

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING

LEADER'S GUIDE

A discipleship series designed
to equip professionals to live
a dynamic, supernatural life



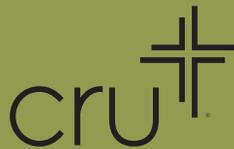
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LEADER'S GUIDE

• PART 1 & PART 2

A discipleship series designed
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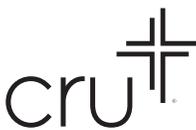
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Guidelines for the Leader

When a person becomes a Christian, Jesus Christ is the only Person who can change a life from within. Yet Jesus also wants you to play a part in helping to change individual lives as you lead them in discovering biblical truths and applying those truths in the power of the Holy Spirit. Your goal, like the apostle Paul's, is to be "... teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Colossians 1:28,29 NASB).

The Holy Spirit will change lives as you lead Practical Christian Living. The impact of what happens in your life and in the lives of your group members will be multiplied in the weeks, months and years ahead as the men and women you lead grow toward maturity in Christ. The praying, loving, caring attitude you demonstrate in your ministry now will reap a great harvest in many other lives in the future.

What Is *Practical Christian Living*?

Practical Christian Living (PCL) is a two-part series designed to help a person grow from his/her initial commitment to Christ to a level of spiritual maturity that results in discipling others (2 Timothy 2:1,2). Completing this curriculum will not ensure that a multiplying disciple is built, but it is an excellent tool to help you accomplish that result.

What Are the Distinctive Characteristics of *PCL*?

This discipleship series has an **opportunity challenge** that the leader should use to invite people to commit themselves to the group. This **discipleship commitment** provides a platform for growth in Christ.

Each session emphasizes not only material to be studied, but also prayer, sharing, evangelism and accountability.

In addition to the small group meeting, there is a high priority for the leader to meet individually with group members outside the group environment.

This discipleship series is more than just a Bible study. It also emphasizes learning and applying ministry skills.

The desired result is transformed lives through the application of God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The content is not just for the group members to learn (spiritual addition) but also for them to teach others who will teach others also (spiritual multiplication).

What Should I Do Before Starting My PCL Group?

Study thoroughly the Leverage Your Life series produced by Priority Associates and apply the principles that are discussed.

If at all possible, participate in a Practical Christian Living group. This will enable you to experience and learn first-hand the concepts and environment that are needed to be an effective leader. If you are not able to be involved in a PCL group, complete the PCL study guide on your own.

What Can I Expect in Leading a PCL Group?

Your overall objective in leading Practical Christian Living should be to help your group members consistently live the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit. You also will want to help them learn how to develop their devotional life and how to begin to share their faith with others.

You should expect to spend an hour to an hour and a half each week in prayer and preparation for your group meeting.

You will want to schedule your group meeting times so that you will have 60 to 90 minutes together for sharing, Bible study, vision building and prayer. Since PCL is more than a Bible study, you will need more than 45 minutes each week to accomplish your objectives. Thus it is very difficult to conduct a PCL group during lunchtime with working professionals. PCL usually works best before or after work.

You also will want to meet personally with those you are leading—at least twice during each 10-week segment of PCL. This one-to-one time with each group member will make the difference between a content-oriented Bible study and a true discipleship group where people's lives are being transformed.

Who Should I Seek to Involve in PCL?

The material is written specifically for new Christians who have already gone through follow-up material such as Foundations. It is also helpful for Christians who have known the Lord for a longer time and who desire to grow in their relationship with Christ.

Should Every Christian Be Encouraged to Participate in PCL?

Only those who have certain qualifications should be invited to participate in PCL. In order for your group to be effective, a prospective PCL group member should meet these essentials:

- Has received Christ.
- Has a desire to grow in his/her relationship with Christ.
- Demonstrates a teachable attitude.

- Possesses confidence/assurance of his/her relationship with God.
- Is beginning to understand how to deal with sin.
- Is beginning to learn the importance of prayer and the reading of Scripture for spiritual growth.
- Is beginning to fellowship with Christians.

A prospective group member also must be available to attend the weekly meetings and one-to-one times and must commit to complete the assignments, interact with and pray for the other group members. Seek to involve people who are “influencers” of others—those who have many friends and whom others seem to follow.

(Usually, mixed groups of men and women are not as effective as single-gender groups.)

How Do I Invite Someone to Be Involved in PCL?

Every successful group is a **result of prayer**. Begin praying daily, asking God to lead you to those people He wants in your group. Ask Him to prepare their hearts to make the needed commitment.

Be selective, as Jesus was, and look for the previously listed qualities in people. You should seek to have six to ten in your PCL group. It might help to co-lead your group with another qualified person. This will allow you to help one another lead, and to divide up your group members in order to meet individually with them on a more regular basis.

Meet with each person whom God has impressed upon you and, by reading through the An Opportunity challenge located in the front of the study guide, invite him or her to become involved in your group. Do not ask people in a group setting to participate if possible, as PCL was designed for those who make personal commitments.

Help your group member to see PCL as a tool or plan to help him/ her become the fourth type of soil described in the An Opportunity challenge. Encourage participants to ask questions where appropriate to ensure understanding.

Be sure each person commits to the requirements of being involved in PCL (including those you are currently mentoring individually).

How Do I Use the *PCL Leader's Guide*?

Each Leader's Guide session contains several parts: **Focus, Objectives, Making the Most of This Session** and **Session Plan**.

Focus

On the first page of each session, you will find a focus for the session, which states the purpose or mission of the session.

Objectives

Following the Focus section, you will find the objectives for the session—specific goals you should seek to accomplish in the course of the session.

Making the Most of This Session

Following the Objectives section comes this section, which offers suggestions to help make the most of each session. It also contains background information as well as further insights into the concepts and the Scriptures used in the session.

Session Plan

Finally, the session plan provides detailed directions and answers to the study guide questions to help you have a successful experience in leading PCL. You also will find Scripture insights, special instructions and/or additional questions. The Day One, Day Two, Day Three, etc. notations are designed to help participants work through the session on a daily basis during the week leading up to the meeting. Remember, PCL is designed for group members to work through and prepare the session ahead of time, thus ensuring fruitful and complete discussion during the group meeting.

The Leader's Guide *is not to be used* while leading your group. Transfer answers, instructions and other notes from your Leader's Guide to your study guide. It has been designed this way to help you become more familiar with the content and better prepared to lead your group.

Be sure to note the **Key Question(s)** in your study guide. These are the principal questions for discussion in the session. If your time is limited, be sure to cover at least these questions.

What Are Important Principles in Discipling Others?

Remember your objective: **to help a person follow Jesus with a whole heart.**

Following Jesus always involves two aspects: a growing intimate relationship with God and a growing ministry to others. (See Matthew 22:36-40 and Mark 3:13,14.)

Love your people and encourage them. Create an environment where they know you want the best for them. Communicate that you will help them reach the best that they can be because you are on their side.

(Relationship-based discipleship is the biblical model rather than knowledge-based Bible study.)

The focus of discipling is people and their needs rather than a program or curriculum. It is what your group members are becoming and doing, instead of what you teach to them. Discipleship, as seen in Romans 12:1,2, is not realized in the completion of a course of material (a means), but in a transformed life (the goal). Therefore, be flexible in using the material according to the needs of your group members.

Set and maintain high standards. People want and need accountability. Raise their sights, ask for faithfulness and expect the best.

When your people fall down, encourage them. **Give them freedom to fail.** Help them learn from failure.

Trust the Lord to give you **wisdom to minister to each person** wherever he/she is individually in spiritual/emotional/personal development.

Use God's Word to encourage, build up and motivate each of your group members. To build a solid foundation in his/her life, don't rely only on examples from your own experience.

Trust the Lord! Depend on Him! Take the initiative to build disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God.

How Do I Lead My First Meeting?

The first meeting is of utmost importance, so **be well-prepared.** Your group's first impression may last for weeks.

The first session is to be used primarily for **getting acquainted with one another.** Wait until the second week to begin the PCL content.

Introduce each person as he/she arrives.

Begin on time.

Help your group members **get to know one another** by having each one share personal facts: where each person is from, how each became a Christian and one or two personal things such as what makes him unique, something about her family, what his hometown is famous for, etc. Jot down a few notes to help you remember these details about your group members. You may also want to get everyone's

phone numbers and e-mail addresses so you can compile a roster to distribute to each group member. This will facilitate communication and fellowship with one another. If you have not done so, tell them how much the PCL study guide will cost, and collect the money at that time.

Introduce the PCL study guide and review the topics. Remind participants of the benefits of being in the group:

- They will have an opportunity to grow in their relationship with God and experience His power.
- Their understanding of God's Word will deepen, and their prayer life will be strengthened.
- They will have an opportunity to develop strong Christian relationships with the others in the group.
- They will gain a foundation in their lives that will enable them to reach out and to minister to others.

Explain that your time together will include **a time of sharing, Bible study, Scripture memorization and prayer**. Emphasize that, in the group setting, there is no such thing as a dumb question!

Have your group members **study and prepare each session in advance** in order to get the most out of the group time. Ask them to begin with Session One for the following week.

Remind them of the day, time and place to meet and to bring their PCL notebook, Bible and pen.

Explain that all of you as a team will **hold one another accountable** for assignments, Scripture memory and application of the content in your lives. You also will be **committed to confidentiality** within the group.

Give an opportunity to ask questions, but **end on time**.

Close in prayer. As they leave, assure them of how glad you are that they are participating in the group.

How Do I Prepare to Lead a PCL Session?

A well-prepared session allows you to lead the discussion with confidence. **There is no substitute for preparation**. If you try to take shortcuts in your preparation time, both you and your group will feel it. (NOTE: If you are discipling someone on an individual basis, you will be able to adapt most instructions that are marked for group usage to your situation.)

Pray for your group members individually and for yourself.

Be yourself, **be vulnerable**, and do not try to impress your group with your spirituality.

Schedule your meeting in a place that will be **conducive to interaction** such as a conference room or boardroom, home or restaurant (only if it has a private area).

Remember, there are **numerous elements to PCL: sharing, content, Scripture memory, prayer, vision building and one-to-one**. All are important. Do not prepare just to cover the content—prepare to lead your group members.

Review the session in your study guide.

Read the session in your Leader's Guide, making additional notes and looking up any additional Scriptures suggested in it. Work through the Leader's Guide side-by-side with the study guide. **Transfer from the Leader's Guide to your study guide any notes, directions and suggestions** that you may want to use in your group. Be sure to define any terms, using clear language. Avoid using religious colloquialisms (hedge of protection, etc.) or terms that newer Christians may not relate to (propitiation, sanctification, etc.).

Complete the assignments while you prepare in order to gain added insights for leading. Ask yourself, "How can I encourage everyone to experience the significance of this topic in his/her life?"

Make sure you **have all the materials** you will need to take with you to the group, maybe even samples of the SUGGESTED READING, etc.

What Qualities Do I Want to See God Build Into My Group Members While in PCL?

- Development in their love for God.
- Growth in their confidence of personal forgiveness and trust in God.
- Demonstration of living by (or walking in) the Spirit.
- Beginning to feed themselves in the Word.
- Growth in prayer.
- Establishment of personal quiet times.
- Willingness to reach out to non-Christians.
- Growth in fellowship and commitment to the local church.
- Gaining an eternal perspective of life.

How Do I Lead Sharing in My Group Meeting?

Set aside time for personal interaction—usually, but not always—at the beginning of your meeting. This should be informal. Try to direct the discussion toward what God is doing in people's lives.

These suggested questions are helpful in opening up your sharing time:

- What has God been teaching you from His Word?
- What was the most meaningful thing you were able to apply from last week's session?
- What answers to prayer have you received lately?
- What one thing do you want God to do in your life in the next two weeks?

Do not allow this time to be too long or drift too far into superficial topics, although some open conversation is necessary to build strong, well-rounded friendships. Sometimes only a brief sharing time will be needed, while at other times a longer one will be necessary.

To the degree that you as a leader are willing to share and be vulnerable, your group will feel free to be open.

How Do I Lead the Session Content?

Studying the session content is essential, but remember that the objective of your instruction is transformed lives.

Concern for the person and his/her needs is more important than getting through the material. Even though the sessions are designed to be completed in one meeting time, you may need to take more than one week to complete some sessions.

(NOTE: According to a survey taken of PCL leaders, if two or three meetings were taken to cover most of the sessions, then group members applied less to their lives than if on average only one meeting time was taken for most sessions.)

Remember that your goal is to help the group members **discover biblical truth** for themselves. Encourage them to share their ideas.

Don't be tied to your notes. Maintain eye contact. Make sure everyone can comfortably see you.

Good questions promote discussion, stimulate thought and reveal truth. Avoid asking "closed" (yes or no) questions except for summation. Allow time for several people to answer. Do not be afraid of silence when it is thoughtful silence. Remember to lead rather than teach.

You generally should **express questions to *the group***. Try not to single out individuals unless you feel they need to be drawn into the discussion. Summarize major sections and conclusions reached.

Avoid answering your own questions. You may find these questions helpful to stimulate thoughtful discussion:

- Why do you think that idea is important?
- How would you explain that idea to one of your friends?
- What other thoughts does that verse trigger?
- How might the truth of that verse make a difference to you?

Try to **bring everyone into the discussion** and keep “talkative” members from dominating. (This might be dealt with best in your one-to-one time.)

Keep to the main topic of discussion. If sidetracked, either use questions to guide the discussion back or acknowledge the “drift” and move back to the main topic. Be flexible according to people’s needs, but also keep good session plans from being overrun by less significant matters.

Try not to tell anyone directly that an answer is “wrong.” Definitely do not make fun of a wrong answer. You can ask another group member to share his or her perspectives, or you can direct another to the Word in order to come up with a more correct answer.

Difficult questions that group members ask **can be handled** by saying, “I don’t know, but I’ll try to find out more about that before our next meeting.”

Make sure people **understand** the assignments, and be sure to help them fulfill their commitments. The emphasis should be on application and accountability rather than on the accumulation of knowledge.

Have your group members share the results of, or their experiences in doing, the assignments or applications.

How Do I Lead My Group in Prayer and Praise?

Don’t assume that your group members know how to **pray aloud** or conversationally. Remind them that prayer is simply talking to God. Teach them how to do both of the above if needed. Suggest that they pray aloud when alone to get used to praying out loud.

Guide your prayer time using short, simple prayers, talking to God as you would to a friend. Encourage honesty.

Encourage group members to pray as often as they wish, but giving everyone a chance to pray. Don't be afraid of silence.

Praying spontaneously is better than praying in sequence.

Encourage **“team prayer.”** When one is praying, the others should agree in their hearts. More than one person can pray about the same subject (praying in one accord).

Have your group members **write down** each other's requests on the prayer request sheets provided in the back of their PCL study guides. They can then pray through them during the week and write down ways that God answers their prayers.

Be careful not to spend so much time taking requests that the actual praying is minimized. This can be accomplished by gathering prayer requests from group members ahead of time before the meeting.

How Do I Communicate My Vision?

Ask God to give you a picture of how He can use your group members to minister to others by sharing their faith or helping young Christians begin to grow in their faith.

Consider reading **visionary paragraphs** from books about missionaries or biographies of Christian leaders.

Keep a file of articles, statements, quotes, personal experiences, etc. that you may use in future sessions. You may point out news articles about current events that help demonstrate some truth that you have studied.

You do not need to include this element of vision building every week, but provide it often enough to give your group members a picture of how God is at work in the world.

Verbalize often (especially during individual times with your group members) how you see God working in their lives and the potential they have in being used by God to influence other people for the kingdom.

How Do I Lead My One-to-One Times?

One-to-one time is the best way of building strong, healthy relationships with group members. You can get to know each individual more personally over a breakfast or lunch appointment. (Again, try to meet twice with each of your members during each 10-week segment of PCL.)

Communicate and **demonstrate your love and concern** for the person. Ask how he/she is doing, and find out if there is any way you can help or pray. Even a phone call is helpful.

Seek to take one of your group members with you when you meet with unbelievers. Allow each person to watch as you use “spiritual springboards” to bridge into spiritual issues on these evangelistic appointments. This builds the person’s vision and motivates him/her to want to share Christ.

Share your life with your friend. Be vulnerable and open about your weaknesses, areas of growth, etc. Pray together for each other’s needs.

Seek to discover how well he/she is understanding and applying session content. Ask what has been the most difficult principle to apply during the past few weeks. Clarify any misunderstandings or difficulties.

Make sure the person is **relating** what he/she is learning to specific issues in life (for example, family life, work, finances, social activities, etc.). You will want to share passages from the Word to encourage the person, to reinforce biblical truth and to address his/her current needs.

A good way to let him/her see you as a real person and not just as a “religious person” is by doing fun or informal things together (for example, shopping, lunch, sports, dinner at your house, etc.). A good “rule” to follow: Never do anything on your own if one of your group members can be with you.

How Do I Evaluate My Group Discussion?

Evaluating ourselves enables a progression of growth and improvement in our personal lives and in our leadership. Review the following checklist every few weeks. (Do not become introspective, but trust the Holy Spirit to show you areas needing improvement.)

- Did everyone come to the meeting? If not, did they let you know ahead of time?
- Did you begin and end on time?
- Did everyone participate in the discussion? Do you need to draw anyone out? Did anyone monopolize the discussion? Did you lecture too much? Did the group keep to the subject? If not, did you bring the discussion back on track?
- Did you guide the discussion with questions, allowing your group members to discover truth?
- Did you use the **Key Question(s)** to develop the main points?

- Did you listen when each person spoke?
- Were you familiar enough with the material to feel comfortable in leading the discussion?
- Did you let the discussion of the session content go too long, eliminating adequate time for sharing or prayer?
- Did you summarize adequately?
- Did you discuss how group members can apply what they learned to their lives?

How Can I Increase the Effectiveness of My Group?

Have a different group member **accompany** you on various evangelistic and follow-up appointments that you make.

Once or twice during the PCL series, plan to spend a Friday night and Saturday together on a **group retreat**. Include prayer, fun, sharing and application of previous weeks' content to their "felt needs." (Felt needs are needs that they realize they have—for example, having a growing relationship with a spouse, dealing with pressures on the job, managing their finances well, etc.)

Have each of your group members (including you) **take a friend** to an organized evangelistic event.

Take your group with you to hear good Christian speakers. Afterward, discuss their relevance and impact.

Am I a Developing Leader?

Most Christians tend to be either leaders or followers. But God desires for all of us to be both. As we lead people, we also must allow God to use others to build into our own lives. Periodically ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I growing in my knowledge of and love for God?
- Am I growing in my love for people and becoming involved in their lives?
- Does my ministry flow out of a deepening walk with God?
- Am I aggressively following and learning all I can from my own spiritual leader?
- Am I increasing in my vision for ministry?
- Am I thinking more from God's perspective as revealed in His Word?
- Am I sharing my faith regularly?

GUIDELINES FOR THE LEADER

- Am I growing in intercessory prayer for people?
- Am I seeking to involve other Christians in growth opportunities?
- Am I seeking to influence my community with Christian values?

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING

LEADER'S GUIDE

• PART 1

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1

Session 1
*Knowing
God's Plan*

Knowing God's Plan

FOCUS

God desires for us to know Him in an intimate and personal way. In knowing Him, we experience life and its purpose to the fullest.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members understand the importance of getting to know God when you lead them to do the following:

- Learn more about what God is like.
- Understand that God is our Father and desires an intimate relationship with us.
- Understand four important benefits of knowing God in an intimate way.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

Have you studied the **Guidelines for the Leader** section at the beginning of this Leader's Guide? Be sure you have!

1. Prepare for this session by copying your notes, answers, illustrations and extra verses from the Leader's Guide into your study guide. Also be familiar with the transitions and examples. This **process of preparing** to lead the session will **help you to grow** in biblical understanding and in your leadership abilities. (Do not take your Leader's Guide to the session.)
2. Ask your **group members to prepare** for the session by answering all the questions. However, do not feel that you must cover all the questions during your group time. You probably will take too much time if you do. Decide during your preparation time which questions, points and verses are the most important and are the ones you want to emphasize. Sometimes, you'll want to just hear what answers people discovered for a particular question and move on, or, as mentioned above, skip it altogether. Other times, you'll want to pause, look up a Scripture verse and spend some time discussing the question. (Do not do this on every Scripture verse and question, or you'll never finish the lesson!)
3. Encourage group members to make every effort to memorize their memory verses so they can benefit from hiding God's Word in their hearts. However, do not be legalistic about it, as some people really struggle with memorization. Point out the **Scripture Memory Verses** pages that are in the Supplements section of the study guide. Encourage your group members to cut out the Scripture verses weekly and carry them in a convenient place to review them regularly.

Also note the **Prayer Requests** sheets that are in the back of the study guide. While in the group, use these sheets to write down each other's prayer requests. The psalmist said, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God" (Psalm 42:1 NIV).

Remind group members from time to time that the Day One, Day Two, etc. headings are an encouragement and reminder that they should try to work on the lesson a little every day. This will help them to be in the Word daily and avoid having to "cram" to complete the lesson the night before the group meeting.

Draw participants' attention to the FOR A DEEPER LOOK sections, and encourage them to make use of them during the week.

Be sure to encourage each group member, as much as possible, to participate in each week's discussion. Call on different individuals to read Scripture references and share their answers to a particular question.

"The psalmist's concern to get knowledge about God was not a theoretical but a practical concern. His supreme desire was to know and enjoy God Himself, and he valued knowledge about God simply as a means to this end. He wanted to understand God's truth in order that his heart might respond to it and his life be conformed to it.

"Our aim in studying the Godhead must be to know God Himself the better. Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance, not simply with the doctrine of God's attributes, but with the living God whose attributes they are. As He is the subject of our study, and our helper in it, so He must Himself be the end of it. We must seek, in studying God, to be led to God. It was for this purpose that revelation was given, and it is to this use that we must put it."

—Knowing God, J.I. Packer

"God is the greatest of all mysteries and the greatest of all realities. He is the infinite mystery behind all reality, and the absolute reality behind all mystery; unimaginably exceeding the profoundest grasp of human comprehension, and beyond all verbal definition. Neither the phenomenal universe nor the invisible universe of thought has any satisfactory explanation apart from God, but the being of God Himself is utterly beyond explanation. He immeasurably outbounds the most distant reach of stars and space in all directions, yet He is so exquisitely close to each of us as to be in Tennyson's phrase, 'closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.' He is the one 'in whom we live and move and have our being,' the God in whose hand our breath is; the Infinite who fills everywhere. Before all other being began, God already was, or rather, eternally is ...

"Our human race and the revolving orb on which we live are surrounded by mysteries deep and vast, mysteries awesome and haunting, mysteries intriguing but impenetrable, fascinating yet ever elusive ... But the mystery of mysteries which ever underlines what infinitesimal specks we are is the inexplicable super-mystery—God."

—*MAJESTY: The God You Should Know*, J. Sidlow Baxter

The mightiest thoughts the mind can entertain are thoughts of God. Therefore, we should base our ideas of who God is on what He has revealed to us about Himself and not on what we think He ought to be.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens ... When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?”

(Psalm 8:1,3,4 NIV).

When we consider the vastness of the universe and God’s desire to be intimately acquainted with us, we are overwhelmed with the dignity God gives to man and the privilege of knowing our Creator so closely.

As Christians, we gain a new relationship with God. He adopts us into His family, and He becomes our Father. To varying degrees, though, our past experiences distort our view of God as our Father. Therefore, we need to get to know Him as He truly is.

SESSION PLAN

Memory Verse

No verse for the first lesson.

Overview

Have one of your group members read the Overview paragraph.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

BILL’S PROBLEM

Bill is a businessman who has misconceptions about God because he has never spent time getting to know God and developing his relationship with Him. As a result, Bill made some bad decisions which have affected his life, business and family.

Based on Bill’s thoughts and actions, how would you describe his view of God? **God is detached, not relevant. God should spare him from his problems, or He should solve all his problems. God is not in touch with modern life and is not interested in him. Bill must help himself since God doesn’t care about his life.**

On a scale of 1 to 5, how relevant would you say knowing God is to the challenges of life and work? What are the reasons for your answers? **Look for various personal answers. These will show you a great deal about the spiritual knowledge and maturity of your people. Don’t allow their answers to be superficial, “pat” answers from Sunday school. Look more for what their hearts say rather than their exact answers.**

Explore (30-45 minutes)

WHY ON EARTH AM I HERE?

Ask one of your group members to read the two paragraphs and quote by Rick Warren.

GOD'S CHARACTER

Read Psalm 145:8-21.

How does this passage describe God? **The psalmist describes God explicitly as gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love, good to all, faithful to His promises, satisfying our desires, righteous, protective and other things you might note from this passage.**

How do these verses reveal that God is personal? **This passage describes a being who is emotionally involved with His beloved, namely you and me. The psalmist is not describing a detached force of some kind, but a loving Person who desires to express that love and kindness toward His people.**

Think of a current challenge you are facing. What is it about God that encourages you to trust Him with your situation? **Look for answers like: I'm fearful because I might be laid off from my job. The group member should be able to identify several qualities of God from the passage that he/she could apply to that need.**

Read Isaiah 40:25-28.

What does God say about Himself in these verses? **Look for their answers to include that God is personal (uses personal pronoun "I," exercises His will, has intellect), is unlike any other and is holy. He knows all our ways, is aware of all injustice, is the Creator, is without equal and is great. He understands beyond our comprehension and never gets tired. He is everlasting, controls all creation, is powerful. Point out that in verse 25 it is God who is describing Himself.**

What was Israel's complaint against God? What was God's answer to their complaint? (vv. 27-29) **Israel's complaint was that God didn't see or care about their problems and struggles—a common complaint from the human race. God responds with His famous words in verses 28-31, that He Himself does not get tired, but gives strength to His people to meet their daily problems and struggles.**

Read Isaiah 40:10,11. What two facets of God's character are brought out here? **God reveals Himself to us, on the one hand, as a nurturing and tender shepherd, and on the other hand as a powerful warrior who rewards His followers.**

How do you think He wants to relate to you? **He wants us to know Him intimately and cares deeply about us.**

How might these verses have helped Bill in our opening story? **If Bill had understood God's character and how much God loves him, he might have been able to trust Him.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Psalm 139 and Zephaniah 3:17.

In these verses, what qualities of God give you hope? **He feels affection, excitement and delight in our fellowship with Him. We are valuable and precious to Him. These key words are found: exalt, love, joy, rejoice.**

Day Two

GOD IS YOUR FATHER AND WANTS YOU TO KNOW HIM

Have someone read the first paragraph.

Read Romans 8:15,16. List from the passage several observations about our relationship with God. **We are no longer slaves but beloved children. The Holy Spirit communicates deep within us that we belong to Him.**

Have someone read the explanation about the term “Abba.”

Read Matthew 7:9-11. Verse 11 tells us that our Father in heaven is much more loving than our highest expectations of an earthly father. How would you describe an ideal father? **Expect answers like loving, kind, interested and involved, yet disciplining us when needed.**

KEY QUESTION

How does a distorted view of God affect the way we relate to Him?

If we have misconceptions about God, they will obviously hinder the way we relate to Him. For example, if we are afraid of God because we believe He will punish us for every wrong step, then it will be difficult to develop a close, intimate relationship with Him.

According to Jeremiah 9:23,24, what does God desire of us? **God wants us to know Him. Some participants may focus on “boasting,” but emphasize that the main issue is that they can know and understand Him.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 15:11-32, Hebrews 12:4-11.

What do you learn about your Father God from these passages? In light of these passages, how will you choose to see your difficulties and opportunities differently? **From the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15, we learn that God loves us and forgives us even when we sin and turn our backs on Him. He longs for our return and welcomes us back with open arms. In Hebrews 12, we learn that discipline is a vital part of any father-son relationship and that God disciplines us to correct us and strengthen our character.**

Day Three

YOU WERE CREATED TO ENJOY GOD AND HE YOU!

Have someone read the introductory sentences and two Scripture verses: Revelation 4:11 and Psalm 149:4.

Knowing that God delights in you, how does this change the way you view yourself? **It should be an exciting and even exhilarating thought and should help us view ourselves as worthy individuals.**

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 10:31.

What are some specific ways in which you can honor God with your life? **This is a pretty broad question, so expect a variety of answers like: worship Him, follow Him, serve Him, etc. Some participants may never have really thought about this concept before, so it is designed to get them to begin thinking about honoring God with their lives.**

Day Four

SOME BENEFITS OF KNOWING GOD

Have someone read the introductory paragraph with the quote from Pascal.

- Purpose. Read Acts 20:24 and Romans 8:28,29.

According to these verses, what is God's purpose for your life? **God's purpose for our lives is twofold: to become like Christ and to fulfill whatever particular mission He has called us to complete. We can see that God created everything for a purpose. There is order, system and design to the whole of creation. Man is the highest expression of God's creation; therefore God has a purpose for us.**

- Provision. Read Matthew 6:25-33.

If we make God our highest priority, what does He say He'll do in return? **In this passage, God promises to provide for our every need. More specifically, He provides our food, clothing, etc.**

- Peace. Read Isaiah 26:3 and Matthew 11:28-30.

Think of one area of struggle in your life right now. Using these verses, how can you immediately experience God's peace in this situation? **By focusing on God and letting Christ take our burdens—putting on His yoke.**

“You should trust in Him; fix your thoughts on Him; not let your heart be troubled; not be afraid; go to Him and take His yoke upon you. He offers to share the load and not make you bear it alone; we are to learn from Him. He promises peace and rest for our soul. Makes clear that we can experience peace in the midst of problems. God does not prevent problems. Suffering is God's megaphone to a dying world.”

—C.S. Lewis

- Power. Read Philippians 4:12,13.

What situations are you currently facing in which you need to experience God's power? **Expect personal answers. Give group members an opportunity to share. Encourage vulnerability.**

KEY QUESTION

Which one of these benefits do you most need today and why?

Expect personal answers to this question.

Day Five

Have someone read the story and **SUMMARY**.

Assignments

Read through the assignments with the group and make sure everyone understands them.

Point out to participants the article, "Can We Trust the Bible?" (in the Articles section of their study guide) for them to read before they prepare Session 2.

Also show them, if they haven't already seen it, the page of Scripture Memory Verses in the back. Group members should cut out the small "cards" and use them throughout the week to learn and review the passages.

Point out the **SUGGESTED READING**. This section is for those who might want to study the subject in more depth. Each lesson will have a **SUGGESTED READING** section.

