

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Exploring Nazarene
History and Polity



SESSION 5
Becoming a Disciple

Becoming a Disciple

SESSION OVERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

This session considers religious experience as the foundation for membership, the meaning of being saved, and being entirely sanctified.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand and explain a profession of faith
- have a clear experience and personal faith

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PROFESSION OF FAITH



NOTES

The ritual statement for taking members into the Church of the Nazarene contains this question for the candidate: “Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and do you realize that He saves you now?” *Manual* (paragraph 801)

The statement from the constitution on the general church simply reads, “The Church of God is composed of all spiritually regenerate persons, whose names are written in heaven.” *Manual* (paragraph 17)

Paul writes in Gal. 1:11-12 (Phillips), “The gospel I preach to you is no human invention. No man gave it to men, no man taught it to me; it came to me as a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.” We become a Christian through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Being saved is also the primary requirement for those joining the Church of the Nazarene. Certainly, other membership requirements exist including adherence to certain beliefs, being in agreement with a common lifestyle, and the willingness to submit to an agreed method of governing the church. Yet, meeting these requirements do not qualify us for membership in the Church of the Nazarene. The primary question is whether we have been saved. The other issues of membership are not even raised if we are not saved. The cornerstone is a profession of faith.

What does profession of faith mean? The word faith conveys different meanings. The first is that faith can refer to *beliefs or doctrines*. The Church of the Nazarene has Articles of Faith that denote those doctrines that both align us with other Christians and make us distinctive. A second understanding of faith is a *positive response to revelation*. In order to be saved, we have to take some course of action when God’s grace reveals His love and gospel message to us. The supreme revelation of God is seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. We are born with the need to discover this gospel and with the need to say “Yes” to God. A third meaning of faith would be *trust and commitment*. The third is related to the second because the nature of the positive response to God is that of placing trust in God and committing to Him. Yet here the emphasis is that the entire Christian walk continues on the basis of trust and commitment. This means, in part, we will trust God by obeying His guidance for how we should live.

A profession of faith by members means agreement to common doctrines. Our profession means we acknowledge agreement with the beliefs and practices of both the Christian tradition and in this case, the Church of the Nazarene.

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The common testimony of the Early Christian Church is formally recorded in the creeds of the church. The creeds became the symbol of Christianity. The heart of the creeds would be the statements on Who Jesus was. Salvation is based on the fact Jesus was both human and God. Central to the nature of Jesus was the fact of His resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus became the basis for Christians asserting the fundamental belief of the resurrection of the body.

Christians differed with those who believed only in the eternal nature of the soul and the temporary nature of the body. In 1 Corinthians 15, the assertion is made that at death the whole person is resurrected, including the body. In Christianity, there is a connection between salvation and the body. The gospel frees the person from living just for the cares of the body. Christian testimonies announce that God through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, has freed them from living by lust or the lower instincts of the body. Christians have been renewed in their minds. Christians affirm salvation only in Jesus, the Christ. Christians pledge to live their life based on the Scripture. Christians within the Nazarene tradition proclaim agreement with the holiness doctrines, experience of entire sanctification, and holy living. A profession of faith acknowledges agreement with certain beliefs and practices. Yet, agreement to the community's beliefs and practices is only significant if we have made an act of faith.

The most common meaning for the phrase profession of faith is that we acknowledge we have been converted and are continuing to live by faith. A profession of faith is thus understood to be a testimony or a public statement of the fact we have said "Yes" to God's revelation and is living in commitment to God. Most of the time when we use the phrase profession of faith, we mean the act of conversion or our ongoing relationship with God instead of agreement to doctrines. The profession of faith is an indication God is a reality to us. In an earlier period of Nazarene history, Christian testimonies were an important element of worship services. A Christian would be expected to share his or her conversion experience or even his or her experience of entire sanctification.

