



CHRISTIANITY BASICS

NEW CONVERTS CLASS

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NOTES FOR INSTRUCTORS

- Ideally, this information should be shared in a small group setting consisting of 8-12 people. Keeping the group small creates a comfortable atmosphere for open dialogue. While it has been my experience that there is not much discussion following the first session, by the end of the second or third lesson people begin to share their thoughts and ask questions. You may not get the same response in a larger group.
- If you desire to keep the group small, you will need to have pre-registration for the course and be willing to close registration when the desired number of participants is reached.
- While this course is intended for *new* followers of Jesus, it can be advertised as an event suitable for anyone who has questions about Christianity. In order to succeed at being sensitive to everyone who attends, you must work at creating an atmosphere of complete comfort, where no one feels isolated or judged.
- Seating people around a table so they are facing one another helps create an atmosphere conducive to discussion.
- Encourage everyone to bring and use a Bible. Some people may be uncomfortable if they are unable to find texts quickly; but this should be presented as an opportunity to practice doing so. Be patient when people are looking for a text, and encourage group members to help one another. You could also provide a photocopied index of Bible books that the student could use to assist them.
- Ask for volunteers to help with reading the scriptural texts without isolating those who are not comfortable doing so.
- Because the intent of this course is to help people grow in their understanding of the Christian faith and Scripture, it is essential to take time to read the many scriptural references listed in this course.
- I encourage you to pause after each main heading to offer opportunity for comments, questions and discussion. While each lesson is intended to take approximately one hour, the students will not resist staying longer if they are learning from one another and are engaged in profitable conversation.
- There may be times when you need to regain control of the conversation because someone has either gone off topic, or is dominating the conversation. However, the group will generally support and encourage those who are willing to ask questions and initiate discussion.
- You may want to set some guidelines about sharing personal information. Ask the class to maintain confidentiality, but gently encouraging the class to use wisdom when

sharing private information because you cannot be held responsible if people do not comply.


- There are times when you will be asked some difficult questions. Determine from the onset to be pragmatic, gracious, and charitable; endeavour to gently navigate away from heated discussions. If debatable issues do arise, suggest that the person seeking answers defer their question to a pastor at a more opportune time.
- Never be ashamed to admit when you do not have an answer to a specific question. You may just need time to research and contemplate the question. As such, be prepared to return to the class the following week with a response. The question may also be unanswerable this side of eternity. It's equally important to convey that some matters of faith are difficult to answer.
- Allow enough time for the students to fill in the blanks in their workbooks as you work through each lesson. And encourage them to use the left hand side of their workbook to make extra notes.
- At the end of each lesson there is recommended reading for those who want to do further study. It would not be possible for students to read each book while taking this course, but you should challenge them to do so over the next year.
- Finally, make prayer a part of every gathering. You can either open or close with prayer, or both. Just remember that it is a vital component that should not be overlooked.
- **A note of caution:** It is not uncommon for people to become confused and even defensive when they suddenly realize that not everything they once believed about following Jesus and the Christian faith is based on Scripture. Your challenge throughout the course will be to help them navigate a deeper view of Scripture, without dishonoring the input of previous mentors, teachers and pastors. Be gentle.





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COURSE INTRODUCTION

PREPARATION NOTES

- Before beginning the first session, be sure to introduce everyone in the class, or give them an opportunity to state their name and why they decided to take the course.
- The General Introduction should take about ten minutes and should be done just prior to, and in the same gathering as Lesson One.
- It is intended to set the tone for the course; communicate its purpose and goal.
- Two truths should be imparted in the General Introduction:
 - Our relationship with God should be based on love.
 - Our understanding of Christianity must be rooted in Scripture.
- It is essential that you pray following the General Introduction. Ask God to open the hearts and minds of each participant so that they become willing to examine their understanding of Christianity, and if necessary, realign it with God's Word.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

To provide an opportunity for people to freely examine and discuss the Christian faith.

GOAL

To present essential truths about Christianity within a rich scriptural perspective.

Some people choose to be a Christian because they say it....

- Gives them strength for daily living,
- Helps them find comfort in difficult times,
- Provides peace about dying.

The BEST reason to be a Christian is love !

Our Creator invites us into a love relationship with Him, and we should respond to that invitation by returning love to Him.

When we love God we obey the greatest commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38).

Our understanding of Christian faith and practice must be supported by Scripture.

CHALLENGE

It can be difficult to sift through the many opinions regarding how to become a Christian, and how to live the Christian life.

SOLUTION

By adopting a scriptural view of Christian faith and practice; confusion and frustration can be minimized.

A CHRISTIAN is a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ.

One who gives control of their life over to God and begins demonstrating their trust in him by living in obedience to his Word.

LESSON 1: WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

In this lesson you will introduce the class to **three** salvation terms. These terms will help them realize that they must be fully committed to the process of salvation. It requires more than a one-time event of repentance. Christianity is a life-long commitment.

Three Salvation Terms:

- ***Justification*** – explains what happens at the point of repentance.
- ***Sanctification*** – the initial and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.
- ***Glorification*** – a look into the future when salvation will be fully realized in the presence of God for all eternity.

*Please take time to read all the scriptures.

JUSTIFICATION

The message in this section is that nothing but the death of Christ can bring people to salvation; not religious practice, good works, or Christian heritage. We must all accept Christ's death as payment for our sin. This requires humility and the abandonment of our own efforts.

- Please be sensitive to those who may be from another denomination. Present this content in love and without condemnation. Our goal is not to persuade people that our teaching is superior, our goal is to encourage people further into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and thus, further into relationship with God.
- The scriptures listed in this portion of the lesson should make the need of repentance and forgiveness clear.
- If this class has been opened up to unbelievers, feel free to gently encourage the class to seek repentance and forgiveness, and to begin a relationship with Christ. As the leader, you should pray about this even before the class begins, ask the Holy Spirit to prepare hearts and help people see the need of taking this step. You are the best judge of your context. Use your own discretion on this matter.

SANCTIFICATION

In this section the students should comprehend that if they truly have a salvation experience, there will be signs of continued growth. As long as we live under God's care, He continues to work in us by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

- Comfort those who to this point may have expected perfection in themselves and other Christians as such an attitude can lead to discouragement and even the abandonment of faith.
- Also encourage students to examine their lives to discover areas that God is still working on. Challenge them to yield to the process.

GLORIFICATION

This section is meant to encourage. Establish the fact that not all of the benefits of being a Christian are fully realized yet. As long as we live in a fallen world we will have trouble, but the hope of eternity, and earthly and bodily redemption at Christ's return keeps us encouraged (John 16:33; Romans 8; Revelation 21).

- Some people truly feel that if they are going through a difficult time they are either under God's judgment or not living as they should be.
- While obedience to God is essential for believers, and perfection is the ultimate goal, a perfect life is not promised until we are living in a glorified state.

REVIEW

Three conclusions are offered at the end of this lesson. Because they challenge some common misconceptions about Christianity it is important to take adequate time to reflect on them.

LESSON 1

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

GOAL

In this lesson we will examine how salvation is a three-stage process. To accomplish this we will look at three Christian terms.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

If you have already committed your life to Christ through an act of repentance, something supernatural has happened. You may have felt this but been unable to explain it. The following is a summary of the changes that occurred when you asked God for his gift of salvation.