Close in Prayer

Have your group members write down each other's requests for prayer on one of the prayer request sheets also found in the back of their study guides. Pray through some of these requests before you close. Encourage group members to pray for one another during the coming week.

2

Session 2

The Reliability and Importance of the Bible

The Reliability and Importance of the Bible

FOCUS

The Bible is reliable as God's written Word to man, and it is reasonable and right to place our lives under the authority of God and His Word.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members to grow in their obedience to Scripture when you guide them to do the following:

- Investigate the trustworthiness of the Bible.
- Express major benefits that God's Word provides for Christian living.
- Understand the importance of basing our lives on the authority of God and His Word.
- Learn to apply God's Word to issues in our lives.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Study and prepare for this session by copying your notes and answers into your study guide. This **process of preparing** will help you as a leader to grow in biblical convictions and in your leadership abilities.
2. **Study the article**, "Can We Trust the Bible?" in order to answer questions that your group members may have.
3. Be familiar with the **Bible study method** explained in the "Applying the Bible to Your Life" section in the study guide. Guide them through the steps, noting the three kinds of questions to ask about a passage.
4. Stress that the **memorization of Scripture** is not "busy work." If appropriate, explain how memorizing Scripture has been a powerful, life-changing practice in your own life. Otherwise, view this as an opportunity for you to grow in this area. Read Psalm 119:11 in support of this assignment.

Make plans to **get together** with some of your group members individually in order to get to know them.

FAMOUS QUOTES ABOUT THE BIBLE

“God’s chart for you to steer by” —Henry Ward Beecher

“... a stumbling block in the path of progress” —Preserved Smith

“... the book widens and deepens with our years” —Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“... has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind” —Thomas Paine

“... the key to your own heart, your own happiness, your own duty”

—Woodrow Wilson

“... everything in it is cowardice and deception” —Friedrich Nietzsche

Obviously, different people view the Bible in different ways. As indicated above, some people revere it deeply, and others despise it intensely. While Christians should be concerned about the latter group, a greater problem exists in the practice of many Christians who claim to revere the Bible but never find time to read it or to apply it.

This lesson intends to deal with both problems. It presents an impressive array of historical evidence to provide logical support for viewing the Scriptures as worthy of our honor and obedience.

The lesson concludes by focusing on an effective, introductory, three-step approach to helping your group members experience first-hand the benefits of getting into the Word on a daily basis.

Your example as a person of the Word will significantly influence your group members. Be prepared to honestly share some of your own experiences in studying and applying Scripture. As you discuss both your struggles and your victories, your group members will benefit greatly.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Memory Verse (3 minutes)

Ask several group members to say Romans 8:15 from memory.

Review/Overview

Have one of your group members read the two paragraphs.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Ask one of your group members to read the story; then ask your group members what Ashley could say. **Ashley could ask in a kind and confident way if her friend has ever taken the time to investigate the reliability of the Bible for herself. It seems**

she is merely repeating tired old clichés that she has heard others use. She could mention a couple of facts that are described in the article, “Can We Trust the Bible?” She could also suggest a good book for her friend to read, such as Josh McDowell’s *More Than a Carpenter*.

Day Two

Explore (30-45 minutes)

EVIDENCES FOR THE BIBLE’S RELIABILITY

Ask someone to read the introductory paragraph.

What has been the impact of archeology on the Bible? **No discovery of archeology has disproven a historical biblical reference. In addition, many archeological finds either verified specific biblical references or provided additional illumination of biblical records.**

Which of the prophecies and their fulfillment concerning Jesus as Messiah were most significant to you? Why? **Try to have several group members respond with their specific answers. This will help your group members to remember some of the prophecies.**

How do we know that the Bible we have today is virtually what was written originally? **Look for such answers as the following: It is God’s Word and well preserved by Him; the accuracy of the Jewish scholars in copying manuscripts; the ability to compare the thousands of manuscripts for errors; the need for accuracy with the New Testament because of enemies’ potential discrediting; the readiness of the New Testament writers to cast themselves in a negative light; the overwhelming amount of archeological support; and the reliability of biblical prophecy.**

Read 1 Peter 3:15,16.

What would you need to do to be ready to answer someone like Kelly?

A person would need to study and do some preparation in order to be ready to answer objections concerning the Bible or any aspect of the Christian faith.

Have a group member read the section explaining MAPS and ask if anyone has any comments or questions concerning this strategy for remembering how to discuss the reliability of the Bible.

Read the introductory paragraph with the two rhetorical questions.

Day Three

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ITSELF

What claims does the Bible make in the following verses?

2 Timothy 3:16,17

It is God-breathed—it came from God; He is the originator, not man; it teaches, rebukes, corrects, trains us in how to live a righteous life and equips us to do what God wants us to do.

Hebrews 4:12

It is the Word of God; it is living, active in our lives, piercing and able to penetrate and judge our thoughts and motives.

2 Peter 1:20,21

Any prophecy found in Scripture came from the Holy Spirit; it was not invented or made up by man.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Isaiah 43-45.

Notice how the text here, as in many other places, claims to be directly quoting God. Count how many times the text says, “Thus says the Lord.”

Ask the group if anyone had a chance to read Isaiah 43-45. Then ask what they found.

Read the quote by Ghandi.

According to Matthew 5:17,18, what did Jesus claim about the Old Testament? (Note: The “Law” referred to by Jesus is the Old Testament we possess today.) **Jesus states that He came as a fulfillment of the Old Testament and that it would not pass away until everything in it has been fulfilled and accomplished.**

Read Matthew 12:38-40.

Did Jesus really believe that Jonah was swallowed by a large fish? What does this tell us about Jesus’ view of Old Testament stories? **It’s obvious from Jesus’ statement that He did believe in the truth of that story. The implication is that other such stories in the Old Testament are also true.**

Based on Matthew 24:35, how confident are you that we still have Jesus’ words today? **Based on this statement (and many others by Jesus), we can be confident in what Jesus is saying.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 17:26-32 and Luke 24:25-27.

What other things did Jesus say about the Old Testament? **Jesus validates the Old Testament stories about Noah and the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, His second coming and His fulfillment of prophecies about the suffering Messiah.**

Have a group member read the section which summarizes what you have studied so far—the reliability of the Bible.

Day Four

THE ROLE OF GOD'S WORD

Have someone read the introductory paragraph to this section.

HOW THE BIBLE GUIDES US

Have the group look at 2 Timothy 3:16,17 again.

How does God's Word "rebuke and correct" us? **These verses illustrate the four ways that God's Word helps us to stay on the path of life. Using the terms "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training," verse 17 points out that each element helps us in a little different way. Teaching tells us what we should be and do; rebuking points out where we have gone wrong; correcting puts us back on the right path; and training equips us to be effective in life and ministry. When do we need that? We need God's correction whenever we begin to stray from His purpose for us for whatever reason.**

How is God's Word like an owner's manual for life? **God's Word is like the owner's manual of a car in that the manual is designed to ensure the most successful operation of the car. Like the manual, the Bible is written by our Creator/Designer. He knows best how our lives should "run." Therefore we ought to know and to follow the Bible in order to live successfully.**

THE RELEVANCE OF THE BIBLE FOR US

Have someone read the introductory paragraph for this section.

Read Psalm 119:97-105. Complete the following statements.

Verses 97-99. Meditating on God's Word makes us: **Wiser than our enemies and smarter than our teachers.**

Verse 100. Obeying gives us: **More understanding than our elders.**

Verse 105. In what ways does God's Word illuminate our steps? **It shows us the right direction for our lives.**

How would the above principles help you in your life? **Look for answers like: it would help me face any challenge, help me make any decision, help me deal with any conflict, etc.**

What else then could you say to answer Kelly's view of the Bible being outdated? **That the Bible, like other ancient literature, still captures the imagination of millions of people and is relevant to issues today. It has stood the test of time and continues**

to be a bestseller 2,000 years after it was written.

Have someone read the quote by Walter Henrichsen, the author of the best-selling book, *Disciples Are Made, Not Born*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEYING GOD'S WORD

Read the introductory sentences to this section and then ask the group to share their answers for the questions in the chart.

Matthew 7:24-27

Obedying enables us to stand firm in the storms of life. If God's Word is not obeyed, we eventually will ruin our lives.

Psalms 1:1-6

A person who obeys will be blessed, stable, healthy, fruitful and prosperous. God will watch over him/her. For the non-Christian, disobedience will result in condemnation at the judgment, and his/her life will disappear from God's presence.

KEY QUESTION

Why is it reasonable to place your life under the leadership of God's Word?

God promises great blessing if we do and great calamity if we don't. God gives us the freedom to choose, but there are great consequences to our choices.

Read the SUMMARY paragraph.

Day Five

APPLYING THE BIBLE TO YOUR LIFE (7 minutes)

Read the sentence about the three-step approach to Bible study. After reading James 1:22, take your group members through each step and ask them the appropriate questions. Try to have several people respond to each question.

Some suggested answers are as follows:

Observation:

What does this passage say? **We are to not merely listen to God's Word, but to do/obey it.**

Interpretation:

What does this passage mean? **It means that if we listen to it but don't apply it to our lives, it becomes meaningless. In the end, we are just deceiving ourselves about its value to us.**

Application:

How can I apply this passage to my life? **When I read something in the Bible which**

is either teaching me, rebuking me, correcting me or training me, I should take heed to obey and apply it to my life.

If appropriate, share how your experience using this method has affected your understanding of God's Word.

Read this quote by Billy Graham.

“Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.” Rising from his knees, tears in his eyes, Billy Graham said he sensed the power of God as he hadn't felt it for months. ‘Not all my questions were answered, but a major bridge had been crossed,’ he said. ‘In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.’”

—Billy Graham, quoted in *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel

Encourage your group members to thoughtfully commit themselves to follow this plan for the next few weeks.

Assignments

Explain the assignment so that your group members clearly understand this method of studying the Bible for themselves. While stressing the importance of becoming “self-feeders” in the Word, encourage them to begin their study this week by picking one or more topics and corresponding Scripture passages to apply the three-step method.

Highlight the other assignments for the coming week.

Close in Prayer

Have your group members write down prayer requests on the sheets in the back of their study guides. Encourage your group members to pray for each other during the week using the requests on these sheets. Close your time by thanking God for the reliability of His Word and by expressing our need to follow it.

3

Session 3
*The Uniqueness
of Jesus*

The Uniqueness of Jesus

FOCUS

Jesus is worthy to be trusted with our lives because of who He is and what He has done for us.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members to capture a fuller knowledge of who Jesus is and why He came and as a result be able to trust Him more fully with their lives. In this lesson, you will guide participants to do the following:

- Understand evidences that Jesus Christ is God.
- Explain that Jesus came to earth to meet our greatest need—forgiveness for sins.
- Understand the role of emotions in our relationship with God.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Remember that you may not be able to cover every question in the session. Try to discuss one or two from a section or what seem to be the most important ones. If your group members have a question regarding an unasked question, feel free to help them find the answer.
2. In order to have a good quality group, **begin to meet individually** with each group member to build a good relationship. Be vulnerable. Share with him/her your testimony and what God is currently teaching you. He/she needs to see you as a fellow learner and not as one who is unapproachable or who has “all the answers.”
3. Be sure to **hold your group members accountable** to complete their assignments and their memory verses. As C.S. Lewis stated, “We all long to have someone in our lives who makes us do the things we know we can.”
4. Before teaching this session, focus your attention on the basic subject to be studied: the character of Jesus Christ. Awareness of who He really is reveals that He is worthy to be trusted with every aspect of our lives. Prayerfully read these Scriptures, noting both who He is and what He does for us. The following passages are excellent background on the person of Christ:

John 10:1-33. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd makes the first 18 verses of this chapter uplifting. The conflict which appears in verse 19 comes as a harsh shock but not as a total surprise. Jesus claims to be sent from God, a claim that forces everyone to face life's most significant decision.

John 14:1-15. Jesus speaks to His closest friends. There is a serious lack of understanding by Thomas and Philip. Again, the claims of Christ bring them to confront life's deepest issue.

Philippians 2:1-11. Paul starts with the practical issue of a loving Christian lifestyle and supports his instructions with the example of Jesus. The humility of Jesus is astonishing because He is Lord.

Colossians 1:15-20. There is no more vivid description in Scripture of the greatness of Christ. Meditate on the expressions of His glory in this passage.

Now read through the Session Plan, and begin to think about how your group members will respond to it. What will be most interesting? What current needs will need to be addressed? Where might you need to add a word of explanation or emphasis? Above all, spend time praying for their trust in Christ to grow.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Memory Verses (3-5 minutes)

Have a few group members share the review verse (Romans 8:15) as well as the current memory verse (Psalm 119:105) with the group.

Review/Overview (3-5 minutes)

Read the Review paragraph.

Ask for the most significant insight from their three-step Bible study or from the preparation of this session.

Read aloud the Overview paragraph.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

SINCERELY YOURS

Have someone read aloud the story in the study guide.

If you were Kate, what would you say to Debra? **You could say something like this in a loving and patient way: “It certainly is important to live a good life and be sincere, but it is possible to be sincerely wrong about something.” Or: “Debra, I appreciate hearing your viewpoint. But the truth is that Jesus made some pretty incredible statements that would seem to indicate that He was more than just a good moral teacher. Would you be interested in hearing about some of those?”**

Does it really matter what a person believes? **Yes.** Is it enough to be sincere? **No. God is a God of truth. Think of the great problems that would result if, for example, we agreed that $2+2=5$ as long as a person *sincerely* believes it!**

OPTIONAL QUESTION: How would you suggest that Kate respond to her own questions about Jesus? **The Bible contains numerous clear statements by Jesus in which He claims that He is God. Thus He cannot be just a good, moral teacher.**

Begin today’s study by reading the transition paragraph.

Explore (30–45 minutes)

WHAT JESUS CLAIMED ABOUT HIMSELF

What are the implications of the following claims or statements made by Jesus?

John 10:30-33.

Jesus claims to be God, but His hearers accuse Him of blasphemy. Here, the word “blasphemy” means the act of giving the attributes of God to a man.

John 11:23-26.

Jesus tells Martha that He is the source of eternal life. He claims that whoever trusts in Him will live forever.

John 14:6.

In this statement, Jesus claims to be our only means of access to God.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read John 8:56-59 and John 20:26-29.

What did Jesus know to be true about Himself in these passages? **Jesus said He was a contemporary of Abraham and even existed before him (John 8:56-59).**

Jesus knew that He had been raised from the dead, and He accepted Thomas’ worship as Lord and God (John 20:26-29).

KEY QUESTION

If Jesus’ claims are true, how does that affect the belief that sincerity is all that matters?

If Jesus is telling the truth, then there is only one way to God. Belief in error is simply that—error—no matter how sincere the belief may be.

Day Two

Read the transition paragraph after the Key Question.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read John 11:38-44.

What are the implications of Jesus' actions here? **Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. That demonstration of power leaves little doubt about His divinity.**

EVALUATING CHRIST'S CLAIMS

Lead into the Trilemma diagram by saying something like, "In the previous session, we established the reliability of God's Word. The Bible is trustworthy. According to what we have studied so far, Jesus claimed to be God. What are the possibilities, then, for His identity?"

Discuss the diagram with the group by asking the question in the study guide: "What is your reaction to the Trilemma?"

Have someone read the paragraph following the question in the study guide, the C. S. Lewis quote and the transition statement.

Day Three

WHY JESUS CAME

Have a group member read the paragraph.

Read Romans 3:23 and 6:23.

What is the problem of mankind? **The problem of mankind is sin, separation from God, living in spiritual death.**

Read Isaiah 53:6.

How does Isaiah define sin? **He defines it as going astray, going our own way instead of God's way.**

In what ways have you "gone astray" and "turned to your own way" in your life? **Look for personal answers here.**

According to 1 Peter 2:24 and 3:18, how did Jesus' death solve our problem?

1 Peter 2:24—**Jesus took our sins on Himself at the cross. He healed us of our sin problem. We can live in righteousness.**

1 Peter 3:18—**His death for our sins brought us to God!**

Read the summarizing sentences.

KEY QUESTION

Does any other religion or religious leader deal with mankind's problem of sin? **No, no one comes close except to ask people to work for it.**

“No teacher, no guru in all history has been able to make an offer of complete forgiveness and an utterly new start like Jesus. Jesus is the only one who has dealt radically with human wickedness by taking its filth upon Himself so that we might never have to bear it. ... The Hindu doctrine of Karma says, ‘You sin, you pay.’ The cross of Christ shows God saying, ‘You sin, I pay.’ That is utterly unique.”

—But Don't All Religions Lead to God? **Michael Green**

OPTIONAL QUESTION: If Jesus is God and died for your sins, what are some implications for you? **Look for various personal responses such as: I can trust Him with my life if He did that for me; it proves how much God loves me, even if He allows me to go through difficulties and suffering; if He loves me that much, it prompts me to love Him in return with my whole heart.**

Have someone in the group read the Dayspring quote.

Day Four

OUR RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S CLAIMS

Read the introductory paragraph.

Read John 3:16-18. What does Jesus say we must do to obtain eternal life? **We must believe in Him and be saved.**

What is the consequence of not believing in Christ? **Being judged.**

Have someone read the story of George Wilson.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Ephesians 2:8,9.

What does it mean to be saved by grace? From what are you saved?

It means that being saved is a gift from God, not something we earned. We are saved from having to pay the penalty for our own sins.

Day Five

CONFIDENCE AND THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS

Have someone read the first four paragraphs.

Read the following questions and ask for answers:

Fact: How often does God's Word reflect the truth? **Always.**

Feeling: How often do our emotions reflect the truth? **Sometimes.**

Faith: If we place our faith in our feelings or emotions (which are reactions to circumstances, events and people) as an indicator of reality, what will our faith do? **It will fluctuate and be accurate only some of the time.**

Read Matthew 14:28-31.

What happened when Peter relied on his feelings? **He began to doubt the truth of what Jesus told him, which resulted in him failing to realize what Jesus had authorized him to do.**

KEY QUESTION

What role should emotions play in our being sure of our relationship with Christ? **They are not the foundation for giving us confidence that we have a relationship but can be one indicator that Christ is in our lives. Some people have strong feelings as a result of receiving Christ, but others experience very little in terms of an emotional response to salvation.**

GAINING CONFIDENCE

Read 1 John 5:11-13.

What is the basis for knowing that we have eternal life? **That we have believed in the Son (Jesus Christ) and have Him in our hearts and lives.**

If you died today, on a scale of 1-100, how confident are you that you would spend eternity with God in heaven? **Expect a variety of answers here depending on how much people understand and what they are experiencing in their relationship with Christ. Hopefully you will get answers in the 80 to 100 range.**

Suppose you were standing before God and He asked you, “Why should I let you into heaven?” What would you say? **Christ has paid the penalty for my sins and given me eternal life as a free gift. Thus, I can humbly request entrance into heaven.**

Read John 10:27,28.

KEY QUESTION

If Christ is in your life now, and you are a child of God who has eternal life, is it possible for all that to change sometime in the future? Why or why not? **No, it is not possible for that to change. See Hebrews 13:5,6.**

Read the SUMMARY paragraph.

Assignments

Read and explain the assignments, especially the part about the participants beginning to work on developing their spiritual journey in written form. Draw their attention to the worksheet that follows, and walk through it with them to see if they have any questions or concerns. If they need help during the week, they can go to www.5clicks.com, which will help them to write their story.

Try to have some copies of *More Than a Carpenter* available for your group members, as they are inexpensive and easy to obtain.

Close in Prayer

Take some time to ask for prayer requests. Then pray for those requests mentioned. Explain conversational prayer, and encourage each group member to participate. Encourage your members to pray aloud at home so they can get used to hearing themselves pray out loud. This will help them be more comfortable praying aloud in the group.

4

Session 4

Our New Identity in Christ

Our New Identity in Christ

FOCUS

Knowing who we are in Christ is critical for us in order to overcome an unhealthy self-image and become free to obey the direction of the Holy Spirit.

OBJECTIVES

You will help group members to live in the reality of their new identity in Christ by helping him/her to understand that:

- They received a new identity when they became Christians.
- They can identify the lies and wrong beliefs that affect their lives.
- They can choose to reject the lies and replace them with God's truth.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Each group member is different. Trust God to show you how to **motivate and communicate love to each one** individually. How can you develop each person's areas of strength? How can you help build each individual's weaknesses? What are unique areas to be sensitive to in discipling each person?
2. Remind group members to begin writing **their stories**.
3. Remember to **meet individually with each group member so that you can get to know him/her**. Ask how he/she is doing and if there is anything you can pray for him/her.

Our identity (how we view ourselves) forms one of the foundation blocks of our personality. Our view of ourselves largely determines how we relate to others, what we value and what our goals will be. If our identity is based on what others think of us, then our life will focus on trying to get others' approval.

This is why, for the Christian, our new identity in Christ is so crucial. The Lord has established a whole new foundation for who we are—the identity we were always meant to have. Our new identity in Christ is not something we earn, nor is it based on people's approval of us. It is based totally on God's unconditional love and acceptance of us through what Christ accomplished on the cross.

“ ... God is your loving Father and you are His accepted child. That’s the foundational truth of your spiritual identity. You are a child of God, you are created in His image, you have been declared righteous by Him because of your faith in Christ. As long as you believe that and walk accordingly, your daily experience of practical Christianity will result in growth. But when you get your eyes off your identity, and try to produce in your daily experience the acceptance God has already extended to you, you’ll struggle. We don’t serve God to gain His acceptance; we are accepted, so we serve God. We don’t follow Him in order to be loved; we are loved, so we follow Him. ... The essence of the victorious Christian life is believing what is already true about you. ... Satan will try to convince you that you are an unworthy, unacceptable, sick person who will never amount to anything in God’s eyes. Is that who you are? No, you are not! You are a saint whom God has declared righteous. Believing Satan’s lie will lock you into a defeated, fruitless life. But believing God’s truth about your identity will set you free” (italics ours).

—*Victory Over the Darkness*, Neil T. Anderson

Understanding and putting into practice our true identity frees us from our former bondage to the world’s values and to what others think. It allows us to please God rather than others and to live for God’s purposes and goals rather than for our own. Before we can live a life of character and fruitfulness, we must believe *what God says* about who we are—rather than trying to establish an identity in our own eyes.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Ask several people to share out loud the current memory verse (John 14:6) and previous memory verses (Romans 8:15 and Psalm 119:105).

Ask if everyone had the chance to start working on their personal spiritual journeys, using the worksheet at the end of session three. Remind them to continue with that assignment this week.

Review/Overview

Have someone read the paragraphs introducing this session.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

WHO ARE YOU?

Have a group member read the story of Chin Lee, and then ask for participant’s answers to the two following questions.

Why do you think Chin hesitated before answering his son? **He hesitated because he is living partly in his Chinese culture and partly in his new American culture.**

Do we as Christians face a similar dilemma? **Yes.** Why or why not? **As non-Christians, we were members of Satan's kingdom, following his ways and values. When we were born again, we were transferred into God's kingdom and called to obey God's ways and values. For Christians, it is a daily battle whether to follow God or to follow His enemy. Although we can be members of God's family, we still can live, sadly enough, as followers of Satan's deceptions.**

Read the paragraph introducing the next section.

Explore (35 minutes)

TRUTHS ABOUT THE NEW YOU

A New Life

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ezekiel 36:26,27; 1 Peter 1:3-5.

What are some of the ways our new life is described? **We are a totally new creation. (New life requires a new birth.) A radical transformation took place the moment each of us placed our faith in Christ. We didn't take on just a new code of ethics or a list of rules under which to operate. We each became a brand new person. Something happened to the old self, and now we can live in newness of life.**

A New Family Relationship

Read Romans 8:15-17.

How does God describe us in these verses? **We are described as His beloved children who call out to Him, "Daddy."**

How does the realization that you are part of God's family affect the way you see yourself? **Expect a variety of personal answers such as: It makes me feel more secure, more loved, etc.**

An Inseparable Love

Read Romans 8:31,32,38,39.

What difference does it make to you to know you can never be separated from God's love? **Again, expect a variety of personal answers: I never have to worry or feel insecure because God will always be there for me, no matter what; I know I can always count on Him, no matter what the circumstances, etc.**

A New Reason for Living

Read aloud Ephesians 2:10.

How does it make you feel to know that you are "God's masterpiece"? **A variety of answers can be expected here: It makes me feel great; I've never seen myself that way before.**

What good things might God want you to do? **Again, look for a variety of answers, all the way from being a better spouse or parent to making an impact for Christ in the workplace.**

A New Freedom to Live for Christ

Have someone read aloud Romans 6:5-11.

In what areas of your life would you like to experience freedom from sin?

Expect again a variety of personal answers.

In what areas have you seen positive changes in your life? **Expect a variety of personal answers: I've become a better husband; I'm more patient, etc.**

Read Neil Anderson's quote.

Day Two

THE "TRUTH ABOUT ME" INVENTORY

Encourage your group members to identify one or two statements in the left column to which they relate. Emphasize the corresponding biblical truth. Before asking the Key Question after the inventory, ask if anyone feels comfortable sharing the statements with which they identified (circled).

KEY QUESTION

What does the Bible tell us to do with our former way of life (Ephesians 4:22-24)? **Lay aside the old self, the old way of life, and put on the new self which has been created in righteousness—our new identity.**

Day Three

WALKING IN THE TRUTH OF THE NEW YOU

Read aloud the paragraphs introducing this section. Ask with which of the four lies your group members could most identify. You may not need to discuss all of the lies if no one could identify with a particular one.

Lie 1: "In order to feel good about myself, I must have the acceptance of certain other people."

Give an example of how we live out this lie. **Expect various personal examples of this, such as: I'm always trying to please my parents or my spouse and get their approval.**

If you believe this, how is your life affected? **Expect personal answers like: If my parents or spouse get down on me, then I get depressed and down on myself.**

God's Truth

In Colossians 1:21,22, God tells us that He has completely accepted us in Christ. This is one of the most amazing and freeing truths in the Bible. If we were to apply this concept in our lives, we would be free from needing the approval of others (including ourselves). We wouldn't be enslaved to performing, to acquiring things or to appearing a certain way for others' approval.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 6:22,26; John 12:42,43; Romans 15:7. These passages tell us that we can't please everybody, so pleasing God is the most important thing. And, since we ourselves are sometimes hard to please, we must learn to accept others despite their weaknesses, just as God accepts us unconditionally.

Lie 2: "In order to feel good about myself, I must live up to my own expectations (standards or rules)."

Give an example of how we give in to this lie. **Expect personal answers like: I often set unreal expectations for myself, and then I'm unable to live up to or achieve those standards—in other words, I'm a perfectionist.**

What is the result of living with this false value? **I'm under a lot of pressure to achieve results. I can never relax and feel good about myself or enjoy life and my relationships with others.**

God's Truth

Romans 5:1,2 teaches that we have been justified with God, and therefore we are at peace with Him. He has been satisfied already. This truth frees us from trying to measure up to our standards because we already measure up to God's higher standards. We can never live up to our own standards which lead to bondage. Amazingly, we can please God—which leads to freedom.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Galatians 3:2,3,11; Galatians 5:1,4,5; Romans 7:4-6,8. These passages teach us that we should live in freedom, not in bondage to anyone's expectations except God's—not even our own.

Day Four

Lie 3: "God will love me more if I obey and do certain activities."

Give an example of how we live out this lie. **Our lives are filled to the brim with activities such as church services, Bible studies and other kinds of commitments.**

If you believe this, how is your life affected? **I feel guilty, disobedient and frustrated if I'm not involved in the maximum amount of activities. I live in bondage to activities and cannot enjoy my relationship with God or others.**

God's Truth

Read Romans 8:38,39 which teaches that God's love for us is not based on our performance, but on what Christ has done for us. This wonderful truth cuts against the grain of our natural thinking and behavior. Because God's love is not based on our works (Ephesians 2:8,9), He will neither love us more nor love us less by our behavior. This principle is part of what Jesus meant when He said that knowing the truth would set us free.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Romans 5:8-10; Ephesians 2:8,9.

These verses teach us that we should live by grace through faith and not by having as many activities, services or meetings as possible.

Lie 4: "My past determines who I am. I cannot change."

If you believe this, how is your life affected? **If I believe this, I will never change. I will be a prisoner of my past, and I will constantly feel guilty and in bondage to my past and to my bad habits, thought patterns and behaviors.**

God's Truth

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we learn that in Christ, we are new persons. We are no longer slaves, but we have received the Holy Spirit who provides the desire and the power to change. Ephesians 1:19 describes "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." God asks us to trust Him to work in and through us and not to trust in our own opinions or feelings.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Philippians 2:13; 4:13; Hebrews 13:20,21. These verses teach us that we can do anything through Christ. We don't have to live in the past. We can press ahead into the future, forgetting what lies behind and focusing on what God wants to make us into through His transforming power.

Day Five

BELIEVE THE TRUTH AND ACT ACCORDINGLY

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this section.

According to Romans 10:17, what should we do to experience our identity in Christ? **We must believe, or have faith in, truth, which is revealed to us from God's Word. A biblical definition of faith is belief, trust, and commitment of mind, attitude and action in what God has said.**

Read James 1:22-25. What does this passage tell us to do with truth that is revealed to us? **We must *act upon* the truth of what God says to us. It is not enough to know the Word—we must apply it and not forget it.**

What effect will it have on our lives? **When we do obey His Word, He will bless our lives.**

Read the quote by Ney Bailey and ask if anyone has a comment on it.

Have someone read the account from Toy Story and then ask if anyone has any comments on how it relates to acting on truth. Buzz Lightyear belonged to Woody. And Woody's name was on him. Ask, "Who do you belong to? How has God stamped His image on you?" Listen to the answers given, then summarize: **Our self-image comes from understanding who we belong to and how much He loves us. We are precious to Him.**

Read aloud the **SUMMARY** section and ask if anyone has any comments or questions.

Assignments

Encourage group members to complete their assignments, especially the one in which they are to write out applicable Bible verses related to their inventory.

Close in Prayer

Ask group members if they have any personal requests, and spend a few minutes praying as a group for those requests.

