



## LEADER'S GUIDE

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# Spiritual Life Basics

Course Lecturer: Dr. Sid Buzzell

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**If you have not already done so, it is important that you first review our [Leader's Packet](#) for specifics on how to open, facilitate, and close your group sessions.**

This Leader's Guide walks you step by step through this lesson. Use as much of the suggested material as you find helpful. Some sections have more than one discussion question or idea so you can choose an option that fits your group. Feel free to add other ideas as well. You may also choose to extend this particular lesson to two or more sessions.

The Leader's Guide contains information that isn't covered in the Listening Guides so the group session adds value to those who have completed the Listening Guides.

## Step by Step Through the Study

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As you prepare for the session, you will find information you need to lead the discussion questions in this Leader's Guide.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 1. “Lesson 1 will provide you with the motivation to grow in the Lord; help you with assurance of your salvation; and stress the importance of prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain the motivation for wanting to grow spiritually.
2. Gain assurance on how to be sure you are a Christian.
3. Understand the relationship between prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

*Open the session by introducing yourself and asking group members to do the same.*

- Ask each to share a general fact about themselves—family; where they attended high school; their favorite course or activity in high school; if they could live anywhere in the world, where would they live and why, etc.
- Tell the group this is a general “get to know you” introduction and you will talk about how we relate to life’s spiritual dimensions later in the session.

*Discuss the COURSE purpose from the syllabus (see below). You will introduce the SESSION purpose in a few moments.*

- The New Testament challenges each of us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18 NIV). What does this mean and how do we do this? The *Spiritual Life Basics* course begins with explaining how to know for sure that we have eternal life through Jesus Christ. Then we learn how to develop and grow in our relationship with Jesus through reading the Bible, how to talk with God in prayer, and the importance of being part of a community of believers and sharing our faith in Jesus with other people. We will discuss how we can either begin or actively continue growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ today!

*Talk through the COURSE objectives — listed below. Upon completion of this COURSE, you should be able to:*

- Explain the motivation for spiritual growth and understand the relationship between prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing.
- Understand how to prioritize and cultivate meaningful devotional time.
- Explain how to enhance your own prayer life and explain how Jesus Christ made prayer a priority.
- Explain why church involvement is important and understand the benefits and responsibilities of church involvement.
- Understand techniques for sharing a personal testimony of coming to Christ and explaining the gospel to someone.

*Ask group members to talk about their spiritual journeys.*

- What do they think spiritual growth is all about?
  - ◊ What do they think its purpose is?
  - ◊ What activities do they think are involved in growing spiritually?
- What is their experience with the idea and/or process of spiritual growth (it is sometimes referred to as spiritual formation, discipleship, spiritual mentoring, etc.)?
  - ◊ Never heard of it? Pursued it in the past but stopped? Turned off by it? Casually involved? Deeply committed? Other responses?

*Discuss group members' personal expectations for these five group lessons.*

- Strictly an academic study of the spiritual life process?
- A desire to participate in a growth process, one which they are committed to?
  - ◊ You many want to say that either option is acceptable, OR that this is a group that is committed to participate in the process of growing spiritually, OR it is open to those who aren't sure how they want to relate to spiritual growth but are interested in being part of the group study.
- It is helpful to surface and discuss what the group members' expectations are and are not for this group study.
- Unlike many study groups, this one may involve a mutual commitment to participate in the practices you will study and may also involve expectations, encouragement, and mutual accountability.

- However the group functions, it's wise to make that decision as the group leader or as a group.

## Discussion

### Does God Want to Know Me?

Ask what the core belief is of the Christian faith.  
(*Listening Guide question 1*)

Ask where we begin in our discussion of the spiritual life.

Suggest that before we discuss any other aspect of life it's essential to affirm that the course is based on the belief that *God is a real, personal being and that He wants us to know and relate to Him.*

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Read the first sentence of Lesson 1 and ask the group why many believe that it is the core belief of the Christian faith.*
  - ◇ *“At the core of the Christian faith is the belief that there is one God who has revealed Himself in the Person of Christ and through the pages of the Bible.”*
- *A highly respected Christian theologian/philosopher named Francis Schaeffer wrote a book titled, He Is There And He Is Not Silent. Discuss the importance of those two beliefs as a foundation of Christian faith.*
  - ◇ *The fourth word in our English Bibles determines how we read the rest of the Bible. “In the beginning God!” If we deny God’s existence, or if we misinterpret what the Bible teaches about Him, all that the Bible contains will be distorted.*
- *Ask someone to read Psalm 19:1–3 and summarize its message.*
- *Ask someone to read Psalm 19:6–9 and summarize its message.*
  - ◇ *Remind the group that this psalm is communicating one fact in numerous poetic expressions in verses 6–9.*
  - ◇ *That one fact is that God not only reveals His glory in a general way through His creation (Psalm 19:1–6); He also reveals His glory and power in specific ways through His Scriptures.*
  - ◇ *In the Bible, God “refreshes the soul,” and “makes wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7). Through the Scriptures He “gives joy to the heart,” and “light to the eyes” (Psalm 19:8).*

Read Hebrews 1:1–3 and discuss the fact that in addition to through nature and Scripture, God spoke in an even clearer and more magnificent way.

- *The point is that the heart and foundation of the Christian message is the fact that God has spoken. As the opening sentence of Lesson 1 stated, “At the core of the Christian faith is the belief that there is one*

*God who has revealed Himself in the Person of Christ and through the pages of the Bible.”*

Stress the fact that the Bible records God’s grand story of redemption history from its beginning in the book of Genesis to its consummation in Revelation. The Bible is a book that—from beginning to end—emphasizes God’s patient, graceful invitation to live in an intimate relationship with Him.

Briefly summarize each of the three movements of the Bible’s grand story.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

1. God’s creation of all things—and, especially the creation of man and woman in His own image.
  - *Read Genesis 1:26–27 and discuss three aspects of being God’s image-bearers. Only we humans can:*
    - ◊ *Comprehend and communicate with God.*
    - ◊ *Live in a loving relationship with God.*
    - ◊ *Be responsible to God as stewards of the truth He has revealed to us.*
  - *God created us for a relationship with Him.*
2. The introduction of alienation between God and the humans He created.
  - *Read Genesis 3:1–7. Sin fractured the relationship between God and humanity.*
3. The third movement in the Bible’s grand story is told from Genesis 3:8 to Revelation 22 and it tells us of God’s amazing initiative to restore and maintain that broken relationship.

Ask if anyone can name the individual who will ultimately redeem all people.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

Read Genesis 3:14–15.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *As part of Adam and Eve’s great rebellion against God, God pronounced this judgment on Satan. The promise that, “he will crush your head” (NIV) is the first reference to Jesus’s ultimate victory over Satan.*

Read Genesis 12:1–3.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *In God’s covenant with Abraham, which denotes the birth of Israel as God’s chosen people, note God’s final promise in verse 3: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (NIV).*
- *Then read Matthew 1:1. All the world is blessed through Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

In one sentence summarize your impression of God’s ultimate answer to the separation between Him and humankind.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

- *Immediately after Adam and Eve’s fall in Genesis 3, God introduced Satan’s ultimate defeat, which was fulfilled when Jesus Christ fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham that one of his descendants would bless the whole world.*

Ask the group their response to the amazing truth that God has made it possible to be restored to a healthy relationship with Him.

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

The New Testament is clear about the fact that Jesus came to earth to reveal and fulfill God’s will to finally restore the relationship that was broken by Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Read John 3:1–3 and talk about what Jesus and Nicodemus were discussing.*
  - ◊ *After some discussion about being “born again” (v. 3), Jesus explained His mission and purpose more thoroughly in 3:16–17.*
- *Read John 3:16–17 and discuss Jesus’s own explanation of His mission when Nicodemus, the esteemed Jewish teacher, asked Him who He was.*
- *Read John 1:12–13 and discuss John the Baptist’s view of who Jesus was and why He came.*
  - ◊ *Note especially the three references to being “born”:*
    - » *In John the Baptist’s proclamation (John 1:12–13).*
    - » *In Jesus’s explanations (John 3:1–3 and 3:16–17).*

Go back and read Genesis 2:15–17 again. What was the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit?

- *“You will surely die” (NASB).*

Read Ephesians 2:1–3. What is the condition of people who have not been “born again”?

- *What form does that “death” take if Adam and Eve were alive and people who are not yet born again are alive today?*

Read Genesis 3:8–10 and discuss how Adam and Eve were relating to God.

Read Isaiah 59:2 and discuss how sin influences our relationship with God.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *What are some ways people today “hide” from God?*

Ask if someone can summarize what actually happened to the human race in Genesis 3.

- *Our intimate relationship with God was severed. A great barrier to fellowship between God and man called “sin” created alienation between God and humans. We died spiritually and need to be reborn spiritually to reconnect that broken relationship.*

OR

- *Sin created an insurmountable chasm where once there had been an intimate union between God and man. The same alienation has persisted since that fateful day. God created us for fellowship with our Creator, but we have chosen to go our own way—read Isaiah 53:6.*

Summarize the lesson up to this point:

- *God wants to be known and has revealed Himself in nature, in Scripture, and in His Son, Jesus.*
- *God created us in His own image so that we—and only we—can know and love and communicate with God. Not only does He reveal Himself, but He created us with the capacity to understand and respond to that revelation.*
- *When Adam and Eve “fell,” that relationship was fractured. Our capacity to know and love and fellowship with Him “died.” The single most significant fact that makes us uniquely “human” died when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.*
- *Because we are dead spiritually, we need to be born again—not physically, but born again spiritually to reawaken and restore the capacity we have to know and relate to God as He intends.*

Jesus’s language in John 3:3 and 16–17 about being “born again” carries enormous symbolism when we understand that He was talking about being “born” spiritually.

