

J. Calvin

(1509-1564)

PLEASE NOTE!

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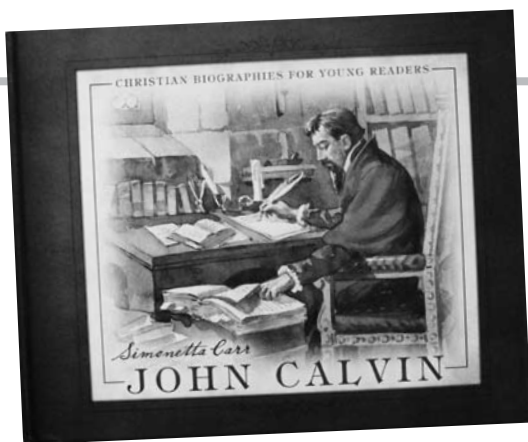
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Illustrations used in the flashcard come from a children's book which we recommend:

CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHIES
FOR YOUNG REDEARS

John Calvin

Author: Simonetta Carr

Reformation Heritage Books,
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Introduction

Our prayer is that through these lessons Christian children follow the example of Jean Calvin - that will learn to trust God to guide them in the decisions they make and to that, in spite of the circumstances in which they find themselves, that they will stand strong in their faith.

Discussion time

For each lesson some discussions questions are given, which can be used after the lesson. This time can be used to reinforce what you have taught, while at the same time giving children the opportunity to discuss situations they are facing.

Make yourself available for counselling

When you present the Gospel message, there will be children who will respond to it independently. They may or may not at a later date tell you that they have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. There will, however, be others who would like some help. They may have questions to ask; they may need help or encouragement in knowing what to say.

As you teach the saved children, there may be times when they would like advice in a difficult situation; they may need clarification on how a particular lesson applies to their daily lives; they may find themselves in a situation where they do not know what the Bible says they should do; they may want to share a difficulty so that you can pray for them, especially if you are the only Christian support they have.

For these reasons it is important that the children know you are available to talk. It is also important that they know when and where to go when they want to talk to you. Finally, it is essential that unsaved children do not confuse coming to the Lord Jesus with coming to you.

In all cases you should not make yourself available at the same time as giving the Gospel invitation, so that the children never get the impression that they cannot come to Christ without coming through you, or that they are saved simply by waiting to speak to you.

An example for use with the unsaved child

“Do you really want to live for the Lord Jesus, but don't know how to come to Him? I will be glad to explain it from the Bible; come and see me. I'll be standing by that tree when the meeting is over. Remember, I can't take away your sin - only the Lord Jesus can do that - but I will be glad to help you understand better how you can come to Him. Just come and sit with me under that tree.”

An example for use with the saved child

“If you have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and you have never told me about it, please let me know. I'll be standing beside the piano after the meeting is finished. I would like to know if you too have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, so that I can pray for you and perhaps help you.”

Lesson 1

Calvin puts his trust in Jesus

Flashcard 1

Four o'clock in the morning.

"It's time to get up!"

Jean Calvin was a young boy of about fourteen years old and a student at Montaigu College in France. There was no question of sleeping in; he was up every week day before dawn. You may think he could always go for a little sleep in the afternoon, but his teachers made him and the other students work very hard from morning until night. Jean probably did not complain much, because he was used to working long hours. Early in life he learned to work hard and do his best in everything.

Map (see page 14)

Jean was born on 10 July 1509 in Noyon in the north of France. His mother had died when he was still very young. His father worked for the bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Jean and his brothers had undoubtedly been taught about God, the Creator of the universe, who is holy and just. They believed that God would only approve of them if they obeyed His rules. The Roman Catholic Church believed there were a number of things you had to do to be saved: go to church on Sundays, be baptised as a baby, confess your sins to the priest, etc. In his family, they followed these rules.

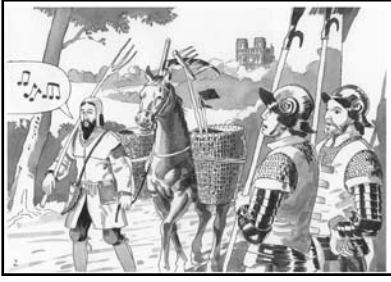
Calvin's portrait

When Jean left college, he studied law to please his father, but on his father's death he decided to go to Paris. He had long wanted to study the ancient languages, Hebrew and Greek, in which the Bible had first been written. He spent many hours studying the Bible. There, he discovered the writings of people called "reformers" or "Protestants" (Martin Luther and others). They taught that man is not saved by his good works but only by putting his trust in the Lord Jesus, God's Son.