5

Session 5

Experiencing God's Forgiveness

Experiencing God's Forgiveness

FOCUS

Christ's death on the cross is the basis for God's forgiveness of the sins we commit daily. Confession is an essential ingredient to experiencing God's love and forgiveness moment by moment.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members to understand the implications of sin in the believer's life, and how God's forgiveness provides the solution, when you guide them to do the following:

- Define sin as actions and attitudes to please self and not God.
- Define confession as "agreeing with" God about one's sins.
- Confess all known sins to God and claim His forgiveness and cleansing.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Each of your group members has a **different spiritual growth level** depending on how long he/she has been a Christian and to what extent he/she has trusted God with the details of life. As you meet individually, don't treat each person the same. You will want to pray and think about **how to motivate and communicate love for each individual** (Colossians 1:28).
2. **Open the Word** during your individual time with each group member to encourage him/her and to reinforce the concepts of forgiveness, confession and restitution. Here are some suggested passages: Ephesians 1:3-8; 2:1-10; Colossians 2:13,14; Romans 8:31-39; and Matthew 5:23,24.
3. **Evaluate your teaching methods** and the group's responsiveness to the past four sessions. Are your group members understanding biblical truths and applying them in their lives? Do all of your group members participate? Do you lead stimulating discussions, or are you lecturing? (Review page G-12 in the Guidelines for the Leader at the beginning of this Leader's Guide.)

"Jesus meant for the Christian life to be an exciting adventure. He said, *'I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).'*" (John 10:10 Amplified). When we walk in the fullness and the control of God's Holy Spirit, every

day is filled with wonder, meaning, purpose and fruitfulness. A rich and satisfying life is the heritage of every Christian, *‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ...’* (Galatians 5:22,23 NASB).

“But most Christians do not know anything about this kind of life—a life of victory, joy and abundant fruitfulness for our Savior. On the contrary, to many people, the Christian life is a burden, a chore, a terrible cross to bear. To many, Christianity is something to be endured in anticipation of heaven. This is not the way our Lord intended it.

“Why was the first-century church able to make a powerful impact for God upon a wicked Roman Empire? The only logical explanation is that the church was composed largely of spiritual Christians, men and women filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Before they could experience fellowship with God and be used by Him to help fulfill His purpose in the world, they needed to be filled with His Holy Spirit. They needed to be forgiven and cleansed of their sins.

“The psalmist, King David, understood the need for cleansing and forgiveness of sin. Listen to his heart-warming prayer, *‘Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ... Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit’* (Psalm 51:2,12 NASB). Cleansing from our sins is a prerequisite for the abundant and fruitful life to which Christ has called us.”

—Dr. Bill Bright, Founder, Campus Crusade for Christ

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Have several group members share 2 Corinthians 5:17 and past verses (Romans 8:15, Psalm 119:105 and John 14:6) with the group.

Ask for the most significant insight from their preparation of the session or about the progress they’ve made in writing their stories.

Review/Overview

Have one of your group members (or yourself) read the two paragraphs in the Review/Overview section.

Day One

Involve (6 minutes)

STEVE’S FIRST YEAR

Have a group member read aloud the story in the study guide.

Ask the group to share what they wrote for their answers to the questions.

The following answers are for your understanding, not for the correction of your group members' wrong answers. **Steve needs to realize that he has been totally forgiven for all his sins. Therefore the guilt or shame that he feels from the sins he has committed is not from God. The Bible says that Steve should confess his sins as the means to experience God's forgiveness and cleansing. Psalm 51:1-3,7,10 would be refreshing for Steve to meditate upon. Once he begins to experience the love and forgiveness that God is extending toward him, Steve will draw near to God in love, thankfulness, faith and obedience. He will also know that a joyful Christian life is meant for every Christian.**

Talking about Steve's problem will stimulate interest in understanding how to experience God's love and forgiveness in daily living. Also, the advice group members offer Steve/themselves will indicate their level of understanding about dealing with sin.

Explore (35 minutes)

THREE TYPES OF PEOPLE

Read the introductory sentences, and then ask group members to open their Bibles to 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3. Direct their attention to the three diagrams, and then ask for their answers to the questions after each person/circle.

Natural Man

What is this man's attitude toward spiritual things? **He does not understand them. They seem foolish to him.**

Spiritual Man

On whose wisdom is this man depending for living? **Christ and His mind.**

Fleshly or Worldly Man

Is the fleshly man a Christian? Why or why not? **Yes, Christ is in his life, but he is a spiritual baby.**

How is his lifestyle like the natural man's? **It is characterized by many of the same attitudes and behaviors.**

KEY QUESTION

As you look at the previous diagrams, what determines whether you live spiritually or in the flesh? **Who's on the throne, directing your life.**

Day Two

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Read the sentence introducing this section.

Read Isaiah 53:6.

How is sin defined in this verse? **Sin is "turning to our own way" and being independent from God; it is doing our own thing.**

Have someone read the paragraph about Romans 14:23b and faith from the study guide.

KEY QUESTION

Is it possible to do good works pleasing to God apart from faith in Christ? Why or why not? **We can do good works in the power of the flesh without trusting God. In the truest sense, no, we cannot live a good, moral life unless by faith we are allowing God's Spirit to produce His life through us. Our attempts at doing "good things" in our own strength are self-centered at best.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Mark 7:20-23.

Why would outward changes in behavior be inadequate to deal with the problem discussed in these verses? **Outward changes would be inadequate because the source of sin is within ourselves, in our own hearts. Our "evil thoughts" (attitudes) form the foundation for sinful actions. Our outward behavior results from our inner motivations.**

Day Three

THE GREAT SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF OUR SIN

In order to answer the following questions in the study guide, have everyone look at Hebrews 10:10-18 while someone reads the passage aloud.

According to verses 12 and 14, what did Jesus accomplish for us at the cross? **He sacrificed Himself for our sins. His sacrifice was completely acceptable to God. Because Christ's death was sufficient to pay for all our sins, He views us as perfectly acceptable. He has "sanctified" us (set us apart) for Himself and His work.**

What idea does the writer repeat in verses 10,12 and 14? **Jesus' sacrifice was once for all and for all time; another sacrifice is no longer needed.**

According to verse 18, what can you add to what Christ did for you on the cross? **Christ's death was sufficient payment for all my sins and the sins of mankind. No additional sacrifice or payment for sins is ever necessary.**

As you look at the following "time line," how many of your sins were in the future when Christ died on the cross for you? **All of them.**

Call attention to the time line. Ask group members if they wrote in their year of birth, when they received Christ and the current year.

What then has Christ done with the sins you will commit next year? **Because I have received Christ, He has forgiven all my sins—including those next year and into the future. (Be sure your group members understand the truth that either *all* of their**

sins have been forgiven—including those in the future—or *none* of their sins have been forgiven.)

Read the summary paragraph and the quote at the end of the section.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Romans 8:31-39.

What does the cross of Christ reveal about the love of God? **It shows us that it is the highest and ultimate demonstration of God's love for us. He sacrificed His greatest possession—His only Son—and will thus do anything for us.**

Day Four

THE ROLE OF CONFESSION

Have someone read the introductory paragraphs at the beginning of the section.

Ask the group to turn to 1 John 1:9. Ask someone to read the verse.

How does God say we should deal with sin in our lives? **By confessing it.**

What do you think is the difference between being forgiven and being cleansed? **Being forgiven is a once-and-for-all experience based on Christ's death on the cross. Confession enables us to experience (make real) the forgiveness Christ secured on the cross—cleansing.**

Have someone read the definition of confession.

KEY QUESTION

If God has forgiven all our sins as we discovered in Hebrews 10, then why do we need to confess our sins when we commit them? **Confession of our sins does not secure forgiveness for those sins, but it does allow our fellowship with God to be unhindered. If we do not confess our sins, those sins are still forgiven through Christ's death on the cross, but we are disobeying God and our fellowship with Him remains broken. To have a growing, intimate relationship with God, we must humbly do what He tells us. Confessing our sins makes real in our experience what God has done for us through the death of His Son. While confession does not result in more forgiveness or another forgiveness, it does allow God's love and forgiveness to flow into our lives. Confession provides the way to experience God's forgiveness, not earn it.**

Day Five

HOW TO CONFESS YOUR SINS

Ask someone to read aloud the three points. Emphasize the three words that describe confession: agree, thank and repent.

Read aloud the Note concerning temptation, and ask if anyone has questions about the difference between temptation and sin.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTITUTION

Have a group member read the paragraph on restitution, and ask if anyone has any questions or concerns about it.

Read Matthew 5:23,24.

What does God say is a barrier to worship? **Broken relationships/conflicts with brothers or sisters in Christ.**

Some Important Guidelines

Have someone read this paragraph. Ask if anyone has questions or concerns.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 19:8-10. How do you explain Zaccheus' response? **His life had truly been transformed by Christ. He had repented and made restitution.**

RESOLVING GUILT FEELINGS

Read aloud this section including the chart contrasting God and Satan. Ask if anyone has any questions about resolving guilt.

Agree or Disagree?

Read each statement and ask the group how they would “vote” on each one.

The purpose of this section is to see by the responses of the group members if they understand the concepts presented in this session. Misconceptions can be addressed briefly at this time. However, you may need to address specific issues with individual group members during your one-to-one times.

1. **Disagree: See Romans 8:38,39.**
2. **Agree: See Psalm 32:1-6; Romans 8:31-37.**
3. **Disagree: See Psalm 32:3,6; 1 John 1:6-10.**
4. **Disagree: See Hebrews 10:14-18; 1 John 1:8,10 provides a different perspective.**
5. **Disagree: See Romans 6:1,2.**

Have someone read aloud the SUMMARY section.

Assignments

Read this section and make sure everyone understands why and how to make their “sin/cleansing list.” Also emphasize the importance of making restitution when necessary.

Close in Prayer

Ask for wisdom and courage to ask for forgiveness or to make any needed restitution.

6

S e s s i o n 6

Power for Living

Power for Living

FOCUS

We will examine the difference between fleshly and spiritual living and how to begin to live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members move toward a life commitment to spiritual living when you guide them to be able to do the following:

- Identify the essential differences between a spiritual and a fleshly believer.
- Examine the results of both fleshly and spiritual living.
- Make a conscious choice to begin living as a spiritual Christian.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Since this session is longer than previous ones, you will need to shorten your time of prayer and sharing. An important principle in leading an effective discipleship group is to **vary the length of different elements**. If group members express real needs or joys, spend more time in sharing and less time in the Word or prayer. Other times focus more on the Word and less on sharing, and so on. This not only provides variety, but more importantly, it also *builds depth in each area* from week to week.
2. **Be ready to share your story** with your group. Set an example for them by describing in specific, non-stereotypical fashion what your life was like before and after you received Christ. (For example, don't begin by stating what your church background was or was not.) Also, clearly explain how you became a Christian. Think about *what will relate to average nonbelievers*. They are the intended audience of your story.
3. Ask your group members about the **“sin/cleansing lists”** they should have made during the week. (Do not ask about their sins, but ask about the process and what they learned.) Also ask if anyone wants to share how God may have led him/her in making restitution or in asking for forgiveness.

The Bible study sections in this session may raise questions with some individuals. While time will not allow you to go into great depth with the passages, the following information may help you answer some questions:

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3. As we talk about living the Spirit-directed life, remember that this is one of the most crucial Scriptures in understanding spiritual and fleshly living.

This one passage describes the three types of people in the world: natural man, spiritual man and fleshly man. Some Christians may doubt that there is such a thing as a fleshly Christian. They believe that if a person truly is a child of God, he/she will walk with God. However, this Scripture plainly teaches that there are three (not two) kinds of people. Paul refers to these people as “brothers” and as “babes in Christ.” He would *never* refer to nonbelievers in those terms.

Yet Paul also describes these Christians by saying that they are not spiritual but worldly (or fleshly). He says that because they are jealous and are fighting with one another, they are living like non-Christians. This truth reveals that as Christians, we can have a permanent relationship with God and still live like nonbelievers. The Spirit of Christ, then, can be living within us and still not be directing or empowering our lives. (See also Romans 8:5-9,12,13.) As we begin to understand the reality and nature of the fleshly Christian, we become more able to learn how to live as a spiritual person.

Psalm 32:1-5. This Psalm of David reminds us that although David was a man after God’s heart, he struggled with fleshly living. The Psalm is traditionally connected with his grievous sin of adultery with Bathsheba which led to the murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11). David’s description of inner torment in this Psalm powerfully illustrates the results of harboring sin. His expressions of praise for God’s forgiveness make clear the extent of God’s mercy and grace in restoring full fellowship when true confession is offered.

Galatians 2:20 and 5:16. These two passages show that God Himself provides the solution to the powerlessness and defeat of attempting to live the Christian life in our own strength. It is not a matter of trying harder to live the way Christ wants us to, or even of asking God to help us be more loving or more patient, etc. These Scriptures (along with several others) teach that *“it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”* He doesn’t want to help us; He wants to live His life through us. By faith, we must trust that He can and will provide the power to enable us to turn away from the desires of the flesh.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Memory Verses (3-4 minutes)

Have several group members share 1 John 1:9 from memory.

Review/Overview

Have someone read the Review paragraph.

Ask for the most significant insight from the article “How to Experience God’s Love and Forgiveness” or from making their “sin/cleansing lists.”

Have someone read the Overview.

Day One

Involve (9 minutes)

I CAN'T STOP— The Story of Frank Abagnale

Ask someone to read the story in the study guide. Then ask the question following: What do you think it takes to break the cycle of sin in a Christian's life? **Expect a variety of answers here. Hopefully by the end of this session, participants will be better able to correctly answer this question.**

Explore (40 minutes)

COMPARING FLESHLY AND SPIRITUAL LIVING

Have everyone turn to Galatians 5, and have someone read verses 19-23. Then have a participant read the introductory paragraph.

RESULTS OF SELF IN CONTROL

Explain the chart by saying that the words in bold print on the left are taken directly from verses 19-21. Also explain that the words under the Bible words are synonyms which help to amplify the meaning of the word or to point out more subtle forms of the particular sin.

Read verses 22 and 23 again. Ask your group members to list the spiritual character qualities found in those verses.

These qualities of love, joy, etc. are not direct opposites of the results of self in control.

The overall purpose here is to see the huge contrast that God makes between what we can do in the power of the flesh and what the Spirit can do through us.

Ask your group members if anyone would like to share his/her answers for the following two questions.

What are some results of the self-controlled life (from Galatians 5:19-21) that you have experienced recently as you have faced stressful circumstances or difficult people? **Encourage honesty and openness in their answers.**

Have any results of the Spirit-directed life been evident in your life recently? **Hopefully some or many of these will have been evident in recent days. If your group members understand this principle, they will mention *character qualities* rather than *things they did*.**

Day Two

THE FUTILITY OF SELF-EFFORT

Introduce the next Scripture verses by having a member of the group read Philippians 3:4-8, and then ask for volunteers to answer the two questions.

On what good things did Paul say he had been depending to make him a righteous person? **He was born and raised a pure Jew (the correct race of the time); he was from the right group of people (tribe of Benjamin); he was a Hebrew of Hebrews; he had meticulously followed all the religious rules (a Pharisee); he was so zealous for his beliefs that he became a persecutor of the church; and he was blameless in meeting the requirements of the Law.**

Like Paul, what are some “good” things that you may be doing that are a result of self in control? **See if your group members can get below the surface on this question. Many things we do as Christians can still be motivated by self, including prayer, for example, when we ask with selfish desires (James 4:3), as well as Bible study, attending Christian meetings and even trying to witness for Christ.**

Have someone read the paragraph explaining that Paul’s good works were a result of his self-effort rather than depending upon God.

KEY QUESTION

Why do we often depend on our own self-effort to live the Christian life instead of trusting the Lord and living by faith? **Look for answers such as: we have been taught that if you try hard enough you can do anything; inwardly we don’t believe that God will be faithful to His promises; subtly we believe that we have a better plan for our lives than what God will give us; we doubt God’s loving intentions toward us, etc.**

Day Three

GOD’S PROVISION

Read the introductory statement and have two or three group members share their descriptions of each Scripture passage with the group.

Galatians 2:20

Christ now lives within me to produce His quality of life in me. I trust Him by faith.

Galatians 5:16

If we are willing to live the Christian life by the power of the Spirit, then we are freed from the powerful desire of the flesh—something we cannot do in our self-effort.

Have a group member read the summary paragraph which also introduces the next section on the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT’S NATURE AND PERSONALITY

Have a group member read the paragraphs and Scriptures on “The Holy Spirit’s Nature” and “The Holy Spirit’s Personality.”

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 3:16,17 and 28:19. Read 1 Corinthians 2:11 and 12:11. The Matthew verses reveal the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The 1 Corinthians verses show that the Holy Spirit has a mind (intellect) and that He gives gifts to men as He desires (an act of the will). Thus the Holy Spirit is a complete Person, with emotion, intellect and will.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN YOUR LIFE

Read the introductory sentence after the heading, and ask group members what they observed from the John and Acts passages.

John 16:8-13

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin (shows unbelievers what is wrong), righteousness (shows what is right), and judgment (reveals that, apart from turning to God in repentance, the sinner is under God's judgment). The Holy Spirit guides us and discloses the truth to us.

Acts 1:8

The Holy Spirit empowers us to be effective witnesses for Christ.

Read the next three paragraphs which introduce and explain the concept of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

KEY QUESTION

Why does the Apostle Paul contrast being drunk with wine to being filled with the Holy Spirit? **People who are drunk are “under the influence” of alcohol. Their behavior, speech, etc., shows what/who is in control. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our lives are influenced—directed and empowered—by God, and we experience a quality of life that we cannot have in our own strength.**

Read the following summary and example of the FedEx commercial from the Super Bowl. Ask if anyone has any comments or observations.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read John 15:4-8. Compare it with Ephesians 5:15-21. Notice how the John passage emphasizes abiding in Christ, while the Ephesians passage emphasizes being filled with the Holy Spirit. They are really saying the same thing, just describing the dependent life in different ways with different metaphors.

Day Four

HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

This section will explain to your group members how they can be filled with the Holy Spirit and will give them the opportunity to do so.

Have a different group member read each step and answer the question.

First: Desire

Why is it necessary to desire to be filled with God's Spirit? **God does not force**

Himself on us. He knows our hearts and does not overrule our true desires.

Second: Confess

Why do we need to confess our sins before we can be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Individual acts of sin show that we are going our own way, living lives of self-effort, being independent of God's power. Until we turn away from this kind of living and choose to let Christ direct us, God will not empower us. He will not force His control on people who want to direct their own lives.

Third: Surrender

Can we be filled with the Holy Spirit if we have an area in our life that we knowingly will not surrender to God? Why or why not? **No. If we knowingly do not want to surrender some area of our life to God, then we are still in control. We still call the shots. The Holy Spirit will not direct or empower us until we yield total control of our life to Him.**

Fourth: Trust

According to Ephesians 5:18, what has God commanded us to do? **The verse is God's command; God clearly wants us to be filled with His Spirit.**

According to 1 John 5:14,15, what has God promised He will do? **If we ask according to His will, He hears and He answers.**

Combining 1 John 5:14,15 with Ephesians 5:18, what is our basis for believing that He will fill us with the Holy Spirit when we ask Him? **He promises to hear and provide whatever we ask that is according to His will. We know from Ephesians 5:18 that it is His will that we be**

filled with His Spirit; therefore, He will fill us with the Spirit when we ask in faith.

A Prayer to Be Filled With the Spirit

Read the introductory sentence, then call attention to the prayer in the study guide. Ask everyone to read through the prayer and the question which follows. Give group members a moment to think and to silently respond to the question, "Does this prayer express the desire of your heart?"

Then tell the group, "It would be less than fair to give you this information and not give you an opportunity to apply this important truth. If this does express the desire of your heart, you can bow in prayer and trust God to fill you with the Holy Spirit right now."

Allow group members to pray silently as you reread the prayer aloud. As you read the next three questions, ask everyone to respond privately—in writing (if not done previously).

Did you ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit? **Yes (or No).**

Do you know that you are now filled with the Holy Spirit? **Yes, by faith I can be confident that I *am* filled.**

Emphasize the answer to the third question.

On what authority do you know you are filled with the Spirit? **Based on the faithfulness of God and the reliability of His Word, I know that I *am* filled with the Spirit.**

BE FILLED CONTINUALLY WITH THE SPIRIT

Read the two paragraphs introducing this section about spiritual breathing, then ask a group member to read the Exhale and Inhale sections. Ask if anyone has any questions about this concept.

Day Five

Assignments

Read through each of the assignments and ask if anyone has questions about any of them. Make sure participants are continuing to work on their stories (testimonies). Remind them of the importance of reading the articles listed in their assignments.

Close in Prayer

You might want to take a few minutes to pray for various prayer requests.

7

Session 7
*Living Out
Biblical Priorities*

Living Out Biblical Priorities

FOCUS

God desires for each of us to know, understand and live by His values and priorities. In this session, we will focus on learning what those are and how we can incorporate them into our lives and weekly schedules.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this session is to begin helping your group members to discover what things God values and to:

- Understand the difference between temporal and eternal perspectives.
- Examine four things that are important to God—loving Him, loving others, finding time for rest and worship, and developing a sense of mission in life.
- Keep a weekly time log to measure how and on what they are spending their time and use that to make adjustments in their weekly schedules.
- Begin developing a Life Purpose Statement for their lives.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. You have spent the past several weeks helping your group members begin to understand and experience the Spirit-directed life on a consistent basis. It is important to recognize, however, that this kind of life is not lived in a vacuum. It is lived in the context of the pressures and demands that we face each and every day at work and at home. This session addresses the need to understand God's values and priorities and provides direction in how to align our lives with His. Thus we will be better able to apply the Spirit-directed life in the midst of making daily choices that honor God and maximize our lives for His kingdom.
2. It is very important that, as a leader, you are increasingly understanding what is important to God, grasping God's purpose for your own life and being willing to make changes in your weekly schedule that will align your life with God's priorities. That is the goal of this session for you and your group members.
3. Make sure that you are beginning to personally work on the assignments for this session ahead of time, as they are unique and challenging and will take several weeks to complete. These unique assignments include: keeping a weekly time

log, developing a Life Purpose Statement and beginning to make changes in your schedule that reflect your Life Purpose in concert with what you learned from your time log.

Be sure to make use of the Personal Life-Balance Assessment that follows. By combining this assessment with your time log, you will gain an accurate picture of what your strengths and weaknesses are in relation to your stated values as well as how you are really spending your time.

Most of us experience stress on a weekly and even daily basis. We seek to appease the demands of our work, families and spiritual lives with a delicate touch, not wanting to burn ourselves out while at the same time not wanting to neglect important things and relationships. When those close to us start to become burdens because our jobs or activities scream for attention, we know it's time to yell, "Time out!" and reassess our priorities.

Life is short and is filled with more options than we could possibly fit into 100 lives. Wouldn't it be wonderful to come to the end and look back with satisfaction, fulfillment and few regrets? It's not impossible, but it does require work. It is within your power to choose a life that ends well because you chose to live it well.

Making correct choices is based on what you've determined are correct priorities. In this session, you will examine how to decide what's important based on lasting values.

Begin with a personal self-assessment that will help you see your attitudes, emotions, activity level and desires in light of what is realistic. This assessment requires that you be honest with yourself and honest in your personal expectations.

Personal Life-Balance Assessment

1. On a scale of one to 10, how balanced do you feel your life is?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

2. Do you know what your purpose in life is?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

3. Do you finish what you start?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

4. Are you always in a hurry?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

5. Do you have trouble turning work off when not at work?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

6. Do you keep your promises?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

7. Do you have difficulty making wise decisions?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

8. Are you always in crisis mode?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

9. Are you physically exhausted?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

10. Are you spiritually and emotionally discouraged?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

11. Are key relationships suffering because you work many nights and weekends?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

12. Are you unable to say no to requests?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

13. Do you feel overcommitted?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

14. Do you often fail to make the right moral choices?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

15. Do you place unrealistic expectations on yourself?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Definitely

16. If your life were in balance, would you feel like you were slacking off?

Yes No

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (3-5 minutes)

Have group members turn to the article “How to Be Filled With the Spirit,” and ask if anyone has something to share with the group that was meaningful from the article.

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Ask several group members to share the current or past verses from memory with the group.

Review/Overview

Read these sections aloud.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

THE MEXICAN FISHERMAN

Have someone read the story of the Mexican fisherman, then ask the two questions that follow.

What were each man’s priorities in life? **The Mexican fisherman’s priorities were relationships, contentment, enjoyment and having just enough to meet his needs. The American’s priorities were ambition, success, financial security and getting more.**

How do we strike a balance between being content with our “lot in life” and having bigger dreams and aspirations? When is enough enough? When is enough not enough? **Look for a variety of personal answers here, as there is no right or wrong answer. The intent of this mythical story is to stimulate thinking concerning our values, priorities and ambitions as they relate to our culture and ultimately, our faith.**

Explore (30-45 minutes)

THE RAT RACE

Have someone read the two paragraphs under this heading as well as the definition of a “priority.”

Reversed Priorities

Have everyone turn to the book of Haggai and ask someone to read aloud verses 1:2-11. Then ask for people’s answers to the questions.

What is the main point of this story? **The people of Israel had put their own well-being—their own houses and fields—ahead of God’s honor and specifically His house/temple. It’s a case of upside-down priorities. It’s an Old Testament example of not seeking first the kingdom of God. Thus God was not blessing them.**

What did God say through the prophet Haggai to address their priorities? **God told them to think about what they were doing and what was the cause of their lack of prosperity (vv. 5-9). The root cause of their lack of prosperity was their wrong priorities.**

If the individuals closest to you examined your life, how would they describe your priorities? **Look for a variety of answers to this personal question. A good suggestion here is to have group members ask this question of their spouse, roommate or close friend in order to get some real live feedback.**

Ask someone to read aloud the Alexander Solzhenitsyn quote and the two paragraphs under it which summarize the discussion about Haggai.

Day Two

ESTABLISHING WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Have someone read the two paragraphs introducing this topic.

TEMPORAL VERSUS ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18 and the definitions of “temporal” and “eternal.” Ask if everyone understands the difference. This may be a new concept for some. The definitions may spark some questions or discussion. Then ask the following questions.

What are some specific things that “don’t last forever” (temporal or temporary)? **Virtually anything that can be seen in this world is temporary—money, houses, cars, careers, our physical bodies, food, etc.**

What are some things that God values that are of eternal (everlasting) significance? **God Himself, His Word, our souls, the souls of others, faith, hope and love (the fruit of the Spirit).**

Why are we told to “keep our minds on the things that cannot be seen”? How can we practically do that on a daily basis? **Because those things matter to God and will last forever and are therefore worthy to be focused on daily, weekly and throughout our lives. Look for a variety of personal answers to the second question.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 12:32-34.

What does God want our attitude to be toward material things? **Our hearts should be focused on the kingdom of God. We should be generous regarding our money and possessions, giving to God’s work, which will earn us a reward in heaven.**

Day Three

THE MAIN THING

Read aloud the short paragraph and Matthew 22:37,38 to introduce this topic. Then ask for people's answers to the questions.

What does it mean to love God with “passion, prayer and intelligence”? **It means to love God with all one's being (heart, soul and mind), with mind, intellect and emotion. It means putting Him first in all areas of our lives and living a life focused on Christ and His values.**

Why should this be “the most important, the first on any list”? **Because God is worthy of our love—He is the center of the universe. And because He has redeemed us with His blood, our hearts should be overflowing with gratitude and love. It is the wise investment for eternity.**

What would be some ways to implement this in your life? Into your schedule? **Look for a variety of personal answers here, such as spending more time with the Lord, etc.**

ANOTHER MAIN THING

Read aloud the few sentences introducing this topic, then ask the two questions.

Who are some of the “others” in your life who might be difficult to love? **Look for a variety of personal answers here, such as a difficult co-worker or even a family member.**

What would it look like to love others as yourself? **It would mean “regarding others as more important than myself” (Philippians 2:3,4), taking the initiative to meet people's needs, etc.**

KEY QUESTION

What would be the most loving thing you could do for someone in light of eternity? **Love them with Christ's love, and introduce them to the Savior.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

What would your family life be like if everyone loved each other as this passage describes? **It would be a harmonious and Christ-centered family, with each member serving the other, etc.**

Read the Ron Jenson quote.

Day Four

REST STOP

Have someone read aloud the paragraph introducing this topic as well as the three Scripture passages from which the questions are to be answered (Genesis 2:1,2; Deuteronomy 5:13,14a; Psalm 127:2).

What might be some reasons why we tend to work constantly? **Look for a variety of personal answers here, such as: our careers are first in our lives, it's a form of escape from family responsibilities, we have addictive personalities, etc.**

What does God promise us in Psalm 127? **To give to us and meet our needs.**

Why do you think setting aside specific times to rest and worship is an important aspect of God's plan for our lives? What obstacles do you face to making this a reality in your life? **First of all, God rested, so He set the example; second, if we don't rest and worship, we'll be burned out, and our relationship with God will be anemic.**

How might you incorporate specific times of rest into your life? **Look for a variety of personal answers, but the key is to build and plan various times into our schedules and into our family's schedules.**

Have someone read aloud the quote by William Hinson.

Day Five

MISSION POSSIBLE

Read aloud the introductory paragraph for this section which includes Acts 20:24. Then ask the two questions based on Matthew 4:19 and Matthew 28:18-20.

What mission might Jesus be calling you to? **He is calling each of us to become fishers of men and to get involved in His Great Commission—making disciples of all the nations.**

Who are some people in your life who need to become disciples of Jesus? What is your role in helping them become disciples? **Look for a variety of personal answers, such as family members, co-workers, etc. Our role is to be "salt" and "light" and to "reflect" Christ through our lives so that people within our spheres of influence desire to become followers of Christ.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Ephesians 2:10.

How does God provide purpose and meaning for us? **God actually has good works planned out ahead for us to do, which gives purpose and meaning to our day-to-day lives.**

SUMMARY

Read the paragraph aloud and ask if anyone has any comments or questions. Then move into the **APPLICATION** section and spend five minutes or so having people write in their answers to the questions in each category. If group members have already done so, and if time allows, ask someone to share something they wrote in one of the categories. Be prepared, as the leader, to share at least one thing you expressed.

Assignments

Review the assignments with the group, drawing attention to number two (completing the Life Purpose Worksheet), number four (keeping an inventory of your time in one-hour increments for the next two weeks) and number six (planning a weekly schedule that better reflects the priorities of God, others, rest/margin and mission).