1. JUSTIFICATION

YOU BECAME A NEW PERSON

- A. Before coming to Christ we were all sinners and our sin separated us from God, (Romans 3:23, 5:12, 1 John 1:8, 10).
- B. Christ came so that we could be free from the power of sin and reconciled to his Father, (Romans 5:8-9, John 14:6).
- C. Only those who believe in Christ and ask for forgiveness of sin are in right standing with God, (Acts 13:38-39, 1 John 1:9).

CHALLENGE

To know with certainty that things are right between us and God.

SOLUTION

Believe that salvation is found in none other than Jesus Christ.

2. SANCTIFICATION

YOU BEGAN A NEW JOURNEY

- A. When we made the decision to follow Christ we changed our direction. We now follow God who is making all things new, (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24).
- B. Justification was only the first step. Sanctification describes the initial purification and ongoing purifying work the Holy Spirit does in our lives (Philippians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
- C. God's desire is to make us like Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, Romans 8:29, 1 Thess. 5:23).

CHALLENGE

To live a life that pleases God.

SOLUTION

Commit to the process of transformation.

3. GLORIFICATION

YOU HAVE A NEW HOPE

- A. When we lived in sin, we were headed for death because that is the punishment for sin, (Romans 6:23). This refers to being separated from God both in this life, and for all eternity.
- B. Now we have a new inheritance, first with God in heaven, and eventually on a renewed earth (Acts 20:32, 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 21).
- C. This promise encourages us to look forward to a better day, when Jesus will redeem our world and set everything right (Ephesians 1:18, Romans 8:18, Revelation 21).
- D. We should now live as strangers on this pre-redeemed earth, always keeping eternity and our ultimate redemption in view, (1 Peter 2:11).

CHALLENGE

To rise above the struggles of this life by keeping our eyes on Christ.

SOLUTION

Come what may, live with our eternal redemption and Christ's coming in view.

CONCLUSION

HEALTHY EXPECTATIONS

- A. No human effort can earn us salvation, we need Jesus, (Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9).
- B. We should not expect Christians to be perfect. We are a work in progress, (Colossians 3:1-10).
- C. Salvation and all of its benefits are not fully realized in this fallen world, (1 Peter 1:5).

FURTHER READING

Francis Chan, *Crazy Love*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook), 2008.

LESSON 2: A LOOK AT A BIG BOOK

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

In this lesson you will help students discover that the Christian Bible is God's Word. It is supernatural and has the power to change lives. It is God's chosen method for communicating with humanity, and is therefore vital to spiritual development.

- If you have new Christians in the class they will no doubt be hungry for knowledge. By telling them that God wants to speak to them daily through his Word, they will discover the benefit of daily Scripture reading.

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

Under this heading the focus will be on the process God used to give the Bible to his people, and how he speaks to us through it today. The topics discussed are Revelation, Inspiration and Illumination.

- It is possible that at this time people will want to take the discussion beyond the 'basic' level intended for this course. Questions may arise with regard to how God 'inspired' people and whether or not we can really trust the process that brought the canon (Bible) together.
- At the end of the lesson a web link to an article that will answer some of these questions is listed. You can read the article beforehand if you like, but you probably will not have time to expand on it too much in the class. You should suggest that students read it for themselves if they would like further information. Also you can recommend that they type the phrase 'revelation, inspiration and illumination' into a web search engine. This will give them access to several articles that expand on this topic.
- Show respect and admiration for the students who want to know more, but try to keep the discussion at a basic level. Some class members may not be ready to go deeper.

THE BIBLE IS A VALUABLE GIFT

The main thought here is that Scripture has been given to us as a gift from God. If we read and study it as he intended; we will develop further intimacy with him.

- Some people are impressed and even intimidated by those who can retain extensive scriptural information such as names, events and specific text location. Regular reading of the Word does lead to increased knowledge of it, but remind the class that gathering information is not the goal of Scripture reading and study. Our goal is to

develop further intimacy with God by giving Him an opportunity to speak to us through it.

THE BIBLE REQUIRES CAREFUL USE

This section is intended to warn against problematic use and interpretation of scripture. Below you will find examples to use with some sections as they require further explanation. Please note the corresponding lettering.

- A. Many cults have started and many lives have ended because people blindly followed those who claimed to have special insight. Examples: Jim Jones and the death of more than 900 people in 1978 in the Jonestown Massacre and David Koresh and the death of 75 people in Waco, Texas in 1993.
- B. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1 which at first glance seems to suggest that marriage is wrong, but if you read verses 6 & 7 of the same chapter you will demonstrate the importance of reading verses in context.
- C. If you quote Proverbs 22:6 you will demonstrate how proverbs are wise sayings and not promises. This verse does not guarantee that every child will be a Christian. In order to make that possible, God would have to suspend their free will.
- D. You can take this opportunity to read Romans 7:14-25 in both the KJV (King James Version) and a paraphrase; I suggest the Message by Eugene Peterson. This will demonstrate how the KJV, which was written in Old English, can be difficult for new believers to understand. Explain also that a translation is closer to the original text than a paraphrase and many find the NIV (New International Version) or NLT (New Living Translation) to be a middle ground.
- E. Use the following examples: The prophecies recorded in the last 17 books of the Old Testament correspond with the events of Israel's history. The books of Luke and Acts were originally one, but were separated because of their genre (gospel and history books).
- F. Use 1 Corinthians 11:1-6 to demonstrate that wearing head coverings was a cultural issue. A woman showed disrespect to her head, who was her husband, if she did not cover her head. It demonstrated loose morals in that culture and was not suitable for a Christian woman. Since head coverings are not an issue in our culture, we must ask how the text applies to us. We learn from it that women should respect their husbands and be modest in their dress, these are timeless principles.

REVIEW

Scripture is sacred and essential for Christian faith and practice. As such, we are to become students of it. Through it we discover who God is and how he wants us to live.

LESSON 2

A LOOK AT A BIG BOOK

GOAL

In this lesson we will examine the value of the Bible and discover why it is an integral part of Christian faith and practice.

1. THE BIBLE...

IS GOD'S WORD

- A. Revelation : God has revealed himself to humanity throughout history (Hebrews 1:1). Through Scripture He reveals His character and activity. We read and study it in order to know Him more fully.
- B. Inspiration : God inspired humans to put thoughts to paper, it is his “breathed” Word (2 Timothy 3:16a, 1 Thessalonians 2:13). More than 40 writers participated in the process over 1500 years. They were from different eras, cultural backgrounds and social classes, yet they were congruent in their theological portrayal of God, His character, and His activity in human history, which indicates divine participation.
- C. Illumination : Something supernatural happens as we read God’s Word. The Holy Spirit leads us into truth, and as we live in obedience our lives are transformed (John 16:13).

CHALLENGE

To discover what God wants us to know about Him and how He wants us to live.

SOLUTION

View scripture as God’s “breathed” Word, and allow it to change us.

2. THE BIBLE...

IS A VALUABLE GIFT

- A. God has given humanity this amazing resource so that we can learn about Him, grow spiritually, and be equipped for service (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- B. Because Scripture is from God, it has power to accomplish tremendous things in our lives (Hebrews 4:12).
- C. If we neglect scriptural study we miss out on an amazing opportunity to develop further intimacy with God. We also fail to discover the strength and encouragement it is able to bring us on our Christian journey (Romans 15:4).
- D. When reading Scripture our goal is not simply to gain information, but to discover who God is and how He would have us live. We must read it prayerfully and with an open heart. There needs to be a willingness to adjust our thoughts and actions as God speaks to us through Scripture (James 1:22-25).

