one-sided and incomplete. (Borg, p. 171)

He said there are three reasons why he made that remark. First, whenever the afterlife is emphasized, the almost invariable result is that it turns spirituality into a religion of requirements. If there is a heaven, it doesn’t seem right that everybody gets to go there regardless, so there must be something that separates those who do get to go from those who don’t, namely, something that we believe or do.

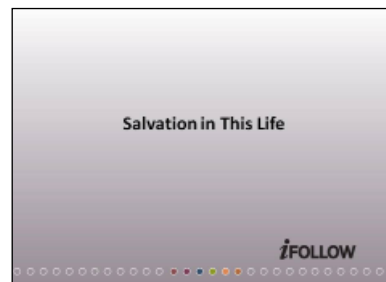
Second, such an exclusive emphasis creates a distinction between an in-group and an out-group: there are those who are saved and those who aren’t. The problem with this over-emphasis is that it too often leads to judgmental and arrogant attitudes on the part of believers, those presumably on the “inside.” The whole point of life becomes convincing people to get inside with you. Nobody outside is good enough or living right. We have what they need and there’s never a give-and-take or sense of mutuality or mutual respect. Everyone needs to be like us. So labels and value judgments are put on people on the “outside.” An “us against them” mentality results.

And third, emphasizing the afterlife focuses our attention on the next world to the exclusion of transformation in this world. Our responsibility to grow and develop ourselves, furthermore make this world a better place goes unnoticed, unprioritized, unimagined or unattended to. The world can go to hell while we get ready for heaven.

None of this critique, says Borg, is to deny the reality of heaven or the afterlife or the importance of it. The point, rather, is to highlight what happens when heaven is made central and when salvation is virtually identified with going to heaven. It becomes a self-centered religion. So what is salvation in its wider context and why would I want to be saved?

## Salvation in This Life

The etymology of the word “salvation” (to save) is fascinating. The concept can trace its lineage clear back to the Sanskrit word *sarvah*. The root, *sar*, became *sal* in the Latin languages. So, for example, we have the French word “*salut*” and the English “*salute*,” to wish someone good health, as well as the words “*salutary*” and “*salubrious*,” promoting health. Later, the word “salvation” became associated with a danger from which one escapes, something that threatens the integrity of a material or physical good.

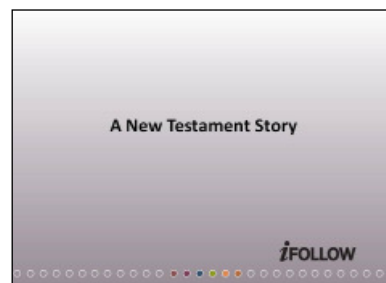


So already, looking at the roots of the word for “salvation,” we get an expanded perspective beyond simply preparing for the afterlife. It has to do with health and healing and wholeness. It involves deliverance from danger. It suggests the significance of integration and congruity whether physical, emotional, relational or spiritual.

That’s why the Greek word (found in the Christian scriptures) *sozo* can be translated both “to save” and “to heal.” It clearly denotes the experience of bringing someone into wholeness and greater wellness in every dimension of life.

## A New Testament Story

Notice how in the following New Testament story both aspects of the word are brought together. The story involves an older woman who had been experiencing bleeding and hemorrhaging for twelve years. She had gone to multiple doctors and consumed all of her finances on treatments that never worked. And to compound her predicament, her religious leaders, according to their beliefs and policy, had declared her spiritually unclean, which meant that she was banned from the synagogue and spiritual community.



She could not access those meaningful religious rituals that would give her a sense of God’s acceptance. So not only was she physically debilitated, she was also emotionally, spiritually and relationally hampered, feeling both the judgment of God and community. A sorry case.

Hearing that Jesus of Nazareth, the rabbi who was whispered to be the Messiah, was healing people and was going to be passing by, she determined to at least get close enough to him to touch his garment. “Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ he said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed from

that moment.” (Matthew 9:20-22, NIV)

Jesus deals with this broken woman on two levels. The word “healed” is used three times and is actually translated in two different ways. In the first instance, the woman wants to touch Jesus’ robe in order to get “healed” physically. In the second instance, when Jesus speaks to her, he says that her faith has “saved” her. And from that moment, says the story, she is “healed” and “saved.” Not only has her body been restored, so has her faith, her psyche and heart. Her physical healing has brought her into reconciliation with herself, with God and with others.