Keeping a time inventory for the next two weeks will be a challenging exercise for many group members. Try to emphasize how helpful it will be in gaining a true picture of how each person is spending his/her time and what's really important and valuable to us on a day-to-day basis. For example, most fitness experts agree that to maintain physical health, a person should exercise vigorously every day for 30 minutes—that's three and a half hours per week. Keeping a time log will enable me to see if I am attaining that goal for my physical fitness. And what about my relationship with God? Am I spending three and a half hours per week with God? etc. Putting our lives and our weeks into this kind of perspective helps us see the value of this type of exercise.

Take some time to explain the Life Purpose Worksheet. The goal is for group members to work on this for several weeks and to come up with a statement that is anywhere from two or three sentences up to a paragraph in length. Make sure that you, as a leader, have already completed your life purpose statement or are actively working on it. Remember, this exercise is designed to help each person discover God's personal purpose for their lives. As a result, group members will begin to feel a sense of destiny about their lives and futures.

There are excellent resources under the suggested reading.

Close in Prayer

Pray for each person to discover God's plan and purpose for his/her life in a special way in the coming weeks.



8

Session 8

Scheduling Time With God

Scheduling Time With God

FOCUS

God desires for us to have regular personal quiet times with Him to develop and maintain our loving relationship.

OBJECTIVES

You will help motivate and equip your group members to have a regular quality time with the Lord when you guide them to do the following:

- Identify a quiet time as an important aspect of fellowship with God.
- Examine the elements for having meaningful quiet times and observe how to conduct a quiet time.
- Make a commitment to having a regular quiet time for the next 30 days.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. There is less material to cover in this session than in previous ones, so use your time to focus on prayer. At the heart of this session, you will **demonstrate how to have a quiet time**. (See the notes in the “Important Note to the Leader” section toward the end of this session.) This will require additional preparation by you, so plan ahead.
2. Bring your own **personal quiet time notebook** to this session to illustrate how you record your thoughts and prayers. If you don’t currently use a journal, now is an excellent time to begin!
3. In the Assignment section at the end of the study guide session, notice the **30-day commitment** to having regular quiet times. It can be challenging and enriching. Be ready to make that commitment yourself!
4. Have you scheduled some of your participants to **share their stories** with the rest of the group? Writing and sharing their stories will be an important aspect of their growth. It will help them solidify in their minds what Christ has done in their lives and will also help prepare them to reach out to unbelievers.

5. Now is **an excellent time to evaluate** how well you have been doing in leading your group. Review pages G-4, G-5, and G-7 through G-12 in the Guidelines for the Leader at the beginning of this *Leader's Guide*.

Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, found it necessary to have definite and extended periods of time alone with His Father. Who could be busier than Jesus? His day was filled from morning to night speaking to crowds, traveling, healing, holding private interviews and training His disciples. Even though there was not always time to eat or rest, He consistently set aside time to be alone with God.

Down through the years, the biographies and writings of men and women who have done great things for God testify to the necessity of consistent devotional time. John Wesley, who founded the Methodist Church and stimulated reforms that changed the face of England, is a great example. Wesley considered prayer, more than anything else, to be his business.

Just as a child needs food to grow physically, we need spiritual food to grow spiritually. We can miss a meal and not feel any ill effects, but if we don't eat for a week, our bodily strength diminishes, and we become susceptible to disease.

So it is in our spiritual lives. The study of the Word of God and the practice of prayer are vitally important for spiritual growth. We may miss a day without feeding on the Word or praying and not notice any apparent ill effects in our lives, but if we continue this practice, we shall lose the power to live the victorious Christian life.

The Christian might be compared to a soldier in battle. He is out on the front lines but is connected with his commanding officer by radio. He calls and tells of the conditions and problems he faces. Then his commanding officer, who from his vantage point can see the entire battle, relays instructions. In like manner, the Christian shares the joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, and needs of daily living with God in prayer.

The soldier who is isolated from his commander is in mortal danger, unable to benefit from the vast resources at headquarters' disposal. The Christian who is not in communication with God is also deprived of God's wisdom for the challenges of life.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (3-5 minutes)

Ask group members to share how they are doing on their Life Purpose Worksheet. Also ask how things are going with the preparation of their stories (testimonies). Encourage them to keep working on their stories.

Memory Verses (3-5 minutes)

Ask several group members to share the current or past verses from memory with the group.

Review/Overview

Read the Review and Overview paragraphs.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

CAN YOU RELATE?

Have someone read the story about Ken. Ask the question that follows.

Is there anything in this story to which you can relate?

Look for a variety of personal answers.

Explore (40-50 minutes)

A QUIET TIME

Have a group member read aloud the paragraph introducing the concept, as well as the Scripture (Psalm 25:4,5) and the quote by Eugene Peterson.

Have group members turn to Philippians 3:7,8, then read the question. What should be our motivation for spending time with the Lord? **Our motivation should be the incomparable value of getting to know the Lord.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Joshua 1:8; Psalm 42:2; Jeremiah 29:13.

All of these verses discuss the importance of thirsting for God and reading, studying and meditating on His Word.

Read the question, then ask group members for their answers.

Psalm 16:11

I will experience fullness of joy.

Psalm 19:7-11

My soul will be restored; I will be made wise; my heart will rejoice; my eyes will be enlightened; I will come to value God's Word as I should—more than gold, sweeter than honey; I will be warned; and in keeping His Word, I will be greatly rewarded.

2 Corinthians 3:18

As I spend time “gazing at the Lord,” I will become conformed to His image—Christ's character, concerns, motives and activities will become more true of me as well.

Day Two

HOW TO HAVE A QUIET TIME

Schedule Time

Read the first sentence and the two questions, then ask the group for their answers.

What is something that is important enough for you to do every day? **Eating, sleeping, spending time with family, going to work, etc.**

How do you make sure it gets done? **You have to be intentional about it and schedule it in.**

Ask group members for their answers to the questions based on Psalm 143:8 and Mark 1:35.

When did Jesus and David like to spend undistracted time with God?

In the morning.

When is a good time in your day for you to schedule time with the Lord? **Look for a variety of answers based on personality and schedule, like: morning, evening before bed, lunchtime, etc.**

Read the summary paragraph after the questions.

Find a Good Place

Read the two sentences introducing this short topic and ask the two questions.

Where is the best place for you to have your quiet time? **Look for a variety of personal answers.**

Is there anything you need to do to make a particular place more suitable for time alone with God? **Again, look for a variety of personal answers.**

Day Three

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR QUIET TIME

Spend Time in the Word

Read the introductory paragraph, then ask group members for their answers to the questions.

How important did Jesus consider God's Word to be? **As important as daily food.**
How often did God tell Joshua to be in His Word? **Daily.**

How can we "meditate on God's Word day and night"? **Look for a variety of**

personal and creative ideas, like writing Bible verses on 3" x 5" cards and carrying them with you so you can read them throughout the day, having Scripture verses as the screen saver on your computer, etc.

Have a group member read the next few paragraphs, through the D. L. Moody and John Ortberg quotes.

Day Four

Ask the question following the John Ortberg quote.
What do the following passages tell us about prayer?

1 Peter 5:6,7

We are to be humble before God. We are to “cast” or release our needs and worries to Him through conscious prayers.

Ephesians 6:18-20

As directed by the Spirit, we are to pray constantly, throughout the day, for the needs of people all around us, especially believers in the battle with us. We are also to pray for opportunities to share the gospel with unbelievers in our world.

Pray for Various Requests

Read the bullet points in this section.

Use a Notebook

Read the paragraph under this heading. Point out that the value of a quiet time can increase if you review your notes later. A notebook in which you record the significant insights of your quiet times is a helpful tool for continued growth. This is often referred to as “journaling.” Show your own journal to the group, and share something special God taught you that is found in your journal.

Ask the group members to turn to the end of the session. Explain that the “My Quiet Time” sheets are provided for their use. They can copy the sheets and use them to start a notebook.

Use Variety

Have a group member read this section aloud. Ask if anyone has any comments or questions.

Day Five

BE CREATIVE

Have a different group member read this section aloud. Make sure everyone understands the concept of praying God's Word back to Him, as this might be the first time some group members have been taught this idea. Try to incorporate it into your group's prayer time in the near future.

KEY QUESTION

How might having a regular quiet time improve your relationship and walk with God?

Look for a variety of personal answers like: It will help me feel closer to God, I'll see more answers to prayer, etc. Guide your group members to give thoughtful answers.

SUMMARY

Have someone read the paragraph.

KEY QUESTION

What advice would you give Ken in our opening story to help him develop a deeper walk with God? **Ken needs to build a regular quiet time into his schedule so that he can experience God's presence and power on a daily basis.**

Read aloud the paragraph discussing the emotions of a quiet time and ask if anyone has any comments or questions about that.

Assignments

Read through the assignments with the group, and emphasize making a commitment to having a quiet time for the next 30 days. Emphasize that having a regular quiet time does not give us greater standing with God nor should we feel guilty if we miss one for some good reason. We don't want to be legalistic about this aspect of our walk with God. We do this out of love for Him and a desire to seek Him.

Have your group members turn to the "My Quiet Time" sheet at the end of this session. Walk through the sheet with them, and emphasize the important points. You may want to note the progression of each question (i.e., how each question builds on the previous one).

First, show your group members how to make **observations** of what the text is actually saying. For example, Psalm 23:4a says, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for You are with me*" (NASB). An observation from this verse would be that I will *walk through* the valley—it doesn't say that I will *stay in* the valley.

The next step is to determine the **meaning** of the verse. A description of the meaning of Psalm 23:4a might be that when I experience very difficult or heart-shaking times, I can be confident that I will, in God's strength, pass through them.

The last step is to discover **how to apply** the particular verse. An application of Psalm 23:4a might be that I will have confidence and will express my thanksgiving to God while I am going through trials because I know that with Him I'll be victorious.

IMPORTANT NOTE TO THE LEADER (10-15 minutes)

Consider incorporating the following ways to lead your group members into having a quiet time:

OPTION 1. Demonstrate a typical quiet time for your group. It may feel a little awkward to “model” an intimate interchange with God in front of others, but the more personal and vulnerable you can be, the more it will help your group members to see what a real devotional time can be like. Set the stage by explaining that you want them to **observe you spending time with the Lord**.

For this quiet time, use a short passage from the Bible rather than a devotional book or guide. This helps group members learn to hear God speak to them directly from His Word. (You may want to use a fresh passage if you want this time to be spontaneous, or you may use one which you've recently studied in order to share some insights or reflections the Lord has shown you.)

As an example: Open your time praying aloud, expressing adoration and thanksgiving to God for who He is. Be sure to talk to the Lord in the first person in order to model a quiet time as meaningfully as possible. Have a time of confession—being as vulnerable as you can while still being edifying. Continue praying aloud as you make the transition to your chosen passage. Express your trust that God will speak to you through His Word. Verbalize your observations, insights and responses to the passage as you work through the “My Quiet Time” sheet at the end of the study guide session. Share aloud one or two applications to your life that the Lord is showing you regarding your thoughts or actions.

End your quiet time with more prayer, perhaps praying back to the Lord some of the Scripture you just studied, personalizing it. Spend some time praying about your personal concerns such as your spiritual growth, particular circumstances, needs of family or friends, people who need to know Christ, etc. As you conclude this time, ask for observations from your group members concerning your time with the Lord.

OPTION 2. Another approach in presenting this section is to include your group members in a “collective quiet time.” Explain that you will now **have a quiet time together**. Your focus will be on the Lord, not on each other. Inform your group members which Bible verse or passage you will use, and have each person work through the “My Quiet Time” sheet at the end of this session.

Take the lead in beginning the quiet time in praise and thanksgiving to God, asking your group members to pray aloud as well. Have a time of confession—being as vulnerable as possible while still being edifying. Make the transition to the selected passage, and have the group share their thoughts, questions, observations and applications aloud to the Lord.

Take some time to pray about various personal concerns, including situations with work, needs of family, people who need to know Christ, etc. End with group members praying to God what they have learned during this time and thanking Him for what He will accomplish in their lives.

As you conclude this time, ask for observations from your group members concerning your time with the Lord. Make sure that this time does not become a Bible study. Each person should talk to the Lord individually and personally, not to the group. Expect to have a very special time!

Close in Prayer

Pray with great anticipation for what the Lord will do in your group members' lives during the next 30 days.



Session 9

*Making Your
Life Count*

Making Your Life Count

FOCUS

Christians desperately need to have an eternal perspective on life and therefore an appreciation for their role as ambassadors for the King.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members begin to understand God's heart for the world and desire to reach out to non-Christians when you guide them to do the following:

- Understand how they can invest their lives to have lasting significance.
- See the importance of being an ambassador for Christ.
- Realize that even with minimal training or experience, there are opportunities to be a witness for the Lord.
- Use the Prayer-Care-Share card as a tool to help them build bridges to their unbelieving friends.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Ask your group members to **share what God showed them** in their quiet times during this past week. Set a precedent of accountability for remaining faithful to the 30-day quiet time commitment.
2. Become familiar with the **Prayer-Care-Share** card located in the back of the study guide. Fill in yours prayerfully to be able to show your group when it comes time for them to show theirs.
3. Continue to **meet with your group members individually**, encouraging them and opening the Word together to reinforce the concepts of being filled with the Spirit (Romans 8:4-9,12,13; Galatians 5:1,13,16-18), spending quality time with the Father (Philippians 3:12-15; Colossians 3:1-3) and being an ambassador for Christ (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 9:36-38; and 2 Corinthians 4:1-7). Help your group members see that these concepts are for all believers.
4. Next week you will talk about how to share Christ with your group members. Bring enough A Guide to Your Most Important Investment booklets for each of your

group members. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the booklet before the class.

5. Begin thinking about whether you want to continue with your group in part two of *PCL*. In order to continue for the second 10 sessions, meet with each individual in your group and **ask for a recommitment** to the *An Opportunity* challenge guidelines. Some participants may decide not to continue with the group. Look at those men or women who have displayed a heart for growth and who have been faithful throughout part one to be candidates for part two. You may wish to postpone a group meeting or two after the completion of Session 10 in order to give yourself enough time to meet personally with each group member.

In This Session

Today's culture has moved away from belief in absolute truth to a pluralistic perspective that is based on the premise that truth is relative. Your challenge as a discipler is to help your group members change from a secular mindset to a biblical mindset. Their value system may be more on the temporal side than the eternal. You need to begin to lay a biblical groundwork that will motivate them to invest their lives in things of eternal significance, not just in things of temporal value such as career, material possessions and personal pursuits.

The concept of being an ambassador helps them to understand the eternal perspective. On three different occasions, Matthew tells us that Jesus felt compassion for the multitudes that followed Him. Jesus repeatedly expressed His care and concern for individuals and groups in need. Who can remain unmoved at Jesus' painful lament over the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37)? There is great depth of feeling in His desire to "*gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.*" This example of Jesus' concern for the unreached, and even the *unwilling*, should powerfully motivate us concerning our own attitude toward non-Christians.

Believing that truth is relative causes many people to criticize the Christian perspective as narrow and exclusive. Therefore we must overcome many barriers and misconceptions in order to gain a hearing for the gospel. Many times the barriers can only be overcome as relationships are built. As they trust God, Christians can develop the discernment and sensitivity necessary to overcome the barriers nonbelievers have to hearing the gospel. Taking the initiative includes discerning the mindset of the hearer and investing the time needed to defuse the misconceptions in his/her mind.

A growing disciple goes through a process of learning to share his/her faith. There are two main issues with which you must help your group members grow. The first is that group members have varying stereotypes of witnessing. They may see it as coercing people to believe or handing out tracts or some other idea. Also, their motivation may be one of legalism instead of love. The second problem is that they will face a barrier of fear as they think about being a witness. You as a leader must help them see a biblical view of evangelism.

There is an important point of view we often overlook. Proverbs 25:13 says, "*Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for*

he refreshes the soul of his masters” (NASB). The emphasis is on the benefit a faithful messenger (or ambassador) brings to those who send him/her. God takes great delight in the faithfulness of those who deliver His Word to this world.

The term “faithful” is of utmost importance in this proverb. If words like “successful” or “capable” or “skillful” had been used, many would not dare to apply this verse to themselves. But the proverb says “*faithful*” messenger. This is a standard every believer can achieve, not through human perseverance, but through simple dependence on God and His promises.

Thus the obedient, trusting Christian who witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit experiences the incredible joy of pleasing God. With this perspective, being an ambassador for Christ is not only a responsibility, it also becomes a privilege!

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (3-5 minutes)

Open in prayer. Ask if anyone has something to share from the past week, especially as it relates to beginning the discipline of a quiet time.

Memory Verses (3-5 minutes)

Have several group members say from memory the current memory verse and any previous verses you choose.

Review/Overview

Read both paragraphs out loud.

Day One

Involve (6 minutes)

MAKING INVESTMENTS

Have a group member read the Edgewater Beach Hotel narrative, then ask the question.

Why do so many people invest their lives in the wrong things?

Look for personal answers that reveal how well your group members grasp the concept of having an eternal perspective—allowing God to give us His vision to see life from His point of view. We invest in the wrong things because we insist on directing our own lives, and our value systems (what we treasure) are short-sighted and shallow.

Explore (35 minutes)

A VALUABLE INVESTMENT—A PERSON’S SOUL

Read the sentence introducing this section, then have someone read Mark 8:36,37. Ask group members for their answers to the questions.

Which would you rather have, eternal life or \$1 billion? **Eternal life. A person's soul is worth more than \$1 billion.** What are the implications for you as you relate to your friends? **Look for answers such as: We shouldn't be as impressed by the wealth or power of big business and its leaders as we are by the endeavor to reach people's souls for Christ; we should be more "impressed" by the efforts to make disciples than by large business deals. Jesus makes the comparison between the value of the world and the value of a person's soul.**

Ask the group for their answers to the questions based on Luke 15:4-7. According to the parable in Luke 15:4-7, what is important in God's eyes? **Again look for various personal thoughts such as people coming to know Christ and building relationships with nonbelievers.**

Why would "finding a lost sheep" be a good investment of one's time? **Because in God's view, every person is of ultimate value.** What do you think "finding a lost sheep" might involve for you? **Look for answers that have been thought through and are not just superficial.**

KEY QUESTION

What is the greatest thing that has ever happened to you? **Receiving Christ.** What would be the greatest thing that you could do for someone else? **Helping them experience what I have—giving them the opportunity to receive Christ.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Proverbs 11:30 and Daniel 12:3.

What is the value of investing in souls? **Winning souls/leading people to righteousness is a wise investment of our lives.**

Say, "Now let's look at our call and privilege as Christ's ambassadors in finding lost sheep."

Day Two

APPOINTED TO BE AMBASSADORS

Read the introductory paragraph, then ask a group member to read the definition of an "ambassador." Ask the first question.

What are some things that strike you about the nature of an effective ambassador? **We expect him/her to build goodwill, to represent the home country accurately and with dedication to its people, to work through misunderstandings and defuse volatile situations and to present the views and perspectives of the home country to the other land.**

Emphasize the role of relationships in this job. When there is an attitude of trust, people will listen and differences can be worked out.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

How do you feel about being appointed as an ambassador for Christ? **Various personal answers should reveal your group members' sense of responsibility and privilege.**

Read the definition of “reconcile,” then ask the question.

From this passage, what does it mean to have a ministry of reconciliation? **Christians are given the privilege and responsibility to take the initiative, through building loving relationships with non-Christians, to share the gospel of Christ with them. The message calls men and women to be reconciled to God. It is not enough to merely tell people that we are Christians.**

Read the quote “A Point to Ponder” by Rick Warren, then ask the Key Question.

KEY QUESTION

What are some things that can draw us into becoming a “traitor” to Christ and His kingdom? **Look for various personal answers to this question.**

Say to the group, “Let’s consider why God gives us the privilege of representing Him in this world.”

Day Three

SEEK AND SAVE

According to Luke 19:10, why did Jesus come into the world? **Jesus came to seek and to save those people who don’t know God.** What does the word “seek” imply? **It implies a proactive outreach to find lost sinners.**

How might Christ’s mission and values of seeking and saving the lost be better reflected in your priorities? **Look for responses, such as spending more time with non-Christians, receiving more training in evangelism, etc.**

Read Matthew 9:36.

What was the condition of the people? **They were stressed and depressed. “Downcast” actually means hopeless, not just sad.**

What was Jesus’ response to their condition? **He was concerned for them and deeply empathetic. He saw them as having no direction, no hope.**

How would Jesus describe the condition of your friends and associates today? **He would describe them in the same way—lost and downcast.** How do you see them? **See if your group members will acknowledge that their friends are downcast, too. Draw out the idea that Jesus saw the inner condition of people. People’s hearts today are in the same condition as in Jesus’ time. All around us, people have tremendous needs and**

concerns. **If we want to ensure that our lives have an impact of lasting significance, we must allow God to increase our love and concern for people and our desire to reach out to them with the love of Christ.**

Have a group member read the **Check This Out** paragraph, and ask if anyone has any comments about the observations on sheep.

KEY QUESTION

How does this analogy help us understand the plight of your family, friends or co-workers who are lost? **It should reinforce the idea that reaching out to our friends and co-workers needs to be a priority in our lives.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 16:19-31.

How does the ultimate plight of your lost family, friends or co-workers affect you? **It will affect each person differently, but it should produce a burden for them to come to Christ as well as a sense of urgency.**

Day Four

BUILDING BRIDGES TO PEOPLE IN NEED

Have a group member read the introductory paragraphs to this section.

Read Mark 2:15-17.

How did Jesus build bridges in His “ministry of reconciliation”? **He spent time with people in *their* environment; He accepted and loved them; He engaged people in conversations; He ate with nonbelievers; He asked them questions; He wasn’t afraid to be seen with the nonreligious.**

What kind of people did He spend time with? What are a few implications for us? **Look for answers such as: If I am to be like Jesus, I must move out beyond my realm of Christian friends; I must not be concerned about what other Christians may think if I spend time with nonbelievers; it is good to have some nonbelieving friends.**

What are some ways you can build relationships with those who don’t seem to know Christ? **Look for specific, personal ways that your people can do this. In general, Christians can build relationships with non-Christians by spending time together having fun, communicating love and acceptance by helping unbelievers with *their* needs, having unbelievers in their home, and helping them overcome barriers and misunderstandings by sensitively approaching and discussing spiritual matters.**

Read Colossians 4:5,6.

What does it mean to let our speech be “seasoned with salt”? **This does not mean that we use religious terms like “praise the Lord” or “hallelujah” around nonbelievers. It means we allow aspects of our relationship with Christ to come out in our conversation in relevant, natural ways. For example, a reference to answered prayer,**

offering to pray for a problem the person is facing, or a brief mention of thanks to God for some benefit can communicate a relationship with Christ while avoiding religious jargon. “Seasoning our speech” creates a response in the non-Christian, be it positive, negative or neutral. This allows us to discern if the door is open for discussing spiritual matters.

OPTIONAL FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: According to these verses, does God place more emphasis on witnessing by our lives or by our words? **The verse implies that there is a balance; it is not an either-or issue. Similarly we may ask, which wing of an airplane is more important?**

Have someone read the paragraph about the use of salt in biblical times, and ask if anyone has a comment about it.

From the Colossians passage, what elements are required to build bridges for effective evangelism? **It is a balance between prayer, the quality of our lives and effectively talking with people about the gospel.**

Have someone read the **REFLECT** paragraph about the wings of an airplane.

“MINIMUM EXPERIENCE REQUIRED”

Read the introductory paragraph to this section, and draw group members’ attention to the verses from John 9.

Could he answer all their questions? What did he say and why? **No. Here you want your group members to see that the blind man had little knowledge about Jesus and couldn’t answer all of the leaders’ questions. But he could tell them what Jesus had done in his life.**

What are some implications for you at home or at work as a representative of Christ? **The obvious implication for us is that even when we don’t have all the answers, we can still share what Jesus has done in our lives. Another implication is that we should not allow people in powerful positions to intimidate us into silence.**

Day Five

THE BRIDGE-BUILDING PROCESS

Read the introductory sentences to this section as well as the paragraph about prayer.

Prayer

What would praying daily for your friends who don’t know Christ accomplish? **See if your group members understand that God commands us to pray, and He works through our prayers to accomplish His will by drawing people to Himself.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

What does this reveal about the heart of God and the role of prayer? **God’s heart is for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The more we pray for**

our non-Christian friends, the more we are tapping into the heart of God and giving Him the opportunity to act.

Have someone read the Charles Malik quote.

Care

Read the introductory sentence about care.

What are some practical ways that you can show a friend or colleague that you care for him/her? **Look for specific answers unique to each person.**

Share

Read the introductory paragraph about sharing Christ.

Read Mark 5:18-20.

What did Jesus tell the healed man to do? What are some implications for us? **He told him to go back to his sphere of influence and share what God had done for him. The implication is that sharing with people what God has done in our lives is an excellent starting point for sharing the gospel with people.**

KEY QUESTION

What are two or three specific steps you could take to begin a ministry of reconciliation? **Look for practical, not theoretical, answers that your group members can apply soon.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 10:1,2 and John 1:35-42.

Who in your sphere of influence might be ready to respond to the gospel?

It could be a friend, neighbor or co-worker. I won't know until I take the initiative to find out!

Have someone read the **SUMMARY** paragraphs. Then read the **REFLECT** paragraph and ask your group members to think about/reflect on their answers to the questions.

Apply (8 minutes)

LOVE IN ACTION

Have your group members finish filling in names on their cards during the group time. Emphasize that they should carry their cards with them throughout the week so that they can be praying regularly for the people listed. Also remind them to bring the card to each group meeting.

Assignments

Encourage your group members to be faithful to complete their assignments, emphasizing the one concerning the Prayer-Care-Share card. Explain to your group members that they should ask the Lord whose salvation He would want them to pray for. As they pray for those on their cards, the next step is to ask God to show ways that they can show care for them, such as writing a note, treating someone to coffee, having lunch with a person,

etc. Caring is doing small things to build relationships. The third step is asking God to give them opportunities to share their stories and/or share the gospel with those for whom they have been praying and caring. It might mean inviting them to an outreach or to church. It might mean giving someone a book or sitting down and sharing Christ with him/her. Emphasize that they need to pray for those God puts on their hearts first. Dr. Bill Bright always said, “Talk to God about men. Then talk to men about God.” As they pray and care, then they earn the right to share. Remember to bring enough *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* booklets for each group member.

Close in Prayer

Pray for specific people that your group members want to begin to care for and share with. Also pray for one another’s requests.

10

Session 10

*Sharing the Message of
God's Love*

Sharing the Message of God's Love

FOCUS

The two principal barriers that hinder most Christians from talking to others about the gospel—fear and lack of skill—can be overcome; then Christians can take steps toward a lifetime of effective evangelism.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members to be more effective and more confident about sharing their faith when you guide them to do the following:

- Understand the progression of steps to effectively sharing their faith.
- Learn how to use “spiritual springboards” to transition from everyday topics to spiritual things.
- Learn how to use the booklet *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* as an effective evangelistic tool.
- Thoroughly prepare and share with the group their own spiritual stories.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. If you know an example, be ready to **share a true story** of someone presenting the love of Christ through normal conversation and seeing the other person receive Christ. Obtain enough copies of *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* to give each of your group members at least one. (The booklets may be purchased from New Life Resources at 800-827-2788.)
2. Refer to the previous session on unconditional love and point out that **a natural result of loving people** will be to share the most important thing in the world with them.
3. When you meet individually with group members, ask each one to **bring along his/her Prayer-Care-Share card** and then discuss the people written on the card. Pray together for these people. Ask your group member to set up informal times—perhaps over lunch—where you will be able to **meet some of these people**, building rapport and being available to discern and minister to needs as God leads you.

Pollsters such as Gallup and Barna have documented many changes in people's attitudes toward life and other people. These changes are critical for Christians to understand if we are to be most effective in reaching others for Christ.

Adults feel that they have fewer close friends than in the past. Christians, however, tend to retreat into their own subculture and don't have many meaningful relationships with nonbelievers. Yet the gospel travels most effectively via relationships. Thus Christians have not only a great *opportunity* to meet a need, but also a great *challenge* to learn how to build friendships with unbelievers and invest the necessary time.

There is also a greater skepticism about people and institutions, making it harder to build relationships to the level of trust. Moreover, because of the way adults learn, new ideas that force a re-evaluation of old beliefs are only taken in slowly. To be most effective, therefore, we should take the initiative to build relationships with many people.

There are three critical areas to address if we are to help our group members become effective in sharing the gospel. One, they will need help in getting their eyes off themselves and onto the Lord and the unbeliever. Emphasizing two biblical principles will help meet this need. First, we are totally accepted by God. Therefore, as we trust Him, we are no longer enslaved to the need for others to approve of us. This frees us to serve people rather than needing them to like us. The second is that we must realize the desperate plight of those who don't know the Lord. They have spiritual "cancer"—they are not merely living a mediocre life. We must allow God to give us *His compassion* for them.

The second critical area is developing sensitivity to the people God wants us to reach with the gospel—not so they won't reject us personally, but so that they don't reject the gospel because of us. Trusting God pleases Him, and we must trust Him to give us sensitivity and insight as to what and when to ask in order to bridge into spiritual things. Sharing the gospel through conversation is a major area in which trusting God to speak and think through us in the power of the Spirit is crucial to our success.

The third area of need that will enable your group members to become more effective in sharing the gospel is the development of two main skills. One is the development and skillful use of the group member's personal story of how he/she became a Christian. The second skill is learning a simple but effective way to communicate the essence of the gospel that can be readily understood and passed on. We have already worked on the writing of your group members' stories. In this session, we will focus on learning how to share the gospel effectively through *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment*.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (3-5 minutes)

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Have several group members say from memory the current memory verse.

Review/Overview

Read these sections aloud.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

TONGUE-TIED?

Ask your group members to share their answers to the two questions. You as the leader should have examples to share also.

KEY QUESTION

What keeps you from sharing Christ with friends and family? **Expect a variety of personal answers to this question. The most common answers are fear, lack of knowledge and ability, etc.**

Explore (30 minutes)

Have a group member read the Bill Hybels quote. Bill Hybels is the founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in the Chicago area, one of the largest churches in America.

MOTIVATION FOR SHARING THE GOSPEL

Read the sentence introducing this section, and ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the two questions about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5-26).

What motivated Jesus to reach out to this stranger? What did He have to offer? **He saw her as a lost person who had a deep spiritual need to know the Messiah. He offered her living water and a relationship with Himself, the Messiah.**

What are people around you thirsting for today? **Look for a variety of answers here, depending on a person's sphere of influence. People today are looking for hope, security, peace, etc., which ultimately are found in God.**

Read the next paragraph aloud. Then ask the questions concerning the illustration about the cure for cancer.

