

Session 1: Saved, Being Saved, Will Be Saved

The three tenses of salvation

PART 1 · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers, in Scripture's own grammar, that the Bible speaks of salvation in three tenses: we *have been* saved, we *are being* saved, and we *will be* saved. Salvation is a past event, a present process, and a future hope, and every one of those is the Bible's own way of speaking.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church holds all three tenses together without flattening any of them. Justification is truly conferred (past), the Christian life is a real growth in grace (present), and final salvation is the object of hope, sustained by the grace of final perseverance for which the Church teaches us to pray (CCC 162, 2016).

What You Need to Know

This study exists because of one question, and tonight you will hand that question to the group in writing: **can a true Christian lose their salvation?** Many of your participants have been asked some version of it on a doorstep, in a dorm room, or by an Evangelical friend: "Are you saved?" Most Catholics freeze at that question, not because the faith has no answer, but because nobody ever showed them that the Catholic answer is the most biblical one available.

Resist the urge to answer the big question tonight. This session does something smaller and more important: it lets the group watch the New Testament use three different tenses for the same word. Paul says "in this hope we *were saved*" (Rom 8:24) and "by grace you *have been saved*" (Eph 2:8). He also says the word of the cross is power "to us who *are being saved*" (1 Cor 1:18) and commands a church he loves to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). And Jesus says "he who endures to the end *will be saved*" (Mt 24:13), while Paul writes that "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (Rom 13:11). None of these texts is obscure, and none is in tension with the others once you see the shape: salvation is a rescue already accomplished in Christ, applied to us and now unfolding in us, and completed in glory.

A grammar note you can hold in reserve (the Dig Deeper box covers it): the Greek verb is the same in all three cases, *sōzō*, "to save, rescue, heal." Ephesians 2:8 uses a perfect participle (a completed action with continuing effect), 1 Corinthians 1:18 a present participle (ongoing action), and Matthew 24:13 a simple future. The three tenses are not a Catholic gloss laid over the text; they are the text.

One pastoral note. Some in your group will have real anxiety underneath this topic: a fear that they are not "saved enough," or a wound from a tradition that demanded a datable conversion moment. Tonight is not the night to resolve that. Let the three tenses do their quiet work: the past tense is solid ground, the present tense is dignity (God is at work in you now), and the future tense is hope, not threat. The study will treat assurance honestly and at length in Session 12.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The Old Testament gives Israel one great salvation story, and the Church has long read it in exactly these three tenses: the Exodus. Israel *was saved* at the Red Sea, a finished rescue she did not accomplish herself. Israel *was being saved* through forty years of wilderness, fed with manna and water from the rock, learning to trust. And Israel *would be saved* in the Promised Land, still ahead of her, and not automatically: the wilderness generation itself fell short, a warning Paul presses and this study will read in full. The whole shape of the Christian life is drawn here first, limits included.

This three-tense reading is the Church's typological map rather than a scheme any single verse states outright, but it is anchored in the apostle's own use of the story: St. Paul makes the connection himself, and makes it as a *warning*. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 he runs through the Exodus (the cloud, the sea, the supernatural food and drink) and then says something that should stop the room: "with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (1 Cor 10:5). People who were genuinely rescued at the sea genuinely fell before the land. "Now these things happened to them as a warning... Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:11-12). Tonight the group only discovers the map; do not preach the warning. The wilderness will return in Session 7.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Augustine of Hippo

On the Gift of Perseverance (c. 428)

Near the end of his life, St. Augustine devoted an entire work to the question of persevering to the end. He teaches, in substance, that final perseverance, actually remaining in Christ until death, is a gift of God and not an achievement we can guarantee from our own resources. That is why, he argues, the Church begs God for it in her daily prayers: nobody asks God for what he already securely owns.

Notice what this does to tonight's three tenses: the greatest theologian of grace in the West treats the future tense of salvation as something to be *prayed for*, held in confident hope rather than carried in the pocket.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Life of Moses (4th century)

Reading the Exodus as the map of the soul's journey to God, St. Gregory teaches, in substance, that perfection in the Christian life is not a finish line we cross but a perpetual pressing forward into God, whose goodness has no limit. To stop moving, for Gregory, is the real danger. And to draw the application (ours, from his teaching): growth itself is what a saved life looks like.

Modern scholars call this his doctrine of *epektasis*, borrowing St. Paul's word for "straining forward" to what lies ahead (Phil 3:13). It is the present tense of salvation, "being saved," given its full dignity: not a sign that the rescue failed, but the rescue working.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. John Henry Newman

An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, ch. 1 (1845)

"In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."

Newman is writing about the growth of doctrine, but the line names something true of every living thing in grace: in this life, standing still is not an option Scripture offers. The middle tense of salvation, the long "being saved," is not a defect in God's plan. It is where we live.

Catechism Connection

CCC 162. Faith can be lost; to live, grow, and persevere in faith to the end, we must nourish it with the word of God and beg the Lord to increase it. The Catechism says this plainly and without panic, which is exactly the register this study wants.