Her need is on three levels: physical health, spiritual health, and relational health. She’s not only broken and incomplete physically, she’s also broken emotionally, spiritually and relationally from a sense of rejection, judgment, failure and unworthiness. She’s in need of wholeness.

So Jesus “heals” her. He heals her body. But He also heals her heart by speaking to her (a woman!) in public, making her name her “shameful” problem out loud in front of that same public, and then publicly affirming her faith and new wholeness. Jesus “saves” her. And her life takes on completeness and wholeness and health in new and transforming ways. There’s never any mention of Jesus “saving” her in order to give her confidence in an afterlife. Her “salvation” on this day is all about Jesus giving her a whole new experience of life at that moment and ever after. She has been reconciled and restored.

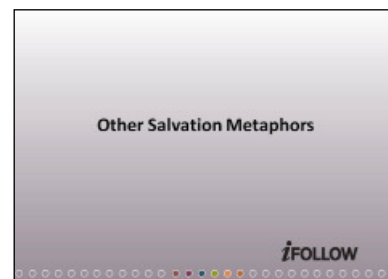
## Other Salvation Metaphors

Dr. Borg makes this observation: “The language of ‘wholeness’ suggests movement beyond fragmentation, and the language of ‘healing’ suggests being healed of the wounds of existence.”

In other words, the problem is multi-dimensional so the solution must be, too. That’s why scripture uses many different metaphors to describe the experience of salvation. The point of salvation is to bring resolution to the correlative problems of the human condition. Salvation is the remedy for those deep human needs.

In the Bible, salvation is: light in our darkness, sight to the blind, enlightenment to the ignorant, liberation for the captives, return from exile, healing for infirmities, food and drink for the hungry and thirsty, resurrection for the dead, new birth from an old life, reconciliation for the estranged, and forgiveness for the guilty. That’s quite a list!

All these metaphors are used in scripture to describe the word “salvation.” And when you look at the comprehensive nature of these descriptions and metaphors for the human condition, no wonder the Bible stories are called the stories of Salvation history, multiple ways God intervenes in the midst of human brokenness, fragmentation and self-absorp-

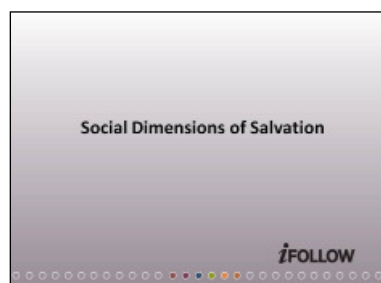


tion in order to bring wholeness, peace and harmony again.

Salvation, put simply, means to be saved from our predicament. And let's face it, our human predicament involves far more than simply being guilty of doing wrong deeds, of "sinning." Our lives have multiple layers and nuances to them. We need transformation on multiple levels and in multiple ways. Salvation is a hugely rich and diverse experience. And what's more, it's not just personal, it's also social.

## Social Dimensions of Salvation

Ancient Israel's story is a story of the creation of a new people, a nation, a community. Salvation is about life together. Salvation is about peace and justice within community and beyond a specific community. It is about "shalom" which is a word connoting not simply peace as the absence of war, but peace as the wholeness of a community living together in peace and justice in harmony with God's dream for the whole world. In the Hebrew Bible, salvation is never only an individual affair.



Significantly, the Christian scriptures of the New Testament continue that social emphasis relative to salvation. Notice the teachings of Jesus. The Magna Charta of Jesus' proclamation about God's Kingdom (the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7) emphasized a higher dimension of communal life motivated by a radical and transforming paradigm, "the kingdom of God is within you." External behavior isn't enough. Internal motivations either heal or hurt. Our responsibility to those who suffer (like the poor, the ostracized, the "sinners," the sick, the guilty, the hungry and homeless, the widows and orphans) is God-given and to be taken as seriously as if we were relating to Jesus himself. This new kingdom of God is not to manifest the qualities and characteristics of the domination empire; ruling through power, control and fear. It is to exhibit the compassion and unselfish service of Jesus who ended up being killed by the social sin of the domination systems of his day.