Paul’s words in Ephesians 2 about being dead in our sins carries the same message in different language. But Paul didn’t stop with his message of death in Ephesians 2:1–3.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Read Ephesians 2:4–9 and discuss the importance of verse 4’s opening word, “But.”*

Discuss Pascal’s description of human emptiness and God’s solution.

- *Ask if group members agree with and/or experience Pascal’s view of each person.*
- *If so, what are some things people who don’t follow God use to try to fill that hole.*
- *Ask if they ever try to fill that hole with things other than God. What do they use?*
- *Discuss what the group thinks Pascal would say to anyone who is trying to fill this, “infinite abyss” with anything but God.*

Break the group into smaller groups of two and ask them to practice what they would say to someone who is searching for something to fill the abyss.

From the discussion so far, ask the group how they would describe God’s attitude toward the alienation between Him and us.

The Bible is clear that God has taken great measures to restore this broken relationship.

Explain that for the next few minutes you want to lead the group through what the Bible says we must do if we want to be “born again” (John 3:16–17) and “be alive in Christ” (Ephesians 4:1–6).

Read Romans 3:23 and discuss what this Bible verse says about the human condition.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Do you believe everyone has sinned?*
- *How would you explain what sin is to a child?*
  - ◊ *Very simply, sin is failure to respond to what God has told us. It is, in a real way, “falling short of the glory” God has created for us to be and to enjoy.*

◇ *Sin is being less than what God created us to be.*

Ask if the group can agree that none of us has lived up to being the person God created us to be.

Read Isaiah 64:6 and discuss the fact that because of our alienation from God and our “dead” condition, we have nothing to offer God that will restore our fellowship with Him.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask someone to summarize what Isaiah 64:6 says to those who reject Jesus’s offer to be born again and try to reconcile themselves to God by their own effort.*

Read Romans 6:23 and discuss the two options Paul presented.

- *“The wages of sin...”*
- *“The gift of God...”*

Read Romans 5:8 and discuss:

- *What motivated God to act on our behalf.*
- *What God did in response to that motivation.*

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and discuss Jesus’s commitment to restoring a relationship with us.

- *How thoroughly did God “save” us?*
- *What parts of our lives did God ignore? (none)*
- *What parts of our lives would He expect us to entrust to Him?*

Read John 1:12 again.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask the group members if they have considered it. Have they accepted Jesus’s offer?*

Ask the group members:

Have you, or are you willing to, pray this simple prayer?

*Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner.*

*Thank You for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin.*

*I want to be born again.*

*I now receive You as my Savior and Lord.*

*I ask You to take control of my life and make me the kind of person You created me to be. Amen.*

As a group read 1 John 5:13–14 together out loud.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

Ask how we can know that this new life in Christ is real. Then read 1 John 1:1–4 and discuss its teaching.

- *In verses 1–2 John assures us that he is sharing what he actually experienced in a relationship with Jesus. We can believe what he’s telling us.*
- *In verses 3–4 John tells us that the only way to know this life is real is to live it. This life is a life of fellowship with Jesus and His people. If we cut ourselves off from this relationship Jesus died to reclaim for us, we will lose the reality of what God offers.*
- *First John 1:1–3 teaches that the Christian life is, first of all, a relationship with God Himself. That’s why He created us.*

Read 1 John 1:5–7 and discuss the fact that the Christian life is a lifestyle guided by obedience to God’s teaching in the Bible.

Read 1 John 5:13 and discuss what John wanted for his readers to experience from reading his letter.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Encourage the group to read 1 John on their own and notice what he says about those who claim to be living in fellowship with God.*
- *You may want to briefly share your own experience of walking with God, or ask a group member who you know has a strong commitment to God to share.*

## **What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?**

Read the first two sentences of this paragraph in Lesson 1.

- *“Experiencing salvation should not be viewed as an event that occurs as a point-in-time but as a point-of-beginning. Once salvation is part of our lives we are called to grow in that salvation and become more like Jesus.”*

Ask the group if this view of Christianity is consistent with their understanding and lifestyle. In what way(s) is it similar or different from their view?  
(*Listening Guide question 27*)

Jesus used the terminology “born again.” When we were born the first time as physical babies, we needed to grow. It is logical that we also need to grow when we are born the second time as spiritual babies.

Read 1 Peter 2:1–2 and discuss Peter’s teaching.

- *Think of your physical chronological age and your matured age. Are they in sync?*
  - ◇ *What is our response when we see a twelve-year-old child acting like a five-year-old?*
  - ◇ *When we see a forty-year-old man acting like a seventeen-year-old?*
- *Now think of your born-again age in chronological years and your spiritual maturity. Are they in sync?*

Read Hebrews 5:11–14 and discuss the author’s concern.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 and discuss Paul’s concern.

Discuss what these three separate New Testament writers (Peter, the unknown author of Hebrews, and Paul) are concerned about.

- *What's the message all three are telling us?*
  - ◊ *Our spiritual maturity matters. We need to be growing.*

The process of becoming more and more like Jesus in our attitudes, characteristics, thinking, and actions is called “spiritual formation.” That is what this course and this group study are about.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask if this approach to Christian living resonates with the group members and discuss responses.*
- *Ask what they think will happen to them if they commit to such a life. What will it involve?*

## **How Do We Start Growing in Christ?**

The Christian life is a life of relationship with God.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask the group how they relate to that idea. Overwhelmed? Interested? Fascinated? Desirous? Scared?*

During the Spiritual Life Basics course and group sessions you will explore four essential components to growing in this new, “born again” life.

- *Learning to hear God speak to us in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16–17)*
- *Talking with God through our prayers (Phil. 4:6–7)*
- *Becoming involved with other Christians (Heb. 10:24–25)*
- *Talking about Christ with those who have not yet come to believe in Him (Rom. 1:16)*

Ask group members if they have questions, concerns, or comments on any of these four components of the spiritual life.

The overall outcome of the spiritual life is that we become more like Christ as we live by His teaching.

- *Romans 8:29*
- *2 Corinthians 3:18*

Review the Lesson Objectives.

- *Can you explain the motivation for wanting to grow spiritually?*
- *Describe how you can be sure you are a Christian.*
- *Review the personal objective you wrote at the beginning of the lesson. How did you do?*

*(Listening Guide question 37)*

## Application

Two main responses are called for in this lesson:

- *If you are not a Christian already, the point of the lesson is to encourage you to become one.*
- *If you are a Christian, the point of the lesson is that you become involved in actively growing as a Christian.*

Ask the group if they have made either of those responses?

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading the overview of Lesson 2. “In Lesson 2, we will learn practical ways to develop a devotional time that builds on a positive relationship with God. In so doing, we will examine Bible texts that show us how to exchange our weakness for God’s strength and to digest spiritual truths that bring joyous life change.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Understand the priority of a relational approach to devotions.
2. Pick a time of day and place for devotions that fits your personality.
3. Learn how to exchange human strength for divine power.
4. Cultivate two-way communication with God through Bible study and prayer.
5. Access different devotional methods.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

Open the session with a brief discussion about how we achieve or acquire things that matter most to us. You may use a quote like Rudyard Kipling’s statement, “If a man doesn’t get what he wants in life it’s a sign either that he didn’t want it badly enough or that he tried to bargain over the price.”

*Ask if anyone in the group has ever pursued a goal that meant sacrificing other things they value to achieve their goal (e.g., running a marathon or 10K, earning a degree, meeting a work deadline, etc.) and talk about what it means to focus on something we really want.*

- Then ask if anyone has ever pursued a relationship with that kind of intensity (e.g., courting a special friend, a significant other, or their spouse).
- How was pursuing a relationship with that person different from and/or like the pursuit of other goals?

*Ask if anyone has ever considered or is involved in developing an active relationship with God.*

- Ask what group members think is involved in relating to God in a personal way.
  - ◊ Ask how it may be like and unlike pursuing other goals or relationships.
  - ◊ Ask what attitudes and activities they think are involved in building an actual, functioning relationship with God.

*Read Genesis 3:8–9 and discuss its two movements:*

- What is God doing in the context?
- What are Adam and Eve doing?
- What does this picture tell us about God and what does it tell us about human nature?
- Review from Lesson 1 what Ephesians 2:1–5 teaches.
  - ◊ Ephesians 1–3 says we were dead in sin and following the lead of the spirit of disobedience to God.
  - ◊ Then verses 4–5 say, BUT God, because of His great love for us, made us alive with Christ.
    - » God created us for a relationship.
    - » We fractured that relationship by sinning and died spiritually.
    - » God has opened the way to rebuild that relationship through His Son, Jesus Christ. We can be “born again” spiritually.
    - » When we are “born again” we are made alive spiritually and, like newborn babies, can begin to grow into a new relationship with God.

In Lesson 2 we will discuss practical ways that we can grow spiritually and cultivate a personal relationship with God.

From the passages below (or you may want to give a brief overview of all of them) establish the fact that God is totally involved in pursuing a relationship with His people.

- John 3:16–17 tells us that Jesus’s whole purpose in coming to earth was to demonstrate God’s intense love for us and to open the possibility of a relationship with Him by paying the penalty for our sin and removing that great barrier that hinders our relationship.
- Matt. 22:35–40, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, and He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind” (Matt. 22:37, NIV).
- In Luke 15 Jesus tells parables where God is cast in the role of a shepherd who searches for a lost lamb (3–7); a woman searching for a lost coin (8–10); and a father longing for the return of a lost son (11–32). Jesus pictured God as the One who takes the initiative in

seeking a relationship with His “lost” people.

- Romans 5:8 teaches that God demonstrated His love for us by allowing Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.
- Romans 8:15 says we have received a spirit of adoption as God’s children and that He invites us to call Him by the intimate name “Abba” or “Daddy.”
- Romans 8:38–39 tells us that nothing can separate us from God’s love.
- Second Thessalonians 2:13–17 teaches us that God has chosen us and set us apart for a relationship—that He loves us and comforts us and strengthens us.