We all disobey God's rules and deserve to be far away from Him. But God so loved the world that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross and take the punishment we deserve. Jesus rose from the dead and He is alive today. What He did two thousand years ago is enough to save you. All you have to do is believe in Him. The Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ..." (Acts 16:31). No other condition! When Calvin realised this, he put his trust in the Lord Jesus.



Read (or have an older child read) the verse from your Bible.



Flashcard 2

Now he needed to get away from Paris. Indeed others in the university believed as he did and they talked about it openly. The leaders of the college and the public authorities were shocked and angry. They had to find ways to stop this new teaching from spreading. Calvin and his friends could be arrested any time. How could he escape from Paris without being caught? He dressed up as a farmer and walked past the soldiers without arousing suspicion.



Flashcard 3

The persecution did not stop the Protestants from spreading the good news. Some of them decided to make big posters to encourage others to put their faith in Christ. On 18 October 1534, when people all over Paris woke up, they saw the posters everywhere. There was even one on the wall of the King François I's bedroom. This made the king very angry. He had two hundred Christians arrested and twenty put to death.



Flashcard 4

Jean Calvin knew it was becoming very dangerous for him and his friends to remain in France. He and his roommate decided to flee to Basel, a city just over the French border where they would be safe. They took two servants and rode off on their horses.

It was a long way to Basel and they probably had to stop and rest, feed the horses and buy food for themselves. One of the servants ran away. Why did he run away? Yes, it was probably because he was scared. They realised he had taken their best horse. And more, he had stolen their money. What were they going to do? How could they get safely to Basel? The French soldiers could catch up with them at anytime. Fortunately the other servant had remained and he kindly lent them all the money they needed to get safely to Basel and rent a room there.

Discussion time

- 1 How can you be saved from your sin?
- 2 Today some people say you must earn salvation. What would you say? Can you quote a Bible verse that backs up what you just said?

Lesson 2

Calvin seeks God's will

Front cover

Jean Calvin had settled in Basel. He was safe now, but many were the Protestants who still suffered for what they believed. Some were even killed or burnt alive. Jean did not want to be a coward, running away and hiding, doing nothing for those Christians who stood up for what they believed.

At the age of twenty-six, he decided to write a book in which he would defend simply and clearly what the reformers believed. He studied the Bible carefully and sought to describe God's wonderful plan to save men, women and children. The title of his book was "*Institute of the Christian Religion*". He dedicated it to the king of France, King François I.

Flashcard 5

Jean Calvin enjoyed writing. He would have liked to find a nice quiet place where he would study and write in peace. He decided to move away from Basel and go to Geneva, a beautiful city by a lake. Geneva had become an independent state, no longer under the authority of the Catholic Church. But there were many problems in the city. The people needed laws to keep them from doing what is wrong in the eyes of God and from hurting each other.

William Farel was the church pastor there. When he heard that Calvin was in town, he hurried over to ask him to stay and help him. Farel could not handle the church alone and there was much to do.

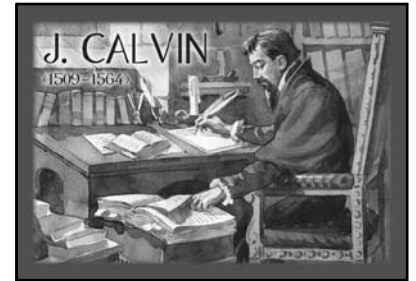
When Calvin explained that he wanted peace to study, Farel said, "If you leave us when we need help so much just because you want a little peace and quiet, God will curse your peace. You won't find it."

For Calvin, it was as if God was telling him to stay. Sometimes you wonder what you should do at school, at home, at play, where to go, whom to listen, how to behave. God can use a Christian friend to make it clear to you what he wants. Calvin listened to Farel and stayed in Geneva.

Flashcard 6

It was not an easy job being a pastor in the church there. Many people came to the services, but they didn't always behave well. They were often very noisy and sometimes rude. The police had even been called in.

Calvin believed that when you came to church, you should behave with respect for others and especially for God. Church is God's house and



we come there to show that we love Him, to worship Him, to listen to His Word and receive His guidance.