CHALLENGE

To understand the value of Scripture reading.

SOLUTION

Discover life changing power as we read Scripture and live in obedience to it.

3. THE BIBLE...

REQUIRES CAREFUL USE

- A. Denying the sacredness of Scripture, misusing it for selfish gain or falsely interpreting it will not meet with God's approval (2 Timothy 2:15).
- B. No belief should be built around a single Scripture verse. Passages should be read in their context, and with other scriptures that deal with the same topic in order to understand it fully.

- C. Just as there are different forms of literature in the world, the Christian Bible includes an array of genres; law, history, poetry, wisdom literature, narrative, letters, and prophecy. These are not intended to be read from the same vantage point. For example a proverb is a wise saying not a promise, and books of prophecy includes imagery that requires careful examination.
- D. Originally, Scripture was written primarily in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, but there are many translations and even paraphrases that bring it to us in modern English. We should choose one that best suits our reading level.
- E. The Bible is divided into two testaments, these signify the two agreements God has made with man throughout history. The first is based on law, the second on grace.
- F. The word 'Old' [Testament] does not suggest that it is outdated. There is much to be discovered about God, and ultimately Jesus in its pages.
- G. In order to decipher which Old Testament principles should be followed today and which were specifically given to the Jews, it helps to study Jesus' teachings on the same subjects and examine how the disciples and the early church interpreted them. For example; while the Sabbath day (Saturday) was the Old Testament day of worship, the disciples worshipped on the day of Jesus' resurrection (Sunday).
- H. There are 66 books in the Bible; 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.
- I. Chapters and verse numbers were added later for easy reference.
- J. Bible books are sorted according to their genre (law, prophecy, letters, etc.) and not in chronological order (as things happened).
- K. Every Bible book had an author who was writing to a particular audience in a given situation. It is always helpful to discover what it meant to the original audience before determining what it means to us.

CHALLENGE

To better interpret Scripture.

SOLUTION

Become a student of Scripture, not just a casual reader.

FURTHER READING

There is a great video series on ‘How to Read the Bible’ by the Bible Project at this web address:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLH0Szn1yYNedn4FbBMMtOIGN-BPLQ54IH&si=r_oLRbuiNwfOn6lk

Wayne Cordeiro, *The Divine Mentor*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House Publishers), 2007.

LESSON 3: SHARING MY STORY

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The goal of this lesson is to help class members discover that the best way to share their faith with others is to simply tell the story of what Jesus has done in their lives.

- While it is relatively easy to convince new Christians they have a story worth sharing with others, it can be more challenging to convince life-long believers of the same. Those who committed their life to Christ in childhood may think they have no story to tell because they have no memory of being delivered from sin. But, this is not the case.
- New believers are fascinated by those who have remained faithful to Jesus throughout their lifetime. They see them as living proof that He can sustain those who are devoted to Him. No two people have the same story, but that is what makes every story worth telling.

COMMISSIONED AND COMPELLED

Under this heading you should remind the class that Jesus has chosen us as His representatives in the world. While sharing our faith is an obligation, it is also an awesome privilege. We have the opportunity to work with Jesus to build His kingdom on earth.

OFFER VISUAL PROOF

This section reiterates part two of Lesson One regarding sanctification. If we are allowing Jesus to change us, others will notice. As we grow in Jesus, we become living witnesses of the power of God.

USE WORDS WISELY

In their zeal for Jesus and with great concern for the lost, believers sometimes make the mistake of pushing their faith on others. While sharing one's faith is essential, it must be done with wisdom and in love. Convincing people of their need of Jesus is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit.

SHARE YOUR STORY

I suggest that you strongly encourage every group member to prepare their written story (testimony) before the next class. State clearly that you will provide an opportunity every week for one or two people to read it aloud.

- A word of caution is required here. From the onset PLEASE console those who are not willing to share their story with the group. Assure them that though you think the experience offers an opportunity for growth, you will NOT force or embarrass those who do not want to participate.
- Be assured that in the coming weeks this will be the highlight of the class! This activity creates a bond and increases people's faith as they listen to what God has done in the lives of others.
- It is suggested that you choose one or two people right away who will come prepared next week.

REVIEW

In order to help the students see the value of sharing one's faith, you should take this opportunity to share your own story (testimony).

- Be well prepared just as you will want the students to be in the coming weeks. Keep your presentation brief (5-7 minutes) and make every effort to use the guidelines given in this lesson for preparing a testimony.

LESSON 3

SHARING MY STORY

GOAL

In this lesson we will consider why and how we should share our faith with others.

1. COMMISSIONED...

AND COMPELLED

- A. We share our faith out of a sense of duty. Jesus commissioned us to do so (Mark 16:15).
- B. We share our faith out of gratitude (Matthew 10:8).
- C. We share our faith because love compels us (2 Corinthians 5:14).
- D. We share our faith because we are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20).

CHALLENGE

To discover the importance of sharing Jesus and the good news of the kingdom with others.

SOLUTION

Understand that it is both a responsibility and a privilege to share this good news.

2. OFFER...

VISIBLE PROOF

People are looking for faith that works. We offer proof that faith in Jesus is effective when we...

- A. Bear fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- B. Love one another (John 13:35).
- C. Do good works (Matthew 5:16).
- D. Choose to illustrate our faith with actions.
 - *Display peace and calmness in the midst of adversity. Exercise patience when we are put to the test.*
 - *Show love even to the unlovable.*
 - *Offer help to those who need it.*
 - *Express confidence in God even when things look bleak. Go the extra mile to show kindness.*
 - *Serve humanity.*

CHALLENGE

To be an effective communicator of faith in Jesus Christ.

SOLUTION

Realize that actions speak louder than words!

3. USE WORDS...

WISELY

- A. We will never win people by judging them (1 Cor. 5:12-13).
- B. We earn the right to be heard when we build friendships, as Jesus did (Matthew 11:19).

- C. Arguing with people will not convince them of their need of salvation, only the Holy Spirit can do that (John 16:8).
- D. Avoid using words and phrases people may not understand (saved, born-again, etc.).

CHALLENGE

To know how to respond when people ask about our faith in Jesus.

SOLUTION

Speak in love and with simplicity about our faith in Jesus.

4. SHARE...

YOUR STORY

- A. The benefits of having a written copy.
- It gives you an opportunity to organize your thoughts.
 - It forces you to examine the length and depth of your story.
 - A written copy can be used for public presentation if and when the opportunity arises.
 - You can reflect on it if you are feeling discouraged.
 - It can be edited as Jesus continues to work in your life.
- B. Your story should include four main components (unless you have been a Christian since early childhood).
- What was your life like before you met Jesus?
 - How or when were you introduced to the gospel?
 - When and how did you become a Christian?
 - How has your life changed since that time?

C. Homework!

- Use the page at the end of this lesson to write your story.
- You may need to use a different format if you have been a Christian since early childhood.
- Remember that everyone has a story to tell, Jesus has been working in your life.
- Be prepared to share your story with the class in the coming weeks. (Most people can do this in 5-7 minutes).
- Each week before beginning the lesson an opportunity will be given for classmates to share their story. (If they choose to do so).

CHALLENGE

To be prepared to tell our story (testimony) when opportunities arise.

SOLUTION

Practice by preparing a written account and share it with the class.