Faith is the act of saying "Yes" to the grace of God. A testimony would also be expected to include a report that our experience with God was up to date. Faith is continuing trust and commitment to God. Our living faith is to be professed. A profession of faith indicates we have a current, living relationship with God. We are saying based upon our own experience and confirmation that God is a living God. One example of this meaning of testimony is found in the life of Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, he makes a clear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He affirms that Jesus appeared to him in his Damascus road conversion experience.

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This appearance of Jesus formed the basis of his own authority, as the Early Church looked to leaders who could personally validate the Resurrection. The Early Church wanted those who could testify Jesus was alive. For a similar reason, the Church of the Nazarene wants those who join the church to have the personal validation that Jesus, the Christ of Nazareth, is alive and saves us from our sins. We additionally want the individual to testify to personal, ongoing transformation and spiritual formation.

The focus upon a profession of faith helps us understand that being a Christian and a member in a church, like the Church of the Nazarene, is based upon religious experience. A profession of faith must include—but go beyond—intellectual agreement that God is real and salvation through Christ is real. It must be an indication we personally have been saved and continue to live for God. A profession of faith says God is real to us and we serve Him. When we join a church, we affirm to be in harmony with the doctrines and practices of Christianity and those of the specific denomination we are joining.

Conversion experiences are both similar and dissimilar. For the presentation of the gospel, we normally focus on certain common elements in religious experience. We repent, believe, and are baptized. Yet, we must not forget that different and unique elements comprise an individual's own religious experience with God. The outcome should be the same for everyone in that we are transformed from a life of sin to one of grace. We are redeemed from living according to our lusts, to living for God. However, the psychological dynamics of conversion experiences differ.

In turning to the Bible, we can note the differences of the conversion experiences of Paul and Timothy. Paul had a radical Christian conversion as an adult. The drama of his conversion was instantaneous and somewhat violent as he was knocked to his knees upon seeing a vision from heaven. He went from persecution of Christians to proclaiming the gospel. Timothy, on the other hand, entered faith as a child through the influence of his mother and grandmother. His conversion experience appeared to come more out of a nurturing environment. Different factors affect our conversion to Christianity.

Adults and children may have different dramatic encounters of their faith. What ties these experiences together is a change taking place and a relationship with God.

- Christian faith is more than acknowledgment of certain beliefs, which it is
- Christian faith is more than making a decision for Christ, which it is
- Christian faith is knowing the Christ who is the object of the doctrine and the decision

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We must be more than convinced of the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the body; we must know the risen Lord. Knowing the Lord means a commitment of daily living to God. We trust God is right, so we are obedient to Him. The experience of God leads to a life of trust and commitment to this God.

We become a member of a church if we:

- can testify that we agree with certain beliefs and practices
- are in harmony with this particular community of Christians
- testify to a personal act of faith through which we were saved
- can testify to a continuing, personal relationship marked by obedience to God

What is your testimony today? In order to be a member, we may be asked to testify about a conversion experience. We should also testify about the current state of our spiritual condition. The profession of faith must reflect the present, not merely the past.

WE PROFESS TO BE SAVED AND SANCTIFIED



NOTES

SAVED

In Acts 16:31, Paul and Silas are asked, “What must I do to be saved?” The reply, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and then you will be saved, you and your household.”

To be saved is the basis of our testimony or profession of faith. Nazarenes believe that everyone is born into the world with the need for salvation. We are born in a dependent situation where we need others to share with us the gospel of Jesus Christ. Being saved is not something we earn but is conditioned on the grace of God. Christians talk about being justified by grace through faith. The grace is in the fact that God sent His Son Jesus as atonement for our sins. His resurrection completes the atonement for us. God’s grace occurs as the Holy Spirit leads people to share the gospel with us and through His convicting us of our sin.

