

LEADER PLANNING

SUPPLIES:

- *Believe Student Curriculum DVD*
- Copies of the **Session 1 Student Handout** (one set per student, provided at the end of this session). Make sure to hand these out to students as they arrive, or make them available for students to easily access at the beginning of your gathering. Always print a few extra copies in case you have a higher number of guests than expected.
- Copies of the **Practice & Imagine** section of this guide for small group leaders (optional for groups which decide to split into small groups)
- **Believe: Student Edition Bible** — Have at least three or four copies of the *Believe: Student Edition Bible* available for students to use if they wish to read the other stories connected with this week's session. Each chapter of the *Believe: Student Edition Bible* looks at multiple Bible stories that further explore the session's Key Observation and themes.

PREPARATION FOR THIS SESSION:

- **Old Testament Story teaching:** For the purposes of this curriculum, it's important to view your role as first-and-foremost a storyteller, providing details and insights that will illuminate the story. Because students are invited to draw their own conclusions from the story toward the end of your gathering time, it's important to try your best to avoid providing any "personal application" for students during the teaching time.
- **Old Testament Story reading:** Pre-assign a student or adult volunteer to read the story of creation, using the Session 1 Old Testament Story Script.

SESSION OUTLINE

Outline for a session that is approximately 50 minutes long:

[Whenever possible, use the time frames listed below for the best experience using this curriculum. However, feel free to adjust the times to fit the specific needs of your group. Including optional material will add approximately 25 minutes to the meeting time.]

Welcome & Introduction	10 min
Old Testament Story – Creation (read, discuss)	15 min
New Testament Story – Jesus' Baptism (watch video)	5 min
Practice & Imagine	20 min

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION 10 MINUTES

LEADER SCRIPT: (please personalize this in your own words)

Hello! Welcome to the very first week of an experience called *Believe*. I'm so excited that you're here, and excited about what we are going to experience over the next few months.

Each week we gather, we'll do a few things that are similar to other weeks, and a few things that are unique to that week. We'll rehearse each week's Key Question and Key Idea together. We'll also spend some time memorizing Scripture. We'll experience a couple of stories from the Bible and consider what they mean for our own lives. And we'll also spend time practicing new ways to believe and engage with God.

What we do each week of *Believe* may be a little different than what we've done here before, or what you're used to. One thing that might be different is that there isn't going to be only one person teaching each week. Instead, *Believe* is based on the idea that when we gather, WE ALL are the teachers. Seriously. I believe one of the best ways we can learn and grow is for all of us to share what we're learning, and trust that God will use what we share to help everyone else in the group learn.

Are you up for it? Are you with me?

LEADER SCRIPT: Are you ready? Great! Then let's get started. I'm going to read this week's Key Question. You can follow along on your student handout if you'd like.

Key Question: Who Is God?

Now before you answer that question I want you to think about where you were in your life just a few years ago. Would your younger self answer differently? Do you think you'll have the same answer five years from now?

[CUE: Ask students for their answers.]

Next let's look at the Key Idea together.

Key Idea: I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[CUE: Ask someone to read the Key Idea aloud.]

Think of a few ways you can personally show this to your community with your own life.

Would anyone like to share an idea?

[CUE: Allow time for students to answer the question aloud.]

As part of the *Believe* experience, it's really important to memorize some key Bible verses. You'll find this week's Key Verse on the first page of your Student Handout. Would someone like to read the Key Verse for this session?

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

[CUE: *Have one student read the Key Verse from the first page of the Student Handout.*]

Here's what I want you to do. I want you to break into pairs and read the verse to each other then read it together.

[CUE: *Give students a few minutes to accomplish this.*]

Take turns recalling the Key Verse.

[CUE: *If time permits, use this activity as an optional tool to help students memorize the Key Verse.*]

Finally, on the back of your paper write down the first letter of each word in one long column. Now, using this list of letters as your guide, see if you can recall the entire verse.

[CUE: *Give students several minutes to accomplish this. Be sure to listen for those who are able to recall the Key Verse from memory and give them some kudos.*]

Great work! Keep working on memorizing the Key Verse throughout the week. There's an activity at the end of your student handout that might help.

We'll start each week by praying. We'll pray in different ways, and for different things each week. But generally, we'll be asking God to help us slow down, notice what we are learning, hear from God, and hear from one another.

For today, I'm wondering if one of you would simply pray in your own words that we will have a great time here today, and that God will use each one of us to help the entire group grow.

[CUE: *Ask for a student to pray a brief prayer.*]

PERSONAL STORIES (OPTIONAL)

[CUE: *Make sure that each student has a copy of the Session 1 Student Handout.*]

LEADER SCRIPT:

Let's start by telling some stories to one another!

What is your very first memory? Not something that you've heard from others about when you were young, but the first thing you can actually remember on your own.

Stop for a second and think about what it is. Then, in your handout, jot down what that memory was, and the main emotion you felt when that event happened.

Now, turn to one or two other people around you and tell your story. Keep it fairly short — maybe 2 or 3 minutes each — but be sure to include some good details. What is your first memory? What can you picture or hear in that memory? How did you feel?