Would this person want to share the cure with those having the disease?

Yes, of course.

What would we think of this person if he/she were not willing to share the cure? **We would consider this person to be self-centered, even cruel and heartless.**

Ask someone to read (or say from memory) 1 Peter 3:15. Then ask what people wrote for their answers to the two questions.

What is the "hope" referred to in this verse? **The hope of eternal life with God in heaven.**

Is the spiritual state of your non-Christian friends and associates more serious or less serious than if they had terminal cancer? **More serious.**

Read aloud the summary paragraph at the end of this section beginning with the rhetorical question and ending with the Amy Carmichael quote.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Timothy 1:12-14.

Are there people in your life whom you think will never come to Christ? How does Paul's experience speak to that? **Paul called himself the chief of all sinners and was, for all intents and purposes, a first-century terrorist for his religion. If God can break through Paul's life, then He can break through to any person in our lives, no matter what sin was committed.**

Day Two

LEARNING TO SHARE YOUR FAITH

Ask one of your group members to read aloud the three paragraphs introducing this topic. Discuss any questions regarding those paragraphs, as you really want your group to understand these principles.

There is a progression in a person's openness to the gospel. Every unbeliever falls on a continuum somewhere between being very closed to the gospel and being very open. The beginning point varies from person to person. The starting point could be "very closed to the gospel" or "turned off by religion" or somewhere else along the continuum of openness to the gospel.

To help people move toward a point of openness, *we must be sensitive to the various barriers* they may have to being open to the gospel. (The concept for the following barriers is adapted from material by George Hunter in his book, *How to Reach Secular People*, pp. 85-89.)

Image barrier: The nonbeliever has a negative image of Christianity because it is perceived as being narrow, untrue or boring.

Cultural barrier: The non-Christian cannot relate to the Christian culture—its jargon, facility (the "stained-glass look" of churches) or music—to which the person has been exposed (usually through a church); nor can he/she identify with the people.

Theological barrier: In many Christian circles, there is more information given about finer points of theology than the individual can understand or needs in order to make a decision to receive Christ.

Barrier of the will: In the final step, the only barrier left is the individual's response to the truth of the gospel. People have to be willing to admit their sin and their need for a Savior, then make a commitment to receive Christ.

Ask a group member to read aloud (or say from memory) Colossians 4:5,6. Then ask the question.

What would “making the most of every opportunity” look like in your daily conversations with people? **It would mean being sensitive to the Spirit’s opening doors to talking about spiritual matters as well as learning how to guide a conversation to the gospel.**

Read the last paragraph, which gives examples of when to use spiritual springboards, then introduce the chart. Ask group members what they wrote as a question and a comment in response to each statement from the seeker.

“I’m not religious like you are.”

Possible Transition Question: **Why do you say that? or What do you mean by “religious”?** (Remember, anytime you can ask a “why” question, which helps get to the root of what a person is saying, thinking or feeling, then you are on the right track.)

Possible Transition Comment: **I’m not either, but I do think about God, life after death and the meaning of life sometimes. How about you?**

“I’m worried about where the world is headed.”

Possible Transition Question: **What is it, in particular, that has you so concerned and why?**

Possible Transition Comment: **I get worried about that sometimes, too, but as I read the Bible, I find answers to many of my questions and concerns about the future.**

“I hate my job.”

Possible Transition Question: **What is it about your job that you hate?**

Possible Transition Comment: **I’ve found that as I experience fulfillment and meaning in other areas of my life, particularly in my relationship with God, I’ve experienced joy and peace even in the midst of difficult and unpleasant circumstances.**

“My spouse and I fight about money all the time.”

Possible Transition Question: **Why do you think that issue is so divisive?**

Possible Transition Comment: **I’ve found that as my spouse and I focus less on material possessions and more on spiritual values, it makes a big difference in our relationship.**

(Fill in your own:) _____.

Ask your group what statements they came up with and how they responded. Your group members will undoubtedly discover many excellent responses to the statements in the study guide which will be just as good, if not better, than the ones listed above.

Day Three

USING YOUR STORY TO MAKE THE TRANSITION TO THE GOSPEL

Ask a group member to read aloud the paragraphs introducing this section. Review the two questions aloud together. Ask if anyone has questions or concerns about using this fairly direct approach to beginning to share the gospel.

A Perfect Example of Sharing the Gospel

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this topic, then ask your group what they wrote for their answers to the two questions about John 4.

How did Jesus begin the conversation with the woman? **He began the conversation with a question, focusing on both His and her felt need of water. Then He moved from her felt need (water) to her real need—discovery of who Jesus was.**

How did He use a “spiritual springboard” to sharing that He was the Messiah? **Jesus used intriguing language about living water to stimulate her interest and then revealed to her that He knew that she had had multiple husbands. He later redirected the conversation from the woman’s focus on *where* to worship to the real issue of *how* to worship.**

We should faithfully apply some additional principles about evangelism that we observe Jesus modeling in this story: He *initiated* the conversation; He listened; He discerned the other person’s needs; He cared; He communicated love without judging her (while at the same time not condoning her sinful past); He didn’t try to answer *unasked questions*; and He didn’t allow her lifestyle to keep Him from speaking the truth.

KEY QUESTION

Think of a conversation you have had recently with an unbeliever. How could you have turned it to spiritual matters? **Encourage specific answers.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Acts 17:22-31.

What principles did Paul use in the transition to sharing the gospel? **He complimented them on their spiritual inclinations. He said he wanted to build upon what they already had and add to their knowledge of truth.**

Day Four

THE ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

The idea of this section is to help your group members identify the main points of the gospel. Help your group members see that they can effectively communicate those main points by using a simple tool like *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment*.

At this point, hand out a booklet to each group member. Read through the four main principles, comparing them with the four points Jesus emphasized in his interaction with the woman at the well.

If the issue comes up that the booklets are too “canned,” point out that the early church used standardized sayings or statements as transferable tools to help new believers grasp the truths of the gospel. For example, 1 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Timothy 2:11-13 are truths that new believers were encouraged to memorize because few had access to written copies of Scripture.

Have someone read the benefits of using *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment* and the paragraph following it. Ask for any questions. If possible, share a true story of someone sharing the gospel with a person after only a short time of knowing him/her.

Read the definition of “successful witnessing.” Then ask the two questions related to being a witness.

Read Acts 1:8.

What is needed to be an effective witness? **To share what you’ve experienced in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Read John 16:7,8.

What role does the Holy Spirit play in our witness? **It’s His responsibility to convict/convince nonbelievers of their need for Christ.**

Read the next paragraph, then read the two questions. Ask if anyone has any questions or concerns about using that approach.

Day Five

HOW TO USE A GUIDE TO YOUR MOST IMPORTANT INVESTMENT

Have someone in your group read the four paragraphs in this section. Ask if anyone has any questions or concerns.

STEPS TO REACHING OUT WITH THE GOSPEL

Ask a group member to read the seven points which summarize what they’ve been learning about sharing their faith.

Read aloud the **SUMMARY** section.

PRACTICING SPIRITUAL SPRINGBOARDS (10 minutes)

The purpose of this time is to help your group members become familiar with how to use spiritual springboards and the two transition questions. Though it may feel contrived, this time can help your group to practice how to artfully turn a conversation to spiritual things. Therefore, don’t just let this go by or let it become a joke.

Assignments

Read through the assignments with your group members, emphasizing “The Power of a Story” and the article, “How to Witness in the Spirit.”

Encourage them to trust the Lord this week to identify at least one person with which to use a spiritual springboard to start a conversation about spiritual matters. Be prepared to share your own experience with your group next week.

Emphasize the importance of each person writing out his/her story using the outline at the end of the session in the study guide. Be prepared to share your story during Session 11 (you may want to give everyone a written copy), and ask for a volunteer to share his/her story at that time.

This exercise of having everyone thoroughly prepare and share their stories with the group is quite helpful and encouraging, but it will take several weeks, depending on the number of people in the group. Be prepared to “camp” on this session for a while. In fact, several of your group members may need two weeks: one to share their stories initially, then based on the amount of feedback they get from you and the group, a second week to modify their stories and share them again.

Close in Prayer

Pray for specific people that your group members will, by faith, talk with this week. Also pray for adequate time for preparation of their stories.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING

LEADER'S GUIDE

• PART 2

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11

Session 11

*Living Consistently
by the Spirit*

Living Consistently by the Spirit

FOCUS

The Christian who is aware of the spiritual resources God has made available, and who is able to appropriate them in daily life by faith, will be able to live consistently by the Spirit.

OBJECTIVES

You will prepare your group members to live consistently by the Spirit when you guide them to do the following:

- Remember what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Express the role of faith in overcoming obstacles in life.
- Understand the spiritual resources available to us for living a victorious Christian life.
- Overcome the hindrances that keep us from living a Spirit-directed life.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Become familiar with the hindrances to living by the Spirit that are discussed in this session. Be prepared to explain how living by faith is the means to overcome each hindrance.
2. Review the qualities that you want to see built into your people (see the Guidelines for the Leader). Also review how to lead your sharing time, session content, prayer and praise, vision-building and one-to-one times. As you move into this half of PCL, determine a few action points from the sections on important principles in discipling others, increasing the effectiveness of your group or developing as a leader.
3. Continue to bring your group members with you when you meet with your associates (or theirs) who may be unbelievers. Let each group member observe you building rapport with a potential non-believer and asking questions to determine the person's spiritual interest. Look for potential "spiritual springboards" to make a transition into spiritual issues. When appropriate, share the booklet *A Guide to Your Most Important Investment*. Discuss the appointment afterwards—answer questions, emphasize important points and pray for the person who just heard the gospel.

Although involving your group in evangelism is often the biggest challenge in discipling others, your commitment to personal evangelism is necessary to build true disciples of Jesus.

This session provides you with the opportunity to review the basics of living by the Spirit and to explore some further principles relating to this topic. The different hindrances examined in this session may reflect various aspects of the same problems rather than totally different problems. A person may face a difficulty in life which combines all the barriers discussed. However, it is helpful to consider each aspect separately for the purpose of understanding the various forces that attack a Christian who is seeking to live by the Spirit.

The concept many people find most difficult to accept is that of giving thanks to God for the troubles we face. Some people misunderstand thanksgiving as a device to make God remove the difficulty: *"I'll thank God in advance for solving this problem."* While this approach is a valid exercise of faith in God's power, it overlooks the purpose that God may be pursuing by directly allowing difficulty to occur in our lives.

Before leading this session, spend some time studying James 1:2-8 and these following passages which teach us to rejoice because God is using the difficulties we face as a means of maturing us in Christ: Romans 5:1-5; 8:28; 1 Peter 1:3-9 and 4:12-16.

The application exercise for this lesson asks your group members to list past or current difficulties and then to give thanks for these in obedience to 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and James 1:2. Do this yourself before leading the session so that you will have a fresh awareness of trusting God in this way.

Spend some time praying by name for your group members, asking the Lord to use this exercise to bring freedom from any bitterness due to past or current problems. Then share with your group some of your own experiences in giving thanks in the midst of difficulties.

S E S S I O N P L A N

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

As this is the first session in Part 2, and you may have been on a break for a few weeks, spend some time sharing what has been going in your lives and how God has been working over the past few weeks.

Memory Verse (3 minutes)

Have someone say aloud the memory verse for this week.

Review/Overview

Read aloud these two sections which review the previous session and introduce this one.

Day One

Involve (4-5 minutes)

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Ask one of your group members to read the story about Alex, then ask the two questions at the end of the story.

Why did Alex fail to respond to his circumstances appropriately at this time in his life? **Alex responded in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. Rather than increasing his dependence on the Lord during this intense time at work, he was operating according to his own resources and thus not walking in the Spirit.**

What would you tell Alex to do now? **Alex should practice spiritual breathing, confess his sin and once again appropriate the filling of the Holy Spirit. He should also apologize to his co-worker for his inappropriate response.**

Explore (30-40 minutes)

LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

Read aloud the two paragraphs and the three principles.

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this section, then ask the questions.

Describe in your own words the concept of “spiritual breathing.” **Group members should express in some way that spiritual breathing is exhaling—confessing their specific sin and inhaling—surrendering afresh to God, asking Him to fill them again with the Holy Spirit.**

What is “exhaling”? **Exhaling is agreeing with God about our specific sin or sins.**

What is “inhaling”? **Inhaling is surrendering to God and appropriating anew the filling of the Holy Spirit.**

Read aloud the summarizing paragraph which briefly explains the role of feelings in being filled with the Spirit.

Read Matthew 6:24. (The term “mammon” refers to riches or money.) Besides money, what are some other things in life that might become your “master” instead of Christ? **Almost anything in life can become an idol or our “master” such as success, career, possessions, status, a relationship, comfort, etc. It is different for each person, and you will get a variety of answers from your group members.**

KEY QUESTION

Can you live a Spirit-directed life if something else is master of your life?

Why or why not? **No, because either God will be your master or some other thing or person will be your master. At best, you will have a divided heart.**

Day Two

HINDRANCES TO BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Unconfessed Sin

Read aloud the introductory paragraph to this section, then ask the questions based on Psalm 139.

According to David, what is your part in discovering sin in your life? What is God's part? **Our part is asking God to reveal to us any sin that is in our lives. God's part is to gently show us where we need to confess and grow.**

Read aloud the paragraph that reviews the concept of relationship versus fellowship. Then ask the question based on 1 John.

What things sometimes prevent us from "breathing spiritually"? **Many things can prevent us from breathing spiritually such as pride, ignorance, busyness, etc.**

Self-Effort

Ask a group member to read aloud the Romans 7:15-20 passage. Then ask the questions based on these verses.

Why does sin have the upper hand in Paul's life as it does in our lives at times? **Self is in control as can be seen by the number of times "I" is used by Paul. He is allowing self to be the dominating control on a daily basis.**

What should we do when this happens? **We should yield to Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to direct and empower our lives.**

What kind of influence will we have on others when we're in this condition? **We will have very little influence with others, or it will be a negative influence.**

Legalism

Read aloud Galatians 5:1 and the definition of legalism. Ask if anyone has any comments, questions or concerns about the definition, then ask the questions. What standards or expectations (yours or others') do you feel you need to live up to in order to feel good about yourself? **This should lead to a great time of discussion in your group with a wide variety of answers: I feel like I need to live up to my own expectations of spiritual goals accomplished, I have to live up to my church's expectations of what it means to be a good Christian and good church member, etc.**

Read Romans 7:6. What does Paul say is our relationship to external standards? **Paul says that we have been released from external standards and expectations that have bound us. This includes the Jewish Law, as well as others' standards and expectations.**

How are we now to serve Christ? **We are to serve Christ in the “new way” of freedom, living as the Word and the Holy Spirit direct us. It is a lifestyle of freedom from what others think of us, concentrating on pleasing God and not people.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Colossians 3:12 and Matthew 18:21-35.

In order to continue to experience God’s love and forgiveness, what must we do? **We are to allow God to fill our lives with humility, compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience. We are also to forgive others from the heart as God has forgiven us.**

Day Three

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES AS A CHILD OF GOD

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this section.

Based on Hebrews 4:16, what is our privilege as children of God? **Our privilege is to come to God as His beloved children and ask for grace, mercy and help whenever we need it.**

Read Galatians 2:20.

What source did Paul have to draw upon to live the Christian life? **He drew upon the strength and power of Christ, by faith, who was living in and through him.**

What did Paul have to do to experience Christ’s life? **He needed to yield to Christ and live by faith.**

How would this truth have helped Alex with his response? **It would have enabled him to respond supernaturally with peace and joy and love instead of with fleshly reactions such as anger and resentment.**

According to Philippians 4:13 and 19, what resources does God promise us? **He promises to meet our needs out of His riches and give us strength to meet the demands and challenges of the moment.**

Read aloud the paragraphs summarizing this section, then ask if anyone has any questions or comments.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Ephesians 1:18,19.

What three things does Paul say we should draw upon on a regular basis? **We are to draw upon our hope, our inheritance in Christ and His power.**

Day Four

LIVING BY FAITH

Read aloud the two short paragraphs introducing this section, then ask the two questions.

What are some areas of your life in which you are tempted to live according to your feelings instead trusting in God's Word? **Look for a variety of answers, such as responses to family members, boss or co-workers, financial pressures, sexual temptation, etc.**

What is the outcome of choosing to believe our feelings over the facts of God's Word? **We will usually sin, falling prey to bad choices, responses and relationships.**

Have a group member read the paragraph summarizing this section on feelings.

Read James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-5.

What are we told to do in the midst of trials and testing? Why? **We are to rejoice in the midst of trials, knowing that testing by God can produce perseverance in our lives, a key ingredient in Christian maturity. This produces full-bodied character as we look toward our future hope in heaven.**

Have a group member read aloud the paragraphs summarizing this section.

Read Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:6.

What do these verses tell us about faith? **Our faith is deepened as we hear God's Word and believe in His promises.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 11:2-6.

What might John the Baptist have been feeling in prison? What was Jesus' message to him? **John was almost certainly feeling intense fear, loneliness, doubt and perhaps even betrayal. Jesus' message to John was that no matter what the outcome, John should not stumble and fail to trust and believe in Him.**

Day Five

DEMONSTRATING FAITH: THE STORY OF A BITTER CHRISTIAN

Ask a group member to read aloud this true story.

KEY QUESTION

In what ways is giving thanks in the midst of a problem evidence of faith in God?

It shows that we really believe that God is in control and that He will use the problem, disappointment and even tragedy to work out for good in our lives. Thus we can walk through the darkness with an attitude of praise and thanksgiving, in spite of the pain, as we cling to our hope in Christ.

Read aloud the **SUMMARY** section.

Application (5 minutes)

Read aloud the application section. Give group members several minutes of silence to write down one or more past or present difficulties. Encourage them to thank God that He is in control and has or is working all things for good in their lives. Close in prayer in a few minutes when you see that everyone is finished.

Assignments

Be sure you reinforce the assignments of Scripture memorization and reading the article, "How to Walk in the Spirit."

Close in Prayer

As you pray through one another's requests, relate the group members' needs to the hindrances to living by the Spirit.

12

Session 12
Talking With God

Talking With God

FOCUS

Every believer needs to know how to pray effectively and how to pray expectantly.

OBJECTIVES

You will help motivate your group members to pray effectively and expectantly when you guide them to do the following:

- Understand that God cares about every aspect of their daily lives.
- Describe four aspects of loving communication with God and understand the three answers God gives to our prayers.
- Pray together using the ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) acrostic.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. At the end of this session, be prepared to **lead your group in conversational prayer**. This prayer time is the most important part of the session.
2. Ask your group members to **share with the group** some of the opportunities God gave them to care for their friends and share their stories this past week. Encourage those who shared, but also encourage those who didn't share to trust God to do so. Remind your group members to keep praying through their PCS cards regularly.
3. As you meet individually with each group member, ask how he or she is doing regarding their 30-day commitment to having a **quiet time with the Lord**. Have they been experiencing good fellowship? What changes have they noticed in their relationship with the Lord?

When you meet individually, **open the Word** with your people. Depending on their personal needs, you may want to **reinforce the concepts** of their new identity in Christ (Romans 6:4-6,11-14; 2 Corinthians 10:17,18; Colossians 3:1-3); following God's Word rather than our feelings (Matthew 22:29; 2 Corinthians 3:4-6; Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17); seeking the Lord first in our lives rather than our careers or our families (Matthew 6:31-33; 16:24-26; Luke 14:26-33; 1 John 2:4-6); or allowing the Lord to make us more others-oriented rather than continuing to focus mostly on what the Lord should do for us (Matthew 4:19; Romans 12:2; Galatians 5:13; Philippians 2:1-4).

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7 NASB).

“And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14,15 NASB).

Prayer is communion with God. This is the way our heavenly Father has ordained for His children to communicate with Him.

Often prayer is misunderstood. It is thought of as a vague, mystical element in one’s duty to an impersonal God. The Word of God does not teach this; rather, it teaches that God our Father desires the close fellowship of His children.

Our relationship with God, our heavenly Father, should be a relationship of complete trust, faith and obedience. As His children, we should approach our Father in love and gratitude. Our prayers to God should be expressions of our trust that He will hear us according to John 15:7 and 1 John 5:14,15. If prayer is anything less than this, it is not true prayer. Prayer is more than words; it is an attitude and an expression of our hearts toward God.

The prayer life of the Christian is essential. The Christian who does not utilize the resource of prayer fails, because the Christian life is an impossibility without releasing the power of the Lord Jesus Christ through prayer.

As you prepare to teach this session, focus your thoughts on the importance of prayer. Spend time daily in fellowship with your Father. Remember Jesus said, “... *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. ... And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it*” (John 14:6,13,14 NASB).

“No amount of money, genius or culture can move things for God. Holiness energizing the soul, the whole man aflame with love, with desire for more faith, more prayer, more zeal, more consecration—this is the secret of power.”

—E.M. Bounds

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Ask several group members to say aloud the memory verse from last week.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the Review and Overview sections.

Day One

Involve (30-40 minutes)

HOW MUCH DOES GOD CARE?

Call attention to the rating scale in the study guide. Ask your group members to share the ratings they marked. They may have marked each item with a high number such as nine or 10. Do not be surprised, however, if some mark low numbers.

This provides a helpful opportunity for you to observe misunderstandings about God's great care for us. Don't get bogged down trying to correct this now because the lesson itself will provide the corrective teaching.

If one person believes that God cares about the details of life, but another believes those things are of little concern to God, the first person would be expected to pray more often about the activities of daily living—as we are urged to do in Philippians 4:6,7. (The first person would expect God to listen and respond to things He truly cares about. The second would probably feel, "Since God doesn't care about it, why pray?")

KEY QUESTION

Why is it so hard to believe that God cares about the little concerns in our lives?

Expect a variety of answers here, depending on the person: God has plenty to do with the billions of big problems in the world, etc.

Explore (30 minutes)

GOD'S CARE FOR US

Have someone read aloud the paragraph introducing this section. Then ask for their answers to the question.

How do the following Scriptures describe God's care for our lives?

Matthew 10:29-31

God governs a sparrow falling to earth, and He knows the number of hairs on our heads; therefore He is involved in, and cares about, the smallest details. We should not be afraid of what others may think or do because God cares for us very much.

Philippians 4:6,7

God is interested in hearing about every detail of our lives; we can thank Him for our particular situation, knowing that He will provide peace beyond our ability to understand.

1 Peter 5:7

We are to “cast” (give, throw upon, yield) our cares upon God because He wants us to let Him handle them, deal with them and take care of them.

KEY QUESTION

In light of God’s care for us, how should we respond to Him?

Suggested answers might include these: We should tell Him about everything that is of concern to us, troubling us, or that might possibly cause us to worry or be anxious; we should trust in His love if He is so concerned about us; we can relax and let Him handle the things that concern us; because of His care for us, we can trust Him even when we can’t see how it will turn out.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 6:25,26.

How should we respond when we are tempted to become anxious about our physical needs? **We are not to be anxious, but to trust God to meet our every need, just as He does for all creation.**

Day Two

Have someone read aloud the paragraph introducing this next section, including the quote by St. Augustine, as well as the first paragraph of the next section.

BUILDING A LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Note the four key elements of communication in a growing relationship, and have your people comment on the parallels they noted from the verses.

What would happen to a marriage if any one of these elements of communication were missing?

Look for specific personal responses.

What would happen to your fellowship with God if any of these expressions of communication were missing?

Look for various specific personal responses.

Day Three

Read aloud the paragraph introducing the next section, and then have different group members read each of the four paragraphs making up the ACTS acrostic.

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

Read Jeremiah 32:17,27 and 33:3. Why does God want us to pray?

God wants us to pray so that He can answer us and show us great things.

KEY QUESTION

What sometimes prevents us from believing these promises from God? What limits do we place on ourselves?

Some possible answers depending on your people: Don't really know God, couldn't trust a parent, little time in the Word, etc. Limits might be: Not deserving, can't ask God for just anything, etc.

On what basis does God promise to answer our prayers?

John 14:13,14

If we pray in Jesus' name, He will answer to glorify the Father.

1 John 5:14,15

If we pray according to God's will, He will hear and answer.

Have two people read the next two paragraphs.

Day Four

What does God require in order for us to see answered prayer?

James 4:2,3

God wants us to ask in order to receive, and to ask with right motives—not just to satisfy our selfish desires.

Psalms 66:18

God requires that there be no evil in our hearts.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 21:22 and John 15:7.

What is the relationship between asking, believing and abiding? **If we ask in faith as we are abiding in (depending on and yielding to) Christ, we can expectantly believe that God will answer our prayers.**

Day Five

Read the paragraph introducing the section. God answers prayers in different ways. If time is limited, briefly summarize the first and third examples, share the answers God gave and focus on the second passage. If possible, however, have your group examine all three passages.

You may offer the following comments in addition to those shared by your group:

Acts 12:5-17

God answered “yes” to their prayer, although in a manner very different from what they expected (something that happens frequently). Sometimes we do not recognize that our prayers were answered, possibly, because of our expected answers.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

God answered “no” to Paul. This was not because God did not desire to provide physical healing, but because He was doing an even greater work in Paul’s life. It took Paul a while—as it usually does us—to accept God’s higher purpose.

Genesis 15:1-5; 16:1-3; 21:1-3

God answered “wait” to Abraham. No human explanation is ever given for why God delayed fulfilling His promise to Abraham, but the narrative clearly shows God working, not only to provide an heir, but also to nurture Abraham’s dependence on Him. Often we focus so intently on the specifics of our requests that we miss what God is doing in us through the process of building our dependence on Him.

Read aloud the **SUMMARY** paragraphs and quotes.

Apply (15 minutes)

PRACTICING PRAYER

Guide your group in a time of prayer, including each type of prayer explored in the ACTS acrostic. Use the instructions in the study guide as guidelines for each type of prayer. Remember that we can discuss and study about prayer, but there is no substitute for praying.

If some of your group members still hesitate to pray out loud, lovingly encourage them to step out and pray to God from their heart. Encourage the other members to follow the guidelines and pray short one- to two-sentence prayers in order to encourage those who may be fearful.

Adoration—Start the time of prayer by simply telling God how you have seen one of His attributes displayed. After one or two individuals have also praised Him for the attribute, praise God together for another of His attributes.

“Attribute” refers to qualities or characteristics of God’s nature, such as love, power, or mercy.

Confession—Read the sentences, then take a few moments to silently confess any known sin to God, thanking Him for His forgiveness.

Thanksgiving—Allow enough time for your group members to thank God for one or two things they listed.

Supplication—Spend sufficient time for several to pray, asking God to meet their needs or concerns.

Assignments

Encourage your people to follow through on their assignment to use the ACTS method for their prayers each day during the week. Also emphasize that they study the article, “How to Pray.” Continue to encourage the memorization of the memory verse.

Close in Prayer

NOTE: As you meet one-to-one with your group members, there are other suggestions that you can offer them to help them along their prayer journeys. For those who are new in beginning to develop a consistent prayer life, you might encourage them to pray one minute for each thing. Example: Begin by praying five minutes a day, one minute for each thing.

1. Thank God for one thing in six words or less.
2. Thank God for something that has happened in the last 24 hours.
3. Pray for God to help someone you know.
4. Ask for something for yourself.
5. Thank God for the ways that He is going to answer.

For those who are more experienced in praying but would like more creativity, you can offer these suggestions:

1. Choose a Psalm or prayer passage and pray it back to God for yourself or someone else. Pray alone or with someone.
2. Pray specific Scriptures for specific needs. Example: Salvation—1 Peter 3:8,9.
3. Pray the names of God. For example: Jehovah-Jireh means, “God is our provider.” Call on Him by His name as you pray for your needs.

13

Session 13
Battling the Enemy

Battling the Enemy

FOCUS

The Christian who is aware of who the enemy really is—Satan—and learns how to defend against and defeat this potent enemy using the spiritual weapons available, will be able to live consistently by the Spirit.

OBJECTIVES

You will prepare your group members to continue living by the Spirit when you guide them to do the following:

- Identify their daily enemy—Satan—and his primary strategies used for defeating the Christian.
- Utilize the spiritual weapons available to him or her to defeat the devil.
- Understand how to overcome the hindrance of temptation in daily living.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. This session focuses in its entirety on the critical topic of spiritual warfare, an essential concept of the Christian life and walk. If we are to live a consistent Spirit-directed life and be used by God to introduce others to the Savior, we must understand and defeat our mortal enemy and the one who leads the whole world astray—Satan.
2. Be prepared for spiritual attack and temptation as you prepare and lead this session. The same will probably be true for your group members. Don't be surprised if you and they experience a high degree of temptation, trials or testing during this time when you are studying this session.
3. Assignments four and five are an essential ingredient for group members to learn how to overcome temptation and defeat the enemy. Assignment four involves listing several areas of your life where you are vulnerable to temptation and a strategy you will employ to overcome that temptation. Be prepared as the leader to share with the group an area where you personally are trusting the Lord for victory. Assignment five involves keeping a log of temptations you encounter throughout the week. This will be an excellent tool for you and your students to learn from your successes and failures and will be a great springboard for sharing within the group during the next meeting.

The Bible teaches very clearly that the Christian life is not only a walk, but also a warfare—a war against “*wicked spirits in the heavenly realms*” (Ephesians 6:12). Many Christians are oblivious to this. They think that living the Christian life means escaping all trials, temptations and difficulties and experiencing a life of comfort, health and blessing. They expect to glide through their years on earth with scarcely a problem and, for the most part, blame their problems on people, circumstances or the government. The truth is, however, that we are strangers, aliens and pilgrims on this earth (1 Peter 2:11), living in a world ruled by Satan, and we must continually face opposition and difficulty. The Christian life should be a victorious one, but it is usually not an easy or comfortable one. We must continually be strengthened “*in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ephesians 6:10). We cannot expect to win the battle unless we put on the armor of God and allow Christ to fight the battle for us.

How can we conquer Satan? We conquer him by being strong in the Lord, understanding Satan’s schemes, and utilizing spiritual weapons to defeat him. We have no strength in ourselves to match his, no cunning, no wisdom by which we can outwit him. But when we trust in God and not ourselves, when we rely on God’s truth and not our own ideas, when we resist him and flee from temptation, we have victory.