CCC 1996. Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help God gives us to respond to his call. Every tense of salvation, including our cooperation, runs on this. Session 2 is built on it.

CCC 2016. The children of the Church rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance and the reward of God for good works accomplished with his grace. Hope, not presumption and not despair: the study ends here in Session 12 and Session 14, but the note is struck tonight.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH · leader only, never read aloud

Thread 1: the sealed guess (plant tonight). At the end of the session, every participant writes an answer on the Take-Home sheet's My Guess box: *"Can a true Christian lose their salvation? Why or why not?"* Fold, seal, name on the outside, collect them. They open in **Session 8**, after the group has read the warning passages and the mortal sin texts for themselves. Do not debate the question tonight, and do not tip your hand.

Thread 2: the Exodus map (plant tonight). Saved at the sea, being saved in the wilderness, will be saved in the land. It returns in Session 3 (the Red Sea and Baptism, 1 Cor 10:1-2), in Session 7 (the fall in the wilderness, 1 Cor 10:5-12), and resolves at the Promised Land in Sessions 13 and 14. Tonight the group should only see the *map*, not the casualties.

Thread 3: the crown (do not name it). The study's title comes from a verse the group will not read until Session 14. If anyone asks where the title is from, smile and say it will be the last thing we read together. Crown imagery surfaces on its own in Sessions 10 and 11.

Parked question: assurance. If someone quotes 1 John 5:13 ("that you may know that you have eternal life"), affirm it warmly as real Scripture that we will sit with properly in Session 12. Write it on the parking lot list where the group can see it. Do not resolve it tonight.

Session Goals

1. Every participant can name the three tenses of salvation and cite one verse for each.
2. The group discovers the Exodus, read with 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, as the Church's great map of the three tenses.
3. Each participant drafts a personal, biblical answer to the question "Are you saved?"
4. Every participant writes and seals a My Guess answer to the study question, to be opened in Session 8.
5. The anxious hear the night as good news: God is at work in you, now.

Time Note

Plan for 75 minutes: Win 12, Build 45, Send 12, prayer and sealing the guesses 6. If you are running long, cut **Build question 6** and the **Dig Deeper** box (it is on the Take-Home in spirit; the grammar survives without the Greek). Never cut the live discovery in questions 4 and 5, and never cut the sealing of the guesses: the whole study leans on that envelope.

PART 2 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Father, you began a good work in each of us before we could ask for it, and you have promised to bring it to completion. Open the Scriptures to us tonight. Give us honest minds, humble hearts, and the courage to ask real questions. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · Opening Questions

- When you hear the word "saved," what picture comes to mind first: a moment, a process, or a destination? Where do you think that picture came from?
- Has anyone ever asked you, point blank, "Are you saved?" What did you say, and how did it feel?

BUILD · Into the Text

Leader: have three volunteers read Ephesians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18, and Matthew 24:13 aloud, in that order, from their own Bibles. Ask the group to listen for one word that appears in all three.

1. All three passages use the same word: saved. Look closely at the *tense* in each one. What does each passage actually say about *when* salvation happens?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Ephesians 2:8 is past: "by grace you **have been saved** through faith." A completed gift. 1 Corinthians 1:18 is present: the cross is the power of God "to us who **are being saved**." Something ongoing. Matthew 24:13 is future: "he who endures to the end **will be saved**." Something still ahead.

Let the group say it before you do: Scripture itself speaks of salvation in three tenses. Nobody has to choose one verse and explain away the others.

2. Read Romans 8:24 and Philippians 2:12-13. Paul wrote both letters. How does he manage to say "we were saved" in one and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" in the other without contradicting himself?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Because for Paul both are true at once. In Romans 8:24 he adds the key in the same breath: "in this hope we were saved," a past rescue whose completion is still hoped for. And Philippians 2:12 never says "achieve your salvation"; it says work *out* what God has worked *in*: "for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:13). The command to work rests on the promise that God is already working.

If the group lands on "salvation is a gift we have really received and are now living out toward its completion," they have found the session.

3. Romans 13:11 says "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." What does that sentence assume about salvation that surprises people?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It assumes salvation, in its full sense, is still *ahead* of believers. Paul is writing to Christians, people who "first believed," and tells them their salvation is approaching. If salvation were only a past transaction, the sentence would make no sense. This is the future tense in Paul's own voice, spoken without any anxiety.

Live discovery. Say: "This three-part shape did not start in the New Testament. Israel lived it first, in her one great rescue story. Turn to 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 and read it slowly. Paul is retelling a story. Name every event he is pointing to, and find where each one lives in the Old Testament." Give them time with the text. They should surface: the cloud (Ex 13:21-22), the sea (Ex 14), the supernatural food (manna, Ex 16), the supernatural drink and the rock (Ex 17:1-7).