The rest of the New Testament describes the creation of new communities "in Christ" whose life together embodied an alternative vision to that of empire. These were inclusive communities centered around the life of Jesus manifested by the sharing of necessities, loving and forgiving, serving, healing brokenness and fragmentation, transcending conventional boundaries of their worlds because of an allegiance to an alternative Lord. As one of the primary leaders of this new community, Paul, would put it: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, NIV)

Salvation is not simply about saving individuals for heaven. It's about a new social and personal reality in the midst of this life. It's about God's transforming intervention into our

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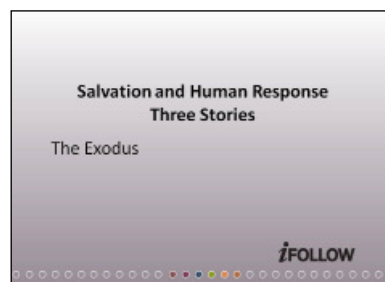


worlds of brokenness and bondage, bringing wholeness and reconciliation and peace. It's about our willingness to be involved in God's work to restore life wherever it is needed.

## Salvation and Human Response—Three Stories

Three biblical stories or narratives provide overarching paradigms for the whole concept of salvation. And those stories suggest some significant ways for human involvement and response.

**The Exodus:** The first is the story of the Jewish exodus from their bondage in Egypt. Our human predicament or problem in this story is shown as bondage and slavery. Though Pharaoh was a historical despot in Egypt during those years, Pharaoh is also a metaphor for what holds human beings hostage and in bondage, internally and externally. We, too, live in the “land of Egypt”, a place of slavery and bondage marked by hard labor and the sense of being trapped, incapable of personal deliverance and freedom, a position of helplessness and victimization.



Salvation, in this story (the solution to the predicament), is an “exodus,” liberation, a way out of bondage. In the New Testament, Jesus is viewed as the second Moses who comes to deliver people from their bondage in an evil empire, whether personal or social bondage. Jesus is the liberator in our exodus story, the one who has come to set the captives free.

As in the original exodus from Egypt, the human response that encompasses the salvation story is twofold: recognize one's state of bondage and slavery, one's need for liberation and deliverance into a life of freedom and wholeness and maturity (symbolized in the original story by God's goal of taking the people to the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, a place of abundance and flourishing life); and second, the willingness to accept God's act of deliverance, the means of liberation and freedom.

In this story metaphor for salvation, the Gospel is about liberation. Salvation is liberation into a life of wholeness, completeness and peace. We recognize our need, the truth about ourselves that we have places of brokenness and bondage that keep us from living in complete freedom. And we willingly accept our journey into deliverance through the means God offers. The point is, without our response (as Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, calls our admitting our need for a power greater than ourselves to free us), we remain in bondage, little or nothing will change in our lives or in the life of the world.

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**The Exile:** The second biblical story of salvation is the story of Jewish exile in the foreign empire of Babylon. This images the human problem as exile, living under an alien empire, a separation from our homeland and a longing for home. It's marked by yearning, grief, loneliness, anger and despair. Psychologically and spiritually, exile is a condition of alienation, a sense of being cut off from a center of meaning and energy, even the sense of being separated from God and others. We live in fragmentation and isolation.

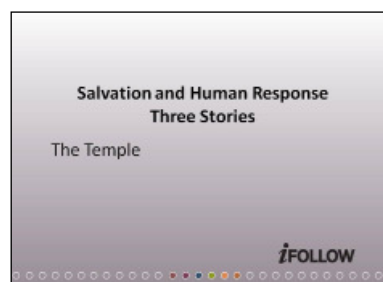
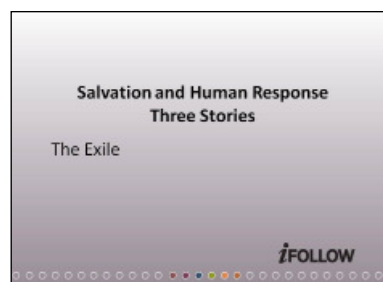
The solution—salvation—is a journey of return, one that God both invites and energizes. This story of salvation is a story of reconciliation, reconnection with the highest Value and deepest Meaning in life. It's about the ending of estrangement and the new beginning of relationship, whether with God or significant others or our place in the world of human family.

Here, too, the New Testament Jesus is introduced as the Way out of exile. The story of his death, burial and resurrection both symbolizes and embodies the way of return and reconciliation. It's the story of homecoming. Salvation, in this metaphor, is homecoming, coming back to our true selves in the midst of alien places and people claiming to give us our identity, coming back to a personal peace with God, and coming back to experience others as Home again, a place we had run from out of fear, hurt, discouragement, distraction, a false sense of satisfaction.