FURTHER READING

Employ this resource by Alpha Canada entitled "Life Shared": <https://alphacanada.org/preview/lifesharedseries/>

THIS IS MY STORY

Before I became a Christian...

When I heard about God’s love...

I decided to give my life to God and I did so...

Since then my life...

LESSON 4: THE SPIRIT & ME

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

By now your students may be feeling a little overwhelmed with all that is expected of them as believers; sanctification, understanding the Word, and witnessing. This lesson is intended to be a source of encouragement.

- Before beginning however, be sure to give an opportunity for people to share their testimonies. Limit participants to one or two per class so there is plenty of time for the lesson.
- As you work through this material the students should come to the realization that they do not work out their salvation in human strength, but rather in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Some people fear the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, but in this lesson you will show them that He is kind and gentle. He has already been working in them, and is present to accomplish much more.

INTRODUCTION

The main thought to communicate here is that the Holy Spirit has been given to the entire body of Christ, the Church, not just Pentecostals.

MAIN HEADINGS

Under these headings the students will discover the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in them and in the world. They will be presented with the many facets of His mission-oriented work.

- Take time with each main point for them to ask questions and discover the amazing power source they have at their disposal because of the abiding presence of the Spirit. The Spirit was given as a gift to assist believers here on earth.

REVIEW

This lesson may provoke a lot of questions and discussion at the end. The discussion and questions may focus primarily on the topics of Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues and

operating in the Spiritual Gifts, but do not panic.

- You can feel free to discuss these topics to whatever extent you feel confident to do so, but do not be discouraged if you need to remind the class that this is a basic course and you can only take the conversation on these specific topics so far. Suggest to those who have further questions that they take time at home to carefully read 1 Corinthians 12-14 which will answer many of their questions.

LESSON 4

THE SPIRIT & ME

GOAL

This lesson will focus on the amazing and powerful work the Holy Spirit is able to accomplish in the lives of all believers.

INTRODUCTION

- A. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the third person of the trinity, but this does not mean He is somehow inferior to the Father and Son, He is not in third place.
- B. Though some people credit Pentecostals with re-establishing the importance of the Holy Spirit within Protestantism, this does not suggest that they have a monopoly on Him. All believers have the Holy Spirit living within them and working through them.
- C. The Holy Spirit's work is always mission oriented. He is working on earth to prepare people for the second coming of Christ.
- D. In the following pages we will discover the many things the Holy Spirit is able to accomplish in the lives of those who surrender to Him.

CHALLENGE

To recognize the presence and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

SOLUTION

Reflect on all that He has accomplished and surrender to what He wants to do in the future.

1. HE CONVICTED...

US OF SIN

- A. The Holy Spirit convicted us of our sinful condition and helped us discover our need of God (John 16:8).
- B. It is the Holy Spirit who convinced us of Jesus' lordship and His ability to save us (1 Corinthians 12:3).

2. HE RECONCILED...

US TO GOD

- A. It is also the Holy Spirit who cleansed us from our sin (Titus 3:5).
- B. Now that we have received forgiveness, the Holy Spirit gives us confidence that we are God's children (Romans 8:16). This simply means that we have received inner peace that things are made right between us and God.

3. HE IS LEADING...

US INTO RIGHTEOUSNESS

- A. The process of sanctification is accomplished by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:2).
- B. The Spirit is continually transforming us to make us like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- C. He is cultivating his fruit in us (Galatians 5:22-23). These characteristics cannot be attained by human efforts.

4. HE IS TEACHING...

US THE WAYS OF GOD

- A. With the Spirit's help we can understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- B. We can trust Him to guide us into truth (John 16:13).
- C. With that in mind it is advisable to pray for the Spirit's help each time we read the Bible.

5. HE EQUIPS...

BELIEVERS FOR SERVICE

- A. The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to every believer so that we can all work together to accomplish great things for God (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).
- B. You can read about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12:4- 8; and Ephesians 4:11. All three passages were written by Paul and the lists are not identical. This suggests that Paul was giving examples of spiritual gifts rather than an exhaustive list.
- C. God will equip people with gifts as they are required to meet specific needs in the body.
- D. We all differ in gifts, but should be anxious to allow the Holy Spirit to help us discover and use them (1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

6. HE DIRECTS...

OUR DAILY ACTIVITY

- A. If we belong to Christ we have the Holy Spirit living in us and He wants to assume control over our lives (Romans 8:9).
- B. Because we trust that He is able to lead us better than we can

lead ourselves, we give Him the freedom to direct our lives as He sees fit (Galatians 5:25).

C. The Holy Spirit can lead us in many ways just as He led the disciples in the book of Acts:

- Visions and dreams (Acts 10:9-10; 16:9)
- Inner voice (Acts 10:19, Acts 11:7)
- Intervening circumstances (Acts 16:6)
- Impressions and promptings (Acts 20:23)

7. HE BAPTIZES US

- A. The Holy Spirit lives in all believers, but we can also receive a baptism of the Holy Spirit, which gives us power for witnessing (Acts 1:5, 1:8).
- B. Jesus sent this baptism of the Holy Spirit to believers (Acts 1:4-5; 2).
- C. When the disciples were baptized by the Holy Spirit they spoke in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:4, 10:44-46, 19:6). We should expect the same.
- D. Baptism in the Holy Spirit, for Pentecostals, is a subsequent experience to when the Spirit inhabits the believer at regeneration (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- E. We should desire empowerment for witnessing of Jesus in order to receive the baptism.
- F. When the Spirit baptizes us we can experience great joy which is sometimes expressed physically (weeping, shaking, dancing, etc.). These expressions of joy often correspond with the personality of the individual being baptized and may not be evident in all people. It is definitely not something to fear.

CHALLENGE

To live a Spirit-directed life.

SOLUTION

Trust in the Spirit's guidance and yield its influence.

FURTHER READING

Andrew K. Gabriel, *Simply Spirit-Filled: Experiencing God in the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit* (Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2019).

LESSON 5: FAITHFUL TO THE END

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

In this lesson you will present a Christian response to temptation and suffering with the intention of helping the class appreciate the role of perseverance in Christian faith.

- Though believers receive many blessings from God here on earth; we cannot expect a perfect life until we see Him face to face. Some of your students may be struggling with either temptation, making sense of the suffering in the world, or both. Because this lesson addresses these two issues, it is divided into two main sections.
- Before beginning this lesson give an opportunity for one or two people to share their stories.

TEMPTATION

Part one of this section requires the reading of three portions of scripture. This will take a little time but it is extremely important.

- Be sure to emphasize that scripture teaches us that no one is exempt from temptation; not even Job who was righteous, or Jesus who is the Son of God. Christians should focus not on the temptation itself, but on their response to the temptation as this is often a good indicator of one's spiritual development.
- Part two should help students realize that all believers face the same kind of temptations. People often think their temptation is somehow more intense than that of other Christians, but here students will discover that even Jesus was tempted in the same ways we are today.
- In part three, two things should be emphasized. First, the greatest battle we have is not with Satan or the world, but with self (also referred to as the flesh). Secondly, it is essential to communicate that believers do not fight against temptation in their own strength. God Himself is on our side.

SUFFERING

If time permits it would be helpful to preface this part of the lesson by allowing people to 'briefly' discuss how they feel about the suffering in the world. Ask them if it makes them question their faith in God.