Jean told the people that they were not to take the Lord's Supper if they only came to church to talk and make noise. This concerned everybody, whether rich or poor.



Flashcard 7

I do not know about you, but it is not always easy to be corrected and told what to do. It can be annoying to have to change your ways and obey someone God has placed over you. However, Jean knew that the rules he instituted for the church were right and pleasing to God.

Some listened and obeyed, others were angry and despised Calvin. To show how little they thought of him, some called their dogs Calvin.

When the reformer walked down the streets, he could hear, "Hey, Calvin, silly dog, come here!"

But this did not stop him from doing what God wanted.



Flashcard 8

Important people began to complain about Calvin and Farel to the Geneva City Council.

"Why can't we do what we want?" they complained.

The council asked the pastors to change their rules, but they refused wanting to please God rather than men. On 23 April 1538, Calvin and Farel were told that they had three days to leave the city. How sad they must have felt, after trying so hard to help the people in Geneva to serve God! How ungrateful the Genevans had been!

Why was God allowing Calvin and Farel to be chased away? God's plans for our lives are not always easy to understand and He can sometimes lead us through difficult situations, but He knows best! We should keep on trusting Him. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Calvin and Farel had no idea what God had planned for them next. Where should they go? They decided to head back to Basel. Once they got there, they realised God had prepared the way. They both received a call for help. Farel was asked to become the pastor of a church in Switzerland and Calvin of one in Strasbourg (France), then a free republic.

Jean was afraid he would experience the same hardships in this new church as he had in Geneva, but it turned out to be a very happy time.

Flashcard 9

The Christians in the congregation in Strasbourg were people who had escaped persecution in France and they loved the Lord and respected His church. Jean was content.

However, his friends thought he needed someone to look after him, to love him and be his companion for life. Yes! He needed a wife. They came up with lots of suggestions, names of Christian women Calvin knew. But how could Calvin know which one God wanted for him?

One day, you might ask yourself the same question. You might wonder whom you should marry or what kind of job you should do. God can guide you by giving you the peace and assurance that this is the way to go.

When someone suggested Idelette as a possible wife, Calvin, after much prayer, knew she was the right one. She was a Christian widow with two children. Jean had often visited her home to study the Bible with her. In 1540 they were married.

Discussion time

- 1 What important decisions will you have to make in your life?
- 2 How will you find out what God wants you to do?
- 3 What are the different ways He can use to show you His will?



Lesson 3

Calvin stands through trials

Flashcard 10

Idelette and Jean were very happy together. They helped and supported each other. Jean was able to spend more time writing books commenting on parts of the Bible. He became an important figure among the reformers. He was asked to come to a series of meetings in Germany. That would last several months. Today you could take a plane and be there in just a few hours, but in those days you travelled on horseback, on foot or by boat. Calvin was to sail up the Danube River to get to Regensburg. It must have been a very difficult, long and cold journey. The river was almost completely frozen. Finally he arrived safely, but a few days later he received news from his wife Idelette.

“The plague has broken out in Strasbourg. Many are dying. Two students who lived in our house have passed away. We have moved in with some relatives.”

How worried Calvin must have been for his family. He was so far away! How could he help them? There was only one thing he could do - pray and trust God to protect them.

Finally the meetings came to an end and he travelled back home. God had watched over his wife and children. Jean was so thankful!

But many people had lost loved ones. Jean tried to bring them comfort.

Flashcard 11

Soon afterwards Jean received a letter from Geneva. The believers there were calling for help. The church needed a good leader. Jean remembered the difficult and painful years he had spent there and he didn't want to go back. Friends told him he should, but how could he forget the mockery and insults? Finally he realised that this was what God wanted him to do.

“I offer my heart as a sacrifice,” he said and off he went to Geneva.

The City Council offered him a lovely new home where he and Idelette welcomed many guests who had escaped persecution. Calvin never said anything about how much he had suffered.

He started to preach from exactly the same text where he had left off more than three years before. He had forgiven these people.

There can be difficult and painful situations in your life. Walking with God does not mean everything will be easy. You might have to move away from your friends. There might be people who hurt or criticise



you. Like Calvin, make sure you obey God. He will give you the strength and peace you need to endure difficult times. He will bless you and help you to forgive. You will be able to say, "My help comes from the Lord" (Psalm 121:2).