In this salvation story of release from exile, if the exiles in Babylon had not set foot on their journey of return and had chosen to remain, they would be there still. Even so, our human response encompassed by this picture of salvation is to turn our faces back Home again and begin the journey of reconciliation and restoration. It's to be willing to accept our true lineage as sons and daughters of God and the human family. It's to take up our place as people of value and worth and acknowledge that same value in all others. It's to join with God in bringing peace, harmony and shalom to the world so all living things can return Home and live in reconciliation.

**The Temple:** And the third biblical story of salvation centers in the Jewish Temple where animal sacrifices were offered regularly to atone for sins. This story images the human problem as sin and impurity and the corresponding guilt. This story is centered in an institution, the temple in Jerusalem as the place of sacrifice. Sacrifices were offered because sin and impurity prevented entrance into the presence of the holy God.

This story of salvation addresses our profound sense of being stained and soiled, of being sinful and unworthy, of feeling guilty and unacceptable because of our failures and wrong behaviors that hurt ourselves and others. So the power of this salvation solution is in the



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story of being cleansed, forgiven, accepted, and reconciled with God, ourselves, and others.

The New Testament Jesus is presented as both the sacrificial lamb and the priest who offers the lamb. His death as the “once for all” sacrifice for sin replaces the temple and temple sacrifices. Jesus comes to tell the story about forgiveness and acceptance. Salvation is about freedom from the guilt of sin and the power of sin. Jesus’ death and resurrection point the way to a profound release of divine energy that both cleanses the guilty conscience and empowers a new and transformed way of thinking and living.

The human response in this salvation story is significant, as well. It’s one thing to be given a gift of freedom; the prison cell doors are thrown open, providing a new life of freedom and liberation. But it’s another thing to sit in the cell refusing to leave. Freedom can only be accessed by accepting it, by walking out of the cell into the light and choosing to live in the light.

Reconciliation with ourselves, God and others can only be experienced in its completeness and greatest meaning if it’s accepted and lived into. The emotional burden of guilt can only be lifted if we accept its eradication and believe it’s been taken away. Accepting forgiveness is the only way to live beyond the sense of unworthiness caused by our mistakes and failures. People can tell you they’ve truly forgiven you, God can assure you that you’re truly forgiven for your worst and “baddest” sins, but none of those declarations mean anything for you personally unless you willingly accept it, embrace it and live into it. Salvation is the work of God. Yes. And yet we must respond to it to enjoy it in all its multicolored dimensions.

## Conclusion

So with Salvation being defined in such a variety of ways to deal with such a variety of human needs, who wouldn’t want to be saved? Who among us wouldn’t want to feel more whole, complete and at peace? Who of us wouldn’t want to experience deeper healing in all of the broken areas of our lives? Who of us wouldn’t want to truly feel at home in this world – at home with ourselves, with God, and with others? Who of us wouldn’t want to see the world become a place of greater reconciliation and harmony?



A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child’s work. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, “I’m drawing God.”

The teacher paused and said, “But no one knows what God looks like.”

Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, “They will in a minute.”

It’s amazing the kinds of God-pictures people draw. If you were the only artist that could describe God to the world, what would the world think about God from your drawing? That’s a sobering thought, isn’t it?

No wonder God has provided so many different metaphors and stories of salvation. He wants the world to see what God’s kind of life is all about; what the problem is and what the solution is. Applying the right solution to the right problem is significant, otherwise something gets lost in the translation.

As we’ve seen, there’s so much more to salvation than simply trying to keep from sinning so we can make it to heaven in the end. That picture people have drawn is not complete. There’s more to it, for our sake and for God’s.

## Handouts in this Package

1. Participant’s Notes



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## Additional Resources

Marcus Borg, Marcus (2004). *The Heart of Christianity*. New York: HarperOne.

Kreider, Alan (1999). *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

Lawrenz, Mel (2007). *I Want to Believe: Finding Your Way In An Age of Many Faiths*. Ventura, CA: Regal.

McKnight, Scot (2007). *A Community Called Atonement*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

McLaren, Brian D. (1999). *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Willard, Dallas (1998). *The Divine Conspiracy: Discovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What first comes to your mind when someone uses the word “salvation” or asks you, “are you saved?”
2. What new insight have you gained from this presentation?
3. What difference do you think it would make to people in general if “salvation” were seen to be a word for wholeness and healing?
4. Which of the stories spoke most to you? What did you like about the story? Where do you see yourself in the story?