[CUE: *Allow students to tell their stories to those around them for 6-8 minutes. Give students a 1-minute warning before ending this time of sharing.*]

Okay, who has a story you'd like to share with the rest of the group — something particularly funny or entertaining?

[CUE: *Invite one or two students to share their stories with the entire group.*]

Before we move on, take a minute to reflect on the stories we just told. In your handout, quickly answer these questions: Why do you think this is your first memory? What was so memorable about it that you remember it years later?

[CUE: *Allow students 60 seconds to write in their handouts.*]

OLD TESTAMENT STORY 15 MINUTES

LEADER SCRIPT:

Each week, we are going to experience two stories from the Bible. I use the word “experience” because we aren’t going to only read or listen to the stories. Each week, one of the stories will be told using a video. We’ll also experience another story each week using different modes of storytelling. Sometimes we’ll read it out loud together. Sometimes we’ll read it silently. Sometimes we’ll even act it out.

Every week, one story will be from the Old Testament, the collection of books in the Bible that were written before the life of Jesus. Our other story each week will be from the New Testament, the collection of books in the Bible that were written about the life of Jesus, or written shortly after he lived on the earth.

It’s been said that every story has three parts. What do you think they are?

[CUE: Ask students to share what three components they think every story has.]

A really smart philosopher named Aristotle once said that every story has these three parts — a beginning, a middle, and an end. Think about the stories you just told to one another about your first memories. Even if you didn’t tell it that way, your story had all three, right?

It’s helpful to think about stories — our own and others — this way. Stories are not just a list of events that took place. Usually, something significant happens or changes between the beginning and the end. Sometimes, it’s the *people* in the stories that change.

Well, our first story has a beginning, but it’s also about THE beginning. The very start of time...

BACKSTORY 3 MINUTES

Share some of the following thoughts to help students better understand the context of the creation story. Some students may already know about these facts and ideas. Others may not. Be sure to share them in a spirit of helpfulness, rather than coming across as the expert in the room. The goal is to provide a great foundation for students to hear the creation story, either for the first time, or with a new perspective than they may have previously heard it.

- This story, found in the book of Genesis, is not only an account of the beginning of the world, but also the beginning of a story about a specific group of people—the people of Israel.
- A traditional view has been that Moses, someone who shows up in the Bible a little later, wrote this story, and the entire book of Genesis. This view suggests that God revealed to Moses many things that happened before his lifetime, and inspired him to write down all that was revealed.
- For thousands of years, two people groups—Christians and Jews—have viewed the creation account as the beginning of the story of God’s relationship with humans.

Keep all of this in mind as we experience this next story. As the story is read, use your handout to jot down notes or questions you might have.

READ THE STORY 2 MINUTES

Have a pre-assigned student or adult volunteer read the story of creation, using the Session 1 Old Testament Story Script. Students may follow along on the Student Handout.

DISCUSS THE STORY 10 MINUTES

LEADER SCRIPT:

Let's talk about the story a bit more as a group for a few minutes. I'll ask a few questions to guide our discussion, but it's important to remember two things—

First, there's no right answer to any of these questions. They are all questions about what you noticed or think about the story. I'm not looking for the best answer, or a correct answer. I just want to hear what you think.

Second, this is one of the main ways we will learn during the *Believe* series — by sharing our thoughts and ideas with each another. But in order for that to best happen, it's important that you don't use this time to TRY to teach one another. Share things from your personal perspective, rather than telling everybody else what you think they should know. Make sense?

[CUE: DISCUSS — Use the questions below as a general framework for discussion. Select the questions that best fit your group dynamic.]

- What details in the story were most interesting to you? What was most memorable?
- What detail in the story did you find most interesting?
- In what ways did the story talk about God that felt new or unfamiliar to you?
- Are there any thoughts or questions you have about God that you want to think more about, or explore further?
- Do you think that God created the earth in a literal period of time? Why or why not?

If you've heard this story before, did you notice anything different about God when you heard it this time?

Thank you all so much for sharing!

REFLECT ON THE STORY (OPTIONAL)

Share a few of your own thoughts and reflections about how God is portrayed in the story. What is God like? Was there anything you noticed about God for the first time? (If any of your prepared thoughts are shared by students during the discussion time, make sure to reflect that back to the group. For instance, "Brandon, you mentioned that God seems very creative. I was thinking something similar...")

The goal of this time is for you to share your own observations. Be mindful to share in a way that communicates to your students that your observations are not necessarily the "right" observations, but simply what you thought about as you experienced the story, like they did.

In the upcoming Practice & Imagine Section, leaders will share the Key Observation for this Session: God seems involved in ALL of life. God brings the whole universe into existence in the creation story, but God is also personally involved in the story of Jesus' baptism.

Work to prepare and share observations that hint at this key observation. God is bringing the whole universe into being, but where in this story do you see God personally involved with creation?

OLD TESTAMENT STORY SCRIPT

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.¹

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.²

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found.³

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.⁴

¹ Genesis 1:1

² Genesis 2:4–9

³ Genesis 2:15–20

⁴ Genesis 2:21–24

NEW TESTAMENT STORY 5 MINUTES**LEADER SCRIPT:**

Now, we're going to watch a video that tells our second story for the day, a story from the New Testament.