*Ask if anyone doubts that God is open and ready to pursue a personal relationship.*

## Discussion

### Finding Time to Spend with God

All relationships—in marriage, with children or parents, with a friend or a neighbor or a boss—require two persons responding to each other.

Ask group members how they would rank the importance they feel for developing an intimate relationship with God. High? Medium? Low? Not at all?

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

Some people feel guilty or troubled if they can’t honestly answer that their relationship with God is the most important thing in their life.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask what role the group believes guilt should play in maintaining a relationship with anyone.*
  - ◇ *If we spend time with, or give gifts to, or pay attention to our spouse, children or friends because of guilt, how healthy will that relationship be?*
  - ◇ *Guilt may play a part in helping us if we get careless in maintaining a relationship, but as Lesson 2 reminds us, “If we measure our spirituality by counting the number of times we have met with God during the week, we have missed the point.”*
- *Discuss motives that sustain us in pursuing a relationship with another person.*
  - ◇ *Why do we have friends? Or relate to our spouse or our children?*
  - ◇ *Why would anyone invest time in building a relationship with God?*

Ask the group if they have ever experienced any kind of longing or desire to be with a beloved friend or spouse. Is that natural and normal?

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

Ask if anyone in the group has any kind of longing or desire to be with your [you, the group leader's] parents.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Tell the group they are really nice people and you enjoy being with them (if that's true—or select a dear friend whom they don't know).*
- *Or ask if they would get really excited about spending a few hours talking with [name the uncle of someone in the group].*
- *Why not? Obviously, because they don't know these people. They are strangers and we don't normally have a deep desire to spend time with people we don't know.*

Lesson 2 puts it well (in the paragraph beginning “A healthy devotional time...”) when it says, “Couples who are in love do not need to be coerced into spending time together. Each has a deep longing to experience life in relationship with the other person. When life's interruptions keep them apart, each one seeks opportunities to reconnect.”

Many people do not care about time with God like they do spending time with a beloved friend or spouse because they do not know Him or even think of Him in a personal way.

Many others *do* long for time with God and reserve time in their day to spend with Him because they have, over time, cultivated a genuine love relationship with Him. They have discovered through experience in Bible study and prayer that to know God is to love Him.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 and discuss its message.

Read the following paragraph together from Lesson 2 and talk for a few minutes about what it says:

- *“This is what a quiet time is all about. We want to spend time with God to experience His presence, comfort and guidance. And in a mysterious way, as we spend time with God, ‘beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image’ (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV). We find that spending time with God actually changes the kind of people we are.”*

Ask in what specific way, according to the Bible passage, spending time with God changes us.

- *Read the verse (2 Cor. 3:18) from the NIV where it is translated, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

You may want to stop and pray together. Ask God to cultivate a passion in your souls to know Him more intimately and to meet with Him and ask Him to make you more like Him.

## A Relational Approach to Spending Time with God

Someone wisely said, “What doesn't get scheduled doesn't get done.”

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Suggest that, as simple as it sounds, the first step in spending time with God is scheduling the time.*
- *Read Psalm 139:7–10 and emphasize the fact that God is never absent.*

Ask the group when their best time of day is. Some are morning people, some night people, some both, and some appear to be neither.

Ask each person to think about their own schedule and see if they have a time of day that they feel would best work with their schedule.

Suggest that they look at their daily calendar and see where they could set aside 15–30 minutes to meet with God.

## Building a Relationship

Two people who love each other are intentional about spending meaningful time together.

The key to wanting time together is the depth of love between those who meet.

We may need to exercise discipline early on to meet regularly because we don't know God well enough for that deep love to be an incentive.

Ask, if need be, "Are you willing to exert the discipline to keep your appointment with God until your relationship with Him develops?"

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 and discuss its content.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask, "What is the 'prize' we're talking about in this lesson?"*
  - ◊ *A genuine, real, honest relationship with the Living God, our Savior.*
- *Discuss the requirement Paul names for anyone who wants to win the prize.*
  - ◊ *Share, or ask a group member to share, an experience of mastering a skill (e.g. athletic, musical, academic) that required a disciplined commitment to practice or train.*
  - ◊ *Discuss what it means that, "Saying 'Yes' requires saying 'No.'"*

Remind the group that practice for the beginner can be dull and humdrum until enough skill develops to actually play music or excel at a game or get enough conditioning to train comfortably.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

Discuss whether group members are willing to develop a plan that helps them exercise these spiritual disciplines on the days they don't feel like it.

Suggest some ways to set up a devotional time:

Ask the group members to consider what kind of schedule has worked best for them in the past.

Ask if they are highly regimented or more casual about their approach to life.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Discuss the fact that some people work well with goals and schedules and others feel trapped by them.*

What works best for each of them?

- *Illustration: A graduate student with a wife and two young children was taking a full load of classes and working 35 hours a week. His schedule was stretched to the limit. He sat with his family each Sunday evening and made 30-minute appointments for each day with his wife and each of his children. When someone said that sounded cold and impersonal he asked his critic if she had 30 minutes of uninterrupted time each day with her husband and children.*
- *What gets scheduled gets done. Conversely, what we “hope” gets done often gets overlooked!*

Consistency is crucial. Ask group members to form a schedule that works for them.

- *Many have found value in prayers during quiet time, but have added prayer time during commutes, taking part of a lunchtime break, or other periods.*
- *A Bible app on your phone also allows for reading during the day when you have a break. Make “quiet time” work for you.*

Ask group members to think of a place where they can make their quiet-time spot.

- *Some find a place in their home early in the morning or in the evening when life is quiet.*
- *Others who have an office go there before the workday starts.*
- *Some are able to concentrate and read and pray on the train during their commute.*
- *“Quiet” is often more a condition of your mind than of your location. Addressing the noise in your head is as important as addressing the noise in your space.*

Monitor your quiet-time location, hour, and amount of time, and be willing to experiment and adjust. Ask if it is too much, too little, or just right.

Discuss what we should do when we just don't feel like reading the Bible and praying.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *What have group members done with other commitments that had to be kept when they didn't feel like it?*
- *Share ideas and commit to pray for each other's ability to develop a quiet time commitment into a habit they keep as regularly as most people keep their appointment to eat lunch. It's not always convenient, and we don't always feel like it, but we most often do it.*
- *Nike has a good motto: “Just Do It.”*

## **Exchanging Human Strength for Divine Strength**

Ask if anyone feels overwhelmed or lacks confidence because they've been here before with other

commitments—or even this commitment—and it faded with the next day’s sunset. We have great intentions, but somehow the commitment cools off.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *How many have a guitar in the closet; an exercise bike used as a clothing rack; or running shoes that became casual footwear? Or ask the group if they have similar faded commitments.*

Read Isaiah 40:28–31 and discuss this promise from God.

Ask if group members believe that asking God to bolster their discipline and their desire to build a relationship will work.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Read 2 Peter 1:3–5 and discuss.*
  - ◊ *Who is responsible for our godliness in verses 3–4?*
  - ◊ *Who is responsible in verses 5 and following?*
- *The following passages refer to a blend of depending on God and exercising our own discipline. John 14:15–17; 15:4–11; Romans 12:1–8; 15:30–33; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 3:4–6; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 6:10–20; Philippians 4:13; Colossians 1:9–12, 28–29; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17; Hebrews 4:14–16; James 4:7–10; 1 Peter 4:11; 5:6–10.*

## Cultivating Two-Way Communication

This combination of depending on God and participating in a relationship reminds us that our relationship with God is a real, two-way, active relationship.

- *Jesus related to people in conversation. Jesus’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) demonstrates genuine dialogue. Jesus consistently responded to her statements. He “visited” with people through dialogue.*
- *Most of the epistles are dialogues. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1 (NASB), “Now concerning the things about which you wrote...” Paul was interacting with his Corinthian friends in a letter.*
- *God spoke to Moses face-to-face in Exodus 33.*
- *The Bible is God’s message to us and is the primary way He speaks with us today.*
- *The consistent reminders about prayer in both the Old and New Testament tell us that God delights to hear us talk with Him.*

Ask the group how they respond to this kind of personal, even intimate two-way conversation and relationship with God.

Discuss with the group how easy or difficult it is for different group members to have this kind of open relationship

- *With other people. Some are extroverted and find it easy to connect; others find it very difficult to connect; and for some, quite frankly, connecting with others is not a favorite pastime.*
- *With God. Some, by nature, will find it much easier to build an intimate relationship with God, and some will be more reserved.*

Knowing that many people find even casual relationships easier than others do may be encouraging to members of the group who prefer to go a little slower as they open up to God.

- *Have an honest conversation with God about it if you are hesitant and ask Him to help you trust Him enough to become more open.*
- *God is never in a hurry and will give you the time you need to grow in your relationship.*

Encourage group members to develop this relationship at a pace comfortable for them.

- *Don't feel inadequate if you talk with someone who finds it easier to relate to God than you do.*
- *Don't push someone to be more expressive and open about their relationship than they are comfortable with.*

Open a discussion about how God speaks to us in the Bible.

- *Read 1 Samuel 3:21 to the group: "The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel . . . by the word of the Lord" (NKJV).*

Ask someone to read 2 Timothy 3:16, another to read Hebrews 1:1, and discuss what these passages have in common. (God speaks to us through the Bible.)

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *God actually speaks to us and reveals His will in the Bible.*
  - ◇ *Ask group members how they feel when they are talking and the listener ignores them, interrupts them, or in some way disrespects their attempt to communicate.*
  - ◇ *Discuss how engaged we are with understanding God's efforts to communicate with us.*

Discuss three steps involved in "listening" to God speak; in "engaging" God's Word.