For salvation to occur, we have to respond through repentance (an act of faith). Even this act of repentance occurs only through the grace of God Who has created us such that we can respond to His gospel. Repentance means to confess Jesus is Lord and to acknowledge sorrow for our sin. Repentance also means to turn from our sinning. In Romans 13:12-14 (Phillips) we find this admonition:

“The night is nearly over, the day has almost dawned. Let us therefore fling away the things that men do in the dark, let us arm ourselves for the fight of the day! Let us live cleanly, as in the daylight, not in the ‘delights’ of getting drunk or playing with sex, nor yet in quarrelling or jealousies. Let us be Christ’s men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling.”

Mark 1:15 (Phillips) exhorts, “The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news.” God responds to our repentance by saving us with His grace.

Being saved changes how God views us because of what He has done for us in Christ, but it also changes us inside because of what He is doing through the grace provided by Christ. Being saved means we can testify to the reality of God because His Spirit lives within us. Being saved means we begin to be led by the Holy Spirit.

NOTES**SANCTIFIED**

Nazarenes also talk about and testify to being sanctified. The word sanctified means being made holy. It can be understood from two different perspectives. First, sanctification refers to spiritual growth or development. From the time a person becomes saved, until the moment of death, we should be involved in nurturing our relationship with God. We are being transformed. Second, Nazarenes affirm entire sanctification. At the fundamental core of the problem of sin lies the issue of who or what is the central focus of our living.

Salvation and sanctification, in their simplest understanding, deal with the issue of central control in living. Sanctification as spiritual formation addresses the implications of living with God in the center of living. Sanctification refers to the specific, life changes we make in our living. The Holy Spirit and the community (church) inform us of what it means to live for God. Being saved begins the whole process as we enter into a relationship with God. The believer is called to present his or her entire self to God, referred to as entire sanctification. Romans 12:1-2 calls the believer to this radical lifestyle. Nazarenes have affirmed that God through His Holy Spirit will lead the believer to a point where he or she will be expected to commit himself or herself to God entirely. God's response to the believer's consecration is known as entire sanctification.

As with being saved, the drama of the experience of entire sanctification differs based upon personality, context, and age. What would be common is the consecration of the believer and the action of the grace of God to sanctify. Entire sanctification leads to further growth and development as we deal with the implications of what it means to live life with God in the center.

EXPRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP: BAPTISM AND EUCHARIST



NOTES

Protestant Christians participate in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. The Church of the Nazarene expects their members to join in the practices that affirm their faith and join them together with Christians throughout history and the globe.

The Church of the Nazarene has taken an ecumenical position on baptism. We can be baptized as an adult or an infant; as to mode, we can be sprinkled, poured, or immersed. At the beginning of the Church of the Nazarene in the early 20th century, while affirming the practice of baptism, the church did not want it to become a divisive issue; hence the latitude in the forms of practice.

Baptism points to the grace of God in salvation. In infant baptism, the parents are expecting a future time when the child will be converted to faith in Christ. Different from some churches, the Church of the Nazarene does not contend the child has been saved through the act of baptism. Rather, baptism is a symbol of God's grace. Here it is a looking forward to a hoped for future time when the grace of God will lead the person to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The church is also asked to commit itself to help lead this child to Christ. Baptism testifies that salvation comes through the grace of God. The baptism of the infant becomes a teaching tool within the family, to lead the child to personal faith in Christ. The child can be told he or she was baptized in anticipation that he or she would eventually pray to receive Jesus as personal Savior.

The ancient Church followed infant baptism with confirmation, at which time the child could acknowledge personal faith in Christ. For a church like the Church of the Nazarene that does not formally practice confirmation, it would be important to provide forums in which those baptized as infants could give a personal testimony of their faith.

Commonly children go through membership classes and are baptized, if they have not been baptized as infants. A feature of these baptismal services is testimony of personal faith by those being baptized. This service could also be an opportunity for those baptized as infants to give a testimony of their personal faith. Another opportunity to afford a personal testimony of faith would be when we become a member of a local church.