“How many battles have been won because of the genius of a leader! Alexander, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Nelson, Patton, Eisenhower—how their names stir us! The whole of Scripture makes it plain to us that the battle is not our personal battle. It is part of a war. We are led by the Unconquerable One. And good general that He is, He knows His soldiers by name and concerns Himself with their well being and safety. There is to be no cannon fodder among heaven’s soldiers. The issue of the battle rests entirely upon the unconquerable might of our Leader.”

—John White, *The Fight*

No Christian need ever fear the devil. Whenever Satan attacks, resist him in God’s strength, and he will flee. When we pray, we should claim God’s victory over him at the cross, and he will be driven out. The Christian, in the name of Jesus Christ, has the right and privilege of trampling the devil underfoot. Christ defeated Satan at the cross—victory has already been announced with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The need is to act upon these facts and by faith claim the victory over Satan in the name of Christ.

In World War II, when the allies invaded Europe, the world knew that the war was really over, even though months of death and bitter fighting lay ahead. There would be cold and exhaustion, peril and pain, bombs and flaming aircraft. But the end had really come. No one, except perhaps for an insane Hitler, was in any doubt to that fact. The curtain was falling. The grim show was finished. We are now in precisely the same position. We fight in a war which is already won. It was won when Jesus burst forth from a sealed tomb.

What a privilege it is to be in the army of the living God, engaged in the great battle of the ages! Great men and women of the past have died on the battlefield for the

Lord Jesus Christ. Today we find few who are willing to engage the enemy and live wholeheartedly for the Savior. Let us go forth to battle, clad with the whole armor of God, more than conquerors because He has already won the battle. *“Now thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15:57 NASB).

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Ask for the most significant insight from their experiences this week of praying using the ACTS acrostic, preparing the session or reading the article “How to Pray.”

Memory Verses (5 minutes)

Ask several group members to say aloud the current memory verse.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the Review and Overview sections.

Day One

Involve (5-7 minutes)

WHAT’S GONE WRONG?

Ask a group member to read aloud the story about Cal and Judy. Then ask what group members wrote for their answers to the questions.

What might be the root cause of Cal and Judy’s problems? **Cal and Judy may be under attack from Satan, as he tempts them with discouragement, defeat and resentment. Adding to that are the effects of living in a fallen world of sin, sickness and death.**

How would you encourage Cal and Judy at this time in their lives? **I would encourage them to pray, trust God and persevere in faith and hope. Their problems stem from Satan, sin and life in a fallen world, not because God has forgotten or abandoned them.**

Explore (30-40 minutes)

WHO IS THE ENEMY?

Ask a group member to read aloud the two paragraphs introducing this section, then ask what people wrote in the chart for their answers.

Who is our enemy? How is he described? What is his strategy?

Revelation 12:7-10

The great dragon, the devil, Satan who leads the earth astray.

1 Peter 5:8

The devil, who is a roaring lion seeking to devour humans.

2 Corinthians 4:4

An angel of light who disguises himself as a benign being.

John 8:44

He is the devil, a murderer, liar and the father of lies.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

He is the tempter—constantly tempting us to do evil.

Ask several group members to share what they wrote as a summary statement for who the enemy is and what he tries to do. **You should get answers such as: Our enemy is the devil—Satan—who seeks to destroy and deceive us through his many lies and temptations.**

Read aloud the powerful quote by Donald Barnhouse as well as the sentence introducing the next section.

Day Two

Ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on Genesis 3:1-8.

What was Satan's tactic with Eve? Why was he effective? (v. 1) **Satan's tactic was to tempt her to doubt and distrust God. He appealed to her senses and intellect, which was a powerful and effective tactic.**

Where did Eve go wrong in her encounter with Satan? (vv. 2,3) **She didn't counter his lies and half-truths with complete trust and truth from God's Word.**

To what did Satan finally appeal? (vv. 4-6) **Satan appealed to Eve's pride and intellect—that she could become like God.**

What were the results of listening to Satan? (vv. 7-9) **Eve's disobedience produced the fall of man and the entrance into the world of sin and death and thousands of years of devastation and evil.**

What should Eve and Adam have done to defeat Satan? **Eve should have said no to Satan and confronted him with God's truth.**

Ask a group member to read the Neil Anderson quote.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

The battleground is in the mind. What do the strongholds represent? How do we defeat the strongholds? **The strongholds are ideas and philosophies that are lies**

and half-truths regarding God, Jesus and the nature of the world we live in. We destroy these strongholds with explanations of the truth based on fact and the Word of God.

Day Three

DEFENDING AGAINST THE ADVERSARY

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this section and the quote by Donald Barnhouse. Then ask everyone to turn to James 4:7-10. Have a group member read the passage aloud, then ask people what they wrote for their answers to the two questions based on those verses.

How should we respond to the devil? **We should resist the devil and at the same time submit ourselves to God. We should also make certain that our hearts and lives are pure so that we do not give the devil a foothold into our lives.**

In what ways can we resist the devil? **We resist the devil by submitting to God and His Word, humbling ourselves and living holy lives.**

Read aloud the sentences about spiritual armor. Have everyone turn to Ephesians 6:10-18, and ask a group member to read those verses aloud. Then ask what people wrote for their answers to the questions based on this passage.

What are the warfare pieces listed which we can use? **The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, the feet that take the gospel of peace to the world.**

Which pieces are defensive? How are they to be used?

The breastplate of righteousness—the breastplate protects the heart against a mortal wound; since we have taken Christ as our Lord and Savior, He has become our righteousness. Since He is for us, no one can be against us and no one can snatch us out of His hand. Thus, we have total security and protection as we go into battle.

The belt of truth—Roman soldiers used a six- to eight-inch belt to gather up their flowing garments and as a foundation upon which to hang their swords and other weapons. The belt facilitated movement for the soldier in battle. Truth—Jesus Christ—is the Christian’s belt that facilitates movement in spiritual warfare. Knowing the truth frees us from sin and allows us to obey the call of our new captain—Jesus Christ—in this great battle in which we are engaged.

The shield of faith—as we trust and hope in Christ, we are freed from doubt and defeat. God is always faithful, and we fight in His strength, knowing that “*The battle is the Lord’s*” (2 Chronicles 20:15).

The helmet of salvation—Jesus Christ has become our salvation. Being confident of our salvation gives us the conviction we need to fight the battle.

Which pieces are offensive? How are they to be used?

The sword of the Spirit is God's Word, which is the weapon the Holy Spirit uses to convict the hearts of lost men and women. We can expect no conviction of sin and need for the Savior apart from the truth of God's Word—Scripture spoken by us in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not our brilliant oratory or persuasive ideas that bring men and women to Christ.

The shoes that take the gospel of peace—the gospel and the truth of the cross are the only messages that can bring peace between us and God. As we actively take the gospel to the lost in the marketplace around the world, we are being used by God to reconcile men and women everywhere to the Savior. *“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!’”* (Romans 10:15 NASB).

Read Matthew 4:3,4. How did Jesus use His offensive armor in battling Satan? **He quoted the truth of Scripture to defeat Satan's lies.**

Ask a group member to read aloud the Neil Anderson quote.

KEY QUESTION

Satan often will attack our identity in Christ. (For example, we might start feeling like this: “I'm such a lousy Christian, God must really be disappointed with me” or, like Cal and Judy, “Why are all these bad things happening—is God angry with me?”)

How will you apply Paul's command to stand firm against Satan by using the Word as an “offensive weapon”?

We should remind ourselves of the truth from God's Word and, in effect, quote Scripture to ourselves. For example, if we begin to “feel” as if God has deserted us, we should read Hebrews 13:5, where God says, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* As we stand firm in the truth, we can defeat Satan's tactics of discouragement and defeat.

Day Four

SATAN'S ALLIES

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this section, then ask your group what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on James 4:1-4.

What enemies are mentioned here? **Our enemies are the world/world system under Satan's direction, my own selfish and fleshly desires and my wrong/impure motives.**

What do you think it means to be a “friend of the world”? **It means to place the things, values and philosophies of this world ahead of or even in place of God.**

Ask your group members what they wrote for their answers to the question based on 1 John 2:15-17 as well as the question based on Galatians 5.

Why does the world's system of values appeal to our fleshly nature? **Because they are both corrupted by the fall and under the dominion of Satan.**

According to Galatians 5:16-18 and 22-26, how can we defeat the fleshly desires that battle within us? **We must crucify (starve) our fleshly desires and walk (live) moment by moment under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit.**

In his classic book, *White Fang*, Jack London relates an incident of his main character, the half-wolf, half-dog named White Fang. One day, White Fang strayed into a hen house and killed several hens. The owner, of course, was furious. White Fang's trainer told the man, "I promise you that White Fang can lie in the hen house all day tomorrow and not kill a single chicken."

The owner was skeptical but the test began. Whenever the lust to kill asserted itself, the master's voice recalled White Fang again and again, until at last the force of the impulse had spent itself as he listened to that quietly restraining voice. He finally fell asleep in the midst of the hens. When he awoke, he yawned and jumped out of the hen house. White Fang's victory over his wolf-nature sprang from the restraining power of his beloved master's voice.

So it is with us. Sensitive obedience to the restraining and empowering voice of the Holy Spirit defeats the voice of temptation and brings victory.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SATAN AND THE FLESH

In James 4:7, we are commanded to resist the devil. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, we are commanded to flee immorality. How do we determine if the situation requires "resisting" or "fleeing"? **If we sense the temptation is coming primarily from our fleshly desires and fleeing—getting away from—the situation will enable us to escape the temptation, then that is what we should do. If, on the other hand, we sense we are being attacked by Satan's lies, then we should resist and use God's Word to defeat the demonic enemy.**

Ask a group member to read the paragraphs summarizing this section. Then ask the group what answers they wrote (whether F or R) for each of the statements.

Compare the following situations and determine if we should physically flee the situation or resist the enemy's lies with God's Word. Mark an "F" for flee (physically) and an "R" for resist (mentally). In the group, discuss the steps you would take.

- R You get fired from your job and have feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy.
- F Your fiancé(e) invites you into his/her home after a romantic evening out.
- R You slip back into an old pattern of sin, and now you feel unforgiven and unworthy to ask once again for forgiveness.

- F You are halfway through a movie at the theater, and the storyline promises to include immoral scenes for the rest of the movie.
- F You are a recovering alcoholic. The people at a party you are attending insist that you drink with them.
- R Someone offends you, and you replay the incident over and over in your mind.
- R Your boss insists that you go to a topless bar for a business lunch.

Read aloud the paragraph which summarizes the entire section.

Day Five

THE HINDRANCE OF TEMPTATION

According to Matthew 4:1-3, who is the tempter? **The devil is the tempter.**

What do you think are the areas in which people are most likely to be tempted?

Temptation occurs in our lives in areas of need, desire or weakness.

Read James 1:13-15.

What causes us to be drawn into temptation? **Our own evil desires draw us into temptation.**

How does temptation differ from sin? **Temptation is the initial impression to sin, while sin is the actual carrying out of temptation. The issue may arise as to the difference between testing and temptation. God tests our faith to produce endurance (James 1:3,4), but Satan tempts our flesh to lead us to sin (James 1:13-15).**

Based on 1 Corinthians 10:13, how does God limit the temptations we face? **He only allows temptations that are common to man and not beyond what we can bear.**

What does He provide when temptation comes? **God provides an escape.**

KEY QUESTION

In light of the three passages just considered and what we have been learning, how should we deal with temptation? **Answers could include the following ideas:**

- **Expect to be tempted; recognize that temptation is not sin, but that it entices me to sin.**
- **Be aware of areas of particular vulnerability; be prepared in advance.**
- **Use Scripture to resist.**
- **Be confident that it will not be too strong for me.**
- **Trust God for an escape.**
- **Don't feel guilty about being tempted, and don't feel overconfident with momentary success.**

Read the quote by Neil Anderson as well as the session **SUMMARY**.

Assignments

Call group members' attention to the assignments, especially four and five, which ask students to identify areas of vulnerability as well as keep a log of temptations throughout the week.

Close in Prayer

14

Session 14
*Loving
Unconditionally*

Loving Unconditionally

FOCUS

Through faith, every Christian is to love others with God's unconditional love.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members to understand God's love and the importance of loving others with His love when you guide them to do the following:

- Compare God's love to our human ability to love.
- Realize His command and His provision to express God's love to others.
- By faith, claim God's love for a specific individual who is difficult to love.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Has each of your group members shared **his/her story** during one of your group meetings? If not, schedule them in now.
2. Continue to trust God to show you how best to **motivate and communicate love** to each of your group members. Pray and think through how each of them is progressing in these areas:
 - Developing in love for God.
 - Expressing confidence in personal forgiveness.
 - Living by the Spirit.
 - Trusting God in various areas of life.
 - Establishing a quiet time and feeding on the Word.
 - Growing in prayer.
 - Developing a vision and heart for sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

Trust God to use you to help them in those areas that need further growth. As Paul says, "encourage the fainthearted, help the weak" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

3. When you meet individually, **ask each of your group members** how living by the Spirit has been affecting relationships with his or her family, relationships with those in the office, or other areas in life that are applicable. As you trust God for insight, ask yourself if your people are demonstrating **how to apply the Spirit-filled life** in various circumstances. Do they trust God to live His life through them, producing

His fruit in their lives? Or are they only asking God to help them, or trying hard to do better in the flesh?

This session on loving unconditionally is crucial to our walk with God as well as in our relationships with others. If we do not learn to truly love people, we will not continue to live by the Spirit nor become more like Jesus.

There are three Greek words translated into the one English word “love.” *Eros* suggests sensual desire; it does not appear in the New Testament. *Phileo* is used for friendship or love for one’s friends or relatives, and conveys a sense of loving someone who is worthy of our love. *Agape* is God’s love—the purest, deepest kind of love—expressed not through mere emotions, but as an act of one’s will.

God’s supernatural love is supremely revealed through our Lord’s death on the cross for our sins. It is this supernatural love that He wants to produce in us by His Holy Spirit.

Agape love is given because of the character of the person loving rather than the worthiness of the object of that love. Sometimes it is referred to as “love in spite of” rather than “love because of.”

The Lord Jesus gave to His disciples—and through them to all believers—a new commandment: “*Love each other just as much as I love you*” (John 13:34 TLB). What kind of love is this? It is the very same love that God the Father expresses for His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus. It is this same divine, supernatural, unconditional, everlasting, unchangeable love which God makes available to us with the command that we are to love one another.

God gave this promised love to the disciples on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As a result, they were not only able to love each other as Christ’s disciples, but they could also love their enemies—the very ones who crucified our Lord.

This same divine love—*agape*—is available to us. It is not merely an emotional experience, but it is a supernatural power originating with the Father and coming from Him to the Son, to the disciples, to us and to the world.

However, we cannot love in our own strength. Just as surely as “*those who are in the flesh cannot please God*” (Romans 8:8 NASB), so in our own strength we cannot love as we ought.

We know from John 15:12 that it is God’s will for us to love others. We also know that He would not command us to do something that He will not enable us to do. In 1 John 5:14,15, God promises that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears and answers us. Relating this promise to God’s command, we can claim by faith the privilege of loving with His love.

God has for us an unending supply of *agape* love—His divine, supernatural love. It is for us to claim, to grow on, to spread to others, and thus, to reach hundreds and thousands

with the love that counts—the love that will bring them to Jesus Christ. In order to experience and share this love, we must claim it by faith; that is, trust His promise that He *will* give us all that we need to do His will, on the basis of His command and promise.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Memory Verses (3-5 minutes)

Ask several group members to say aloud one or more of the memory verses from the past several weeks.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the paragraphs reviewing the previous session and introducing this one.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

ADVICE NEEDED

Ask a group member to read aloud the “Dear Gabby” letter. Then ask the group what advice they would give to Stephanie. Look for how your group members apply the Spirit-filled life to this situation.

Explore (30 minutes)

Read aloud the paragraph introducing the next section as well as the quote by Oswald Chambers.

GOD’S LOVE

Ask a group member to read aloud the 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 passage that is printed in the notebook, then ask what qualities people listed as meaningful to them.

Using verses 4-7 from this passage, list two or three qualities of God’s love that seem most meaningful to you. **Answers might include: Love is patient; is never envious; does not demand its own way; is not irritable; does not hold grudges; will hardly notice when others do it wrong; is never glad about injustice; is always loyal; always expects the best; etc.**

Day Two

Ask the group what they wrote in their chart for the differences between God’s love and man’s ability to love.

OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS

Ask someone to read aloud the introductory paragraph as well as John 13:34.

How does Jesus command us to love others? How would that look? **Our love should be undeserved, active and costly to us.**

Read the Ephesians 4:32 quote.

When someone offends us or hurts us, what should our response be? **We are to be compassionate and forgive the person.**

Why is this so hard to do? **Because our fleshly response/emotional response to someone who offends us or hurts us is to retaliate, get even and hold a grudge. Only if we are drawing upon God's power can we respond in a supernatural way.**

KEY QUESTION

What actions do you think are involved in forgiveness? **We should practice the following actions: not to hold a grudge, not to avoid the other person, keep the event in the past, release the person from all debt to us.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 23:33-35.

How might we typically respond to someone who attacks us physically or emotionally? Where would we find the power to respond as Jesus did? **We would typically respond with hatred, vengeance and bitterness. Only by turning to God and entrusting ourselves to the Father as Jesus did on the cross could we respond supernaturally.**

Day Three

What does Hebrews 12:14,15 say are some results of not forgiving? Can a person be living a Spirit-directed life and yet refuse to forgive someone who has hurt or offended them? Why or why not? **Not forgiving will lead to a "root of bitterness" springing up and "blooming" into hatred and vengeance. Also implied is that we will fail to experience God's grace and peace if we don't forgive from the heart. We also really won't be able to live a Spirit-directed life because a part of our lives will be unyielded to Christ. Yieldedness to Christ is a foundational aspect of the Spirit-directed life.**

According to Luke 6:27-36, what are some loving actions you are to take with someone who hates you? **We are to love them, bless them, pray for them, give to them.**

Have someone read aloud the two paragraphs summarizing this section, and ask if anyone has any questions or comments about the ideas presented.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 18:21-35.

What does Jesus say is the relationship between a person's attitude about his/her own need for forgiveness and forgiving others? What does this reveal about our evaluation of our own sins? When our evaluation is correct, how does that affect our readiness to forgive others? **If a person doesn't understand the depth of or appreciate his forgiveness from God, it will be difficult to forgive others. When we realize how much we have been forgiven by God and that we are just as capable of hurting others the way we have been hurt, then it will enable us to forgive others, with God's power, as we have been forgiven.**

Day Four

LOVING WITH GOD'S LOVE

Read aloud the sentence introducing this section.

Read Ephesians 3:16-21.

What part does living by faith play in demonstrating God's love toward those who are difficult to love? **Since everything in the Christian life is based upon faith, we should, as an act of the will, claim God's love by faith. We will not feel like loving or forgiving certain individuals. However, we can please God by claiming God's love through faith rather than acting on the basis of our feelings.**

What must be true in our lives for us to be able to demonstrate God's love?

We must be filled with the Holy Spirit. We cannot love others in our own strength, but we can give this love to others as we allow the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in our lives. We must actively trust God to express His love for others through us.

THE SECRET TO LOVING WITH GOD'S LOVE

Read this section aloud including the quote by Arlis Priest.

Have a group member read aloud the **SUMMARY** paragraph.

Day Five

Apply (12 minutes)

A PLAN FOR LOVING

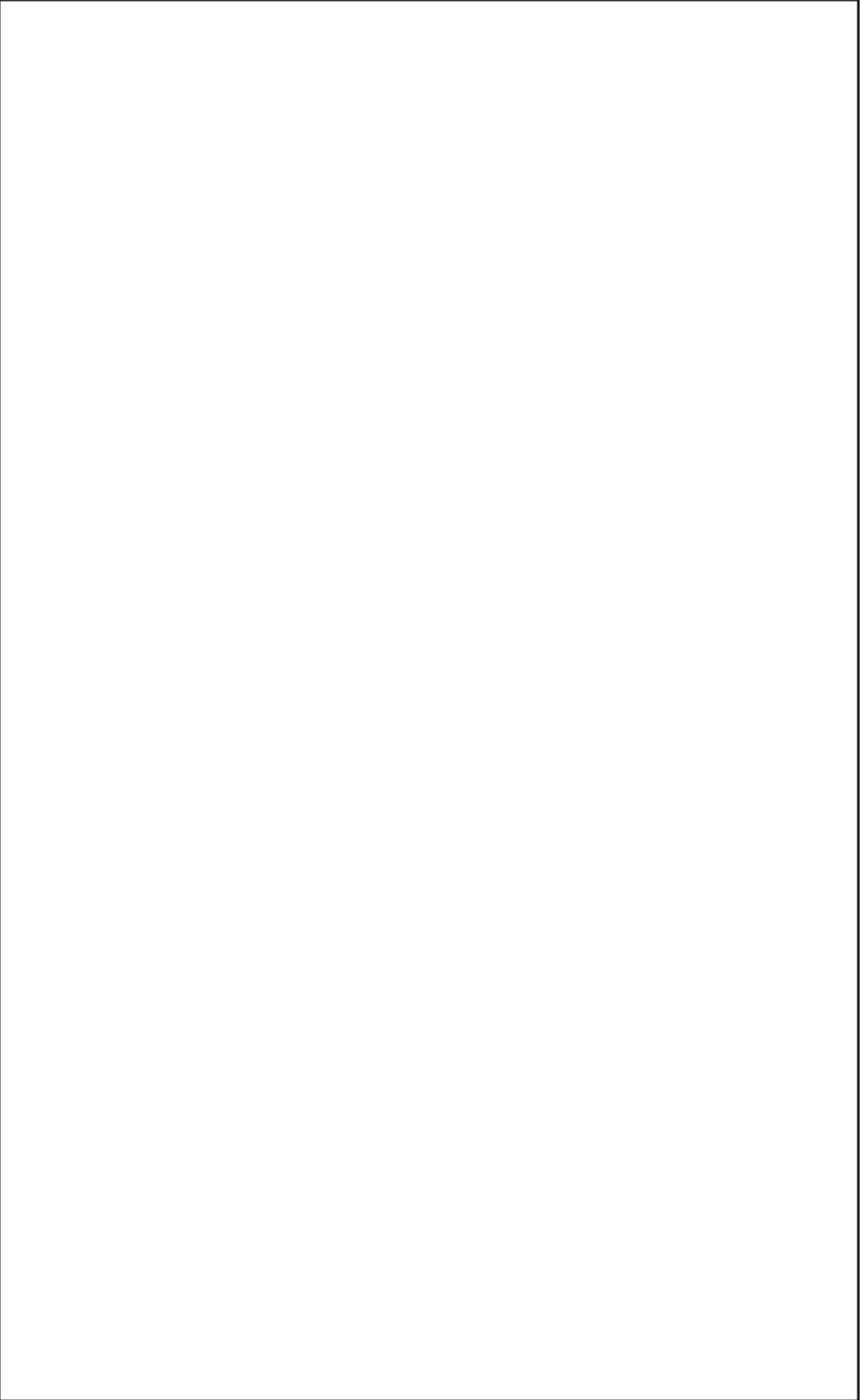
After you share something that was meaningful for you, invite one or more volunteers to share one aspect of this exercise which was particularly meaningful or helpful to them.

Assignments

Encourage your group members to be faithful to read 1 Corinthians 13 throughout the week and to accomplish their "Plan for Loving." Also remind your group members to bring their PCS cards to the next group meeting.

Close in Prayer

Pray for each other to be encouraged and strengthened to follow through on this exercise and for each member's personal requests.



15

Session 15
God's Gift of Work

God's Gift of Work

FOCUS

Work is a gift from God and, in fact, is God's plan for every human being. He uses it to meet our needs and appoints His children to be His ambassadors within their professional sphere of influence.

OBJECTIVES

You will help group members to understand God's plan for work and to realize that:

- God is a worker, and He created us to be workers.
- God meets our needs through our work and enables us to bless and serve others.
- God places us in our work to be part of His redemptive plan for our job and for the people who work there.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. The purpose of this session is to help group members understand that **work is not a curse** or a part of God's curse from Genesis 2. Rather it is a gift from God and a vital part of His plan for our lives. Yes, certain aspects of work have been corrupted by the fall of man. Certain aspects of the curse affect our work and the people at our work, but work in and of itself is not a curse. It is something that is at the core of our existence on earth.
2. This session will examine the various ways **God uses work in our lives**—meeting our needs, giving us satisfaction, blessing and serving others, utilizing our gifts, talents and abilities to make the world a better place and helping others succeed. But it will also help your group members begin to internalize the eternal significance of their jobs—that God has given each of us a platform at work to be His ambassadors in reconciliation.
3. Ultimately, God desires each of us, no matter what our profession, to be able to **integrate our faith** in Him with our work and our jobs, whether we be a construction worker, a professional athlete, a lawyer or an accountant. The Work Style Questionnaire at the end of the session will help you and your group members get a handle on how you're doing in this area and how you can improve. Be sure you and your group members complete the survey and discuss it during the session.

Many Christians compartmentalize their faith, expressing it on Sundays and special occasions, but almost never in the workplace. Some of that is due to misinformation from our secular society saying that it doesn't belong. But think about it—everything you are as a person of faith you bring to the office anyway—your integrity, your sense of hard work, your honesty, respect for your boss, fairness to those who work under you. Using relevant words to express that faith is just identifying why you are who you are. We almost act schizophrenic when we try to compartmentalize our faith and relegate it to a little corner of our weekends on Sunday.

This study on the relevance of faith in the workplace is based on a biblical worldview. It begins with the premise that God created work and called it a good thing. Because He created humans to work, we gain a lot of satisfaction from our work—we are self-fulfilled when we perform our tasks well and to the best of our ability. The bonus for us as Christians is that we can find meaning in our labor—whether it is physical or cerebral. Even the most mundane work has value in God's economy because God says He is with us.

He wants to fulfill His plan through us in the workplace. There is meaning beyond the tasks we perform, and a lot of that is related to the people with whom we work. People matter most to God. Because God is sovereign, we can believe that He has placed us in our particular job to be with those people—even that cranky secretary and demanding boss. God gives us work because He wants to provide for us and bless us. He also wants us to have a ministry in the lives of the people we work with. We can have a positive impact on them as we look for ways to bring our personal faith into the situations and conversations we have on a daily basis.

We stand around the water cooler talking about the latest episode of a popular TV show or the front-page story of our newspaper. We can turn those conversations to spiritual things using thought-provoking questions that cause people to begin to think about God. It's a natural thing to do when you know how to do it. Your faith is relevant because people are relevant to God. You provide the natural bridge between the two. Your job is to bring it to work with you every day and leave the results to God.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Ask several group members to say aloud one or more of the recent memory verses.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the Review and Overview sections at the beginning of this session.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

JOE'S DILEMMA

Ask a group member to read aloud the story about Joe, then ask the question.

What perspectives would you share with Joe regarding his work? **His job is a gift from God, who is providing for Joe and his family. (Think of all the people who have been unemployed for months and years.) Most importantly, he can work for the Lord and experience His presence and joy while on his job. Plus, he can still get involved in ministry opportunities in the evenings and on weekends.**

Explore (30-40 minutes)

GOD'S VIEW OF WORK

God Is a Worker

Ask a group member to read aloud the passage from Genesis. Then ask what people wrote for their answers to the questions.

What do you notice about God and what He did in these verses? **God was busy working, creating the heavens and the earth and humankind. He finished His work and then He rested. So God is a working God, and He created us in His image to be people who work.**

Read aloud the paragraph summarizing this section.

God Created Us to Be Workers

Ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on Genesis 2:15.

What did God give man to do upon his creation? Why do you think God did this? When did God give man work to do? **God put man into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. He gave Adam responsibilities so that he would gain a sense of purpose, meaning and accomplishment in life while using his abilities. He gave man work before the Fall.**

What are the implications for us today? **Work is a big part of God's plan for our lives, and we should accept and even welcome it.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Psalm 104. Write down as many "occupations" of God as you can find. **Some of the "occupations" of God that could be inferred from this Psalm are: sustainer of the heavens and earth, builder of the universe, creator of the animal kingdom, feeder of the animals, etc.**

Day Two

THE VALUE OF WORK

We Earn Money to Meet Our Needs

Ask the group what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on 1 Thessalonians 4:11,12.

What does God command us to do regarding work? Why? **He is telling us to be sure we work hard in order to meet our own needs and our family's needs; to fulfill our responsibilities—to take care of our own business. This will earn people's respect and put us in a position to share and be a blessing to others.**

We Learn Important Skills

In what ways has your job/career enabled you to develop skills? **Expect a variety of personal answers to this question based upon what kind of job or career each group member has.**

How have you been able to leverage those skills for God's kingdom? **Again expect a variety of answers such as: sharing the gospel with co-workers, using my professional expertise to help Christian organizations, helping to fulfill the Great Commission through my international travels with my job, etc.**

We Earn Money to Help Others

Ask group members to turn to 1 Timothy 6:18,19 and have one of them read this passage aloud. Then ask the questions based on these verses.

What are several key words/concepts Paul wants us to embrace in our lifestyle? **We are to “do good,” be generous and be willing to share.**

How can you apply this in your life and family? **Expect a variety of personal answers to this question.**

Why does Paul call this a “foundation for the future”? **By doing good and being generous, sharing people, we are being good stewards of the resources God has given us, and we are laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven.**

Day Three

WE CAN SERVE PEOPLE

Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:10.

What unique abilities and skills has God given you? **Look for a variety of personal answers here.**

What are some specific and unique ways you can serve people through your job/profession/career? **Again expect a variety of answers.**

Ask a group member to read aloud the quote from Truett Cathy. Then ask if anyone has any comments about it.

We Can Find Satisfaction in Our Work

Ask a group member to read aloud Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, then ask the questions.

In what ways does your work/job bring personal fulfillment and satisfaction? Why? **Look for a variety of personal answers here.**

In what ways is it frustrating? Why? **Again expect a variety of personal answers.**

What changes can you make to increase your satisfaction level? **Look for answers like: focus more on helping and serving people, do things more excellently, try to work fewer hours, etc.**

Have someone read the Shelly Genoveve quote. Then ask the group for their comments about it.

Day Four

We Can Make a Difference for Christ

Ask someone to read aloud Matthew 5:13-16. Then ask the questions.

