

**CHRIS THEULE-VAN DAM**



**16 things you need to know about your faith**

Faith Alive Christian Resources thanks Chris Theule-VanDam for developing and writing this course. Chris is the regional director of Young Life for the Western Great Lakes Region.

Faith Alive staff members Christin Baker and Bob Rozema (retired) also contributed to this course. Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, editor in chief of Faith Alive Christian Resources, wrote the session backgrounds.

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#### **Feedback**

We welcome your comments. Call 1-800-333-8300 or e-mail us at [editors@faithaliveresources.org](mailto:editors@faithaliveresources.org).

# How to Use This Course

This curriculum was developed by Chris Theule-VanDam while working as a Young Life Church Partner at EverGreen Ministries (CRC) in Hudsonville, Michigan. Chris responded to a need to teach foundational Reformed beliefs to high school students in a way that engaged them and was easy to use for leaders. The course he developed does exactly that. It is focused on the Bible and follows the sequence and teachings of the Belgic Confession.

## Audience

*Believe It!* is aimed at high-school-age teens who have either grown up in the church or who are new to the church and its teachings. The course can be used for youth groups, Sunday school classes, weeknight meetings, and similar small group meetings of teens led by one or more adult leaders.

Formats of group meetings will vary according to size and setting and allotted time. If you have a very large group of students, you could try the approach Chris used when he developed this material. His group began their meeting with a light supper or snack, followed by general announcements and some sort of group-building activity. The large group then broke down into small groups, each with its own room and leader, and followed the four-step session plans provided. The meeting ended with the large group reconvening for prayer.

Adapt the course as needed to fit your own particular situation and setting.

## Goals

*Believe It!* aims to have teens

- become acquainted with the basic doctrinal teachings of the Reformed/Presbyterian faith;
- understand how these teachings are rooted in Scripture;
- grow spiritually by interacting with God's Word and with each other;
- recognize and respond to the challenge to live out their faith in the world.

## Approach

Each session follows Larry Richard's format of "Hook, Book, Look, Took" (from *Creative Bible Teaching*, Moody Press). For this course those methods have been renamed *Get Started*, *Get Into It*, *Get Personal*, and *Get Going*.

- *Get Started* opens the session with the group talking and thinking about the subject of the session in an engaging way.
- *Get Into It* always features one or more Bible passages (printed out on the handouts for easy reference) for study and discussion, often in small groups. Because of its easy-to-understand language, *The Message* is used for most sessions.
- *Get Personal* offers a variety of activities that apply the Scripture and doctrinal teachings to the daily lives of teens.
- *Get Going* gives students several choices on how to live out each session during the week.

Each session addresses three domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and volitional; or head, heart, and hand.

Backgrounds for the leader, written by Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, are included in each session. A brief *Words of Our Faith* section, a glossary of terms, is part of every student handout.



## Components

All components of the course are included in this single PDF. It includes

- ➔ **a leader's guide** that offers clear, easy-to-use plans for sixteen sessions. Sessions follow the four-part approach outlined above. Print out a copy of the guide for your use and reference.
- ➔ **student handouts**, one per session. The handouts also follow the four-part session sequence of the leader's guide (*Get Started*, *Get Into It*, and so on). Print out one handout per student for each session.

## The Author

Chris Theule-VanDam is the husband to Arika and the regional director of Young Life for the Western Great Lakes Region (the western half of the state of Michigan along with northwest Indiana). He is the former area director for Eastern Ottawa Young Life, former Young Life Church Partner at EverGreen Ministries (CRC) in Hudsonville, Michigan, and a current member of Spring Valley Community Church (RCA) in Allendale, Michigan. Chris holds degrees in Christian Education and Biblical Studies from Taylor University, as well as a Masters degree in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary.

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# The God Who Knows Us— and Can Be Known

## Focus

God knows everything about us. And, through God’s creation and God’s Word, we can also come to know God.

## Goals

- ➔ Give evidence from Psalm 139 that God knows us.
- ➔ Describe several ways that we can come to know God.
- ➔ Feel assured that God knows us personally and that we can know God.

## Scripture

Psalm 8:1, 3-5; Psalm 119:105; Psalm 139

## The Belgic Confession (for leader reference)

Articles 1-2

## Background

Article 2 is one of the best-known articles of the Belgic Confession. After the first article paints an almost austere picture of God’s divine power and unimaginable goodness, the confession now tells us how we can get to know this God. It uses the wonderful image of God revealing himself in two books.