The predominant practice of baptism in the Church of the Nazarene is believer's baptism. Here the baptism looks backward to the time when God's

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grace saved the person from his or her sins. The baptism becomes a public testimony of God's grace and our living faith. If we were not baptized as an infant, the expectation would be that we who have become a Christian would be expected to give a verbal testimony at the time of baptism.

Another ongoing symbol of our faith in Christ and the continuing presence of Christ in our life is the sharing of Communion or the Eucharist. Christ instituted this practice at the last supper. The bread and wine point to the death and resurrection of Christ who actually died for our sins with His broken body and shed blood. The power of the Resurrection constitutes the power by which we are being saved. In participating in Communion, Nazarenes join with Christians in history and throughout the globe, in saying their salvation rests in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is also a statement of Christian unity in Christ. The Eucharist is not an individual act, but one done in community. It is a symbol of community. We acknowledge other Christians as our brothers and sisters in the faith. The Eucharist also witnesses to the continuing presence of God in our life and the need for God to nurture our spiritual growth.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Learn the basic of sharing your faith through reading: Shaver, Charles. *Basic Bible Studies*. No. 1, *What Happened?* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1983). NPH #VE-81.
2. Write an essay to explain:
 - How a person is saved.
 - How a person is entirely sanctified.
 - What a profession of faith means.
 - Why a profession of faith is the basis for membership in a church.

See also: *Stepping Stones Discipleship Series*. Available at:
<http://whdl.org/en/browse/resources/8926>

Be prepared to discuss your essay with your mentor.

3. Write out your personal testimony. Include how you became a Christian and how you know you are presently a Christian.
4. Write out your testimony about when you became entirely sanctified or your journey to being entirely sanctified if you have not been so.
5. Read and reflect on the following paragraphs from the *Manual*: 8-13, 23-27, 701.

See: http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/EN_manual_2013-17.pdf

EXAM



NOTES

1. The ritual statement for taking members into the Church of the Nazarene contains the following question for the candidate: "Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and do you realize that He saves you now?"
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. We become a Christian through _____.
 - A. joining a local church
 - B. being baptized as an adult
 - C. being good and attending a local church on a regular basis
 - D. through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ
3. Faith means which of the following?
 - A. doctrines or beliefs
 - B. positive response to revelation
 - C. trust and commitment
 - D. all of the above
4. We become a member of a church if _____.
 - A. we can testify that we agree with certain beliefs and practices
 - B. we are in harmony with this particular community of Christians
 - C. we testify to a personal act of faith through which we were saved
 - D. we can testify to a continuing, personal relationship marked by obedience to God
 - E. all of the above
5. Which of the following is NOT part of what Nazarenes believe?
 - A. that everyone is born into the world with the need for salvation
 - B. salvation is something we earn
 - C. salvation is conditioned on the grace of God
6. Which of the following is correct?
 - A. being saved changes how God views us
 - B. being saved changes us inside
 - C. being saved means we can testify to the reality of God
 - D. all of the above

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7. Which of the following best describes sanctification?
 - A. never sinning
 - B. spiritual formation
 - C. giving ourselves totally to God
 - D. trying hard to do the right things
 - E. B, C

8. The Church of the Nazarene affirms the following types or modes of baptism
 - A. immersion
 - B. poured
 - C. infant and adult
 - D. sprinkling
 - E. all of the above

9. Participation in the Eucharist at worship services joins Nazarenes with Christians in history and throughout the globe, in saying salvation rests in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. Which of the following witnesses to the continuing presence of God in our life and the need for God to nurture our spiritual growth?
 - A. church attendance
 - B. tithing
 - C. preaching
 - D. celebration of the Eucharist

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Discuss the essay you wrote (how we are saved, how we are entirely sanctified, what is a profession of faith, why is a profession of faith the basis for membership in a church).
2. Discuss the distinction between being saved and being sanctified.
3. Talk about how you could help someone seeking to become entirely sanctified.
4. Discuss the importance of baptism.
5. Talk about what the Eucharist symbolizes.