- *Observe: Ask, "What does this passage say?"*
  - ◇ *As you read, identify the details of who, what, where, when, why, and how.*
  - ◇ *Read each passage in its larger context. Read paragraphs instead of verses and engage with what the writer was saying to his audience.*
  - ◇ *Read with the Bible's cultural and historical setting in mind.*
- *Interpret: Ask, "What does what I just read mean?"*
  - ◇ *Identify the spiritual truth in the passage that is true for all ages.*
  - ◇ *State the plain, normal meaning of each text you read.*
  - ◇ *Many find it helpful to summarize what the passage means by writing it down.*
- *Apply: Ask, "What does this passage say I should do?"*
  - ◇ *Ask God's Holy Spirit to teach you what He wants you to do with this passage.*
  - ◇ *Lesson 2 suggests, "A key question to ask is, 'In what measurable ways should my life change as a result of reading this passage?'"*

Read James 1:22 and discuss its meaning.

Announce that Lesson 3 is devoted to prayer and you will study this essential discipline more in that lesson.

Read Daniel 6:10 and discuss what we can learn from it. Note: If time allows, work through the exercise below. If not, lead in a brief discussion of the verse.

- *Daniel prayed and gave thanks. Two aspects of prayer: conversation about our needs and expressing thanks to God for what He has done.*
- *Daniel had a scheduled time of prayer that he maintained under any circumstances.*
- *Praying in response to what we read in God's Word is a great combination of spiritual activities. Read to "hear" God and then respond to Him in a dialogue about what you read.*

If you have time, walk through the following exercise where you practice, "Observe/Interpret/Apply" on Daniel 6:10. Or suggest the group members do it between this and the next meeting and discuss then.

### 1. Observe the verse. What does the verse say?

- *From the context, we learn that Daniel is an older man who has served in the Babylonian court for years and is now serving the Persians.*
- *Daniel's enemies had outlawed prayer as a way to trap Daniel in an illegal act. They knew he prayed daily and wanted to discredit him with Darius, the Persian ruler.*
- *Ask, "who" is in this verse? (Daniel)*
- *Ask, "what" is the person doing? (Note the elaborate explanation of what Daniel was doing):*
  - ◊ *Continued kneeling; On his knees; Three times a day; Praying; Giving thanks; Before his God; As he had done previously.*
- *Ask "what" objects are mentioned? (The "document" forbidding anyone to pray to any god; compare to Dan. 6:1-9.)*
- *Ask "where?" Are any place names mentioned? (In his house; in his roof chamber; with the windows open). Once again, notice the way the writer emphasized certain facts with repetition.*
- *Ask "when?" Are there any time references? (after the document forbidding prayer was signed)*

### 2. Interpret it. What does the verse mean?

- *Ask the group to discuss where the emphases are.*
  - ◊ *Daniel prayed after it was forbidden to do so.*
  - ◊ *Daniel prayed on his roof with the windows open.*
  - ◊ *Daniel's prayer is the major focus of the verse and it is explained in great detail.*
- *The law forbidding prayer did not stop Daniel from his customary practice of praying to God three times a day on his rooftop with the windows open. Even a law forbidding prayer did not discourage Daniel's commitment to his relationship with God (notice "prayed, giving thanks to his God" [NIV]).*
- *Daniel was willing to be thrown to the lions rather than miss his time with his God.*

### 3. Apply it. What does it mean I should do?

- *Ask the group to suggest lessons we learn from our brief study of Daniel 6:10.*

## Taking Time to Digest Your Meal

Read Jeremiah 15:16 and walk through it together.

- *“Your words were found and I ate them” (NASB). Jeremiah obviously engaged with God’s words.*
  - ◊ *Found also means, “to acquire, to encounter.” The imagery of “eating” God’s words suggests he devoured and digested them. They became part of his being.*
- *God’s words were a source of joy and rejoicing in Jeremiah’s heart.*
  - ◊ *As Jeremiah understood God’s words, they had an impact on his inner person.*
  - ◊ *“Heart” in the Bible refers to the thinking, feeling, and willing process.*
  - ◊ *God’s words nourished his thoughts and emotions.*
- *“For I have been called by your name, O LORD God of hosts” (NASB).*
  - ◊ *Jeremiah’s encounter with God’s Word reminded him of who he was and to whom he belonged.*
  - ◊ *His relationship with God was revitalized by his exposure to Scripture.*

Ask the group what their experience has been with the Bible. Has it produced new teachings and challenges?

## Writing It Down

The lesson suggests that we keep a journal of our discoveries from reading the Bible.  
(*Listening Guide question 19*)

Discuss why people journal.

- *They have a record of important events in their lives—“marker” events.*
- *They can compare where they are with where they were—this helps keep them on a growth track.*

Suggest that group members consider keeping a record of:

- *What God is teaching them—specific things they learn from reading Scripture.*
- *Their responses to what they have learned and how it is changing their lifestyle—their attitudes, values, and behaviors.*
- *Their commitments they make to God, to themselves, to other people.*
- *If they date their journal they will have a record of commitments made, of prayer requests and answers, of progress in their relationship with God, with people and with events.*

Suggest the group try writing short letters to God as a way to record their prayer thoughts. Remind them that’s where most of the psalms came from.

## Varying Your Methods

Suggest a periodic change in devotional reading.

- *Include both Old and New Testaments, the Gospels, Psalms, and Proverbs.*
- *Some people listen to Christian music periodically as a change of pace.*
- *There are some excellent devotional guides:*
  - ◊ *Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest*
  - ◊ *Reading the Bible through in a year guides*
  - ◊ *Our Daily Bread devotionals, for instance, are available at odb.org.*

Ask if the group has favorite devotional books they would recommend.

Almost any devotional book we use will introduce its thoughts with a Bible passage. Be sure to read the Bible passage along with the devotional thought.

Discuss ways that we relate to other people.

- *Some prefer texting or email or writing letters.*
- *Some prefer face-to-face, and in those relationships, some prefer talking and some listening.*
- *With God we add silently, meditatively thinking our thoughts to God and then quietly listening for His Holy Spirit to respond.*

The key to this whole process is to find comfortable ways we can relate to God and to do so regularly.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 3. “In Lesson 3 we will examine how Jesus Christ made prayer a priority, learn a helpful prayer guideline based on the acrostic ACTS, and see how to take the divine dialogue with us out into the day.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain how Jesus Christ made prayer a priority.
2. Follow the devotional guideline represented in the acrostic ACTS.
3. Bring the divine dialogue with you into the day.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

*Open with a discussion about prayer.*

- Ask group members how they would define or describe prayer, or how they would explain what it is to a child.
- Ask why people pray.
- Ask them why they pray.
  - ◊ To say thank you to God, to express praise or worship, saying the blessing at meals, prayers in church, to ask for things, etc.

- ◇ If no one mentions it, ask how prayer fits into the purpose of this course—to build a stronger relationship with God.
- ◇ Along with other reasons, discuss with the group how prayer contributes to our personal knowledge of, our trust in, and our love for God.

## Discussion

Since prayer is part of a relationship with God that has some similarities to our relationship with our earthly father, take a moment and reflect on how your experience with your father may influence your relationship with your Father in heaven.

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

- *Illustration: A Bible teacher was talking with a group of troubled teenagers and he referred to God as “Father” a few times in his talk. The sponsor suggested to the Bible teacher that when he returned for the next session with the boys he not refer to God as the boys’ father. So many of them had deadbeat or abusive fathers that casting God in that role was a problem.*
- *Discuss how our view of God—whether related to our earthly father or not—influences how we think about prayer. Is God our Santa Claus; our judge; a distant relative; a scary, abusive authority figure; a loving, accepting father figure, etc.?*

An important reason to spend time reading Scripture is that it informs and shapes our view of the God we pray to.

Ask how this truth that we can refer to God both as “Father” and as an “Abba” influence how you view God.

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

Ask someone to read Romans 8:15 and discuss the two legitimate ways to address God.

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *“Father” focuses on His transcendence—the fact that He is Almighty God, Ruler of the universe.*
- *“Abba” focuses on His immanence—the fact that He is deeply involved in our lives.*
- *Discuss which image of God group members are most comfortable with.*
- *Discuss how we must balance the two images in our minds as we pray. Either image without the other can give us a distorted view of God. He is both at the same time.*

Ask if anyone is more comfortable with one of these terms than they are with the other.

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

Ask in what ways do their prayers reflect this image of God as “Abba, Father”? In what ways do they not reflect this image?

- *His transcendence is reflected in our worship and in our confession.*
- *His immanence is reflected in our expressions of love, trust, requests for things.*

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

## Jesus's Priority of Prayer

Read Mark 1:35–39.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if Jesus prayed more or less than most people pray today.*
- *Since Jesus was in constant communication with God, why would He take time to actively pray?*
  - ◇ *Because of His love for His Father, He took time to communicate.*
  - ◇ *Because He was wise enough to know how important prayer is to everything we do.*

## Seeking Isolation and Communion

Read Mark 1:35 again. Note two points Mark emphasized:

- *Jesus rose before most people were awake.*
- *He went out; He departed—and Mark told us—“to a solitary place” (NIV, note the repetition for emphasis).*

Ask the group why they think Jesus wanted or needed this quiet time in isolation with His Father.  
*(Listening Guide question 6)*

- *He was committed to a sinless life (2 Cor. 5:21—He knew no sin). But since He was tested in all things as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15), He was aware of His need for God's support.*
- *Jesus was depending on gaining strength from His Father because He was committed to the highest ideals of a sinless life. He prayed with such power because He wanted to live with power.*

Jesus verbally taught His disciples to pray, but He also modeled a life of prayer for them.

Jesus taught and modeled godliness. He was devoted to a holy life. He felt great compassion for people and healed them. He was committed to His mission to seek and save lost people (Luke 19:10).

- *The higher our goals and the more we care about them, the greater we will feel a need for prayer.*
- *If we plan to do or be nothing special, we will not feel a need for God's help in our lives.*

Ask the group members to honestly evaluate their lifestyle and identify aspects of their daily routine for which they feel a need to ask for God's help.

## Listening to God's Direction Amid Distraction

Read Mark 1:36–38.