First, there is the “beautiful book” of the universe itself, “in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God.” By emphasizing that God reveals himself in creation, the Belgic Confession opens up astronomy and biology, chemistry and physics, not just as ways of knowing the world, but as ways of knowing God. That God reveals himself in the “book” of creation guarantees that he will not be shoved into a religious box, separate from the exciting explorations of science.

But creation isn’t the only “book” that reveals God. If God reveals his power and wisdom in the book of creation, he lays bare his heart to us in the Bible. The Bible, inspired and preserved for us by the Holy Spirit, tells the unfolding story of God’s unyielding love for his creation.

Whatever we know of God in the book of creation, wonderful as it is, it cannot save us. The Bible tells us that God is on a mission to restore his fallen creation, and that we are called to be part of that great cosmic renewal movement through Jesus Christ.



### Materials

- Session 1 handout (see Student Handouts section, starting on p. 61)
- Pens
- Newsprint
- Markers

### Get Started (10 minutes)

As group members arrive, take a few minutes to chat with them about their week, how school is going, and so on. Let them know you're glad they are here. Explain that during your time together they're going to learn about some of the basic and really important things we believe as Christians from the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition.

Distribute the session 1 handout. Ask everyone to take no more than three minutes to complete the "I see myself more like \_\_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_\_" activity. Point out that they can add their own comparisons if they wish.

Ask students to share three things they circled and to tell why they circled them. You may want to do this in groups of three to five students each, especially if your class is large.

Once everyone has shared, ask:

- ➔ **How can someone really get to know you?**
- ➔ **Who is the person who knows you best? Why?**

You may want to list responses on newsprint and return to them later in the session.

### Get Into It (10 minutes)

Ask for volunteers to read Psalm 139, as printed from *The Message* on the handout, or give a good, expressive reading yourself. Take a moment to have students do the activity described next to the passage on the handout:

**Circle a line or two that you think best captures the meaning of this psalm. Put an asterisk by a line or two that you especially like, and be ready to say why you like it.**

Either share responses with the entire group or continue in the small group format from the previous step. Be sure to show your appreciation for the answers students give—this will encourage them to respond more freely in future sessions.

### Get Personal (15-20 minutes)

To generate more discussion, give students a few minutes to write down their responses to the *Get Personal* questions on their handout. Allow about five minutes for this, then discuss the questions with the entire group. (You can save time by not having your teens write their responses down and jumping right into the questions.)

- ➔ **What does this psalm tell you about God?**
- ➔ **What does this psalm tell you about yourself?**
- ➔ **On a scale of 1 (doesn't know me at all) to 10 (knows everything about me), how well do you think God knows you? How does it feel to be known by God?**

Invite participants to share their response to the scale question, then talk about how it feels to be known by God. Recognize that some students may find it a bit scary to have someone know so much about them!

➔ **How can we get to know God? How did you personally come to know God?**

Spend some time letting group members tell how they get to know God. They may mention learning about God from their parents, instruction at church or school, reading their Bibles, talking to God, sensing God's presence in nature, stories about Jesus, and so on.

Point out that the church often emphasizes two main ways we come to know God. Have someone read Psalm 8:1, 3-5, and then ask what way of knowing God is being talked about here (God's creation of the universe and of people). Ask your group to think of a favorite place in God's creation and what they could learn about God there. If you wish, label this "general revelation—the way God makes himself known in his creation and care of the world." (See *Words of Our Faith* in session handout.)

Ask someone to read Psalm 119:105 for the second main way we learn about God. Talk about how the Bible was written by people inspired and motivated by the Holy Spirit; it tells us everything we need to know to be saved; it is the very breath of God. You may want to label this "special revelation—the way God makes himself known through his inspired Word, telling us everything we need to know to be saved." (See *Words of Our Faith* in session handout.)

➔ **How is getting to know God similar to or different than getting to know a family member or a friend?**

Refer to your opening discussion about how people can get to know us. Some of the same principles can apply to getting to know God. Just as we need to spend time with our friends to get to know them, so we need to spend time with God to get to know God. Let the group suggest some ways to do that (talk to God as we would talk to a close friend, take time to read God's Word, be aware of God's presence with us throughout the day, and so on).