- As you work through the material in this section it will help the class see that evil and suffering do not come from God. It exists because people refuse to give God his rightful place. Suffering affirms the presence of evil in the world, and humanity's desperate need of God.

REVIEW

Conclude by identifying times of temptation and suffering as opportunities for spiritual growth. In order to remain faithful in times of adversity believers must put their faith into action, spend more time in prayer and the Word, and affirm their commitment to God.

LESSON 5

FAITHFUL TO THE END

GOAL

The purpose of this lesson is to examine how believers can bear temptation and suffering without losing their faith.

SECTION 1: TEMPTATION

The word temptation describes the struggle we encounter when we are enticed to do something that would not please God. All believers are tempted, but where does temptation come from?

1. SATAN LEADS...

US INTO TEMPTATION

- A. Satan brought temptation to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-6), Job (Job 1:6-12), and even Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11).
- B. From these three incidents we learn the following:
 - God does not force people to obey Him. He has given us a free will.
 - Temptation gives us an opportunity to prove our fidelity to God's ways.
 - God permits temptation to come in order to test us.
 - God rewards faithfulness, (Job 42:10-13, see James 1:12 also).
 - Our greatest defense against Satan is the Bible.

2. THE “WORLD”...

BRINGS TEMPTATION

- A. Residents of this fallen world can expect to be tempted by what it offers (1 John 2:15-17).
- B. From this text we learn something about the kinds of temptation we face:
 - There are physical cravings for things that bring pleasure to the body. For example, sex and food are gifts from God but we can be tempted to misuse either or both of these.
 - We can also crave the things we see. While there is nothing wrong with having material things, we can become obsessed with them and never be satisfied.
 - We are tempted to boast about our achievements. We want to be elevated above other people.
- C. Scripture identifies these temptations as: Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life (1 John 2:15-17).
- D. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus understands our temptations because He too was tempted in every way that we are, but what does this mean?
- E. Jesus’ own experience with temptation shows us that He can identify with the kinds of temptation we encounter.
 - He would have been tempted by a physical craving for food during his forty day fast, yet He did not eat until the fast was finished.
 - He was tempted by Satan to take possession of the kingdoms He saw before Him without first enduring the anguish of the cross.
 - He was tempted to call the angels to rescue Him so that people would recognize Him as God and elevate Him above others.
- F. Jesus endured all these temptations, yet He did not sin!

3. OUR DESIRES...

BRING TEMPTATION

- A. James 1:14 and Romans 6:12-13 make it clear that we are fighting a war against sin. We have a natural (human) tendency to think first about our own desires.
- B. We know that we should live a Spirit controlled life but the flesh does not relinquish control easily so there is an inner battle. So, how can we overcome?
- Realize that we have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us (Romans 7:14-8:4).
 - Realize that we do have a part to play (James 4:7). We can resist temptation by taking control of our thoughts (Philippians 4:8 and Romans 12:2).
 - Realize the importance of prayer (Matthew 6:13).
 - Understand that we need to be spiritually strong in order to rise above temptation. Spiritual strength comes from spending time in the Word and in prayer.

CHALLENGE

To rise above temptation.

SOLUTION

Expect it to come but be prepared to win the battle!

SECTION 2: SUFFERING

The word suffering describes the pain we encounter in this life and as we follow Jesus. This can be physical, emotional, or mental, which can be caused internally or externally by circumstances or others. All believers suffer, but what does Jesus and Scripture say about our suffering?

1. GOD'S INTERACTION...

WITH SUFFERING

- A. Some people believe that a loving God should not permit suffering. However, before humanity brought sin into the world suffering did not exist.
- B. Suffering proves that we are now under a curse and there is another ruler at work in the world (Ephesians 2:1-2).
- C. Some Christians believe that if they are suffering in any way God must be punishing them. However, history teaches us that those who have endured much suffering often go on to accomplish great things for God. Consider some Scriptural examples:
 - Joseph was sold into slavery, falsely accused, and spent years in prison before he was ready to come to the aid of his people (Genesis 37-47).
 - Moses had to flee from Pharaoh and live in a foreign land for many years before he was ready to lead God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 2-3).
 - David had to flee from the anger of Saul, fight a giant, spend years tending sheep, and face many enemies including his own son before he was ready to be the king of Israel (1 Samuel 16 - 2 Samuel 7).
 - Paul describes the hardships he endured in order to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (2 Corinthians 6:3-12).

2. THE COST OF...

FOLLOWING JESUS

- A. We can quickly become discouraged if we believe that serving God guarantees us a life of ease.
- B. In reality the opposite is true, we are called to be disciples of Jesus at a great cost (Luke 14:25-33).

C. Jesus teaches us that:

- Our relationship with God must take precedence over all others.
- Suffering should be expected (we are asked to carry a cross), and this is a cost we should count before becoming a disciple.
- As disciples we are no longer owners of our earthly possessions, but stewards. We need to be willing to abandon or use everything we have for God's glory if He directs us to do so.

D. So how is it possible to endure a life of such sacrifice?

E. 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 demonstrates God's ability to:

- Be compassionate toward us
- Bring us comfort
- Grant us patience to endure
- Deliver us when suffering becomes unbearable
- Give us hope in the midst of suffering
- Answer prayer

F. The sufferings of this world help us turn our attention toward God and the wonderful future He has in store for us (Romans 8:18, Revelation 21:4).

CHALLENGE

To remain faithful to God even in times of hardship.

SOLUTION

Keep our eyes on God and look forward to spending eternity in heaven where there is no suffering and pain.

FURTHER READING

Mark Clark, *The Problem of God: Answering a Skeptic's Challenges to Christianity*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2017.

LESSON 6: COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

Though prayer is one of the most important activities in the believer's life, it is often the most neglected. This lesson is intended to inspire prayer by focusing on its benefits and removing some of the intimidation of speaking with God.

- Don't forget to give an opportunity for testimonies before beginning the lesson!

WHY IS PRAYER NECESSARY?

All too often people feel compelled to pray because they fear God's wrath if they do not. Guilt and fear are not good incentives and do not inspire positive action. This section focuses on how prayer is for the believer's benefit.

- Most believers want to live power-filled lives. They want to see results for their labor and know that God can use them to make a difference in the world. Remind them that prayer is the only way for this to happen.

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

Scripture is not silent on the topic of prayer. By discovering what scripture says about how to pray, and putting it into practice, we are able to pray more effectively.

- When you get to the topic of fasting you can expect some questions. Time will not permit in-depth conversation on the topic but you may want to be prepared to answer basic questions.
- Because the questions can vary greatly, it would be impossible for me to deal with all of the possibilities here. However, fasting is often discussed in a concise fashion in books that deal with the spiritual disciplines. You may want to do a little reading prior to the class. Your pastor or an avid reader from your congregation should be able to provide you with a book on this topic if you do not own one. Another option is to do some online research beforehand.

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY?

The students will be grateful for the prayer method described in this section. Encourage them to try it this week. If you wish you could also ask them to come back next week

prepared to talk about their experience.

- Under the heading of 'Adoration' it is suggested that the students use the Psalms in their prayer times. Since this may be a foreign concept to some, I suggest you ask them to turn to Psalm 100 and follow along as you read the following prayer that was developed from it. You will notice that some of the words have been changed to make the prayer personal.
- "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Let us worship the Lord with gladness; and come before him with joyful songs. I know that you are good Lord. It is you who made me; I am yours, one of your people, a sheep of your pasture. I will enter your gates with thanksgiving and your courts with praise; I will give thanks to you and praise your name. For you are good and your love endures forever; your faithfulness continues through all generations."
- Explain that the Psalms were originally used in worship to bring honor to God. It is acceptable to use them in this way as long as the words are heartfelt. It may take some practice, but this is a profitable exercise.