4. Lay the Exodus story over tonight's three tenses. Where was Israel *saved*? Where was Israel *being saved*? Where *would* Israel be saved?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Saved at the Red Sea: a finished rescue Israel did not achieve, only received (Ex 14:13-14, "the LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still"). Being saved in the wilderness: forty years of being fed, led, tested, and taught to trust. Will be saved in the Promised Land: the goal of the whole journey, still ahead.

The Exodus is Scripture's own map of the three tenses. Tell the group to keep this map; the study will walk it to the end.

5. Notice what Paul calls the sea crossing in 1 Corinthians 10:2: Israel was "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Why do you think Paul reaches for *that* word? (Hold your answer loosely; we will earn it properly in Session 3.)

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Paul reads the Red Sea as a foreshadowing of Baptism: a rescue through water that begins a journey. Do not develop this tonight; just let the group feel the door open. Session 3 walks through it.

Build, Then Press

Leader: present this at full strength. Let it land before anyone answers.

A thoughtful Evangelical friend says: **"Scripture says you HAVE BEEN saved, past tense, by grace through faith. It is finished. And to be clear, we grant that Scripture speaks of salvation in past, present, and future tenses; our claim is that everyone truly justified and born again will certainly be preserved by God to final salvation. So when you Catholics say 'I hope so' or 'I'm working on it,' that sounds like you either doubt God's promise or think you can add to what Christ did. Which is it?"**

6. Feel the force of that before answering it. Then answer it, using only verses we have read tonight.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

First, grant everything true in it: Ephesians 2:8 is really in the Bible, the past tense is real, and salvation is by grace, not our own doing. A Catholic should say "I have been saved" without flinching.

But the same Paul wrote "to us who are being saved" (1 Cor 1:18), "in this hope we were saved" (Rom 8:24), "salvation is nearer to us now" (Rom 13:11), and "work out your own salvation" (Phil 2:12); and Jesus himself said "he who endures to the end will be saved" (Mt 24:13). The choice the question offers, past tense or unbelief, is a choice Scripture never makes. The fully biblical answer uses every tense the Bible uses: **I have been saved, I am being saved, and I hope with confidence to be saved.** That is not doubt; that is quoting the whole New Testament instead of one verse of it.

DIG DEEPER · The Grammar Under the Hood

The Greek verb in all three passages is *sōzō*: to save, rescue, heal. In Ephesians 2:8 it appears as a perfect participle, *sesōsmenoi*: a completed action whose effect continues, "you are in a saved state." In 1 Corinthians 1:18 it is a present participle, *sōzomenois*: "those who are in the process of being saved." In Matthew 24:13 it is a simple future, *sōthēsetai*: "will be saved."

Three inspired tenses of one verb. The Church did not invent the three tenses of salvation; she inherited them from the grammar of the New Testament.

SEND · Taking It Out

- Next time someone asks you "Are you saved?", what will you say? Try your three-tense answer out loud on the person next to you, right now.
- Which tense do you personally need to hear most this season: the solid past, the growing present, or the hopeful future? Why?

Live It This Week

Pray the verse. Once a day, pray Philippians 2:12-13 slowly, and rest a moment on "for God is at work in you."

Write the answer. Write out your own three-tense answer to "Are you saved?" in your own words, and keep it in your Bible.

Watch the tense. Once this week, notice yourself thinking of salvation as only past or only future, and gently supply the missing tenses.

The Sealed Guess

Leader: hand out Take-Home 1 now, but before anyone leaves, have everyone complete the My Guess box on the back: "Can a true Christian lose their salvation? Why or why not?" Two or three honest sentences. Fold it, seal it with tape, name on the outside. Collect them all. They will not be opened until Session 8, and no one, including you, discusses them until then.

Closing Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord Jesus, you rescued us at a price we could not pay, you are at work in us now, and you have set a hope before us. Guard what you have begun. Teach us to hold fast. Through the weeks ahead, give us love for your word and honesty with each other. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Philippians 2:12b-13 (RSV2CE)

PART 3 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Passage	Where it is used in this session
Ephesians 2:8	Opening reading: past tense, "you have been saved" (Build Q1)
1 Corinthians 1:18	Opening reading: present tense, "who are being saved" (Build Q1)
Matthew 24:13	Opening reading: future tense, "will be saved" (Build Q1)
Romans 8:24	"In this hope we were saved" (Build Q2, steelman answer)
Philippians 2:12-13	Work out / God works in (Build Q2, steelman answer, memory verse)
Romans 13:11	"Salvation is nearer to us now" (Build Q3)
1 Corinthians 10:1-4	Live discovery: Paul retells the Exodus (Build Q4-5)
Exodus 13:21-22	Discovery target: the pillar of cloud
Exodus 14	Discovery target: the Red Sea; v. 13-14 "the LORD will fight for you"
Exodus 16	Discovery target: the manna
Exodus 17:1-7	Discovery target: water from the rock
1 John 5:13	Parking lot only if raised; assurance treated in Session 12