It's an interesting concept that Peter “hunted down” God's Son because he had a question.  
(*Listening Guide question 8*)

### Ideas for Discussion

- *In your prayers do you ever feel as though you need to hunt down God to get a response?*
- *Do you ever feel as though you may be annoying God with your persistence?*
- *Read Psalm 40:1 and discuss the fact that the psalmist (probably David, who had an intimate relationship with God) needed to be persistent in prayer at times.*

Jesus lived a full and active life.

- *Mark used the word immediately forty times and emphasized how busy He was.*

He obviously put a high priority on prayer—arising “a long while before daylight” to pray (Mark 1:35).

Ask if Jesus's life was driven more by pressure or by purpose and discuss the difference.

- *Jesus was guided by purpose—He had a mission to accomplish and, therefore, He was guided by that purpose. Prayer was an essential part of accomplishing that purpose.*
- *Jesus's very busy and purpose-driven life always included time for prayer.*
- *Because of His purpose He lived with pressure of time and priorities just like we do. However, in the story Mark told us in Mark 1:36–38, Jesus wasn't pressured by Peter to meet the crowd that was looking for Him.*

Ask the group what interruptions — external and internal — hinder their prayer times.  
(*Listening Guide question 10*)

Reflect on Lesson 1, where you discussed scheduling quiet times, and ask how group members are doing with their commitment to communicate with God through Bible reading and prayer.

Jesus was persistent in prayer because of His strong focus on His mission. Ask, “What are some of the urgent concerns and passions in your life that prompt or drive you to prayer?”  
(*Listening Guide question 11*)

Discuss how our prayers teach us about ourselves.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Illustration—Ask if anyone was ever told to “Just listen to yourself!”*
- *Suggest that we “just listen to ourselves” when we pray. How much time is spent in praise, in worship, in thanksgiving, in confession, in asking blessing for others?*
- *How many of our prayers are focused on ourselves?*

- *How many of our prayers are focused on others and on asking God to help us make a difference in our world?*

Ask group members to reflect on their prayers over the past week and write down in a few words what it tells them about themselves. If not happy with the result, what could they do about it?

## Carrying Out Application

Read Mark 1:39. Jesus went and preached in the synagogues and cast out demons. He did two things that only God can do.

- *He preached the need to be born again. Only God's Holy Spirit creates new birth. Jesus said a person must be born of water (physical birth) and the Spirit (born again) in John 3:5.*
- *He cast out demons. Demons do not respond to human power—only to God's power (Jude 9).*

Ask group members what they face during their days for which they know they need God's wisdom and strength for.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if prayer gives them faith and courage to stretch and grow beyond their current capacity.*
- *Ask if they have troubling issues in their lives that they feel are beyond their current capacity.*

The point of this discussion is to encourage group members to begin seeing God as their “ever-present help in time of trouble.”

## One Helpful Approach to Prayer

Discuss the actual practice of praying.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if group members actually do pray.*
- *What do they pray for?*
- *How comfortable and confident are they in their prayers?*
- *Do they think there's a “proper” or more beneficial way to pray than how they pray now?*
- *Do they have any pattern in their prayers?*
- *Is there a right and wrong way to pray or does it not matter how we pray?*

Suggest the ACTS approach as a way to be a little more comprehensive in prayer. ACTS stands for:

- *Adoration – Confession – Thanksgiving – Supplication (asking for things)*

## Adoration: Worshiping God for Who He Is

Read Revelation 4:11 and explain that “Adoration” is just that—it is telling God that we recognize

His glory and majesty.

Discuss the difference between Adoration and Thanksgiving. Mention that often when people use the ACTS approach, the Adoration step ends up being more like the Thanksgiving step. People are thanking God for things He has done for them.

Ask if they express awe and worship to God because of who He is and what He is like (Adoration) in addition to expressing appreciation for what He does for us (Thanksgiving).

- *In the Adoration step of prayer avoid saying, “Thank you”; instead say, “We adore you because...”*
- *Notice the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9 (KJV), “Our Father, who art in heaven...”*
  - ◊ *Hallowed be your name*
  - ◊ *Your kingdom come*
  - ◊ *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
    - » *Jesus taught us to begin our prayer with adoration.*

Ask if they have trouble finding ways to adore God and suggest that it is not uncommon because many people don’t know that much about God. If they need help developing the Adoration step, suggest they start this part of their prayer with a praise psalm. Some ideas you can suggest are:

- *Psalms 19:1–2; 8:1–3; 9:1–2; 29:1–11; 65:1–13; 89:1–2; 92 to 101; and Isaiah 6:1–4*

Begin your prayer by acknowledging God for who He is.

## Confession: Acknowledging Sin

How honest are you with the God who knows everything you think and say and do? Read Psalm 32, Psalm 5,1 and Psalm 40 as illustrations of genuine confession and repentance. (*Listening Guide question 16*)

Read 1 John 1:9, where God promises to forgive us when we confess our sin.

## Thanksgiving: Thanking God for His Grace

Read Philippians 4:6 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 and discuss Paul’s instructions about giving thanks.

## Supplication: Asking God for Things

Read Luke 11:11–13 and 1 John 4:14–15 and discuss God’s will as the most foundational request we make.

- *Read Matthew 6:10—The Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.*
- *Read Luke 22:42—Jesus in Gethsemane said, “Not my will, but your will be done”.*

Ask the group how easy—or difficult—is it for them to ask for help? Or for material gifts? Or for things to meet their needs?

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *Some find it very difficult to humble themselves by being placed in a needy role.*
- *Others have a “You owe me” attitude.*
- *Ask how they would teach a child to balance these attitudes when asking God for things?*

Discuss how group members feel when they ask God for things.

*(Listening Guide question 20)*

## Prayer as a Way of Life

Psalm 139:7–12 reminds us that we are never absent from God’s presence. Read those verses and write a brief statement in your journal to remind yourself that God is never absent from you even though you may be “absent” from God.

*(Listening Guide question 21)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Discuss the implications of God’s omnipresent (present everywhere, all the time) nature.*
- *From God’s perspective, when are we NOT in touch with Him? (NEVER!)*
- *Every word and every thought we have is, in a real sense, a kind of “prayer.”*

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and discuss how that works.

- *We are to live in the reality that God is aware of every thought and every word. Our LIFE is a prayer.*

Read John 15:5 and discuss what it means to abide in Christ. He is inviting us to participate in a mutual relationship of His constant presence.

Suggest that group members write a brief statement in their journal to remind them that God is never absent from them even though, mentally, they may feel “absent” from God.

## Carrying the Divine Dialogue into the Day (Luke 24:13–32)

### A. Encountering Jesus in Real-Life Problems

Read Luke 24:13–16. What were these two men struggling with?

- *Overwhelming disappointment and discouragement. They thought Jesus was the Messiah and the Romans had crucified Him. Their hopes were destroyed and their friend was dead.*
- *“Their eyes were restrained” (NKJV) or “they were kept from recognizing him” (NIV).*
- *In Luke 9:44–45 and 18:31–34 Jesus had told the disciples He would be crucified and they didn’t grasp*

*it. The point is, Jesus's crucifixion shocked and bewildered His followers. They could not believe it when He told them it would happen nor could they believe it when it happened.*

Ask if anyone can relate to these two men. "Has anyone ever been totally confused by life? By what God is doing?"

## B. Trying to Make Sense of God's Ways

Life's pressures can be triggers to remind us that He knows and cares about us. When life gets sour or tough, do you ask Him for patience and love to deal with the situation?  
(*Listening Guide question 23*)

Read Luke 24:17–24.

- *Jesus's questions in verse 17 and verse 19 showed that He cared about their concern.*

Read John 14:15–21 and discuss Jesus's teaching there.

## C. Letting Jesus Explain Himself

Read Luke 24:25–26. Discuss Jesus's reply, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe." The gospel is hard to get our minds around. It is a difficult story to comprehend (1 Corinthians 1:18).

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if anyone ever gets confused or doubts or wonders how all this can be true.*
- *Read John 15:25–27 and discuss Jesus's teaching there.*
- *Read James 1:5 and discuss why James tells us to ask for wisdom*
  - ◊ *Because we are all slow of heart to believe. We wrestle with life and it doesn't always work.*

Lead a brief discussion about these nuts and bolts, these fundamental realities of prayer. God is there to help us and prayer is a real benefit all the time.

## D. Learning to Keep the Conversation Going

Read Luke 24:28–29.

When we ask God for knowledge or for wisdom, we need to wait for an answer.  
(*Listening Guide question 25*)

- *Suggest setting aside enough time for prayer at least once a week so they are not watching the clock and have time to ask God:*
  - ◊ *For help in the hard times.*
  - ◊ *For wisdom when they "don't get life."*
  - ◊ *For strength when they feel exhausted.*
- *And then to quietly wait and "listen" for God to silently "speak" into their minds.*

## E. Responding to Glimpses of Divine Activity

The intimate picture of the men’s eyes being opened and finally recognizing Jesus is one we should all be growing into. How much do your prayers resemble a conversation with a known, respected, and loved friend?

*(Listening Guide question 26)*

Read Luke 24:30–32.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Discuss how much your group’s prayers resemble a conversation with a known, respected and loved friend.*
- *Ask if there are suggestions for ways to make our prayers more like this kind of conversation.*

Read Luke 24:33–35. The end of this story should encourage us to pray for God’s insight and wisdom. These two men were despondent and discouraged. They doubted and wondered what God was doing. Luke tells us they were changed by their conversation with their Lord.