Flashcard 12

Idelette and Jean supported each other especially when times were hard. Their little boy Jacques died. Both were very hurt. In their suffering however, they were able to say, "God, our Father, knows best."

On 19 March 1549, Calvin faced another terrible trial - his dear wife, Idelette, the best companion he ever had, died after a long illness and went to be with the Lord. He could have rebelled against God and said, "That's it! I've suffered enough, I don't want to serve You anymore, it's too difficult!" But Jean did not turn his back on God. He found refuge in the One who could understand and comfort him like no-one else. Idelette's two children were able to count on their stepfather to look after them.



Photo of Geneva Academy

Jean was convinced that people needed to study the Bible more, understand it and put it into practice. He preached from the Word week after week in the church in Geneva and the city became a better place to live in.

But people from all over Europe also needed to be taught. So Calvin started one of the first Protestant colleges in the world and he was one of the teachers. The Geneva Academy was founded in 1559 and trained hundreds of students who became pastors and evangelists. They went back to their countries to teach others God's precious Word. Many of them were arrested or even killed, but these terrible trials never stopped the Protestants from spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.



Flashcard 13

Jean put all his strength into teaching, preaching and writing books. Sometimes he was even far too busy to eat. Imagine having only one meal a day! His doctor had to convince him to take care of himself! He knew Calvin was very weak and very ill. He had terrible chest pains and coughed a lot. He could wake up in the middle of the night in a sweat because of high fever. He sometimes had to stay in bed all day. But all this never stopped him from working. He depended on God to give him strength.

His friends would say, "Why don't you give yourself a break? Stop doing so much! Rest and look after yourself!"

But Jean only answered, "What? Do you want the Lord to find me doing nothing when He comes?"

In February 1564 as he was preaching in the church in Geneva, he began to cough so much that he had to leave the pulpit. He knew he hadn't much more time to live.

The following Sunday, he insisted on going to church. But he could not walk and had to be carried in his chair.

Flashcard 14

Calvin's last days were spent helping the leaders who would soon take over his responsibilities, giving them advice and encouraging them to keep the faith. He also wrote to his friends far away.

When William Farel heard about Jean being so sick, he was determined to see his friend one last time. But Farel was now seventy-five years old. At his age, travelling seventy-five miles on horseback or by coach could seem far too much. However, he made that long journey, just to spend a few moments with his dear companion.

Finally, at the age of fifty-five, on 27 May 1564, Calvin went to be with his Saviour and Lord. Many cried and grieved. They would no longer benefit from his teaching and love for God's Word. At his funeral, a great procession followed his coffin to the cemetery. He was buried just outside Geneva. No stone was set up to mark his grave. Jean did not want people to make his tomb into a monument.

Photo of the "Wall of the Reformation"

If you went to Geneva today, you would find no trace of where Calvin's body lies, but people remember his tremendous passion for the Word of God and his desire to share it with others.