REVIEW

In closing, simply remind the class that prayer will change and empower them to achieve mighty things for the Kingdom of God. Prayer is something they should look forward to. It is hard work, and it does require discipline, but is extremely rewarding!

LESSON 6

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

GOAL

This lesson will explore basic truths about prayer; including why it is so important and how we can simply approach it.

1. WHY...

IS PRAYER NECESSARY?

- A. In lesson two we discovered that the Bible is God's primary way of speaking to us. Here we will discover that prayer is how we speak back to him. All relationships need two-way communication in order to flourish.
- B. Christ was a person of prayer, we would be wise to follow his example. He demonstrated how prayer and fasting were necessary before He launched His preaching ministry, chose His disciples, and began healing the sick, (Matthew 4).
- C. In prayer we receive power for service. Without prayer we will never discover the power that is available to us. Jesus had power because Jesus prayed. He laid aside His divine attributes while He was on earth and relied wholly on the power of the Holy Spirit for service, (Acts 10:38). That same power is available to us, if we make prayer a priority as Jesus did (John 14:12).
- D. Prayer works ! It changes people and situations. If we do not believe that it will make a difference, we will not pray.

CHALLENGE

To discover the vital role prayer plays in the life of a believer.

SOLUTION

Examine the life of Christ to see how important prayer was to Him.

2. WHEN...

SHOULD WE PRAY?

- A. We need to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- B. We need to pray when we are alone (Mark 1:35); with other believers, (Luke 9:28); and when we gather in God's house (Matthew 21:13a).
- C. We should pray during times of temptation and suffering, (Matthew 26:41, Luke 22:44).
- D. When specific needs and concerns arise, (Acts 12:5).

CHALLENGE

To become a person of prayer.

SOLUTION

Adopt an attitude of prayerfulness and practice prayer regularly.

3. HOW...

SHOULD WE PRAY?

- A. With humility (2 Chronicles 7:14). A proud person feels self-sufficient and does not recognize their need of prayer. They also expect to be honored by people (Matthew 6:5-6) and by God (Luke 18: 9-14).
- B. With a pure heart (Mark 11:25). It is essential to settle matters with God and humanity before expecting answers to prayer.
- C. With our spirit and with our mind (1 Corinthians 14:15).
- D. Scripture teaches us to direct our prayers to the Father (Matthew 6:9). To pray in Jesus' name, (John 14:13-14) and with the help of the Holy Spirit, (Romans 8:26).

- E. With faith and according to the will of God (Mark 11:24, 1 John 5:14).
- F. With fasting (Luke 5:33-35). This is intended for our benefit, not for God's. By temporarily feeding the soul rather than the body, we are more focused on God and therefore able to discover what He would have us do in a specific situation.

CHALLENGE

To pray with success.

SOLUTION

Follow Biblical requirements and instruction to ensure desired results.

2. WHAT...

SHOULD WE PRAY?

- A. For many people, the greatest challenge is in knowing what to say to God.
- B. It is important to relax and speak to God as a friend. Our words should be heart-felt and sincere.
- C. It also helps to have a method of prayer that keeps us focused on essential elements that should be included.
- D. The popular A-C-T-S method is a great example (alternatively, try PRAY: Praise, Rejoice, Ask, Yield).

ADORATION

- A. Prayer should begin with words of adoration because God deserves to be praised. Choose words that give Him honor and glory. Acknowledge that He is holy, worthy, righteous, powerful, all-knowing, etc. The Psalms can assist you in this area as many of them proclaim the glory of God. Feel free to read Psalms back to God. By doing so you are agreeing with the things his Word proclaims about Him.

- B. As we adore God we build faith in our heart. As we proclaim His splendor we are reminded of His power and ability which prepares our heart for the next step.

ADORATION

- A. Giving God adoration is a humbling experience. As we acknowledge His greatness we become aware of our own smallness. We should then be ready to offer words of confession. We need to confess the things we have done wrong and the things we have failed to do as He brings them to our memory.
- B. Be completely honest and vulnerable. Though God already knows everything about you, it is important for you to acknowledge your shortcomings and seek His help.

THANKSGIVING

- A. Confession brings forgiveness, a sense of relief, joy and peace. At this point we are ready to thank God for these and the many other wonderful gifts He gives to us.
- B. We should not take God's blessings for granted.

SUPPLICATION

- A. By now our faith is strengthened through adoration, our conscience is clear through confession, and our hearts are pure through thanksgiving. This is the time to present our requests before God.
- B. There are so many needs around us that you may want to consider writing them down. You can use a prayer journal which can also serve as a record of the many ways God has answered prayer.

C. We should pray for:

- Our personal needs, including our concerns for family and loved ones, co-workers and neighbors (Philippians 4:6).
- The sick, (James 5:14-15).
- Other believers (Romans 1:9-10, James 5:16).
- Those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
- Workers for and of the harvest; including leaders, pastors and missionaries (Luke 10:2).
- Our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

D. The A-C-T-S method has proven successful for many people. Remember however that whatever prayer method we use, there should always be a time of silence following our prayer so that God has an opportunity to speak back to us. He will do this by directing our thoughts or prompting us to take action. Be patient, wait, listen and expect to hear from Him.

CHALLENGE

To learn how to pray.

SOLUTION

Practice! The best way to learn how to pray is by praying.

FURTHER READING

Pete Greig, *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress), 2019.

LESSON 7: STEWARDSHIP

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

This lesson is meant to advance the student's thinking toward a Christian view of using their resources. They will be challenged to use everything God has given them for the benefit of others and the extension of His Kingdom.

- Once again, don't forget to give an opportunity for testimonies before beginning the lesson!
- This lesson is divided into three main sections in order to assist you in communicating the importance of being a good steward of three things; time, talent, and money.
- The feedback you receive from the class on these topics will be determined by where members are on their own journey toward adopting a Christian view of stewardship. One's input may not be positive if they are struggling with surrendering control in any specific area.
- Be patient, if God is dealing with them they will leave the class with a lot to think about.

STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

This topic may inspire some discussion on busyness. Remind the class that though we are expected to be diligent in service, if we are busy to the point of feeling frustrated or overwhelmed, then chances are we are doing something that God has not called us to do.

- Emphasize also that busyness is what often prevents people from having time to develop intimacy with God. Activity, no matter how well intentioned, is no replacement for intimacy. We must first be with God before attempting to do God's work.

STEWARDSHIP OF TALENTS

It may be challenging to convince everyone that they are gifted and have something to contribute to the work of God. If the class members know each other well, it would be profitable to give them an opportunity to mention the good qualities they have discovered in one another.

- For example, a shy or insecure person will be encouraged to hear that someone else perceives them as caring, kind, or to be a good listener. It is important to make sure every person in the class is included in this exercise.

STEWARDSHIP OF MONEY

This can be a sensitive issue, but determine from the onset to approach it with sensitivity, and do not allow the conversation to get out of hand.