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Discussion  
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## Group Activities

**Purpose:** To practice a new way of thinking about and responding to the concept of “being saved.”

**Preparation:** For this activity, all that is needed is a white board or flipchart and markers, and writing materials for each individual.

**Assignment:** First, lead a short discussion of the meanings of the word “salvation” as outlined in the presentation. Use the list of scriptural metaphors, and the etymology (Sanskrit and Latin roots). Have a scribe make notes on the board. Then have each person write a witty answer to the question “Are you saved?” They could be in the tradition of housewives who began calling themselves “domestic engineers” or the “Sidetracked Sisters,” whose response to “only a housewife” was: “I am accountable for creating a climate of love, peace, joy, beauty, abundance, health, and order in my home. I am raising responsible citizens of the United States of America. What do you do?” (See [www.shesintouch.com/essays/ppfirst.html](http://www.shesintouch.com/essays/ppfirst.html).) So, for example, one’s cheerful answer could be, “Yes, thank you, I am seeking ever-increasing depth, wholeness, and integrity in my physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual life here and now, and forevermore!” Encourage each person to use the meanings that really do most appeal to them personally. Finally, you, as the presenter, obnoxiously ask each person in turn, “Are you saved?” and let them share their answer.

**Debrief:** This exercise is likely to lead to sharing of laughter as well as other emotions and reactions.

**Time:** Keep the first discussion short, no longer than 10 minutes. Then allow five minutes for each one to write their answer, and a minute or two per person to go through the answers. Allow another 20 minutes for debriefing at the end.

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Group  
Activities

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# Handout 1

## Why Would I Want to Be Saved?

“If I were to make a list of Christianity’s ten worst contributions to religion, on that list would be popular Christianity’s emphasis on the afterlife.” (Marcus Borg)

A. It turns spirituality into a \_\_\_\_\_

B. It creates an emphasis on \_\_\_\_\_

C. It focuses our attention on the next world to the \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 1. What does the word really mean?

The etymology of the word “salvation” (to save) is fascinating. The concept can trace its lineage clear back to the Sanskrit word **sarvah**. The root, **sar**, became **sal** in the Latin languages. So, for example, we have the French word **salut** and the English “salute,” to wish someone good health, as well as the words “salutary” and “salubrious,” promoting health. Later, the word “salvation” became associated with a danger from which one escapes, something that threatens the integrity of a material or physical good.

So already, looking at the roots of the word for “salvation,” we get an expanded perspective beyond simply preparing for the afterlife. It has to do with health and healing and wholeness. It involves deliverance from danger. It suggests the significance of integration and congruity whether physical, emotional, relational or spiritual. That is why the Greek word (found in the Christian scriptures) *sozo* can be translated either “to save” or “to heal.” It clearly denotes the experience of bringing someone into wholeness and more complete health or wellness in every dimension of life.

### 2. A Story from the New Testament



“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ he said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed from that moment.” (Matthew 9:20-22, NIV)

**Question:** What are the different ways the word “healing” is used in this story?

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### 3. Other Bible Metaphors for “Salvation”

light in our darkness;

sight to the blind;

enlightenment to the ignorant;

liberation for the captives;

return from exile;

healing for infirmities;

food and drink for the hungry and thirsty;

resurrection for the dead;

new birth from an old life;

reconciliation for the estranged;

forgiveness for the guilty.

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HANDOUT

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**Implications:**

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**4. Social Dimensions of Salvation**

Ancient Israel's story is a story of the creation of a \_\_\_\_\_

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Salvation is \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus' Magna Charta proclaimed what kind of Kingdom?

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"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, NIV)

**5. Three Bible Narratives about Salvation**

A. Exodus from Slavery in Egypt

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HANDOUT

**Exploring  
Spirituality:**  
Why would  
I want to be  
Saved?

What is the human problem?

What is the salvation solution?

What is the human response?

## B. Exile in Babylon

What is the human problem?

What is the salvation solution?

What is the human response?

## C. The Temple in Jerusalem

What is the human problem?

What is the salvation solution?

What is the human response?

## 6. Application

Which of the biblical metaphors for salvation speaks to you the most right now? What does it say to you personally? What does it cause you to feel? What about that “story” gives you the most hope?

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