While we watch the video, feel free to jot down in your handout again a few things that popped out at you from the story.

[CUE: Play "God" video from the curriculum DVD (3 minutes).]

[CUE: If your group consists of more than 10-12 people, you may choose to split into small groups at this time. Make sure the discussion leaders have copies of the Practice & Imagine section of the curriculum.]

PRACTICE & IMAGINE 20 MINUTES

LEADER SCRIPT:

Let's talk about how the two stories we experienced relate to each other.

[CUE: DISCUSS] — Use the questions below as a general framework for discussion. Select the questions that best fit your group dynamic.]

- Was there anything John the Baptist or Jesus said or did that reminded you of the first story?
- In what ways do the stories describe God in similar ways?
- Would you describe God as being "Near" or "Far"?

Imagine you just jumped into a pool. How involved are you with the water? As close as you can be, right? It even penetrates your skin cells. Can you think of an example of how God is involved in our lives to that extent?

[CUE: REFLECT AND SHARE] — Many times, students will share an observation that is very similar to the Key Observation written below. In this teaching and learning format it's best to allow students to discover and share this observation themselves, and for you to reflect that observation back to them, and use what they've said to transition to the Key Observation. For instance, if a student says, "It's like God is really involved — both in the world, and in Jesus' life," then you can reflect back to the student: "I love what you said about God being involved. I noticed something like that too..."

If no student provides an observation that helps with this transition, then at the end of the discussion you should move directly to the Key Observation. But make sure you share the observation in the same spirit that the others have shared. You are not teaching here, but rather sharing your own observation. It is not that your observation is the right observation, only that it is one observation that will be helpful for the group during the rest of the small group time.]

KEY OBSERVATION:

One thing I noticed is that God seems involved in ALL of life. God brings the whole universe into existence in the first story, but God is also personally involved in the story of Jesus' baptism.

[CUE: Pause here for a moment, and give students a chance to process what you've just said.]

Which makes me wonder: Do we believe that God is involved in each of our own stories? Do we believe that God is involved in the world around us?

One really exciting thing that we are going to do every time we get together is to take a few minutes and try to practice the belief we are talking about. And when I say practice, I mean practice. We are going to try to actually experience God in a new way over the next few minutes.

Here's what I want us to do...

In your handout, you'll see five icons. Each of the icons represents different areas of life: **Family, School, Relationships, Church, and The World.** For the next few minutes, I want you to answer the following question:

In which of these areas do you need to see God more clearly working or active in your life? We saw in today's story that God is involved in all of creation, from the creation of the world to our personal lives. Where are you currently having trouble seeing or feeling that? Use the next few minutes to write or draw anything that comes to mind.

[CUE: Allow students to write in their handout. Let students know that you are available to help them as they process, but only if they want. Make sure to give students a 1-minute warning to finish writing before moving on.]

Okay, now we're going to reflect on one more question. And this is where the practice part comes in...

In which of these five areas — your family, school, relationships, church, or world — might you see God already involved or at work? Now, depending on what life is like for you right now, or whether you've thought about this question before, this might be a hard thing to do. That's why we call it practice!

I want you to spend another few minutes seeing if you notice any areas of life where you can sense God is already at work, or maybe even think that God might be at work, but aren't totally sure yet. Just like before, write or draw something that comes to mind.

[CUE: Allow students to write in their handout. Let students know that you are available to help them as they process, but only if they want. Make sure to give students a 1-minute warning to finish writing before moving on.]

At the bottom of the page (or on the back if you need it), I want you to write a short note to God. If you were able to think of an area of your life or the world around you where you've noticed God, maybe just say thanks to God for that. Then, spend a minute or so letting God know that you'd like to notice God in those other areas, the areas where right now it's hard to see or feel God.

I'll give you a couple of minutes or so to do that...

[CUE: Allow students to write in their handout. Make sure to give students a 1-minute warning to finish writing before moving on.]

Okay, quick question: Why do you think we could call what we just did "practice"?

Each of you spent time stretching yourselves, trying to see God at work in areas of your life where you might not have noticed God before. That's huge! If God really is at work, around all the time, and personally involved in our lives like we saw in both of the stories today, then it's a huge deal when we notice God around us.

Okay, I'd love it if a few of you would be willing to share what you wrote with the rest of the group. As you share, it will encourage us to trust God in new ways, and we'll be able to encourage you to keep practicing this newfound trust as well.

[CUE: SHARE] — *Invite students to share what they wrote. If no students are willing to share, consider sharing your own answers.]*

CLOSING PRAYER

Great! Thank you all so much for sharing! Let's pray now as we end our time:

[CUE:] *Use this sample prayer as a guide. Or, feel free to insert your own closing prayer.]*

God, thank you so much for the stories of creation and of Jesus' baptism. Thanks for being involved in the world—and in our lives—since the very beginning of time. Help us to live every day knowing that you are with us, and playing an active role in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.