- A third section was added under this heading in order to answer some common questions about giving.
- The greatest risk with this lesson is that some may want to debate whether or not tithing at 10% is a New Testament principle. While a scripture is included that demonstrates Jesus' belief that general tithing should take place in his day, it will likely prove insufficient for some. It's important to emphasize the "principal" of tithing found throughout Scripture, not precise numbers or man-made policies regarding the issue. For instance, make mention of how members of the early church were willing to give not just 10%, but everything they had, Acts 2. Remember, people more easily accept "why" something is done over "how" something is done.
- Giving is a heart issue and if there is tension it is probably because some have not yet learned to trust God in this area. It is not your job to convince them to do so. Present the lesson material and leave the rest to the Holy Spirit.

REVIEW

Remind the class once again that all good things come from God, and we are a blessed people. As an act of love and thanksgiving we should use our resources to bless others and extend the Kingdom of God.

LESSON 7

STEWARDSHIP

GOAL

The purpose of this lesson is to determine why believers should use their time, talent and income to invest in kingdom work.

SECTION 1: STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

1. WORLDLY VIEW...

OF TIME

- A. Because life on earth is short, unpredictable and even uncertain, time is viewed as humanity's most prized possession.
- B. Generally speaking, non-believers view death as the end of their existence. This view motivates them to spend the time they have on earth seeking as much pleasure as possible.
- C. For those who have the desire to leave their mark on the world for future generations, time is spent seeking fame and fortune.
- D. People in the world spend their time as they see fit.

2. CHRISTIAN VIEW...

OF TIME

- A. As believers we live with the promise of spending eternity with God. With eternity in view, time on earth loses its luster (Hebrews 13:14).

- B. Because death is what ushers believers into heaven, it is no longer feared (2 Corinthians 5:8), and our time on earth is spent Preparing for eternity (1 Peter 1:17).
- C. We are expected to invest our time in things that have eternal value, (Matthew 6:19-20). We are instructed to spend the time we have on earth wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16).
- D. We need to remember that our time in this world is short and it could end at any moment. As long as we live on earth we should focus on helping others prepare so that they too can enjoy eternal life (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

CHALLENGE

To realize that time on earth should be spent preparing for eternity.

SOLUTION

Examine time spent here in light of the promise that awaits us.

SECTION 2: STEWARDSHIP OF TALENTS

1. WORLDLY VIEW...

OF TALENTS

- A. Success in this life is measured by the extent to which a person uses their talent to attain fame, fortune and pleasure.
- B. Those with the most outwardly visible talents are expected to achieve the greatest level of success.
- C. If someone chooses to live a mediocre life, it is assumed they either have no talents, or they have chosen to waste them.

2. CHRISTIAN VIEW...

OF TALENTS

- A. Success is measured by the extent to which we use our talents and gifts to serve humanity, (1 Peter 4:10).
- B. We are expected to put our talents to use for God, and as we are faithful to do so, he will increase them, (Matthew 25:14- 30).
- C. It is God who distributes gifts and talents, and we can trust his wisdom in doing so. We are responsible only for discovering and using what he has given to us (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

CHALLENGE

To use our talents to serve God and humanity.

SOLUTION

Recognize our talents as coming from God and accepting that we will be held accountable for how we use them.

SECTION 3: STEWARDSHIP OF MONEY

1. WORLDLY VIEW...

OF MONEY

- A. In this materialistic and consumer driven society, the amount of money a person earns is often used to measure their value and social standing.
- B. People are encouraged to use their money to gain as many worldly possessions as possible. Little attention is given to relieving the troubles of the less fortunate.

2. CHRISTIAN VIEW...

OF MONEY

- A. The wealth of the world belongs to God. He distributes it as He sees fit and we can trust Him to meet our needs, (Deuteronomy 8:17-18, Psalm 50:9-12, Matthew 6:25-34).
- B. We should not hoard money or use it solely for our own benefit; we are blessed to be a blessing (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).
- C. We should give generously to help and bless those in need (2 Corinthians 8:1-15).

3. BIBLICAL VIEW...

OF GIVING

- A. Scripture teaches a principal of giving back to God a constant minimum of our income, known as tithing (Lev. 27:30; Prov. 3:9). There is also an additional, sacrificial form known as offerings or giving (Lk. 6:38).
- B. Based on Leviticus 27:30, many Christians continue to see tithing as 10% of their income. Tithing is considered a method God has established in order to finance the advancement of his kingdom.
- C. In the New Testament, Jesus instructed others to continue the practice of tithing (Luke 11:42).
- D. Offering / giving refers to what is given above and beyond our tithe (1 Timothy 6:17-19; Psalm 37:21). As we give, we invest in God's kingdom.
- E. Generous givers quickly discover that God is always faithful to bless them according to their willingness to bless others. This (Malachi 3:10) is the only time in scripture that God tells us to test Him.

CHALLENGE

To surrender our grip on money and generously use it to advance God's kingdom.

SOLUTION

Try it! It will be easy to continue when the benefits are discovered.

FURTHER READING

John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook), 2019.

John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2002.

LESSON 8: SACRAMENTS

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this lesson is to give understanding and meaning to the practices of water baptism and communion. This lesson is therefore divided into two main sections.

- Once again, don't forget to give an opportunity for testimonies before beginning the lesson!
- If there are people in the class from other denominations they may have conflicting views about the meaning and practice of sacraments. Simply explain that while opinions may differ, your desire is to focus solely on what we can learn about them from Scripture.

WATER BAPTISM

There are a few misconceptions that should be dispelled when it comes to water baptism. Be sure students clearly see that water baptism does not produce salvation.

- Emphasize that water baptism is an outward image of an inward work of salvation. It is an opportunity to witness to the world that we trust Jesus for our salvation. There is a strong emphasis in Scripture on the need for believers to be baptized.

COMMUNION

Emphasize that communion is intended as means of remembering Christ's sacrifice and bringing equalization to the body of Christ. We are all the same under the blood of Christ. It is our relationship with Christ that makes us worthy to participate, not our good works or socio-economic status. Also note that we have a vital responsibility to examine our attitude toward Christ and His church before partaking.

REVIEW

Depending on your comfort level you can choose to end the class with either or both of the following activities.

- Take the group on a tour of the church facilities; showing them the baptismal tank, where people get changed for baptism, etc. Explain the procedure your

particular congregation follows when conducting water baptism.

- Partake in communion as a group, this will need to be prepared beforehand and approved by the pastor who may want to join you and take lead of this part of the gathering.

LESSON 8

SACRAMENTS

GOAL

This lesson is dedicated to explaining the importance and meaning of water baptism and communion.

SECTION 1: WATER BAPTISM

1. WHY WE...

PRACTICE WATER BAPTISM

- A. We follow the example Christ set for us when He was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17).
- B. The disciples practiced water baptism (John 4:1-2).
- C. Jesus included a command to baptize in the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20).
- D. The early church continued to baptize after Jesus' ascension (Acts 2:38).

2. WHY IS...

WATER BAPTISM SIGNIFICANT?

- A. Romans 6:1-4
- B. In water baptism we identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

- C. The water represents a grave. Going down into the water represents our death to self, and coming up represents rising to new life in Christ.
- D. It is a public declaration that we believe Jesus' death brings us new life.
- E. Water baptism does not wash away our sin, only the blood of Jesus can do that (1 John 1:7).