What are some practical ways you can be a light at work? **Look for answers like: I can be a person of integrity; I can serve others; I can make time for people with a kind attitude; I can use pure, uplifting language; I can be the best at my work; I can take a stand against unethical practices, etc.**

What are some unique ways you can make your company/department succeed? **Look for answers like: I can work hard, I can be a team player, I can help others with their work, I can think of creative ways to do things more effectively and efficiently, etc.**

What are some negative situations/behaviors God might want you to help change in your work environment? **Look for a variety of personal answers here such as: change unethical practices, change negative attitudes, bring a servant spirit, be more creative, etc.**

Ask a group member to read aloud Colossians 3:23,24, then ask the group what they wrote for their answers to the following two questions.

Who are you really working for? **We are ultimately working for Christ, and it is the Savior whom we serve.**

What are the implications for your work ethic? **As verse 23 points out, we should do our work wholeheartedly, not holding anything back, working, as we are, for Christ.**

Have a group member read aloud the quote from the Our Daily Bread. Then ask if anyone has a comment about it.

Day Five

Ask a group member to read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:20, then ask what people wrote for their answers to the following questions.

What would it mean for you to be an ambassador for Christ in your workplace? **It might mean pointing people to Christ through your attitudes and behaviors as well as verbalizing your faith and the gospel at appropriate and opportune times.**

You may want to remind your group of the definition of an ambassador as you discuss and answer this question (PCL Session 9, “Making Your Life Count”): “An ambassador is the highest ranking diplomatic representative appointed to represent a country or government. He lives in the country to which he is an ambassador, but it is not his home. He is a foreigner, being different from the people who live there. He must be faithful to his own country and represent it accurately. Even though his heart’s desire may be to return to his home, his job is to stay and represent his country to these people. He is the unifying link between the two.”

How could you effectively communicate who you represent (God) in such a way that it would draw people to Christ rather than repel them? **Look for answers like: I would really be a welcoming, kind, encouraging person; I would try to share with people, when appropriate, what God has done in my life and how He has helped me in specific situations, etc.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-13. What was the example Paul wanted to set for the Thessalonians and why? **He worked hard, earning a living, always paying his way and not taking anything from anyone. He didn’t want to be a burden to anyone. He wanted to set an example for the believers.**

Have someone read aloud the **SUMMARY** paragraph.

Assignments

Highlight the assignments with your group, especially one and four. Assignment one, writing down some additional advice for Joe, will take just a few minutes, but it will be a valuable exercise, as it will show how much each person has learned from the session.

Assignment four, completing the Work Style Questionnaire, will take between 15 and 30 minutes and will be a valuable tool for identifying how you are doing as an ambassador for Christ at work.

Close in Prayer

16

Session 16

*Developing
Character From
the Inside Out*

Developing Character From the Inside Out

FOCUS

Every believer should live a life of holiness and be continually developing character—from the heart—that affects daily behavior.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members to begin living a holy life built upon a foundation of character when you guide them to do the following:

- Understand that God’s first priority is the condition of one’s heart, from which flows character.
- Understand the definition of holiness and begin practicing it on a daily basis.
- Begin growing in five specific character areas of life.
- Develop an action plan for change in these areas.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Take some time at the beginning of this session to share among the group the results of the Work Style Questionnaire from the previous session. What did the group members learn about themselves? What action or growth points need to be put into practice? How can you pray for each other as you all seek to more effectively integrate your faith and work?
2. This will be a stimulating and challenging session for you and your group members because it focuses on a topic—character—that has long been seriously eroding the fabric of our culture and has also significantly infected the Christian community. In addition, you will be examining some areas of life that are not often discussed or challenged on a regular basis—areas such as sexual purity, speech and use of alcohol.
3. The application section at the end of the session will enable you and your group to evaluate and formulate action points for growth in each of the five areas studied in this session: your moral purity, your speech, your thought-life, your finances and your use of alcohol. Be sure you and your group members take the time to thoroughly work through the application.

We cannot overemphasize the biblical call to spiritual holiness, righteousness and godliness. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:7,8: *“Train yourself to be godly. For ... godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”* Whether or not we are living holy lives will make a huge difference for all eternity as well as the quality of our relationship with God in this life on earth, especially as it relates to influencing our family, friends and co-workers.

We are all members of one another, and we are each either elevated or depressed by the inner lives of one another. Some of us affect others like a joyous tide, lifting them upward, but some of us are like undertows to the body of Christ. If you are married, the presence of holiness or lack thereof can serve to either sanctify or repel your spouse, children and grandchildren. And it is the foundation of whether or not you have any long term respect and relevance among your co-workers.

As for “the life to come,” godliness builds the enduring architecture of one’s soul on the foundation of Christ—gold, silver and precious stones which will survive the fires of judgment and remain a monument to Christ for all eternity (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-15).

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Take some time to share the results of everyone’s Work Style Questionnaire as well as pray for each other in this area.

Memory Verses (3-5 minutes)

Ask several group members to recite aloud the current or previous memory verses.

Review/Overview

Read aloud these sections which introduce the session.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

A True Story

Ask group members for any comments they might have about the story of the four reporters and then ask the question.

What was the root cause of this international incident? **The root cause of this incident was a total lack of honesty and integrity. Their professional success was the driving force in their lives and jobs and, in the end, nothing else really mattered.**

Read aloud the quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Explore (30-40 minutes)

THE BIG PICTURE

Ask group members for any comments they might have from the 1 Samuel 16:1-7 passage and then ask the questions.

What was most important to God, as opposed to men, in the selection of David as a leader? **The most important aspect of David's selection by God was his heart condition—his humility, teachable attitude, faithfulness, and most importantly, his hunger for God.**

What are some implications of the statement, “the Lord looks at the heart”? (See also Proverbs 4:23.) **The implication is that a person's heart condition is of paramount importance to God, especially as it relates to being chosen for a spiritual leadership position.**

Day Two

Ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the question based on Peter 1:13-16.

To what kind of lifestyle does God call us? **God calls us to be vigilant in maintaining a life of holiness. We are to be like God—because He is holy, we are to be holy.**

KEY QUESTION

What do you think it means “to be holy” in daily life? **To be holy in daily life means to be set apart for God's use each and every day. It means to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). It means being a cleansed vessel, an instrument made holy for noble purposes, useful to the Master for good works (see 2 Timothy 2:20-22).**

Ask a group member to read aloud the next three paragraphs, beginning with the definition of holy.

Ask another group member to read aloud 2 Peter 1:3-11 and then answer together as a group the questions.

What has God granted us? (vv. 3,4) **He has given us everything we need in life to live for Him as His godly child. He has also granted us promises to claim day in and day out.**

For what reason? (v. 4) **That we may escape temptation and corruption and thus participate in His holiness.**

How does Peter describe our discipline of faith in verses 5-7? **He describes our faith as a foundation, and we should strive to lay goodness, knowledge, self-control,**

perseverance, godliness, kindness and love on top of this foundation.

What will be the outcome? (vv. 8,10,11) **We will be effective and productive in our walks with Christ. In addition, we will not stumble and fall spiritually. At the end of our lives, we will receive a hearty welcome into heaven.**

If we fail in this area of our lives, what does Peter say will be the result? (v. 9) **If we fail to do all this, it will be as if we are blind or need “spiritual contact lenses.” It will be as though we were never born again, having never experienced God’s forgiveness and cleansing.**

Read aloud the quote by R. Kent Hughes.

Day Three

CHARACTER ISSUES

Read aloud the sentence which introduces the next section examining five areas of character development.

Moral Purity

Ask group members if they have any thoughts or comments on the Christianity Today surveys, then ask the questions based on 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

What commands are we given here? Why? **We are to be sexually pure and self-controlled, as that will set us apart from our sexually impure culture and society.**

Ask group members the questions based on Corinthians 6:18-20.

What key principles does God call us to live by in this passage? Why? **Again, we are told to run from sexual immorality, as we are a temple of God—the Holy Spirit resides within us. God redeemed us by the blood of Christ. Now we belong to Him.**

KEY QUESTION

In what specific ways might you daily “honor God with your body”? **Abstaining from adultery and any type of sexual immorality, including the viewing of pornography. We should constantly take an inventory of the things we look at and the things we say.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Timothy 4:12 and 2 Timothy 2:22.

What things are we told to pursue? **We are to pursue purity, faith and love, as well as righteousness and peace.**

Our Speech

Ask group members to turn to Ephesians 4:29-5:10. Have someone read the passage aloud.

What commands are given for living in this passage? Why? **We are to be imitators of God, living our lives directed by God's love. We are to be holy and pure, living in the light as God is light. We are to avoid sexual immorality and unwholesome speech, getting rid of anger, bitterness, malice and slander.**

Ask group members what they wrote for the four “speech traps” Paul warns us to avoid in verses 4:29 and 5:4.

Unwholesome talk—**This could include gossip, spreading rumors and any other type of conversation that tears down or negatively impacts other people. It could also mean using God's name disrespectfully.**

Obscenity—**This would primarily mean profanity, four-letter words, etc.**

Foolish talk—**This would include constant chatter about inane things that are meaningless such as sports, hobbies, etc.**

Coarse jesting—**This would include dirty jokes or any type of kidding around that would contain sexual innuendos, racial or other types of negative overtones.**

What do the same verses tell about the kind of speech that we are to engage in? **We are to engage in uplifting speech, saying things that will encourage, motivate and help people.**

Give an example of how you might apply this in a real-life situation at work or at home. **Look for personal and specific answers here.**

Ask a group member to read the quote from R. Kent Hughes.

Day Four

Our Thought Life

The following questions are meant to be thought questions for group members to reflect on. However, ask if anyone feels like sharing their answers.

What types of things do you tend to daydream or fantasize about? Why? **Expect a wide variety of personal answers such as: a member of the opposite sex, shopping, acquiring material things, becoming president of the company, etc.**

Read Philippians 4:8. What kinds of things could you think about to replace your current daydreams? **Things that are right, pure and admirable, such as God, His promises, the good and positive things about people and what they could become in Christ, etc.**

What obstacles might you face in doing that? **Look for a variety of personal answers, such as: not being able to control my thoughts, not spending enough time with God, etc.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 5:27-30.

What does Jesus say about the seriousness of sin? **He is saying that overcoming sin is more important than even our physical health and well-being. Even physical deformity pales in comparison with the eternal consequences of ignoring sin.**

Our Finances

Ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on 1 Timothy 6:6-19.

What is the source of true contentment? (vv. 6-8) **True contentment comes from experiencing godly character in our lives and having the basic necessities of life.**

What are some dangers of loving wealth? (vv. 9-10) **It's easy to be led into temptation and to wander away from our relationship with God. According to Scripture, the love of money is the "root" of all evil.**

What am I to pursue in life? (vv. 11-16) **We are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. We are to seek eternal life and the God who gives it.**

What are some things I should do with my money? (vv. 17-19) **We are to be generous with our money and be ready and willing to share with those who have need. We are to use it in the pursuit of good deeds—helping others.**

Have someone read the quote by Crawford Loritts.

KEY QUESTION

What are some specific ways you could be "rich in good deeds" and "generous"? **Look for a variety of personal and specific answers.**

Read the quote by Thomas à Kempis.

Day Five

Alcohol

What does Paul caution us against in Ephesians 5:18? Why? **He is commanding us not to get drunk. We are to avoid the over-indulgence in alcohol which is a mark of our culture. It impairs our judgment and leads to further sins.**

In Galatians 5:19-21, "drunkenness, orgies and the like" are listed as "acts of the sinful nature." What environments in today's culture might lead to this type of behavior?

What might be some alternative environments we could seek out? **Look for a variety of answers here, such as bars, clubs, certain types of parties and even some athletic events. Alternative environments could include church, Christian groups, retreats and other types of fellowship opportunities where alcohol is not at the center of the event. Encourage creative answers from your group.**

Ask a group member to read aloud the quote from Oscar Wilde.

Read aloud the **SUMMARY** paragraph and ask if anyone has any comments or questions.

Application

Ask group members what they wrote down as their next step of practical growth in each of the five areas. If group members have not completed the application, encourage them to complete that as part of the assignments for next week.

Assignments

Review Colossians 3:23,24 and memorize 1 Peter 1:16.

Take some “think time” and ask God to reveal to you any character issues on which you might need to work. Submit these to Him and ask Him to show you what you need to do to overcome these issues in your life.

Study and prepare Session 17.

17

Session 17
Living in Community

Living in Community

FOCUS

Every Christian needs community, which consists of friendship, fellowship and accountability with other believers.

OBJECTIVES

You will help motivate your group members to experience community in group situations when you guide them to do the following:

- Identify how community provides mutual benefits to participating believers.
- Discuss ways to encourage loving fellowship among believers.
- Plan actions to take to be a “giver” in relationships with other believers.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Take some time at the beginning of this session to discuss everyone’s results of the character application section from Session 16. What areas need to be strengthened? What action points did they come up with? How can you pray for each other and hold each other accountable?
2. By this time, you should know where (or if) each of your group members attends church. If appropriate, be available to **help evaluate their situations** on an individual basis according to the guidelines listed at the end of the session. If needed, suggest some good churches and be available to bring them to your own church or go visiting churches with them.
3. **Evaluate your leadership** of your *PCL* group for the last time. What improvements should you make? Review the appropriate pages in the Guidelines for the Leader at the beginning of the *Leader’s Guide*. Determine one or two action steps that you will take for your continued growth as a leader.

Community is critical for Christians in two ways. First, Christians need to be involved in community for their own spiritual well-being and growth.

Second, Christians need to be “givers” in relationship situations. This is the least-understood aspect of fellowship. Because Christians have been so influenced by the society around them, many have fallen into a self-oriented syndrome—“What’s in it for me?”

This is the exact opposite of what the Lord wants to build into us, namely that we would become “others-oriented.” Community is for both my growth and for how I can and should help others to grow. The first without the second is self-centered and superficial. Christians become stagnant if they are not giving; but when they give, they become channels through whom God can work.

Your group sessions should be a positive example of authentic community within your group. Often a leader tends to focus so much on the lesson to be taught that relationship needs are neglected. Yet it is the *loving relationships* which are the conduit of spiritual development. As you prepare for this session, evaluate the quality of community that has been present from week to week. Consider both the kinds of relationships you have provided for your group members and the opportunities you have provided to help them give to one another:

- Are you and your group members experiencing the benefits of authentic community?
- How have you encouraged loving relationships in each session?
- Has your group provided an environment for true fellowship to take place in both giving and receiving?

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Memory Verses (5 minutes)

Have several group members share one or more verses from memory.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the Review and Overview sections.

Day One

Involve (5-10 minutes)

Common Approaches to Fellowship

Ask your group members to share a brief statement about what is misunderstood about the fellowship experience of two or three of the people in the study guide chart.

- Phil

Christian groups are not for sampling, but for relationships and commitment. Phil sees only what's in it for him! He does not think of

the importance of committing himself to others (Philippians 2:3,4). See also Matthew 22:37-39.

- Jean

Bible study groups help meet needs that a larger church service cannot; but the opposite is also true. Jean should realize that worshipping together with other Christians and hearing the Word preached is vital to our growth (Hebrews 10:24,25).

• Wayne

He wants to grow and to be ministered to without making the investment necessary for such growth. We receive proportionately to what we invest (Galatians 6:7).

• Donna

She thinks that church is only for what she receives. She is missing the corporate element of worship, of receiving fellowship from others and especially from giving fellowship to others (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

“I am probably most like _____ because ...

Have two or three volunteers share their responses to the situation with which they identify most closely. Then ask if anyone has a problem with fellowship which is different from any of the five examples. Remember, this is an exercise to get people thinking and involved in the topic. You don't need to be concerned if your group members don't see all of the problems clearly.

Have someone read aloud the next paragraph, the quote and the verse.

Day Two

Explore (30 minutes)

DEFINITION

Read aloud the two paragraphs, then have the group members turn to Hebrews and read aloud the two passages (3:13 and 10:24,25). Ask what people wrote for their answers to the two questions.

What benefits of true Christian fellowship are found in these passages? **Continual encouragement of each other provides protection against falling prey to sin's deceitfulness. Love and good deeds result from the motivation that meeting together with other believers can give.**

Why would these benefits be important to your spiritual growth?

Look for specific personal application.

Read aloud the sentence summarizing this section.

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS: Ask your group to recall one of the people in the “Common Approaches to Community” chart. Then ask them this question:

What would you say to help [that person's] perspective of fellowship?

If the answers given seem too pat, ask a follow-up question such as:

How do you think [Wayne] would respond to your telling him that? Or why do you think that would help [Donna] want to change her attitude and actions?

Day Three

GIVING FELLOWSHIP

To help your group see that fellowship is not a one-way street designed solely for our personal benefit, have someone read the introductory paragraph. Then guide your group in discussing the chart and how we are to minister to others.

Romans 12:4-8

Since everyone has different gifts, it is necessary to use our gifts for the growth of others in the body; also, we need each other's gifts to complement our weaknesses.

Romans 12:12-16

Our fellowship is meant to meet the needs of others; we are to join our brothers and sisters in their experiences of joy or sorrow to encourage them; we are to be together with one another and not separated by racial differences or socioeconomic levels.

Romans 14:19

We are to pursue peace among believers and seek ways to spiritually strengthen each other.

Read aloud the paragraph summarizing this section.

KEY QUESTION

How do these perspectives compare with attitudes prevalent in our culture today? **Our culture is very self-oriented—"What's in it for me?" We often don't realize that Christianity exists not primarily to help me feel better, but to bring glory to God through me as I serve others. Scripture teaches self-sacrifice and service to others rather than using others for personal gain.**

Day Four

LOVE: THE MOTIVATION OF FELLOWSHIP

What ingredients found in Acts 2:42-47 show that the early believers cared for one another?

- v. 42 continually devoted to fellowship
- v. 44 all were together and had all things in common
- v. 45 began sharing as anyone might have need
- v. 46 took meals together with gladness and sincerity
- v. 47 had favor of all people

According to Jesus' words in John 13:34,35, why is love among believers always so important? **Love for one other is commanded by Christ. This shows the world that we are truly His followers.**

Read the Booker T. Washington quote.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 John 3:11,14; 1 John 4:20,21; 1 Peter 4:8.

How is my relationship with others a reflection of my relationship with God? **If I am unable to love and forgive others, it is an indication that I have fallen short in my own experience of God's love and forgiveness. Love for each other compensates for our human weaknesses and failings.**

OPTIONAL QUESTION:

What do you think would be the impact on our society if we Christians were giving and receiving this level of love? **See if group members grasp the powerful impact love has and how it is linked to unbelievers' response to God.**

RECONCILIATION WITH OTHERS

Read aloud the paragraphs introducing this section.

Think of a time when...

You offended someone. What could you have done to apply Matthew 5:23,24? **I should have gone to him/her and humbly asked for forgiveness. I should not have just asked God, "Is everything cool between us?" Then I would be able to come near to and receive grace from Him.**

You were aware that a Christian friend was caught up in a sin. How could you have followed Galatians 6:1? **I could have become involved with him/her to the point of trusting God to speak wisdom with love, to seek to restore that person. I should not have stopped at only praying for him/her.**

Someone offended you. What could you have done to obey Matthew 18:35? **I could have completely forgiven the "debt" that he/she owed me, bearing in mind the enormous debt that God, through His grace, willingly released me from. He wants me to do likewise to others.**

Read aloud the paragraph summarizing this section and the quote by Harrington Lees.

SOURCES OF COMMUNITY

Have your group members share their definitions of the word "church."

Biblical answers include:

- a local group of people (Christians), a congregation—the local church.
- all people who have received Christ as Savior—the universal church.

Ask a group member to read the next three paragraphs.

Ask another group member to read the section entitled, “Questions to Ask in Choosing a Good Church.”

Ask another group member to read aloud the section entitled, “Suggestions for Getting the Most Out of a Church Service or Christian Meeting.”

Read aloud the **SUMMARY** paragraph.

Assignments

Read the assignments and encourage your people to follow through on each one. If they need assistance, help them evaluate their church or other community situation.

Close in Prayer

Have your group members write down each other’s prayer requests and pray through some of them before you close. Encourage your group members to pray for one another during the coming week.

18

Session 18
*Living in Light
of Eternity*

Living in Light of Eternity

FOCUS

Every believer needs to develop an eternal perspective on life and then live according to that viewpoint.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members begin to live in light of eternal values when you guide them to do the following:

- Contrast the temporal and eternal perspectives on life.
- Determine whether earthly or heavenly investments are the primary focus of their life.
- Evaluate how an eternal perspective will affect various areas of daily life.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Consider the commitment and maturity shown by each of your group members. **Pray about whom you will want to continue to involve** in future groups and ministry opportunities such as *Make the Net Work* or *Leverage Your Life*. Which of your group members are ready to start their own groups, such as *Discovery*, *Foundations* or *PCL*? Make sure you are available to assist them in helping them start their groups. Encourage those who are not yet ready for this commitment level to get involved in another activity which will continue to build them spiritually (such as a Bible study in their church or community).
2. When you meet with your group members one-to-one for the last time during their *PCL* commitment, discuss how their quiet times have gone. Have they been experiencing consistent fellowship with the Lord? Quality time with God on a regular basis is a commitment they should want to pursue for the rest of their lives.

Now also is the time to talk with them personally about any area in their lives that you think needs to be addressed. Open the Word regarding that area, expressing your love for them and your desire for their best.

“If I fear to hold another to the highest because it is so much easier to avoid doing so, then I know nothing of Calvary love.”

—Amy Carmichael

Students of human behavior consider the ability to delay gratification to be one of the key indicators of maturity. An infant demands immediate response to any need or desire. A preschooler jumps up and down in anxiety and anticipation until a promised treat is delivered. Many children and teenagers do poorly in school because they find it hard to focus on the distant rewards of doing well in school—admission to a top university, access to a choice of good careers, success in various areas of life, etc.—versus enjoying immediate pleasures from other activities. Most parents sense that a milestone in development has been achieved when their son or daughter announces to a friend, “*I can’t come to the party. I need to study for that test.*”

The growing Christian goes through a similar process of learning to take a long-range view of spiritual life. Many new believers begin patterns of Bible study, prayer and church attendance and quickly recognize immediate benefits. But as time goes on, growth tends to become less noticeable. Gradually it becomes easier and easier to let temporal matters squeeze out attention to spiritual concerns. Continuing to grow in obedience to the Lord often begins to appear less attractive than sleeping in, making money, watching TV or a host of other choices.

By this point in a believer’s life, it is crucial to develop an eternal perspective on life. Until a person really sees the permanent outcomes of attitudes and actions, true Christian maturity will never be reached. Tragically, many Christians never move beyond evaluating their spiritual lives in terms of immediate blessings. Emotional responses dominate many individuals’ attitudes toward devotion and service.

It is sad to see Christians whose thoughts of eternity stopped at the point of salvation. Having trusted in Christ in order to gain access to heaven, they tuck eternity into a spiritual safety deposit box and go about the business of living as though this earthly life is all there is.

This session is designed to help your group members see that, in comparison with the treasures of heaven, the *very best* of this world is merely “wood, hay or straw” (see 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Only that which will last forever deserves to be the focus of a person’s life.

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Memory Verses (3-5 minutes)

Ask one or two group members to say aloud the memory verse from this week or previous weeks.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the Review/Overview paragraphs which begin this session.

Day One

Involve

Quotes on Life (5 minutes)

Ask your group members to comment on the quotes in the study guide and then to answer the question.

In your opinion, what are some differences between success in making a living and living successfully? **Anyone can make a living, whether or not they have a spiritual foundation to their lives, but true successful living involves allowing Christ, rather than our careers or our families, to be first in our lives.**

Explore (35 minutes)

Two Perspectives on Life—Temporal vs. Eternal

Read aloud the introductory sentence to this section as well as the Scripture verse, 2 Corinthians 4:18.

Have several of your group members share some of the questions they are most likely to ask themselves when considering a decision. Ask them which question represents an eternal or temporal perspective.

Have someone read the quote by C. T. Studd.

Encourage them to describe which viewpoint has been dominant in their lives.

Read aloud the paragraph explaining the difference between temporal and eternal. Then read the quote by Thomas à Kempis.

Day Two

Have someone read the story about Jan. Then ask the Key Question.

KEY QUESTION

If Jan has an eternal perspective, how might she evaluate the pros and cons of her decision? **Your group members should evaluate Jan's decision based on whether it advances her walk and her impact for the kingdom. Would her promotion give her more time to invest in her relationships with God, family, co-workers and church, or would it detract significantly from that?**

Read aloud the two paragraphs summarizing the section.

APPRAISING LIFE BIBLICALLY

Have a group member read aloud Philippians 3:4b-10 and 3:20. Ask your group members what things they listed which Paul counted as loss or gain.

Answers might include: (loss) religious purity and zeal, educational accomplishments, professional achievements and cultural distinctives. Paul gained: knowing God through Christ, true righteousness that's not based on works but is given by Christ, access to God's power and suffering that comes from following the true Messiah.

If you evaluate your life as Paul did, what specific things would you count as loss compared to the value of knowing Christ? **Look for personal answers to this question—encourage honesty and vulnerability.**

How did Paul's awareness of his heavenly citizenship affect the way he lived his life on earth? **He counted earthly things for their real value—loss; he realized heavenly things were worthy to be the focus of one's life and energy; he pursued his overriding value—to know Christ.**

How can your life be more reflective of a heavenly citizenship? **Look for personal, specific answers, but it boils down to having an eternal perspective—understanding what's of eternal importance in life and what's not.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Luke 16:19-31.

What were the consequences of the rich man's choices? What opportunities did the rich man ignore? **The rich man ended up spending eternity in judgment. He ignored all the signs God sent his way—prophets, His Word and the beauty and order of creation.**

Day Three

A TRUE STORY

Have someone read aloud the story of the treasured ring and then discuss briefly together some applications to our lives from the story.

Some suggested ideas include:

- **Our hearts are easily consumed with things that, in the end, are of low value.**
- **Many times we need to listen to an objective observer to help us wisely appraise things in our lives.**
- **The Lord knows what He is talking about when He tells us about the value of things in life. (See Luke 16:13-15 and James 4:4.)**

THE GOAL OF PERSONAL PEACE, AFFLUENCE AND COMFORT

Read the introductory sentence to this section and the Scripture passage, then ask what group members wrote for their answers to the questions based on Luke 12:15-21.

What was foremost on this man's mind? **The securing of material riches—now and for the future.**

Why did God say this man's perspective made him a fool? **He was a fool because he disregarded his accountability to God, accumulated that which he could not keep anyway and did not invest his life for eternity.**

Day Four

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Ask someone to read Matthew 6:19-21 and 31-34 and the introductory sentence.

What are some specific ways in which you can invest in "heavenly treasures"?

Answers should be specific, personal ways that include not only their finances but also investing of time, using abilities and strengths, ministering in the power of the Spirit, sharing the gospel, discipling others, leading people, etc.

How could Jesus' promise in Matthew 6:33 free you to focus on God's kingdom? **He puts His credibility on the line by stating that He will provide our needs when we put Him first in our lives.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

What is the significance of making eternal investments? **We will be rewarded greatly in heaven!**

Day Five

EVALUATING LIFE'S INVESTMENTS

Take some time in your group to begin evaluating each of the areas listed. Some, or even all, of the areas will need changes as a result of this session. Group members may need to continue working on this evaluation during the week. If so, plan to start next week's meeting with sharing from this section.

At that time, have each of your group members share how an area of his/her life would be affected by developing a greater eternal perspective. Look for *specific changes* in career, relationships, finances, etc., which would enable each group member to *invest* his/her time, talents and treasure *more effectively* to advance God's kingdom.

Be aware that some group members may have difficulty doing this. That's all right, as you want to be helping people grapple with these issues, because each person will need to give his/her own account to God.

Have someone read aloud the **SUMMARY** paragraph.

Apply

An Investment Plan (8 minutes)

Read the paragraph and call attention to the quote by Jim Elliot.

To set an example and to encourage good sharing in your group, begin with yourself and tell one temporal thing you are willing to change and what eternal benefit you expect to gain.

Emphasize that the most important thing in our lives is knowing God. Everything else in our lives hinges on our relationship with Him.

Assignments

Encourage your group to complete the assignments by carrying out their "Investment Plan" and by composing a short statement about what they would like to have written about their lives.

Close in Prayer

Pray for each member's requests and ask each group member to purpose to live according to an eternal perspective.

19

Session 19
*Finances in
God's Kingdom*

Finances in God's Kingdom

FOCUS

Every believer needs to understand that God is the owner of all things and that he/she is simply a steward of the resources that God has entrusted to him/her.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members begin to live as stewards of God's resources when you guide them to:

- Understand that they are not the owners of their resources but merely stewards or managers.
- Understand the responsibilities of a steward of God.
- Understand the dangers of pursuing wealth.
- Understand the role of giving to kingdom work for their lives.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Be sure to take some time for sharing at the beginning of this session to find out how your group members fared with their "Investment Plan" from Session 18. What applications and changes in attitude or lifestyle did they plan to make? What things were difficult or challenging? Spend a few minutes praying as a group about these action points that everyone should have come up with. Also ask if anyone would like to share a statement about what he/she would like to have written about himself/herself at the end of life. Be prepared to share your statement as the leader.
2. The main goal of this session is to help students come to grips with the fact that they are not *owners* of their resources (time, talent, treasure), but rather *stewards* or *managers* of what God has entrusted, or lent, to them. You are seeking to help them live and develop a lifestyle based on that truth. The key application or action point from this lesson is to have students develop, or at least begin to develop, a budget that honors God with giving, saving, eliminating debt and living within their means. Be prepared to assist group members with that development if need be, and make certain that that is something you have accomplished in your own life.

It is commonly agreed upon that the central theme or focus of the Christian faith is to worship and walk with God in all areas of our lives. The lordship of Christ is often a predominant topic of the sermons and messages we listen to, the hymns and songs we sing, the books and articles we read and the small-group Bible studies we attend. And according to Jesus and the New Testament writers, one of the most important ways that we demonstrate the lordship of Christ in our lives is how we handle our possessions and finances. By this God is able to measure our faithfulness on earth and determine our level of responsibility in heaven.

How we handle our finances is also a measure of our commitment to winning the world for Christ and helping to fulfill the Great Commission. Mature followers of Christ realize that how they handle their finances and possessions is genuine evidence of godly spiritual formation in their lives. Scripture is clear that God entrusts us with money to teach us to always put Him first.

Our possessions and the spiritual development of our soul are very important topics to God—so important that 17 of the 38 parables of Christ were about money or possessions. Money or possessions are mentioned more than 2,300 times in Scripture—three times more than love, seven times more than prayer and eight times more than belief. About 15 percent of God’s Word deals with money or possessions. Obviously God understood that believers would find this a difficult area of their lives to turn over to Him.