- *Read verse 34 again: “They were saying, ‘It’s true!’” (NIRV)*
- *The outcome of their prayer was a strong conviction that the fantastic facts of the gospel are true.*
- *Jesus did rise from the grave and all we are promised is valid and life-changing.*
- *But they had to spend time with Jesus to reach that conviction.*

Review the objectives:

- *Explain how Jesus made prayer a priority.*
- *State the words represented in the acrostic ACTS.*

*(Listening Guide question 27)*

## Application

Devise a plan to carry the divine dialogue into the day. Mark your calendar to remind yourself at various points of the day to breathe—even a ten- to fifteen-second, “Thank You, Lord” or “Guide me, Lord” type of prayer. After a short time you won’t need the reminders anymore. Your mind will “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 4. “In Lesson 4, we will examine why it is important to connect with people in the local church. The term *church* and its benefits and responsibilities will be explained. Special attention will be given to spiritual gifts and their importance in effectively serving Christ.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Explain why involvement in a local church is important.
2. Define the “visible” and “invisible” church.
3. List the benefits and responsibilities of church involvement.
4. See why using spiritual gifts is essential to serving Christ effectively.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

*Ask people to talk about their church. What denomination? What attracts them to it? What is the most positive thing about it? What questions do they have about it?*

*If your group members all attend the same church, ask why they chose this church, what their experience is with church, and what kind of church, if any, they grew up in.*

## Application Questions

Some people are highly extroverted and love being with other people. Some are more introverted and prefer time alone. What is your preference?

*(Listening Guide question 1)*

Ask group members what their preference is.

- *Talk about the fact that some people are more naturally comfortable in groups than others.*
  - ◊ *Some are involved in numerous activities and look for close relationship in church.*
  - ◊ *Others are less comfortable in groups and are less involved.*
- *Discuss members' other involvements. Some are very involved in community activities, in social functions, in their own or their children's school, or in work.*
- *The point is not everyone relates to church in the same way and that's all right.*

### Why Church Involvement?

Since the church is the identifiable presence of God's people in the world today it's important that, as Christians, we are involved in the church.

#### Ideas for Discussion

- *Read Hebrews 10:23–25 and discuss what it says about how Christians should relate to one another.*
  - ◊ *Ask the group to list and discuss the specific exhortations.*
  - ◊ *Note especially the encouragement in verse 25 to not forsake assembling together.*
- *Read William Temple's statement from Lesson 4 and discuss it with the group: "Evangelism is to so present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men [and women] might come to trust Him as Savior and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of His church."*

Discuss what role the group believes the church should play in a Christian's life.

Discuss how the group members describe church "involvement."

*(Listening Guide question 3)*

Ask the group where they have their most significant relationships outside of their families.

*(Listening Guide question 4)*

Ask if they have any close friends in the Christian community.

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

Discuss with the group what they are seeking from their church and how they would describe the ideal church.

## What Do We Mean by “Church”?

Read the explanation given in Lesson 4 and discuss it:

- *The word translated church in the New Testament is from the Greek word ecclesia, which means “called out ones.” It’s a word that simply identifies those who have separated from the world through relationship with Jesus Christ. The church is not a building and not an organization. It is a living organism made up of Christians.*

Ask if the explanation fits with the concept they have of “church?” How is it similar and how is it dissimilar?

*(Listening Guide question 6)*

Ask if anyone has heard of the term “invisible church” and can describe it in their own words.

*(Listening Guide question 7)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Simply stated, the “invisible church” is the sum of all the people who have ever been “born again” and related to Jesus as their Savior.*
  - ◇ *Talk for a bit about your country’s national heroes and how they are part of your national heritage. People feel a sense of pride for being associated with such people.*
  - ◇ *Then relate that to the great heroes of the Christian faith. We are part of a tradition that goes all the way back to Noah and Abraham and Joseph and Moses.*
  - ◇ *Ask the group who some of their heroes of the faith are.*
  - ◇ *Remind them of Hebrews 11 and how important it was for the biblical writer to remind us of our great heroes of the faith. We are part of that invisible body.*

Read John 10:27–29 and discuss what it means to be related to the greatest hero the world has ever known. You may want to ask someone to read Philippians 2:5–11 and discuss how privileged we are to be part of Jesus’s invisible church.

Ask if anyone can describe the “visible church” in their own words.

*(Listening Guide question 8)*

- *The “visible church” is made up of those people currently alive who have been “born again” and relate to Jesus as their Savior. For each of us, it is the Christian community we relate to.*
- *Reread Hebrews 10:24–25 and discuss what it means to be part of the visible church.*

## What Are the Benefits of the Church?

Ask the group members to name one or two of the most compelling reasons they attend church.

## A Place to Worship

The most frequent command in the Bible is to worship and praise God. We do that in two ways—individually and corporately.

For a few minutes discuss how, as members of God’s invisible church, group members worship Him by themselves.

*(Listening Guide question 9)*

- *What form does this worship take?*
- *Are you satisfied with your personal approach to worship?*

Discuss corporate worship.

*(Listening Guide question 10)*

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Remind the group that corporate worship is nothing more nor less than the collective worship of the individuals who are participating. If the individuals are not genuinely worshipping then there is no actual corporate worship.*
  - ◇ *Ask if anyone has suggestions for how we can be most involved in church worship.*
  - ◇ *Ask how we may be able to better prepare ourselves for worship before we attend the worship services at our church.*
  - ◇ *For some people, worship during their church’s service is genuinely helped by the worship leaders while others are turned off by the same experience.*
    - » *Discuss ways we can best participate in our own worship experience regardless of what’s happening around us.*

## A Place to Grow

Read 1 Peter 2:2 and discuss what Peter is encouraging us to do.

Read Hebrews 5:11–14 and discuss what the passage is encouraging us to do.

Discuss some ways being part of a church fellowship can help us actually grow and become stronger Christians.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask members if they find genuine help in becoming more informed about the Bible and about God and His will by attending church. Why or why not?*

## A Place to Fellowship

Discuss some ways being part of a church fellowship can help us stay true to our Christian commitment.

*(Listening Guide question 13)*

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask if anyone faces challenges to their faith during the week and discuss them.*
- *Ask if going to church refreshes their soul and invigorates their commitment to Christ and the church.*
- *Ask if anyone relates to others in their church as a support group. Do they have a team where they offer and receive encouragement and direction for their life? A place where they feel genuinely loved and accepted?*

Read Romans 12:9–16 and discuss specific ways we can relate to one another in our churches.

- *Ask how someone's life would be better by being part of a group that is committed to these principles of relating.*
- *How committed are group members to practicing this style of life in church and in community?*

How would walking in fellowship with Jesus and other believers help us live a stronger Christian life?

*(Listening Guide question 14)*

Read 1 John 1:5–7.

- *Ask why it's important that we all are in fellowship with Jesus before we attempt to be in fellowship with each other.*
- ◊ *Because we are all committed to one thing—and that is to obey Him and live by His standards.*

Having Christ in common is a great benefit for believers. Ask what are some other “things” we can share as Christians living in fellowship.

*(Listening Guide question 15)*

## **A Place to Give Back**

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7–8 and discuss the following questions:

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *What is this passage telling us to do?*
- *What attitude does it tell us to have as we do it?*
- *What is the reason we are to do what the passage teaches us to do?*
- *What promise does the passage make to those who obey what it tells us to do?*

## **A Place to Serve**

Read Ephesians 4:11–16.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Point out that verse 11 names the leaders of the church.*
- *Verse 12 begins with the word for (NKJV) or to (NIV). Discuss what these leaders' role is:*
  - ◇ *“Equip” the saints for “their” ministry.*
  - ◇ *Discuss the fact that verses 12–15 explain how Christ’s body matures.*
  - ◇ *Read verse 16 again and point out that the body matures by everyone’s contribution.*
  - ◇ *A church without ministers is a church that will not grow and the members are the ministers. Everyone is expected to contribute their time and talent.*

Ask group members if they would consider themselves as someone who needs training or as someone who could train others.

*(Listening Guide question 18)*

- *All of us have strengths we could contribute to training others.*
- *All of us have areas where others are better trained and could equip us.*

Ask each group member to write down . . .

*(Listening Guide question 19)*

- *How he/she can best serve God in their church and community.*
- *How he/she can best be served by others believers.*

The Greek word translated equip was also used to describe fishermen sewing up holes in their fishing nets so the nets could be used.

Ask group members to discuss gaps they think are obstacles to their best effort to serve God.

Discuss how the church could specifically help fill their gaps.

Discuss what gaps they believe God could use to help fill them.

## The Picture of Head and Body

Read 1 Corinthians 11:12–13 and discuss Paul’s metaphor for the church.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *The Corinthian church had issues with unity and had divided themselves into groups.*
- *Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to help them understand how important unity is in the church.*
- *He had also explained how each church member is equipped by God to contribute to the church in 12:1–11 (we will discuss that later in this lesson).*
- *To explain how people’s diverse strengths can all work together, Paul related the church to the human body. All our bodily parts play different and essential roles, but they work together as one unit.*
- *Paul used this analogy in a number of his letters.*

Read Ephesians 1:22–23 and discuss the picture Paul used there.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask what it means that Christ is the head of the body and discuss the responses.*
- *Ask how our physical head relates to the rest of our body.*
  - ◊ *It is the control center. Wisdom, understanding, and decision making go on there.*
- *Ask in what ways Christ should be treated that way in our churches.*
  - ◊ *Honored, obeyed, seek His will, etc.*

Ask how actively group members relate to Jesus as the “Head” of all things in their own lives. Is He your Savior? Is He your Lord?  
(Listening Guide question 22)

Read John 14:12–17 and discuss the fact that Jesus promised to send His Holy Spirit.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *What did Jesus say the Spirit would do in verse 12?*
- *What did He call the Spirit in verse 16?*

Read John 14:25–26.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *What did Jesus call the Spirit in verse 26?*
- *What did He say the Spirit would do for us in verse 26?*

Read or reference 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 again and remind the group that the church members relate to one another like the parts of our body relate to other parts. Each serves its purpose and, therefore, serves the whole bodily process.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:6–7 and stress the point of verse 7 that each one of us is given a gift for the common good.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask if each member of the group has identified their place in Christ’s body and discuss responses.*
- *Ask if they feel like an essential member of their church just as they consider their head and hands as essential parts of their own body and discuss responses.*
- *Ask if they see others in their church who may not feel just as they are integrated.*
- *If so, what could they do to help them get plugged in?*

Read 1 Corinthians 12:15 and ask what the potential problem is that Paul addressed there.