3. THE PRACTICE...

OF WATER BAPTISM

- A. According to Acts 2:37-41 and other New Testament examples, people first heard the gospel; then repented of sin and were baptized. Repentance preceded baptism, and this is why we do not practice infant baptism.
- B. After salvation there is no need to wait before being baptized. In the New Testament people were baptized immediately (Acts 8:12).
- C. The Greek word 'baptizō,' from which we get the word baptism, means 'to immerse in water.' This is how John and the disciples baptized people (Matthew 3:16, Acts 8:38) and we follow the same act.
- D. The water represents a grave. Going down into the water represents our death to self, and coming up represents rising to new life in Christ.

CHALLENGE

To understand that water baptism is an important part of Christian faith.

SOLUTION

Discover its significance and pray for courage to make a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

SECTION 2: COMMUNION (ALSO CALLED: THE LORD'S SUPPER OR SACRAMENT)

1. WHY WE...

PRACTICE COMMUNION

- A. 1 Corinthians 11:17-33.
- B. The practice was initiated by God himself, vs. 23.
- C. We are instructed to proclaim the Lord's death in this way until He comes, vs. 26.

2. WHY IS...

COMMUNION SIGNIFICANT?

- A. It is a reflection of the Old Testament practice of Passover, (Exodus 12:21-27, 1 Corinthians 5:7b).
- B. It is meant to help us live in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for our sin (v. 24b).
- C. Paul's instruction regarding communion was given to those who were already believers that communion is not a way to salvation.
- D. We believe the emblems represent Christ's body and blood.

3. THE PRACTICE...

OF COMMUNION

- A. We are told to examine ourselves before taking communion (vv. 28-32) to make sure we are partaking in a worthy manner.
- B. Christ makes us worthy to partake when we receive his gift of salvation, but we must still check our attitude.
- C. Our attitude should be one of thanksgiving to God for His sacrifice, and respect for other believers, vs. 17- 22, 33. We need to be in right standing with God and humanity.

CHALLENGE

To understand the important role communion plays in helping us keep our eyes fixed on Christ and His church.

SOLUTION

Discover the significance of communion and practice it with the right attitude .

FURTHER READING

Stephen Arterburn and John Shore, Being Christian: Exploring Where You, God and Life Connect, (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House), 2002.

LESSON 9: BELONGING

PREPARATION NOTES

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The intent of this lesson is to help believers understand that they belong to the universal church of Jesus Christ. When they came to Christ they joined the fellowship of all believers and this affords them many benefits.

- Once again, don't forget to give an opportunity for testimonies before beginning the lesson! Since this is the last session together, more time may be required for this so that everyone in the class who is willing to participate has had the opportunity to do so.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

When people think of the word 'church' they often visualize a physical structure or a particular denomination, but Scripture teaches that the church is the body of Christ. This includes every person who has ever put their faith in Jesus Christ.

- Students should be encouraged to look beyond their local congregation and imagine the vastness of the church which Christ has been building since His death.
- Though society is often critical of organized religion, it should be established that it was God, not people, who initiated the gathering together of Christians.

WHY IS THE CHURCH SO IMPORTANT?

This section focuses on how the Church fits into God's overall plan for humanity. He purchased the Church with His blood which makes it extremely valuable to Him. Through the Church (his people) God wants to do mighty things and bring others to faith in Him.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO BE PART OF A CONGREGATION?

God's children are not meant to live in isolation. The burden of living for God in a broken world would be too much to bear. Help your students discover the benefits of belonging to a congregation of believers, and help them understand that we all need the support of others.

- It is not uncommon at this point for someone to ask if a person can be a Christian and not go to church. An appropriate response would be that according to

scripture Christians are the Church, the two are inseparable. While some people may be prevented from gathering with other believers due to illness or other restrictions; believers who can join with others should do so, and they will quickly discover that it affords them many benefits.

WHAT ABOUT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Many people are opposed to 'joining' a church because they do not understand why it is necessary to do so. This section will help them understand the benefits that come with membership. You should bring copies of the membership application as some may ask to see it. Allow them to take a copy home so they can prayerfully consider becoming a member.

REVIEW

You have reached the end of your time together. You may want to conclude by going out for coffee as a group. You could also prepare beforehand to have a small lunch provided by some classmates. As you spend this time together, discuss the group's overall impressions of the course material and how they may have found it helpful.

LESSON 9

BELONGING

GOAL

The purpose of this lesson is to help you discover the value and importance of belonging to God's family, the church.

1. WHAT...

IS THE CHURCH?

- A. The church refers to people who love, serve and revere God. It is the union of all who have faith in Jesus Christ from every generation, nation and tongue (1 Corinthians 1:2).
- B. In scripture the word Church does not refer to buildings, denominations, or organizations, but to the people God has supernaturally brought together through faith in Jesus Christ. In its early stages, the church met in people's homes, (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19).
- C. The church is first mentioned in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus took ownership of it by calling it 'my' church, and He also took responsibility for its expansion.
- D. The church is not the result of human planning or effort, it belongs to Christ, and He is head over it, (Colossians 1:18).

CHALLENGE

To understand the magnitude and significance of the church.

SOLUTION

Look beyond buildings and focus on the people worldwide who are connected through faith in Christ.

2. WHY...

IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT?

- A. The church has great value because it was purchased with Christ's own blood. We are instructed to watch over it and protect it (Acts 20:28-31).
- B. We must remember that the church is a living organism and living things grow when they are healthy. It is important for believers to contribute to church health and understand that only God can bring growth.
- C. According to Acts 2:42 God brings an increase when believers are devoted to the following:
 - Teaching / Fellowship
 - Breaking of bread / Prayer
- D. Acts 2:43-47 teaches us that making these a priority will lead to:
 - Supernatural activity (signs and wonders)
 - Unity (united in purpose)
 - Caring and concern for one another (meeting their needs)
 - Having favor with people (a good reputation)

CHALLENGE

To understand the nature of Christ's church.

SOLUTION

Discover that the church is a living organism that requires constant care.

3. WHY IS IT...

NECESSARY TO BE PART OF A CONGREGATION?

- A. We need the support of other believers to flourish and grow. Believers who gather together function as one body. Every person being unique, yet necessary (1 Corinthians 12: 12-31).
- B. Salvation frees us from self-centeredness and we discover our need of others.
- C. As believers we are all working out our salvation, the congregation plays a vital role in helping us stay focused (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- D. Belonging to Christ's church should be a positive experience; something that we appreciate and even love (1 Peter 2:17).

CHALLENGE

To discover the advantages of belonging to a local assembly.

SOLUTION

Believe that God instructs us to come together for the benefit of all.

4. WHY DO...

LOCAL CHURCHES HAVE MEMBERSHIP?

- A. While salvation is the only prerequisite for "membership" in the body of Christ, an application for formal membership is often required in order to become an active participant in a specific congregation.
- B. Membership in a local church is important for many reasons:
 - Accountability : members subject themselves to the authority of others who will watch out for their spiritual well-being.

- Consistency of doctrine : members agree to abide by and promote the congregation's statement of faith. This ensures their commitment to teach according to the congregation's beliefs when they minister to others in the assembly.
- Support : members agree to give time, talents and tithe to help sustain the ministries of the assembly.
- Benefits : members are given opportunities for ministry, and the right to vote on major decisions.

CHALLENGE

To commit to the support and authority of a local church body.

SOLUTION

Examine the benefits and follow the necessary procedure for membership.

FURTHER READING

Charles Colson and Ellen Vaughn, *Being the Body*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing), 2004.