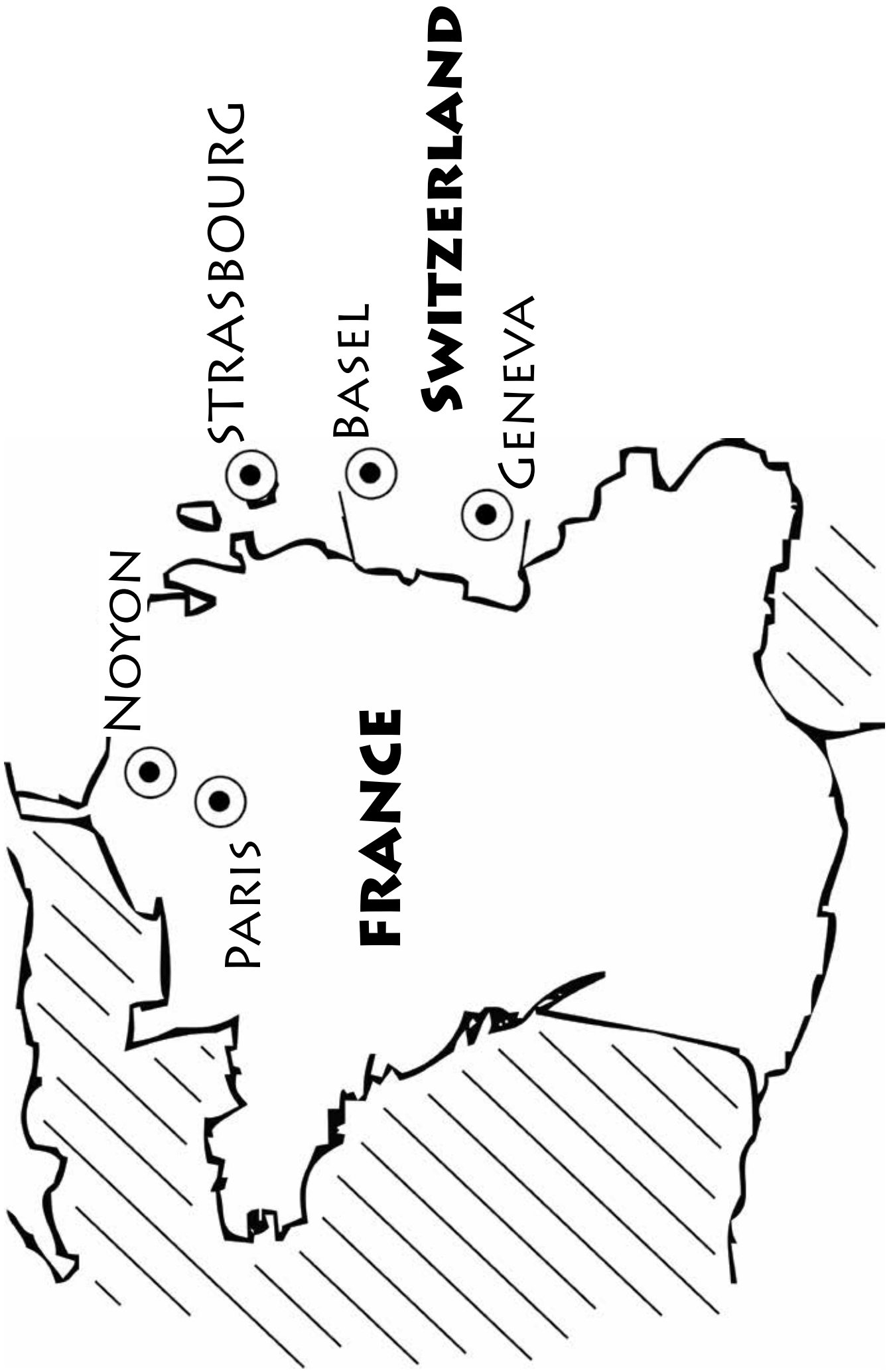
In Geneva, you can visit the "Wall of the Reformation" with four large statues of Jean Calvin, William Farel, John Knox and Theodore Beza. The inscription below says, "Post tenebras lux," which means "after darkness, light."

Yes, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to be "the light of the world" (John 8:12). If you believe in Him, He will help you to walk on the path of light and truth that leads to God our Father.

Discussion time

- 1 Did God promise His children that life would be easy?
- 2 What kind of problems could you face?
- 3 What should you do in the midst of difficulties?





NOYON

STRASBOURG

BASEL

GENEVA

SWITZERLAND

FRANCE

PARIS

Copy, cut out and keep in your Bible



Summary of steps for counselling the child who wants to come to Christ

Make sure the child understands about

God

Who is God?
God made us. He speaks to us through the Bible.
God is holy and pure. He loves us.

Sin

What is sin?
Sin is disobeying God's commands. It is against God.
Speak about specific sins.
The child is a sinner by nature and act. (We sin because we are sinners.)
Sin deserves punishment.

The Saviour

Who alone can take away your sin?
God the Son died on the cross for sinners.
The Lord Jesus rose again from the dead.
He is Lord of all.

Explain how to be saved

Explain what the Lord wants us to do, and what He will do.
Use a Bible verse (*John 1:12; 3:16; 6:37; Acts 16:31; Romans 6:23 or 10:13*).
What does the Lord want you to do?
What will the Lord do?
Warn about difficulties.
Ask: "Do you want to trust Christ, or would you rather wait?"
Encourage the child to pray audibly (if ready).

Speak about assurance of salvation

Go back to the Bible verse you used.
Speak about a changed life.
Tell him what the person who is truly trusting in Christ can know.

Give (later) some advice about the Christian life

Read and obey your Bible.
Talk to God, our Heavenly Father.
Tell others what the Lord has done for you.
Ask God to forgive you when you sin.
Meet with other Christians.
Remember the Lord promises: "*I will never leave you*" (*Heb 13:5*).