**Ideas for Discussion**

- *Some functions are not as visible or glamorous, and those who do those functions can feel unimportant.*
  - ◊ *Discuss Paul’s response to this problem in verse 18.*

- Ask if any of your group members feel like a “foot” and ask what the body could do to encourage them.
- Ask if they see others who act like a “foot” and discuss what they could do to encourage them.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:21 and ask what the potential problem is that Paul addressed there.

- Read Paul’s response to that potential problem in verses 22–27 and discuss how we can deal with ourselves if we have highly visible gifts and are tempted to act like the “eye” or the “head.”
- How can we graciously help others who develop an “eye” (“I”) or “head” complex?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:26 and Romans 12:15 and discuss them.

## Spiritual Gifts

Ask the group members to share if they have ever experienced a time when they felt as though God was using them in a particularly powerful way to help someone.

*(Listening Guide question 27)*

As a group read the four passages where the gifts are listed (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:8–10; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:10–11), and then ask, “What is your gift? Not all of us are teachers or evangelists. God utilizes a wide array of abilities and you may be gifted by God to provide a ministry that is lacking in your own church.”

*(Listening Guide question 28)*

The gifts listed include:

- *Serving*
- *Faith*
- *Teaching*
- *Prophecy (Preaching)*
- *Evangelism*
- *Giving*
- *Leading*
- *Showing Mercy*
- *Wisdom*
- *Knowledge*
- *Healing*

Follow the process described in this section to know which gifts are yours. After you give it some time, write down on a piece of paper what you believe God has given you as a spiritual gift that He will use to build His church. Tell your pastor what that gift is and ask him how you can serve.

*(Listening Guide question 29)*

Start a discussion about how people can know how God has gifted them.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *Ask if anyone feels confident they have identified and are using their spiritual gift(s).*
  - ◊ *Be cautious here. If you aren't confident of the kinds of responses you may get, avoid this discussion. There are varied understandings of the gifts and this could lead to a long detour. Stress how important it is that you not do that as a group.*
- *Share your own story if you have identified your spiritual gift(s).*
- *Ask if anyone can name a spiritual gift another person in the group has demonstrated.*

Discuss how we can begin to identify a spiritual gift.

### Ideas for Discussion

- *First, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in discovering how He has gifted you.*
  - ◊ *It may be some natural talent you have always had that He will empower and use to accomplish what only He can accomplish.*
  - ◊ *It may be something completely new to you.*
- *Second, experiment. As you see needs around you, address them and allow time for God to show you that He will use you in this capacity.*
  - ◊ *Some have tried some ministries and discovered that was not their gift.*
  - ◊ *Ask others to give evaluative feedback on their attempts at different ministries.*

## A Beacon of Spiritual Light

Read Philippians 2:14–16. Discuss ways group members can be lights in our dark world (Matt. 5:14) and exercise their spiritual gifts in ways that draw people to Christ.

Review the objectives.

- *Why is involvement in the local church important?*
- *Describe the difference between the “visible” and “invisible” church in your own words.*
- *What are the benefits and responsibilities of church involvement?*
- *Why is using your spiritual gift essential to serving Christ effectively?*

*(Listening Guide question 31)*

## Application

To take this lesson seriously is to identify the spiritual gift God has given you, and then begin to develop it and use it for His glory and for the benefit of your local church and your community. And who knows how and where He will use you?

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.

## Introduce the Lesson

**Introduce the lesson** by reading or paraphrasing the following overview of Lesson 5. “In Lesson 5, we will provide you with simple tools for sharing your faith with unbelievers. Suggestions on preparing a personal testimony will be supplemented by a gospel presentation called ‘The Romans Road.’ Special attention will also be given to listening as you dialogue with those who have expressed spiritual interest.”

*Ask if there are questions about the session or about preparation for the session.*

## Review the Lesson Objectives

**Review the Lesson Objectives** below and briefly comment on any that you feel need elaboration.

*By the end of this study you should be able to*

1. Share how you came to Christ through a simple personal testimony.
2. Use “The Romans Road” to clearly explain the gospel to someone.
3. Effectively dialogue with someone who has expressed spiritual interest.

While we provide comprehensive **lesson** goals, it is important that your group members also reflect on their own **personal** goals. Even if they choose to elaborate on one of the lesson goals that you provide, it helps to have their own reason for studying the lesson. The group will also have time to reflect on these personal goals at the end of the lesson to see how they have or have not been fulfilled, or perhaps have changed.

*After you have explained the two levels of lesson goals, ask if anyone would like to share in a sentence their personal goal for the lesson.*

## Introduction

*Introduce the session by reflecting back on the opening session when group members introduced themselves. You shared stories of how you were introduced to Jesus and became a Christian.*

*Over the weeks of studying the spiritual life together you discovered ways life can, or should be, different because you are Christians.*

*As you briefly review the four previous lessons, ask group members to comment on any decisions they made about that part of their life.*

- Lesson 1: Making a commitment to build a personal, active relationship with our Lord by spending time with Him.
- Lesson 2: Learning how to grow by reading and meditating on God’s Word.
- Lesson 3: Learning how to connect with God one-to-one in meaningful prayer.
- Lesson 4: Participating in our local church by exercising our spiritual gifts and being open to other Christians’ ministry to us.

*Ask the group to discuss ways these spiritual disciplines benefit us. What are some of the specific contrasts between life without active participation in our Christian walk and being involved in building our spiritual strength?*

Lesson 5, “Sharing the Good News of Christ,” builds on all the other lessons.

- The concept of “sharing” the “Good News” presupposes that the gospel really is good news to us because of how it benefits us.
- If someone’s Christian life is flat and Christ isn’t making any difference to them, they probably won’t share it—or at least not share it very effectively.
- If someone claims to be a Christ follower and isn’t following Christ’s teaching, their attempt to share the gospel may be counterproductive. Few things turn others off like hypocrisy.

*Discuss the connection between the rest of the Spiritual Life Basics course and this session on “Sharing the Good News of Christ.”*

## Discussion

Ask the group, after hearing the words of the hymn at the beginning of the lesson and the section following it about God’s love, “How would you explain or describe what it means to be loved by God?”

*(Listening Guide question 2)*

Ask someone to read Ephesians 3:14–19 and talk about Paul’s prayer—especially beginning with verse 17, “[I pray] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Discuss the four images in verse 18 as they are suggested in Lesson 5:

- The **width** of God’s love is presented in John 3:16—God loved the whole world.

- The **length** of God's love is presented in *Ephesians 3:21*—for all ages.
- The **depth** of God's love is presented in *Romans 11:33*—it is profound wisdom.
- The **height** of God's love is presented in *Ephesians 4:8*—it opens heaven's gates to us.

Explain that this poetic language is summarized in the statement, “to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Eph. 3:19).

- *We will never fully know the extent of Christ's love because we are attempting to comprehend an infinite quality and quantity with our finite minds.*
- *We can spend a lifetime growing in our understanding of His love, because we will never fully reach that goal.*

Discuss the purpose of Paul's prayer, “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask what the relationship is between God's love and God's fullness.*
  - ◊ *All that God does for us—redemption, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit's ministry, the Bible, prayer—is all generated because of God's love.*
  - ◊ *John 3:16—“For God so LOVED the world that He...” (NKJV)*

Ask the group to discuss how they personally relate to God's love.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Is it a real part of your life or is it a theoretical idea?*
- *Do you sense it as a real thing, like your love for a spouse, a parent, or child?*
- *Do you cultivate your love for Him by gaining a deeper understanding of Him?*
- *After discussing the hymn and Paul's prayer about God's love, how would you explain it or describe what it means to be loved by God?*

Read Romans 5:5.

- *Explain that the verse actually states that God's love is being constantly poured out into our hearts.*

Read Philippians 1:9: “And this I pray, that your love may abound [be abundant, plentiful] still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.”

Combine the two thoughts from Romans 5:5 and Philippians 1:9.

- *As God's love is being poured out in our hearts, it is His love that abounds and overflows through our lives into others' lives.*

Discuss specific ways you can think of for how God's overflowing love is experienced.

#### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *In general ways, would those around you — neighbors, coworkers, or fellow students — think of you as a loving person? A person who genuinely cares about them?*

- *In specific ways, do individual members of your family or close friends experience God's infectious love from your attitudes, responses, and behaviors?*

Introduce the idea that:

- *Our genuine experience of God's love should be so overwhelming that we cannot not talk about it.*
- *Our genuine love for others compels us to share the great good news of Jesus's love with them.*
- *Sharing the gospel is an essential part of our lives as Christians. Not because we have to, but because we are excited to.*

## Tapping into God's Power

Read the opening sentence in this section of Lesson 5 and discuss it.

- *"A witness is someone who can bear testimony to something they have seen, heard, or felt. In our legal system, a witness is brought into court to share what they know through personal experience."*
  - ◊ *There is a saying, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"*
  - ◊ *Read 1 John 1:1–4 and discuss the ways John validated himself as a true witness.*

Read Acts 1:8 and discuss the following with the group.

- *This is Jesus's final commission—the last thing He said to us before leaving the earth.*
- *The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 tells us what we must DO—we are to "make disciples."*
- *This Final Commission in Acts 1:8 tells us what we are to BE. We ARE witnesses for Jesus because we bear His name. We are Christ's ones.*
- *As Christians we cannot choose whether or not we are witnesses. The only option is what kind of witnesses we are.*

God never intended us to create Christians by empowering them to be born again. That is the Holy Spirit's work. We tell the story, but God creates the change.

- *In John 3:5, Jesus said we must be born by the Spirit.*
- *Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit empowers our witness (John 14:6).*
- *Jesus said, "He who abides in Me . . . bears much fruit" and "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).*

Ask what the implications are of this fact that only God can produce the intended result of our witness to others.