Scripture repeats many times that if Christ is not first in the use of our money, He is not first in our lives. Our use of possessions demonstrates materially where we are spiritually. Is it possible that our checkbooks are a better reflection of our spiritual condition than the underlining in our Bibles? We are to be faithful managers and generous givers of what God has provided us.

S E S S I O N P L A N

Sharing and Prayer (10 minutes)

Take some time to share action points from everyone’s “Investment Plan” from Session 18.

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Ask several group members to quote the current memory verses.

Review/Overview

Read aloud the Review/Overview sections, which introduce this session.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

A QUESTION OF VALUES

Ask a group member to read the story about Bob. Then ask the following question.

Where might Bob have gone wrong in his approach to his career and finances? **Bob did not set biblical priorities in his finances from the beginning. Instead of putting God first with some sort of tithing or giving program as well as a saving program, Bob overextended himself with debt, putting himself and worldly acquisitions first.**

Explore (30-40 minutes)

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF MONEY

Read aloud the paragraph introducing this topic, ending with the question.

Why might He have been so concerned with this topic? **Because the love of money is the root of all evil and is at the heart of our rebellion against God. Therefore He took great pains to address this topic at length throughout His ministry.**

God Owns It All!

Read Psalm 24:1 aloud and then ask the question.

What are some implications for you from this verse? **God owns me. Every blessing that I have and am experiencing comes from Him.**

Read Deuteronomy 8:17,18.

Aren't money and manufactured goods essentially "ours" by virtue of our making or building them? Why or why not? **No. God is the One who created the raw materials of the earth, and He has given us the abilities—the wisdom, skill, and creativity—to turn things into useful products. God is at the center of all that we are and do. Without Him, we could do and be nothing.**

What warnings are given in this passage? How might they apply to your specific abilities and work? **We are warned not to forget that God is the ultimate source of our abilities, blessings and achievements. If I am a skilled carpenter, then God is the One who enabled me to be skilled in that area. God is always the One giving me the resources that I need.**

Read aloud the sentence introducing the next section about stewardship. Read the definition of a steward.

OUR ROLE AS HIS STEWARDS

What are some things that God has entrusted to your stewardship? **Look for a variety of personal answers, such as: my health, financial resources, material possessions, intellect, station in life, etc.**

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1,2.

Why is it important that we as stewards be “found faithful”? **Because our stewardship as Christians is primarily that of “servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.” That is a very high calling and one that requires the highest standards.**

Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Corinthians 6:19,20 from the Amplified Bible in the study guide, then ask the question.

In what ways do we act as though we are the owners of our lives rather than God’s stewards or servants? **Look for a variety of personal answers here, such as: I’m stingy with my time and possessions, etc.**

Read the sentence summarizing this section and the John Wesley quote.

Ask group members what they wrote for the answers to the questions based on Matthew 25:19-30.

What was the responsibility of the servants? **The responsibility of the servants (us) was to invest the resources the owner (God) gave them and produce a return on His investment. Thus, we are to invest in kingdom work the resources (time, talents and treasure) that God has given us and produce an impact for eternity.**

What was the reward? **The reward is to be given more resources by God to invest and be commended by God as a good and faithful steward.**

What responsibilities has God entrusted to you? **Look for a variety of personal answers here, such as: to take care of my family, be the best I can be at work, be a witness for Him, etc.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Deuteronomy 10:14 and 1 Chronicles 29:10-13. What do you learn from these verses about God’s ownership? What was David’s attitude toward God and why? **We learn that “everything in heaven and earth” is God’s, that He is the ruler of all and that all wealth and strength and power come from Him. David’s attitude was one of total humility and gratitude, as he recognized the above truths.**

Day Two

THE POWER OF WEALTH

Ask group members to turn to 1 Timothy 6:6-11 and have someone read this passage. Then ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on this passage.

What are the dangers of pursuing riches? **Pursuing wealth can lead to falling “into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires.” These temptations**

and desires include greed, lust, success, prominence, etc., which can “plunge men into ruin and destruction.” These temptations can lead to adultery, unethical business practices, power struggles, etc. The end result is that you “wander from the faith” because pursuing wealth becomes the center of your life.

What does the Scripture say is evil? What then is the moral status of money? **The love of money is the root of all evil. Loving money leads to many other sinful things, but money itself is neutral and can be used for good or evil purposes.**

What things should we pursue? Why? **We are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness (v. 11), which are character qualities that flow from a life of dependence on God. These lead to contentment with what God has given us because Christ is at the center of our lives, not material wealth and possessions.**

Read aloud the paragraph that summarizes this section.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Timothy 6:17, Matthew 19:23, Genesis 13:2-13. Why do “riches” have such a strong influence on our lives? How can wealth affect our relationships? **Wealth and possessions appeal strongly to our flesh, provide us with power and influence in the world and give us status with people. Thus, they can easily become a dominating focus of our lives and become more important than our relationships with people. We can easily succumb to the danger of abusing people to protect our financial resources.**

Day Three

Read Matthew 6:19-24.

What is the danger of “storing up treasures on earth”? **They can easily be damaged, destroyed, stolen or devalued. No possession or financial resource is permanent.**

Besides money, what are other “treasures” we tend to “store up” on earth? **We can also be guilty of “hoarding” our time, our emotions, our abilities and possessions.**

What does it mean to store up treasure in heaven? How does money relate to that? **When we give of our time, selves and resources—and especially our money—we are gaining interest for our heavenly bank account. God will reward us in heaven for our faithful investments in kingdom work on earth.**

In verse 21, how does our use of money relate to our heart? **Wherever we are using our finances, that’s where our hearts will be focused. Our use of money is a strong indication of what’s most important to us.**

Ask a group member to read aloud the paragraph explaining “Mammon” as well as the quotes by Christina Onassis and D. L. Moody.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 6:33; Galatians 6:7-9; Exodus 18:21; Luke 19:8. What are some other benefits that result from being a good steward? **God promises to provide us with everything we need and we will inherit eternal life.**

Day Four

THE ROLE OF GIVING

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19 and the sentence which follows.

What are we commanded not to do? **We are not to be arrogant about who we are or what we have, since everything we are and have comes from God. We are also not to put our trust in financial wealth, which can be here today and gone tomorrow. As the Psalmist says, “Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psalm 62:10).**

What are we commanded to do? **We are to be engaged in a lifestyle of doing good deeds—helping and serving people, as well as being generous and willing to share. We are to have an open hand with our possessions, since ultimately they belong to God.**

What do you think it means to be “rich in good deeds”? **It means to be aggressively looking for ways to help and serve people as a way of life.**

What can you do to cultivate an attitude and lifestyle of generosity? **Look for a variety of personal answers here.**

What is the reward for a life of giving and sharing? **We will truly experience heaven and eternal life.**

Ask a group member to read aloud the “Think about it . . .” points, which summarize this section.

WHERE SHOULD I GIVE?

Have someone read 1 Timothy 5:17.

Why does the Bible place a high priority on giving to the church you attend? **Because I benefit from them spiritually week in and week out.**

Have someone read 3 John 5-8 from the Amplified Bible in your study guide.

Who are some missionaries or mission organizations that God might be leading you to support financially? **Look for a variety of personal answers.**

Ask a group member to read aloud the two paragraphs summarizing this section of the session. Then read the quote from Crown Ministries.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5,14,15; Galatians 2:10; 1 Timothy 5:8. Remember the Scripture has more than 2,300 verses regarding money, and many of those deal with giving. As a result of reading these passages, where might God be directing you to give? **Look for a variety of personal answers here.**

Day Five

WHAT ABOUT TITHING?

Read aloud the the paragraph introducing this section. Then ask if there are any comments or questions about this concept.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Proverbs 3:9,10; Proverbs 11:24; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Acts 20:35. How does God's view of giving differ from the world's view of giving? How can we develop the proper attitude in giving? **God's view of giving is that we should give to His work and the needs of people as much and as generously as possible. We are to hold everything we have with an open hand. The world's philosophy is to get as much as you can for yourself and hold onto it tightly with a closed hand.**

Application (3-5 minutes)

Ask if anyone would like to share their answers to the two questions in this section.

What do you think would be the immediate benefits of applying God's plan of stewardship in your life? **Look for a variety of personal answers, but in general, we will experience freedom, blessing and availability to be used by God for His purposes.**

What would the eternal benefits be? **Rewards from God and eternal life.**

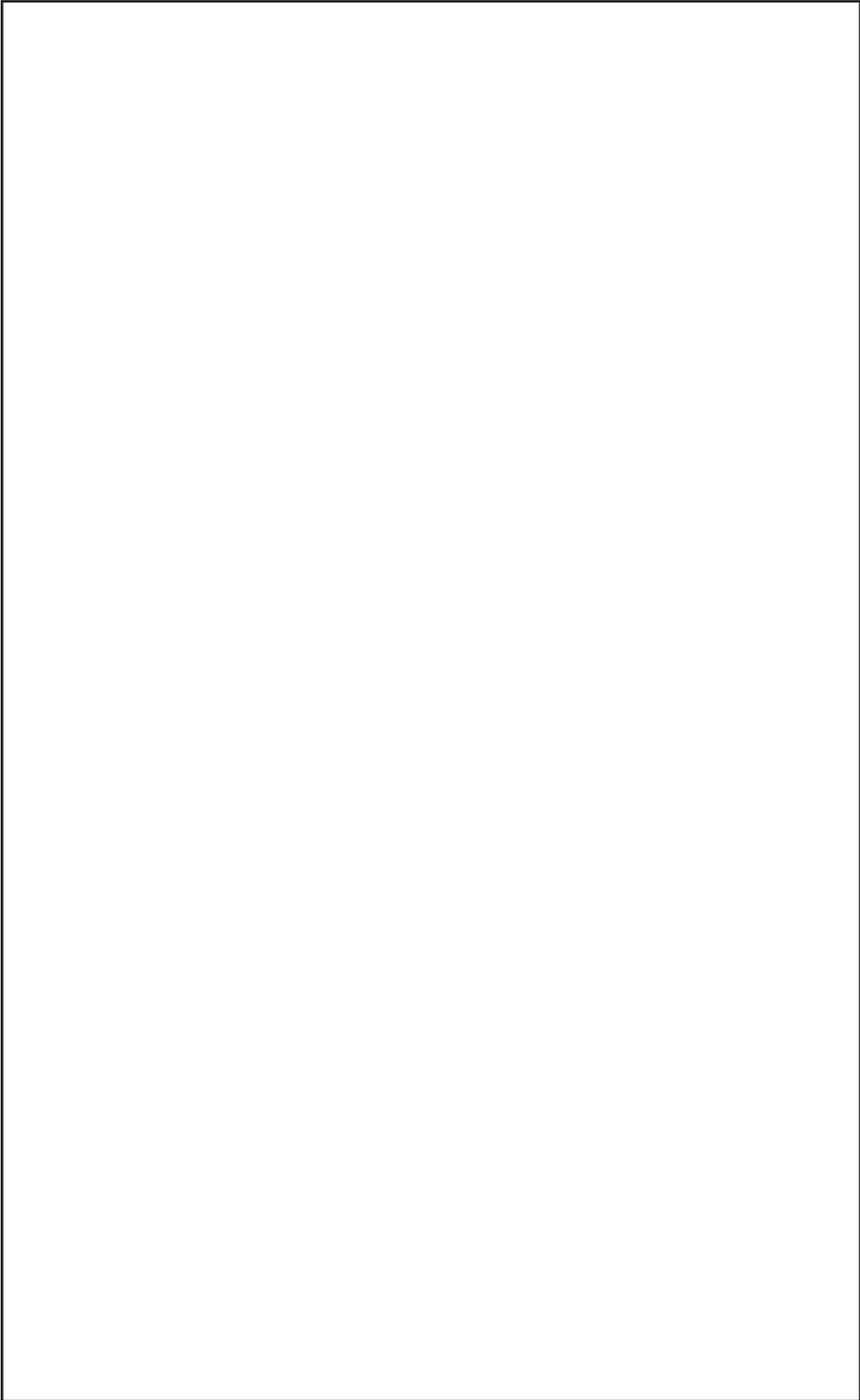
Read aloud the **SUMMARY** section and the David Livingstone quote, then ask if anyone has any comments or questions.

Assignments

Read through the assignments with the group, emphasizing beginning to prepare and live by a budget. Offer to assist anyone who might need help with that assignment.

Close in Prayer

Ask God to bless the group members as they seek to bring their financial resources under the lordship of Christ. Pray also for God's enabling as they begin to develop and establish their budgets.



20

Session 20

*Spiritual Leaders
for a
Spiritual Movement*

Spiritual Leaders for a Spiritual Movement

FOCUS

In order to maximize his or her personal spiritual growth, giftedness and ministry impact, a believer should be involved in a spiritual movement.

OBJECTIVES

You will help your group members be involved in a spiritual movement when you guide them to do the following:

- Understand the impact on history from spiritual movements of the past.
- Understand the definition and components of a spiritual movement from the book of Acts.
- Understand the personal benefits of being involved in a spiritual movement.
- Begin to understand the goal and process of biblical discipleship.
- Develop a plan for maximizing their strengths, gifts and desires within a spiritual movement.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Spend some time at the beginning of this session to share together as a group some action points each person developed in the financial area as a result of Session 19. Has everyone begun working on a budget? What changes have been made in group members' giving plans, etc.? Take a few minutes to pray together about these points, since undoubtedly they will be challenging issues that will take time to bring under God's control.
2. Spend some time reading chapters one and two from the Priority Associates publication, *Leverage Your Life*, since a large portion of this session is covered at length in those chapters. By studying these pages, you will gain a significant understanding of biblical discipleship as modeled in the life of Jesus as well as a good understanding of the process of discipleship. This process of helping people progress spiritually to maturity through key concepts of the Christian life is what you have been seeking to accomplish with your group during *PCL*. As your current group members launch out into their own ministries, their understanding of this process is critical, so this is a very important session.

3. Since this is the last session in *PCL*, it is vital that you develop a game plan for each group member's future involvement in the movement and in your personal ministry. Perhaps you will want to keep the group together and begin a new Priority Associates curriculum, such as *Make the Net Work*, which focuses on equipping for evangelism, or *Leverage Your Life*, which focuses on discipleship and actively developing an ongoing personal ministry of evangelism and discipleship in the marketplace.
4. Another option is to focus on helping each member begin his/her own group, using either the *Discovery* or *Foundations* series or even *Practical Christian Living*. Since this direction will entail considerable energy and time, including an additional meeting (if there is enough interest to form a group) for your group members, you may want to meet once a month instead of every week while they form and begin their own groups. Even if your group members begin meeting with just one person for discipleship (*Discovery*, *Foundations*, etc.), then this will be an exciting development, since this is an important step in getting them to lead out in ministry.
5. It could also be that some of your group will not be interested at this point in leading others. If that is the case, it may well be that this would be a good time to continue their spiritual growth in another environment, such as their church, etc. Since one of the key goals of the Priority Associates movement is spiritual multiplication, then, if after 6-12 months of involvement a person is not ready to lead in some way, it may be time to encourage the person to plug in to another environment more suitable to his/her goals and desires.
6. Another important area to think through is how to encourage involvement and leadership by each of your group members in the various areas (multiplication, momentum, management) of the movement. If a person is geared toward personal evangelism and discipleship, he/she should be guided toward starting a small group. If, however, he/she is bent toward getting involved in momentum events, he should be plugged into giving leadership to the outreach events of the movement by inviting lots of people, planning the event, etc. And finally, if a person is geared toward the management side of the movement because of certain gifts and personality, he or she should be encouraged to get involved in fundraising activities, database management or office-type operations.

Before Christ left His disciples, He entrusted them with a staggering task: go to all the world and make disciples. This commission, found in Matthew 28:18-20, has been valid for every generation for the last 2,000 years. Today, Christians who take this command seriously are burdened to reach their own cities, nation and world for Christ. Often, however, they are overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the mission. In the United States alone, there are an estimated 150 million people who don't know Christ as their personal Savior. Moreover, it seems that American society is marked by selfishness, materialism and disposable relationships to the degree that even Christians are affected. What can change our nation? We will only see our nation changed through the development of thousands of compassionate, committed Christians who are reaching out to others with the gospel. This enormous task requires far more than the status quo. It requires nothing less than a supernatural effort, a spiritual movement to reach our cities, nation and world for Christ.

What is a movement? It is a group of committed people who embrace a common purpose and philosophy and who move toward defined goals and objectives. They also spread and multiply these goals and objectives using constant repetition to foster allegiance to their beliefs.

What is meant by “a spiritual movement”? It is characterized by the awesome power of God working through a committed team of men and women to draw a lost world back to Himself. This is done by building men and women to maturity in Christ with a passion to reach their world.

The magnitude of the Great Commission is so great that it challenges us to work together to influence our cities through reaching the business community. The power of a movement multiplies the effect of those working together so they will have a far greater impact than if they were to work separately.

A spiritual movement is more than just a large Christian group with clear goals. Apart from the supernatural aspect, a spiritual movement is made up of three basic elements: momentum, multiplication and management.

Momentum is the sense of excitement and vision for the cause which can be transferred from the leaders to others in the movement or gained from certain activities. Momentum is characterized by the enthusiastic spirit of a large group of people who are captured by a sense of ever-increasing progress toward their common goal. The enthusiasm generated by a group with momentum attracts other people to join. Momentum activities are high-visibility functions that spark interest and expand the vision of the participants. These activities help individuals identify with the bigger movement rather than just their small group.

Multiplication is the effort to personally develop and mentor a few people in their personal and spiritual growth with the intent that these people would do the same with others. This is expressed well by 2 Timothy 2:1,2: *“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also”* (NASB).

Management is the planning, organizing and leading of the many aspects of a movement. Strategic planning, resource development, prayer coordination, communications and event planning are all examples of management skills and gifts which are critical contributions to a ministry. These are often skills which are performed behind the scenes but are services which undergird the entire movement. Management must be balanced with the other two elements to sustain and expand both the size and impact of the movement.

Jesus employed all three of these components in developing the leadership of what would become a great spiritual movement—His church. The feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:15-21) is a clear example of His use of all three of these elements of momentum, multiplication and management. He led a large public event that enhanced His credibility and visibility, thus increasing His following. While ministering on a large scale, He also focused on building His men in a personal way. He discussed with His disciples the needs

of the crowd and how they could meet those needs. As the disciples participated in the miraculous provision, their own commitment to and involvement with the Master was deepened. Jesus also employed the disciples to count the people, distribute the food and collect the remnants.

While all three components above are vital to a movement, in this article we want to examine the importance of momentum and the role of momentum activities in building a spiritual movement in your city. Momentum in a group does not happen by accident, nor just by generating a great deal of effort. It is very possible for people involved in your city ministry to be very busy doing good things—with little or no momentum. Momentum in a city movement occurs when people become excited about the process and the results of working together toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

For example, when you have a large group of people together at one site, a group dynamic occurs that probably wouldn't happen with smaller groups. In October 1997, over one million men from all across the United States gathered on the Capitol Mall in Washington, D.C. to confess their sins and pray for revival. The sense of power and excitement was electrifying! Imagine if the same one million men had met in 10,000 small towns in groups of 100 each. What would the atmosphere have been in these small gatherings compared to the Washington, D.C. event? The energy and enthusiasm displayed in the large group is what we call “momentum.”

SESSION PLAN

Sharing and Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Ask the group to share how they are coming with their budgets and financial planning. Ask someone to open this session in prayer.

Memory Verses (3 minutes)

Ask one or two group members to say aloud the memory verse for this week or previous weeks.

Review/Overview

Read aloud these two sections, which introduce this final session of PCL.

Day One

Involve (5 minutes)

THE IMPACT OF A SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT

Ask group members what they thought of the story. Then ask the question.

What were some things that made these women so effective in their cause? **What made these women so effective was their commitment to their cause, their moral outrage, their effective organization and their rational arguments.**

Explore (30-45 minutes)

Read Acts 1:8. What has been the impact of the movement Jesus began? **The impact of the movement Jesus began has been phenomenal, expanding exponentially over 2,000 years to include billions of people of every nation, tribe and language.**

Have we finished the task? Why would a movement be important to reach the world? **We have yet to finish the task, as there are still billions of people to be reached. The task is so monumental that only a multiplying movement will accomplish it.**

Ask a group member to read the **DEFINITION** section, which describes a spiritual movement. Then ask if anyone has any questions or comments about the information, since these may be new concepts to many in the group.

Have someone read the quote.

Day Two

Have someone read the two introductory paragraphs.

Ask the group to turn to Acts 2:40-47, then have someone read the passage aloud. Ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on this passage.

How would you describe the excitement level of the early Church? **There was a very high excitement level in the early church in Jerusalem, since God was doing great wonders in their midst and thousands of people were involved. Verse 43 states that there was a “sense of awe” permeating the community.**

How do you think that excitement affected their motivation to reach out to their city? **Because they were so excited, it greatly affected in a positive way their motivation to reach out to those around them—their enthusiasm bubbled over to everyone. This is momentum.**

Ask a group member to read the multiplication paragraph and 2 Timothy 2:2. Then ask the questions based on this verse.

What was Paul’s goal in developing the spiritual leadership of Timothy? **Paul’s goal was to see Timothy pass on to others what he, Paul had imparted to Timothy. In short, Paul’s goal was to see reproduction and multiplication take place in and through Timothy and others.**

What are some implications for a movement like Priority Associates or some other organization? **The implications for Priority Associates and other organizations are that they should seek the same goal—spiritual multiplication that builds leaders and influences their community, city and world. It’s the biblical model that all Christians should follow.**

Read the management paragraph. Then have the group to turn to Acts 6:1-4, and ask someone to read the passage. Ask the group what they wrote for their answers to the questions based on this passage.

What kind of men were required to handle the “management” aspects of the early Christian movement in Jerusalem? **They were reputable (had proven track records of character, faithfulness, integrity and service); they were wise, knowledgeable and effective; and most importantly, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.**

What does that say about the need for spiritual leadership in every area of a movement? **It is essential, because every segment of the movement is important and is a spiritual ministry of service.**

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read Matthew 14:15-21. Which verses describe momentum? Multiplication? Management?

BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT IN A SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT

Ask a group member to read this section aloud. Try to think of examples of each benefit listed as a result of your involvement with Priority Associates or some other group. Ask if group members can also provide specific examples of how they have seen some of these benefits through their involvement.

Read the Douglas Hyde quote.

Day Three

THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP: BUILDING SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Ask a group member to read the Robert Coleman quote, then ask if anyone has any comments or thoughts.

Ask the group to turn to Matthew 28:19,20, then ask the questions based on this passage, commonly called the Great Commission.

What is Jesus calling every Christian to do? **Jesus is calling every Christian to be involved in making disciples—the process of reproducing one’s spiritual life into the lives of others.**

What did Jesus mean by the phrase, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”? **Jesus meant that I am to teach/help others observe (understand and apply to their lives) all (not just some) that Jesus has told me to do. In other words, I am to duplicate in others what God has done in me.**

Ask a group member to read aloud Colossians 2:6,7, then ask the question based on those verses.

What things might be involved in being “firmly rooted, built up and established” in a person’s faith? **Being firmly rooted would include, first of all, the fundamentals of the Christian life, such as being confident of eternal life, knowing how to deal with sin, understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as well as principles of growth that lead to a consistent walk with God. These are all concepts that are taught in the *Discovery, Foundations and Practical Christian Living* series.**

Ask a group member to read aloud Colossians 1:28,29. Ask the questions based on these verses.

What do you think it means to present someone “complete in Christ”? **To be complete or mature in Christ means that a person is living consistently in the power of the Holy Spirit under the lordship of Christ, and they are actively involved in duplicating their lives into the lives of others.**

What kind of effort is required to build people to this level of maturity? **It requires an investment of a significant amount of time, effort and energy as well as heartache in order to accomplish this, but it is worth it because of the eternal rewards.**

Part of becoming like Christ means learning to make disciples. Whom might God be leading you to build into to begin this process? **Hopefully everyone will be able to list at least a few people.**

Ask a group member to read the concluding sentence to this section as well as the Peter Drucker quote.

Day Four

THE DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

Ask a group member to read aloud the paragraph introducing this section, then ask what group members wrote for their answers to the questions based on 1 Peter 2:2,3.

How does Peter characterize spiritual growth in this passage? **Peter describes growth in this passage as teachability—a willingness to learn, a hunger for God and His Word as well as consistent growth in Christ.**

What stages of growth are involved in raising children? **Some of the same things as spiritual growth, such as helping them with their attitude, discipline, education and providing an environment for spiritual growth.**

Read aloud this next section (including the chart and the paragraph following it) which describes the discipleship process and the concept called “Essential Qualities.” Ask if anyone has questions or comments. Again, these might be new concepts to some people in the group.

Have someone read the next two paragraphs. Then ask a group member to read aloud the “Essential Qualities” that are listed in the study guide and explain that these are the

concepts/principles that we are trying to see developed, first in our own lives, and then in the lives of other people. It is, in essence, a game plan for spiritual growth and the things we are trying to build into people.

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 5:17, 6:20,21. Why is it important for one to have certain “essential qualities” before he/she begins to lead? What are the dangers of being in leadership before being ready?

Day Five

INVOLVEMENT IN A GREAT COMMISSION MOVEMENT

Ask a group member to read the paragraph introducing this section as well as the Matthew 28:18-20 passage. Then ask the questions based on these verses.

Where do you see the ideas of win, build and send in this passage? **We see the idea of win in the word “Go.” We see the idea of build in the words “make disciples.” And we see the idea of send in the words “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”**

In which of those areas and its activities are you most interested? **Look for a variety of personal answers here. Some people will have gifts, abilities and interests in the area of evangelism; others will have strengths and desires in the area of developing and building people; and still others will gravitate toward missions or enabling others to “go.”**

USING YOUR GIFTEDNESS IN THE MOVEMENT

Ask group members what they wrote for their answers to the question.

In Acts 6:3-5, what kinds of gifts were useful to serve the widows? **A variety of gifts and abilities were used here, including respect, fairness, compassion, attention to detail, wisdom and understanding, and wholeheartedness.**

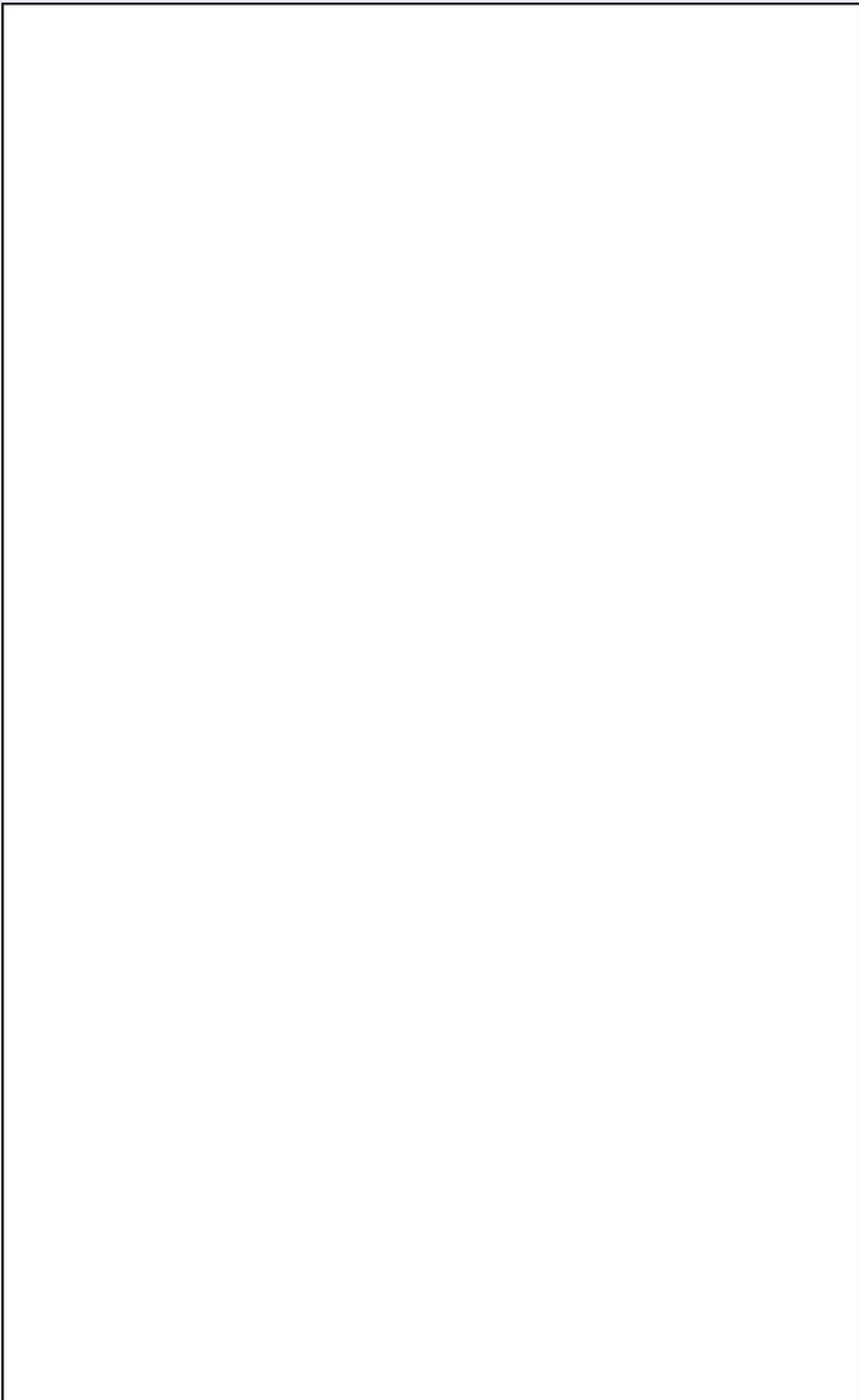
Read Romans 12:6-8. In your group, discuss how these gifts might be employed in one or more of the areas of momentum, management, and multiplication in your city. **Spend a few minutes in your group discussing this.**

Read aloud the paragraph summarizing this section as well as the **SUMMARY** for the entire session.

Assignments

Read through the assignments with the group and, if you have not already done so, make plans to meet with each group member to discuss the next step for them in personal spiritual growth as well as ministry involvement.

Close in Prayer





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****What does all this need to be changed to?**