Remind your teens that the God of the universe, who created the heavens and the earth, is never too busy to spend time with his finest masterpiece—us!

**Get Going** (5 minutes)

Call attention to the *Get Going* section of the handout. Give group members a minute or two to select one or more of the activities to do during the coming week. Be sure to pick an activity yourself and tell students what you plan to do.

- ➔ Make Psalm 139 your devotional reading for the entire week. Read it slowly and carefully every day, then say a prayer to God based on your reading.
- ➔ Write down three specific ways you can develop your relationship with God. Commit to act on these ways during the next month.
- ➔ Take time out of your busy life to be by yourself in a favorite nearby place in God's creation. What signs of God the creator do you see around you? Say a prayer of thanks to God.
- ➔ Talk to an adult you know about how he or she sees God in the way God guides and controls the daily events of our lives (providence).

Optionally, have each person inform one other person of his or her choice of *Get Going* activities. Partners can check back with each other next week. You can use this model more often throughout the course, if it's well-received.

Close your session with prayer. This is a crucial part of getting to know your students' needs and concerns and reasons for thanks and/or praise. Invite your teens to mention things they'd like included in prayer time. Then either lead the prayer yourself or invite students to pray for each other, using the list of things mentioned earlier. You may want to give students an opportunity to pray a line or two from Psalm 139, which is itself a prayer.



# The God Who Knows Us— and Can Be Known

## ★ Get Started

“I see myself more like \_\_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_\_.”

Circle the words in each comparison that best describe you:

- Quiet lake ..... Rushing river  
Magazine stand ..... Library  
Glossy photo ..... Original painting  
Country road ..... Superhighway  
Short story ..... Heavy novel  
Morning ..... Evening  
100-meter dash ..... Cross-country run  
BMW ..... Monster truck  
The 4<sup>th</sup> of July ..... Christmas  
Quarterback ..... Fan in the stands  
Add your own, if you wish:

\_\_\_\_\_ .....

\_\_\_\_\_ .....

## ★ Get Into It

**Psalm 139: 1-16** (*The Message*)

God, investigate my life; get all the facts firsthand.  
I'm an open book to you;  
    even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.  
You know when I leave and when I get back;  
    I'm never out of your sight.  
You know everything I'm going to say  
    before I start the first sentence.  
I look behind me and you're there,  
    then up ahead and you're there, too—  
    your reassuring presence, coming and going.  
This is too much, too wonderful—  
    I can't take it all in!

Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?  
    to be out of your sight?  
If I climb to the sky, you're there!  
    If go underground, you're there!  
If I fly on morning's wing  
    to the far western horizon,

Circle a line or two that you think best captures the meaning of this psalm. Put an asterisk by a line or two that you especially like, and be ready to say why you like it.

You'd find me in a minute—  
you're already there waiting!  
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!  
At night I'm immersed in the light!"  
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;  
night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;  
you formed me in my mother's womb.  
I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!  
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!  
I worship in adoration—what a creation!  
You know me inside and out,  
you know every bone in my body;  
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,  
how I was sculpted from nothing to something.  
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;  
all stages of my life were spread out before you,  
The days of my life all prepared  
before I'd even lived one day.

### ★ Get Personal

- ➔ What does this psalm tell you about God?
- ➔ What does this psalm tell you about yourself?
- ➔ On a scale of 1 (doesn't know me at all) to 10 (knows everything about me), how well do you think God knows you? How does it feel to be known by God?
- ➔ How can we get to know God? How did you personally come to know God?
- ➔ How is getting to know God similar to or different than getting to know a family member or a friend?

### ★ Get Going

Choose one or more of the following options to do this week:

- ➔ Make Psalm 139 your devotional reading for the entire week. Read it slowly and carefully every day, then say a prayer to God based on your reading.
- ➔ Write down three specific ways you can develop your relationship with God. Commit to act on these ways during the next month.
- ➔ Take time out of your busy life to be by yourself in a favorite nearby place in God's creation. What signs of God the creator do you see around you? Say a prayer of thanks to God.
- ➔ Talk to an adult you know about how he or she sees God in the way God guides and controls the daily events of our lives (providence).

## WORDS OF OUR FAITH:

**general revelation:** the way God makes himself known in his creation and care of our world.

**special revelation:** the way God makes himself known in his inspired Word, telling us everything we need to know to be saved.