First, our effectiveness as a witness is directly related to our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

- *Acts 1:8 says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (NIV).*
- *We have been instructed to maintain an active relationship with the Holy Spirit:*
  - ◊ *Ephesians 5:17–18*
  - ◊ *Galatians 5:16*

- ◇ *Ephesians 4:30*
- ◇ *1 Thessalonians 5:18–19*

Second, our efforts to witness will be most effective when they are energized through prayer.

Read 1 John 1:9 and discuss the importance of being cleansed from all unrighteousness.

- *A helpful illustration—If someone asked you for a drink of water and you had an expensive crystal goblet with a milk ring in the bottom and a clean plastic glass, which would you use to serve your guest a glass of water? God is far more apt to use a “clean” vessel to communicate His message than a “dirty” one.*

Before we can share the good news with honest sincerity we have to be experiencing it. Earlier lessons in this course walked us through some practices that make our Christian life vital and vibrant. Can you honestly share the gospel as “good” news because of what God is doing in you on a regular basis?

*(Listening Guide question 5)*

As important as it is that we are in tune with the Spirit, we still must be able to clearly witness to the gospel message.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, where Paul presented a simple, straight summary of the gospel message.

In the next part of the session, you will discuss some practical ways to communicate this simple gospel message.

## Sharing Your Own Story

Our gospel “witness” begins with our own testimony. Creating a testimony is easy and it is essential because it is a powerful tool in our witnessing process.

Ask those in your group who became Christians later in life to identify ways their lives changed after they became Christians.

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Ask them to write down specific instances of how their values, attitudes, relationships, and/or behaviors changed.*
- *Ask them to think through the decision-making process that led them to accept the gospel message and describe what convinced them to make that life-changing decision.*

Ask those who grew up in Christian homes and have known Jesus in a personal way for most of their lives to identify specific reasons they believe their lives have benefited because they are Christians.

### **Ideas for Discussion**

- *Have them write down specific privileges they have by being Christians.*
- *Ask them to describe what God spared them from by His early intervention in their lives.*
- *Ask them to describe how their Christian experience benefits them from day to day.*

Everyone's story is different. Consider Paul's dramatic conversion in Acts 9 when he became the church's great evangelist instead of its great persecutor. But Timothy's story is no less miraculous because he was taught the Scriptures from his youth (2 Tim. 3:14–15).

Take five minutes and let each person outline their story. Then put them in pairs and ask them to briefly tell it to their partner.

Regardless of your conversion story's details, the important thing is not to focus totally on that moment. What matters is how being a Christian matters in your daily living. Avoid "selling" Christianity like a life insurance policy that has no benefits until you die and get to go to heaven. Focus on the blessings you experience by being a Christian now.

## A Simple Presentation of the Gospel

Ask the group how they would go about sharing the gospel message with someone. Ask what facts they would share and what Bible verses they would use to support the facts.

Many facts and verses are included in the gospel message, and we need a simple, useable way to make the message clear.

Many witnesses use an effective approach called the Romans Road to explain the gospel.

- *It's clear.*
- *It's all limited to one Bible book and avoids a lot of searching through the Bible.*
- *It's easy for the witness to present and for the hearer to retain.*
- *It includes six passages from the book of Romans.*

An effective way to learn the Romans Road is to use it. You could break your group into pairs and have them talk through the presentation.

- *Ask them to take their Bibles and turn to each passage as you announce it.*
- *One person can play the role of the witness and the other the one being witnessed to.*
- *The witness can either read the verse or ask the other person to read it. Some encourage the witness to let the other person read so there is no question in their mind about what the Bible verse actually says.*
- *With each verse, have the pairs in the role-play switch roles.*

It is a good idea to have the transcript of Lesson 5 with you so you can read the brief explanations there for each of the Romans Road verses.

- *As you move through the verses, announce where the verse is found and then read the brief explanation from Lesson 5. Ask if there are any questions and then let the pairs complete the discussion.*

So you will read the verse and its explanation from Lesson 5. Then ask one of the members in your pairs or groupings to read it and explain it.

- *Romans 3:23*
- *Romans 6:23*
- *Romans 5:8*
- *Romans 10:9*
- *Romans 5:1*
- *Romans 8:1*

Suggest that they practice this presentation on their own and put the explanations into their own words so they can share it without it sounding like a scripted sales pitch.

When sharing the gospel:

- *Read the verse, or ask the person you're sharing Christ with to read it.*
- *Follow it up with a brief discussion using a dialogue.*
- *Ask if the person you are witnessing to has any questions or comments.*

We present the gospel message so that people can make a decision to be born again and begin to follow Christ as their Savior and Lord.

After going through the verses, ask the person if they would like to respond by accepting Jesus as their Savior. Offer to lead them through the simple prayer. "Personalize" it so it sounds like your own way of speaking.

- *"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin. I open the door of my life and receive You as Savior and Lord. Take the throne of my life and make me the kind of person You want me to be."*

## Evangelistic Dialogue

Some people may not respond immediately, or they may have questions, concerns, and doubts. It's important to trust God's Holy Spirit to guide you through an intelligent conversation with them.

Philip the Evangelist presents an excellent case study of an evangelistic dialogue that we can learn from.

What do we learn from this passage about sharing the good news?

- *Read Acts 8:26–39 and ask the group to identify and discuss ways Philip "nurtured" the Ethiopian eunuch to a decision. Use the suggestions from the notes and the few additional points listed below.*
  - ◊ *Philip obeyed God's leading (vv. 26–29). It's important to be sensitive to opportunities God gives us to share the gospel with people. We should also pray that God will give us a concern for people and to pray for individuals to whom we want to tell the gospel.*
  - ◊ *Philip approached the eunuch in a natural way (vv. 30–31). He began his witness with the normal*

situation they were in.

- ◇ *Philip engaged the man in conversation (vv. 32–34). The eunuch asked him a question and he responded by interacting with the man’s concerns.*
- ◇ *Philip guided the man through the Scriptures. Rather than depending on his own wit and wisdom, he kept the focus on Scripture.*
- ◇ *Philip was prepared for the moment. Had he not been familiar with the Scriptures and been in tune with the Spirit’s leading he would not have engaged the man, nor been able to explain the Scriptures.*
- ◇ *Philip turned the man’s question to his need for the gospel (v. 35). Luke wrote that, “Philip began with that very passage of Scripture. He started with the man’s concern. Whether, like in this case, it’s the Scripture, a person’s troubled marriage, concern over career, lack of happiness, or whatever else we are talking about, we can be like Philip, who “told him the good news about Jesus” (NIV).*
- ◇ *In Philip’s case, the eunuch was ready to respond to the gospel and so Philip took him as far as he wanted to go (vv. 36–39). Sometimes people don’t respond immediately and we need to give them space to consider the gospel message. In that case, we keep the relationship healthy, pray for the person, and ask God to open further opportunities.*

The basic principle we learn from Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is that sharing our faith should be relational and our role is to cultivate spiritual interest without being overbearing.

## Waiting for the Harvest

Read Mark 4:3–8 and discuss the four images.

- *Hard heart—rejects the message.*
- *Shallow heart—quick but insincere response.*
- *Weedy heart—responds but doesn’t grow and eventually turns away.*
- *Good heart—responds and grows.*

This can be the story of four different people’s responses, or it can be a single person’s journey from rejection to a receptive response.

- *Ask how many accepted Jesus the first time they heard the message.*
- *Encourage group members to build relationships and revisit the gospel with others if they don’t respond at first.*
- *Pray for the person you plan to share the gospel with—and pray for yourself as God’s witness. When people don’t immediately respond, we may feel they have rejected us because they didn’t accept our message. This “waiting for the crop to bear fruit” often requires patient prayer and faith as God prepares the heart’s soil to receive His Word.*

Read Mark 4:28–29 and discuss Jesus’s point about the seed taking time to bear fruit.

- *A well-known Bible teacher named Howard Hendricks and his family prayed for decades that his father would respond to the gospel message he had heard a number of times. After decades of prayer, a man stopped Mr. Hendricks on the street and shared the salvation message with him. Mr. Hendricks—after decades of rejecting Jesus—accepted Him as Savior and Lord.*

## Where to Go from Here?

The “growing heart” interpretation of Jesus’s soil and seed parable relates to any biblical truth.

The *Spiritual Life Basics* course is only an introduction to a lifetime of enriching our “soil.” The spiritual life practices discussed in this course require time to develop.

Suggest that your group members:

- *Revisit the goals about regular Bible study and prayer discussed in Lesson 1. Give the Holy Spirit time to develop these practices into habits.*
- *Briefly write out their Spiritual Life Growth Plan.*
- *Block out a few hours or even a half day for prayer, meditation, goal setting, and planning so this foundational part of life doesn’t get pushed aside.*
- *If we have a written growth plan and we get off course because life gets too crowded for a time, we can reenter our plan and continue the process.*

Don’t stop the growth process because this is the final lesson in a spiritual life course. It’s the beginning—not the end—of the process. Other courses are available to help us grow:

- *Bible Basics*
- *Bible Study Basics*
- *Old Testament Basics*
- *New Testament Basics*
- *Theology Basics*
- *World Religions Basics*
- *Worldview Basics*

Suggest that group members further their learning by including these courses in their life plan.

## Application

After you have completed personalizing your Romans Road presentation, ask another Christian person to let you practice your presentation a few times until you feel comfortable talking it through. You could also provide a helpful ministry to your friend by encouraging him or her to practice giving the presentation to you.

## Reflection

It is important to promote this reflection time in each session of the course. Ask the members to think back over what they have just experienced and form at least one point they can add to their understanding of God's Word. These insights may or may not match what they expected at the beginning of the lesson. Have them reflect on those affirmations or changes.

Also emphasize that this part of the group session could be an important time for participants to minister to other members of the group. Not everyone "sees" the same emphases and something one person highlights may be an added insight to others in the group.

## Close in Prayer

You may want to ask if anyone is dealing with something they would like prayer for. Depending on the size of your group, it would be meaningful to pray for each person by name.